

The Baka of Gabon: the Study of an Endangered Language and Culture

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Abstract

The Baka Pygmies, in Gabon, are unusual in that they speak an Ubangian language in an essentially Bantu environment. This small community has successfully maintained their language despite pressure from Fang, the language of one of the country's majority ethnic groups. However, government imposed sedentarization policies have forced this population to abandon their nomadic lifestyle, a consequential change which has important repercussions for the community as a whole. In this article I talk about my fieldwork, and the impact of my presence as I see it in the Baka community during the last three years, as well as the relationship of trust established between myself and the community. I discuss how my principal collaborator gave me some confidential information during my last field trip. I then introduce the different factors which have contributed to the endangerment not only of the Baka language but also of the Baka culture, including a difference in the social status between the Baka and Fang populations, and the deprecating attitudes of the Fang towards the Baka, which has convinced the latter that they are inferior. Finally, I discuss the various ways in which my different language informants give value to their language and culture, notably through the different types of language products I have given back to the population.

Introduction

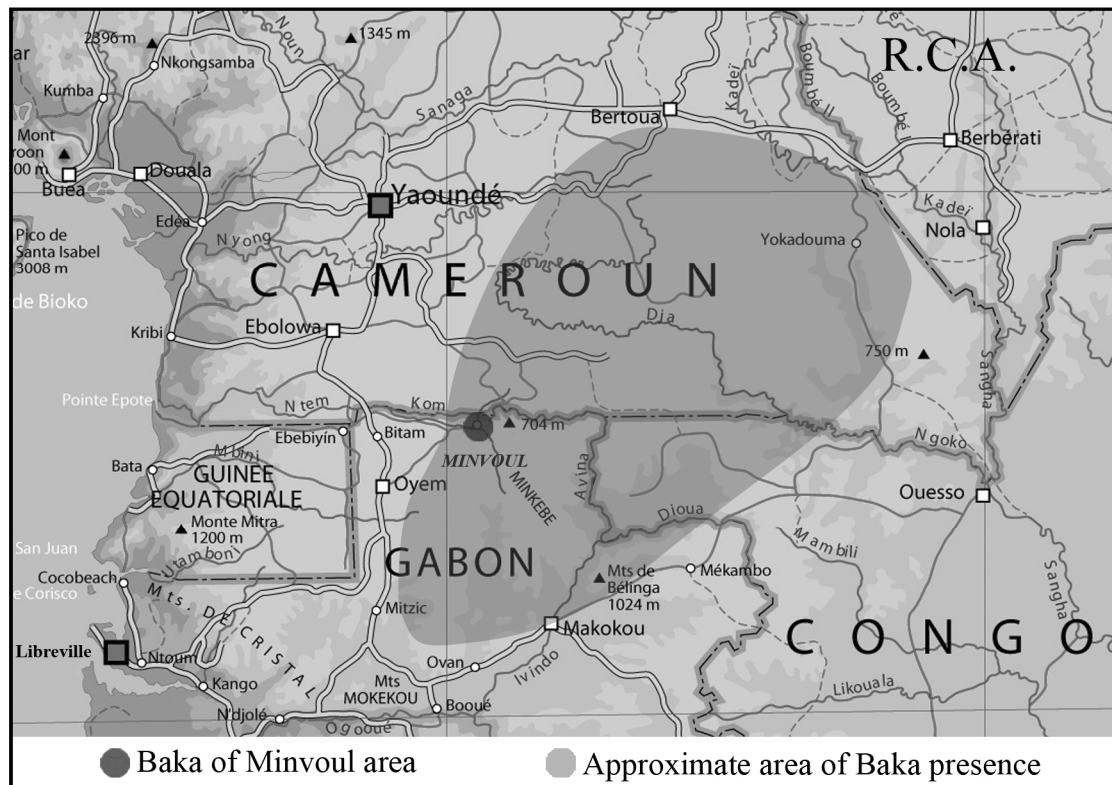
The Baka Pygmies live in Cameroon, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville. In Gabon, they form a small community (of about 500 individuals) in the North, and they are surrounded by the Fang population, the largest community in Gabon, with whom they have frequent contacts. They are, for this reason, bilingual, speaking Fang as well as Baka from their earliest years. Fang, like the rest of the languages of Gabon (estimated at 50), is a Bantu language, whereas Baka is an Ubangian language. Traditionally, the Baka are hunter-gatherers and have a nomadic lifestyle. Nowadays, even if they find the bulk of what they need for subsistence in the forest, their situation is changing, as the Baka are becoming gradually sedentarized, leading them to abandon their own language for Fang.

