

VARIATION IN THE PLANNING OF A DICTIONARY IN GABONESE LANGUAGES, CASE OF FANG.

Guy-Modeste EKWA EBANEGA,

Department of Language Sciences, Omar Bongo University, Libreville, Gabon.

ekwaebanegagymodeste@gmail.com

Médard MOUELE,

Department of Language Sciences, Omar Bongo University, Libreville, Gabon.

mmwele@gmail.com

Abstract:

Variation in dictionary planning is an essential aspect of lexicography. It involves taking linguistic diversity into account to create a dictionary that faithfully reflects the language and its variations. Variation can manifest itself at different levels, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon. This research addresses the planning of variation of dictionary in Fang, a Bantu language spoken in Gabon as well as in neighboring countries such as the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo. It identifies several varieties of the Fang language, including the standard variety of Fang.

Keywords: Variation, planning, dictionary, fang, standardization

Résumé

Le Gabon est un pays multilingue. La Langue, fang, comme les autres langues gabonaises ne sont pas standardisées en comparaison avec le français qui est la langue officielle. Il existe un certain nombre de travaux linguistiques sur les langues gabonaises, mais ils n'ont pas conduit à une standardisation complète. Cette recherche aborde la planification de la variation du dictionnaire en fang, une langue bantoue parlée au Gabon ainsi que dans les pays voisins comme la République de Guinée Equatoriale, la République du Cameroun et la République du Congo. Elle identifie plusieurs variétés de la langue fang parmi lesquelles la variété standard du fang.

Mots clés : Variation, planification, dictionnaire, fang, standardisation

0. Introduction

Variation is a ubiquitous phenomenon in all dictionaries and manifests itself in different ways. It can be related to factors internal to the language, such as spelling and pronunciation, or to external factors, such as language contact or regional or dialectal differences. The purpose is to investigate different competing dialectal forms of Fang to be considered for inclusion in the planned dictionary. Martinet (1991: 35) says “nothing

can be recognised as belonging to the language which is not common to many speakers”.

This lexicographical issue has an implication for the data to be included in the dictionary. The objective of this research is to show how dictionaries can faithfully reflect linguistic diversity by effectively planning for variation.

This study, which is based on data from Fang (classified A75) spoken in Gabon, comprises six main sections. After the introduction, we will present the theoretical framework (1) then we will review the dialect varieties of Fang (2), before examining in turn the standard variety of Fang (3), the variety of the Fang writing system (4) with different types of tones in Fang (5), the different types of labels (6) and finally the loan words (7). We will then conclude.

1. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the theoretical framework of linguistic variation, as conceptualized by Ladislav Zgusta (1971). Linguistic variation refers to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of language, characterized by differences in usage, form, and meaning that can be observed across various dimensions. These dimensions include regional variation, which involves differences in language use associated with geographic locations or dialects, orthographic variation, which involves differences in spelling or writing conventions, phonetic variation, which involves differences in pronunciation, lexical variation, which involves differences in word choice or meaning, and social variation, which involves differences in language use associated with social factors such as socioeconomic status, age, or gender. This theoretical framework, grounded in the principles of theoretical and methodological lexicography, provides a comprehensive approach to analyse the representation of linguistic variation in dictionaries and exploring its implications for the fields of linguistics and lexicography.

2. Variation and users

The target user of a dictionary is undoubtedly the central figure in lexicography. Indeed, the lexicographer does not write a dictionary for his own pleasure, but to meet the needs of the target users. It is therefore

essential for the lexicographer to know his target audience before starting work on the dictionary. The variation in the dictionary must be determined by the target users, which makes the task of creating a user-friendly product paramount for the compiler. It is speakers' usage that determines linguistic variation, in the sense that they are the ones who use the language and therefore create linguistic variation through their usage. Speakers influence linguistic variation in several ways: 1. They use the language in their daily practice, and this can lead to variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and expression. 2. Speakers from various regions or communities may exhibit specific linguistic variations that can be meaningful due to their cultural and geographic identity. 3. Speakers can produce neologisms, expressions, and linguistic forms that can subsequently become part of everyday usage.

In a word, speakers are predominant in the sense that they are the ones who actually practice the language, and therefore who create linguistic variations based on their practices.

The central question of lexicography is therefore: Who are the users of the dictionary? This is true even if the lexicographer can only form a vague image of the user who will ultimately consult the dictionary. In the past, lexicographers have often neglected the needs of users, which naturally led to a distancing between users and the dictionary.

This dictionary focuses on two main groups: fluent Fang speakers (high school and university students) who are proficient in French, and Fang learners (college and university students) who want to improve their language skills or learn the language. The dictionary is intended for both Fang speakers who need help writing, and learners at various stages, acting as a helpful tool for translation and understanding information for a diverse range of people.

3. Variation and dialectal varieties of Fang

A variety of a language consists, just as a dialect does, of the sum of the idiolects of all speakers who speak the variety or dialect. The distinction between a variety and a dialect is to a certain degree artificial, as it is at the very least difficult, probably impossible, to distinguish between a

variety and a dialect. Since a pejorative value is often given to the term *dialect*, the term *variety* is used in this work.

Dialects are regional or social varieties of a language, characterized by differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Language variation refers to the differences in how people speak, which can be influenced by factors like geography, social class, and context. Dialects are one form of language variation, and they are not inherently "better" or "worse" than other dialects; they are simply different ways of speaking the same language.

Apart from the fact that Fang is widely spread in Gabon (in four provinces and 17 regions), it is also spoken in neighbouring countries (i.e. Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, the Republic of the Congo and Sao Tome). This means that the varieties of Fang spoken in these countries are also counted as varieties of that language. However, in this work I will focus primarily on Fang varieties spoken in Gabon.

There are six Fang varieties spoken in Gabon. These are:

- **Fang-Ntumu:** Fang-Ntumu speakers represent the most important community of Fang in Gabon. This variety, located in Oyem and Bitam, covers the largest Fang area in Gabon.
- **Fang-Okak:** Located principally in the Mitzic, Medouneu and Cocobeach regions.
- **Fang-Mvai:** The sole Fang variety spoken in only one region of Gabon, namely the Minvoul or Haut Ntem region.
- **Fang-Mekè:** Fang-Mekè speakers can be located on the other side of the sea, in the Metek ma vii chinchoua zone (on the western side of the Estuaire River