According to the literature, the Pygmies were always in contact with their neighbors. They were in a position of subordination, and often considered as properties of their neighboring communities. Even if Turnbull (1961) does not agree that the Pygmies were subjugated to their neighbors, as Schebesta (quoted by Turnbull) has suggested, it does not

change the fact that the Pygmies were in contact with neighboring villagers.

The Baka community in the Minvoul region is largely located in seven villages: Bitouga, Doumassi, Mféfélam, Mimbang, Nkoghakom, Ovang-Alène and Zangaville. To this list I would add Etogo, located between Ovang-Alène and Bitouga, making eight villages in total (I do not take into account the various villages further to the east in the forest, close to the gold mines, where they may be a few dozen Baka).

The majority of these villages are located next to a Fang village on the main road. As in Cameroon (Bahuchet 1989) the Baka in Gabon settle further back, further away from the road, between the Fang village and the edge of the forest. A typical example of this situation is Mféfélam, a Baka village located just behind the Fang village of Esseng. These two villages are so close that the villagers are used to using just one of the two names to refer to both villages, preferably Esseng. In other villages, the Baka settlements are found in the heart of the Fang village; they tend to be few and grouped together. Only one of the villages, as far as I know, presents a very different situation: Bitouga, which has no Fang houses strictly speaking.



The shaded area shows roughly the territory in the three countries where Baka groups are found.
The dark patch is the zone in Gabon with which this article is concerned.

Figure 1: Map of the approximate Baka area in Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon.

1. Fieldwork

The first time I went to the Minvoul region, it was for a different project than the one I am currently working on¹, I was not alone², and we were introduced by a student in anthropology³ who is acquainted with the Baka. We visited five of the eight villages, and the village of Bitouga caught my attention for various reasons. This village is essentially populated only by Baka, except for one Bantu couple⁴, with a

population of around sixty. As such, nobody stepped up as an intermediary between us and the Pygmies, nor declared them their property. In this way we were able to gain direct access to those we wanted to speak to, and our exchanges were therefore facilitated.

Accessing the village was not so easy, due to the fact that it is located in the middle of the forest and reached by crossing on foot a very steep hill, and then traveling upstream and across a river in a dugout canoe. The inhabitants are not therefore in permanent contact with the nearest town (Minvoul), even if they travel there regularly to sell (marantaceae leaves⁵, game, etc.) or to buy (oil, salt, cigarettes...). Furthermore, the forest is a place feared by many town-dwellers⁶ who would never venture out on the road to Bitouga. In this way, it is the Baka who initiate contact with the neighboring Fang in Minvoul.

1 The « Bantu Languages, Genes and Cultures » Project is directed by Lolke Van der Veen for the DDL (Dynamique Du Langage) Laboratory in Lyon, and is conducted in collaboration with the LABAN (Laboratory of Anthropology) of Libreville (Gabon) as well as with two research laboratories specialized in Population Genetics.

2 Patrick Mouguiama-Daouda, Professor of Linguistics at the Omar Bongo University (UOB, Gabon) and researcher associated with the DDL Laboratory, was responsible for this mission to Minvoul.

3 Modeste Mengue, who was working on the reasons why the sick were coming to be cared for by the Baka.

4 The man is a Bamileke from Cameroon, and the woman a Fang from Gabon, from the Bitam (North-East) region. They

farm for their own needs, and sell products brought from town to the Baka, a little bread, oil and confectionery, but mostly alcohol and cigarettes.

5 These large leaves are used to roll manioc in the form of a stick, or to wrap perishable foodstuffs for the market sellers.

6 The forest is often described as dark and inhospitable, and a place of wild beasts. It is more the fear of the unknown and the power of the imagination that terrorize these people, rather than any real danger present in the forest.

When we arrived in Bitouga village, a young Baka man named Sumba quickly came to meet us. He is a very curious man, always interested in new or unusual things. Sumba was keen to work with us, and after a few linguistic tests it seemed that he was a good speaker.

As there was no previous linguistic work on this variety of Baka in Gabon, I decided at that time to work in this region, given that at least one of the members of this community was interested. I set myself up primarily in the village of Bitouga, but I was also able to collect information from all the Baka villages surrounding Minvoul. I worked almost systematically with Sumba who turned out to be an excellent language informant, and became my speaker of reference.

1.1. Impact and place of the researcher

It is not an easy task for the researcher to find his or her place in the community, nor is it surprising to discover changes in the behavior of the population towards the researcher.

I find it difficult if not impossible to believe that the researcher makes no intrusion in a given community, even when that community has asked for the researcher's presence; there will always be a certain number of individuals who are not pleased with our presence. I believe that there are as many different situations as approaches, which will vary according to the particular researcher and to their own sensibilities and intuitions. It seems to me that if the researcher is honest, fair and open to dialogue, after a few field trips, even the most recalcitrant will welcome them with open arms.

My return to Bitouga for an ethnolinguistic study was somewhat special. In effect, after my first lightning visit (2 hours) where I met Sumba, I was able to, thanks to my research laboratory, bring Sumba to France. He spent three weeks in Lyon, two of which staying in my own home with my family. We worked intensely during this period, in which Sumba picked up my style of working and what I expected from him, not only linguistically speaking but also anthropologically.

A few weeks later, in July 2004, I traveled to Bitouga to spend a month with him, staying in his house. It was no surprise that Sumba, delighted by his trip to France, announced my arrival with enthusiasm. I was therefore very well received, even more so given that I had not come empty handed. I had previously asked the anthropology student what I should take to the members of the village. I thus arrived with rice, petrol and soap - gifts that were shared a few days later amongst all the families of the village, the shares of those absent at the time being set aside for their return.

On arriving, following Sumba's suggestion, I was careful to greet all the members present in the village. I felt a little lost in front of all these people, and I wasn't sure that I had successfully retained even one of the names given.

My presence in Bitouga was to totally change the daily routine of the villagers, as I was as much an object of study for them as they were one for me. It was mostly at the beginning that the impact of my presence was most felt, because my arrival had shaken their routines. Over time though, I believe that it became less perceptible, as each found his or her place in this new relationship.

Sumba was not asked to work as intensively as in Lyon, as I had forced myself to adapt to the rhythm of the village. Nonetheless, he was in some way compelled to follow a daily pattern which did not allow him to continue attending to his everyday jobs. So, he was traveling less and less to the forest to check on his traps, which meant that the game was often starting to decompose and uneatable a few days later. Mbèyè, his wife, would reprimand him at times virulently. Even though she realized that there was no time to go check on the traps, it was unacceptable to allow meat to go rotten⁷. After this, Sumba sent one of his nephews to go check on the traps in his place. Time management turned out to be difficult with pressure coming from all sides, and it was necessary for me to be patient and not too rigid or demanding, at the risk of obtaining false information, given quickly in order to do away with the overly insistent researcher.

The researcher knows why he or she is there; the desire to collect as much information as possible about the population. There are therefore certain expectations with respect to the community, and it would be illusory to believe that the community does not have any of the scientist either. The expectations of the locals are of a different nature; financial, prestige, a relay between the authorities, a different understanding of the ways of functioning to that of the White Man, etc.

It is easily understandable that the foreigner, White moreover, is considered as a rich person, given that he or she has come to the country so far away from his or her home. And despite precautions put into place by Sumba, I was asked for money to buy all sorts of things (cigarettes, alcohol, sheets etc.).

Having a White person as a friend, and receiving him or her in one's house, is socially rewarding, even more so if the village is in the forest. When we went into town, the townsfolk would endlessly question the Baka to find out what I ate in their homes and how I came to be living in their village. I noticed that they were proud to respond that there was no problem. I believe that it was a type of "payback" for them towards the Fang, who have tended to denigrate them, some of them even considering the Pygmies as animals rather than human beings; they don't understand therefore the value of my work.

The Baka sometimes asked me to intervene in their favor with certain authorities who were demanding of them unjustified taxes in order to obtain birth certificates which are normally delivered free of charge. Some people take advantage of their

⁷ Hunting is an essential part of the cultural practices of the Baka, and so meat is the principal source of nourishment. Even though Sumba was paid for the work he undertook with me, he still should not have allowed this sacred food source to go rotten.

status and the illiteracy of this population to take advantage of them financially in dishonest ways. The Baka expected then that I would act as their “firewall” against these fraudulent practices.

In the same vein, the inhabitants of Bitouga held the hope that I would be a witness to the contempt that certain Fang employers showed them. They would list the different breaches by the employer of the verbal contract made between the two parties, but I would never, of course, have any detailed account from the other party involved.

The members of the community under study will try to understand their interest to the researcher, their way of life, to comprehend their world, particularly in a forest environment, and more generally their way of functioning. They will be equally curious to know what benefits (essentially financial) the researcher him or herself will take from the collaboration. Thus, over time, sometimes following extensive negotiations, the members of the village would have to readjust their expectations of me and vice versa. I noted a real change in attitude of the Baka towards me after three weeks. The infants, aged between 15 and 24 months approximately, were very distant, as they were afraid of me. After around three weeks, this fear waned, and some even came to me to be held, just as any other mother⁸ of the village. It was at this time that I noted that the inhabitants no longer paid any attention to my various movements around the village.

It was not always simple for me to find my place with all these expectations, but I believe the most difficult was definitely my aloneness within the community, particularly during my first field trip. By this I mean, the fact of being alone with my thoughts, amongst people with a very different way of operating. Furthermore, I found it impossible to establish any real communication: each of us not knowing how to speak the other’s language. For four of my six stays in the field, I was obliged to make use of translators, which, in my opinion, can cause further difficulties, depending on the translator chosen.

Over the years, my stays in the field became evidence in their eyes; a sort of routine, if I can call it that, was set up. They became used to seeing me come regularly, around every six months in fact.

1.2. Relationships and trust

I believe that the relationship established between the researcher and the community should be considered as a dynamic requiring collaboration between each party, in order to gain the community’s trust.

It is well understood that over time a real relationship of trust can be established. The parties involved have a need to get to

know each other in order to position themselves. This getting to know each other begins with learning the names of the various members of the village, not an easy task when that involves around sixty people. In addition, it turns out that Baka each have five family names⁹, as well as a series of nicknames. The work of keeping track of names thus becomes even more complex. After a month in the field, I could easily refer to all the inhabitants of the village by their Baka name. However, even after six field trips, I was still not always able to identify people by their nicknames. It seems to me essential that the researcher wishing to increase the status of the hosts’ language use the family names of that language. I tried to force myself systematically to follow this rule, which was not only a mark of respect towards their language, but also towards their culture, knowing that all the family names have a meaning in their language.

I sought as much as possible to establish relationships of complicity, and circumstance helped me in this regard. In fact, various factors such as the danger of the forest or the particular ideas of the Baka about White people etc., meant that I was not allowed to go to the river alone. So I went there with the children and the young women. After a few trips, the women and I were able to establish complicity as we laughed together and bathed without the men. This complicit relation was the start of a friendship, albeit a fragile one due to my prolonged absences, but one that I was able to quickly reestablish (to my delight) on each new return to Bitouga.

Over time, they naturally paid less and less attention to me. They would speak in complete confidence about certain secret actions, knowing full well that I would not betray their trust, all the more so given that I had intervened on their behalf several times with certain government organizations or others. Sumba, very keen to preserve his language and culture, took care to give me as much information as possible, even when that involved medical knowledge which is never passed on except under very specific conditions¹⁰, conditions which were not however fulfilled in my case. Sumba thus placed a great deal of trust in me, and no other member of the village was allowed to question this relationship. It needs to be said that I never sought to collect particular secrets, nor force an informant to reveal certain information to me.

8 All the women, whether mothers of families or simply at reproductive age, are considered as “mothers”.

9 Two Baka family names, two Fang and a Christian first name.

10 Medical know-how is passed on to a single, chosen person, by the healer himself, generally within the family network. However, anybody who is motivated enough and keen to become a healer may, eventually, on paying a large sum of money, acquire a large part of this medical knowledge.

During my last stay in the field, in February of 2006, when I explained to Sumba that I would not be returning for quite a long period because I had to now write up my dissertation¹¹, he decided to reveal to me some confidential information. It was as if he wanted to seal a pact, one of "absolute" trust. In reality, it wasn't so much the information given that was important, but the way in which it was revealed which recalled certain conditions of an act of initiation. In fact, these revelations were made in secret, between him and me, almost in a whisper, as if nobody else were allowed to overhear us, with the restriction of never being able to reveal them, like a secret pact committing me entirely to their destiny. Prior to this, Sumba had made clear that "we are of the same family now", a gage of trust, but also of responsibility between and towards each other, of the solidarity that comes from belonging to the same family; a friendship which binds not only him and me but also his family and mine. I could not refuse this responsibility that I had in some ways brought about myself throughout my work with them. It was also a gift, a sort of present which came to reward all the work we had carried out together.

2. Factors contributing to endangerment

Following the various criteria established by UNESCO, it is clear that Baka is an endangered language; besides the intergenerational language transmission, and the proportion of speakers with respect to the total population, all other values established for the other criteria are weak or non-existent. No government policy has been put into place for the preservation of the fifty or so Gabonese languages, though for the case of Baka, the use of the language remains vital inside their own communities. In addition, I believe that it is necessary to take leverage from the existing strong points to strengthen those weak factors which could otherwise prove deadly to language transmission, for example the attitude of the speakers towards their own language.

2.1. Social status

The Baka are often looked down upon by the Fang. The latter do not consider themselves simply as the bosses of the Pygmies as they say - when they call on them, as they often do, to clear their fields - but as their owners. Even if behind this notion we can also see an idea of responsibility towards the Baka, it is still the case that the Fang consider them as their property, them as well as their material goods. And as I have already mentioned, some people have gone so far as to say that

they are not even human beings. The Fang have successfully convinced the Baka that they are inferior to them, due to the fact that they are not schooled and therefore uneducated. In addition, it is necessary to keep in mind that the Fang make up more than a fifth of the population in Gabon¹², and are therefore one of the majority ethnicities of the country; they also are strongly represented in Cameroon, their country of origin. The Baka consider the Fang as inferior to Whites. There is also, in their minds, a social hierarchy in which Whites are placed at the highest level, after which come the Fang, and then they themselves, the Baka, at the very bottom. This is why, as I have shown earlier, it turns out to be prestigious for the Baka to receive a White person in their home, and even more so to take part in scientific research. The majority of the Baka, thus persuaded of their inferiority, are proud to show that they can speak Fang. They seek by any means to gain access to a higher social status, notably through interethnic marriage. In Gabon, a man wishing to marry a woman must put together a dowry, in the form of compensation for the lost productivity of the bride's family. However, it turns out that the Fang dowry is the highest of all ethnic groups in Gabon, according to Mayer (2002). It is therefore very difficult for a young man to gather a sufficiently large sum, and if he's keen to marry quickly, he will "fall back" and seek a Baka wife, because the dowry is generally around ten times less than what it would be for a Fang wife. The Fang man is happy with his lot, but so is his Baka wife, who then has access to a so-called "superior" social status, as her children will too. The Baka and the Fang are two patrilineal societies, and so the children from such mixed marriage belong to the father's Fang lineage. The mother does not see therefore why she should speak Baka with her children, and in more than half the cases I noted that the father in fact forbids his wife from speaking her mother tongue to her children, who do not even have a Baka family name. These children are lost speakers for Baka, since, even if they are able to understand normal conversation and express themselves in this language, they actually do not, thereby highlighting that they belong to the "superior" lineage of the Fang.

2.2. Sedentarism

The Baka are traditionally hunter-gatherers, finding still the majority of their subsistence in the forest. In the past, the Baka were nomads, but the government policy of sedentarization has forced them to settle in a village and build clay houses similar to those of the Fang. The village has become then the place to systematically return to after excursions to the forest, taking the place of the forest camps of the past. Not only do

11 I am currently working on a doctoral thesis entitled "The Baka of Gabon: an ethnolinguistic study", in the Dynamique Du Langage CNRS Laboratory in Lyon, under the direction of Lolke van der Veen.

12 According to the official census of 1993, there were 250,000 Fang out of a total of population of 1,200,000 people in Gabon.

the Baka spend less time in the forest, but they don't travel as far into the forest as they used to and, because of this, are starting to lose a great deal of the vocabulary related to tree species found in the primary forest. In the same way, they are no longer really in a position to administer the sort of care requiring this type of canopy, and here certain practices are disappearing.

New customs are being established; the Baka tend to live like the villagers and aspire to material comfort. They are therefore becoming more and more dependent on paid work, which means spending more and more time in the company of Fang, speaking the language of their neighbors to the detriment of their own. The Baka have established a few plantations, and the changes in their diet are not always adapted to their organism. Idleness is gaining ground because of the increasing distance of the forest, and alcohol dependence is becoming frequent in some villages. All the changes have brought about new diseases, and according to H  l  ne Nz  ¹³, more and more Baka youths are dying prematurely, barely reaching their thirties.

It seems obvious that the more rapid and brutal the changes of lifestyle are, the greater the risk of language loss. And going beyond just language, a radical change in lifestyle, and certain draconian restrictions – for instance, some NGOs have forbidden the Baka to hunt large game anymore¹⁴ – would clearly imply the loss of ancestral know-how, such as elephant hunting techniques, or the gathering of different types of honey; in this way, a large part of their culture will also disappear.

3. Collaborators

The role of the linguist is above all to document the language of a chosen community; however languages are not easily dissociated from the cultural practices which surround them, and that is why it is just so important to collect data of all sorts: cultural (stories, songs, dances), anthropological (family trees going back generations), ethnological (honey collecting, large game hunting), and historical (tales from elders). To

13 H  l  ne Nz  , Baka from both parents, is the President of the Edzengui Association, working for the preservation and improved status of nature and of Baka culture. Personal communication, Libreville, Gabon, February 2007.

14 In order to preserve elephants from poachers present in this region, certain NGOs impose hunting restrictions on the Baka, who are not allowed to kill elephants except on the occasion of a few specific ceremonies, while a large elephant could feed a whole village of sixty people during more than a month. It seems to me more relevant to put into place a system capable of distinguishing poaching from classic hunting.

have access to these different types of data, it is necessary to work with consultants of varying ages, due to the fact that linguistic and cultural knowledge varies from one generation to the next.

3.1. Expertise

At the start, I mainly worked with Sumba, who, over time, learned from our working together to spot borrowings from the neighboring language. When he was unable to recall the term in Baka, he spontaneously proposed that I turn to the Elders of the village, guardians of the community's collective memory. Knowing that Sumba was familiar with my way of working, I tried, as much as possible, for him to be consistently present during my work sessions. He thereby became my consultant of reference, always by my side during our trips to the seven other Baka villages. We were the base team, although often joined by a translator, or a few youths curious to learn new notions, or Elders (men or women), at occasionally a Gabonese ethnobotanist, or other Baka, according to the circumstances.

The Bitouga inhabitants would become particularly excited by and interested in work sessions involving, for example, the names of animals, a subject that they take particularly to heart given that hunting remains their principal source of food. It seems to me wise to intervene at these times so that they become conscious of the place that Fang is taking at the heart of their own language. A convincing argument is to point out the loss of terms in Baka and borrowings from neighboring languages: here the elder can act as a collective memory to remind the youth of older terms that many will be keen to revive. I also make use of the specific skills of the Baka in collecting honey, for instance, and of the specific vocabularies which accompany these skills and which are not found in Fang. I have, in fact, collected eight terms in Baka corresponding to different types of honey, while it would seem that the Fang only have names for four, even if they are otherwise familiar with more than four varieties¹⁵. It is specifics like these that one must therefore make use of in order to enhance the value of their language and their culture.

3.2. Language value and status

Although the Baka are recognized throughout the country for some of their specific practices, such as their medicinal knowledge, as I mentioned before they have a very low opinion of themselves. That is why I insist on valuing their *savoir-faire*. The act of collecting data about different elements of their lifestyle, and of showing an interest in the

15 Work in progress, Medjo Mv   Pither. Personal communication. Lyon, DDL, December 2006.

many practices that they themselves have a tendency to undervalue, brings them bit by bit to recover confidence in themselves, and some do not hesitate to ask me about their value in the social hierarchy. I have taken the opportunity to highlight certain aspects of the culture which are recognized throughout Gabon, such as their impressive hunting skills, their mastery of the forest and their familiarity with the fauna and flora, and their polyphonic songs of a style similar to yodeling. This always seems to help them feel proud in what they are.

I have tried to help them understand that each human being lives and acts according to their environment; that it is for this reason that the Baka do not know how to read or write, as it is not useful for them in the forest. It is more relevant for them to learn animal behavior, in order to successfully capture their prey. They are able to therefore conceive of their language and their various cultural practices as being just as worthy of interest as those of their neighbors. The idea is not to put them on a pedestal either, but on an equal footing with all the other societies around them and elsewhere.

During a symposium¹⁶ in the Gabonese capital, I had the opportunity, as a researcher, to gain access to different media outlets of the country, such as the radio or television. This allowed me to present a positive vision of the Baka community with which I had worked, and from a "scientific" point of view, which guarantees often that these ideas are actually taken into consideration (even if not necessarily justified). I am not certain that this had rapid and direct repercussions on the population - the object of the study - but even if it was only able to change the negative view of a few people, it was still an initial success. Making the rights of minority communities count is a long and time-consuming task which, in my opinion, should leverage off the interests of the majority populations. What needs to be made clear is how linguistic and cultural diversity is a source of wealth in both the literal and figurative senses. Producing music CDs from different cultural groups of the country, and making them known, can attract tourists who are curious about cultural differences - tourism which is often an extra and non-negligible source of revenue for these so-called "developing" countries.

3.3. Giving back to the community

The various language products the Baka have received from me, the result of my work in various media (photographs, CDs etc.), have contributed I believe to the increasing value the Baka attach to their language and culture. They have become

even more interested since realizing they are able to capitalize on this work and on our work together, and in the end on the outside acceptance of their own linguistic and cultural identity. Giving back to the population is not simply about increasing language value; it is not only a testimony of my interest in the community as a researcher and also as an individual, but it is also a mark of respect for the differences between their language and mine, their lifestyle and way of thinking and mine, and more generally their culture and mine.

They now have, in addition, a tool which allows them to recall the customs, songs or any other cultural practice from the past. Oral tradition is certainly no longer the only channel for preservation, and is maybe losing its prestige to newer tools, but one mustn't neglect the power of "direct" words which one finds in evenings of storytelling, and the impact of these stories on the young children. These words transmitted under certain conditions such as these special "evenings" are sources of unforgettable memories which will then be retold. The atmosphere of these evenings has cohesive social power whose reproduction is difficult, or even totally impossible via other types of media (radio for example). These stories, these word games, these sketches, allow family and friendship bonds to be reinforced inside the community as a whole. Other media which might be made use of (CDs, photographs) are only supplementary means to bring together members of the village at one of these evenings.

Conclusions and perspectives

If the presence of the researcher has inevitably had an impact on the community studied, in my situation I believe that it has been above all an acceleration of various phenomena which would have taken place anyway. In fact, the Baka have always been in contact with their neighbors, their curiosity and maybe also their naivety has brought them bit by bit into contact with the towns.

The sedentarization policies imposed by the government have succeeded to shift even the most resistant to village life. The village has therefore become a base to return to after excursions to the forest. Given their lack of obvious distance in the face of what we might call globalization, in the sense understood by Laplantine & Saillant (2005), the Baka have a tendency to let themselves be carried away by a consumer society in which the term "comfort" takes on its true meaning.

I have tried, as far as possible, to help them understand that the changes in their lifestyle they are currently facing have real consequences. This is why I have documented not only the language, but also the different cultural practices of this community, and insisted on highlighting the value of their know-how. Thus, through this work, the Baka have gradually become aware that it is essential to preserve their language, and through it their culture. It is not simple to take into consideration the local specificities of a global environment, and if there is a hope to take from all of this, it is that Gabon successfully integrates this notion of "glocal" (Laplantine & Saillant, 2005) in order to preserve and value all of the cultural and linguistic riches still present in the country.

16 Inter-university Scientific Week "20 years of research on the languages and cultures of Gabon", University Omar Bongo (Gabon), University Lumière-Lyon 2 & CNRS, 16-20 January 2007.

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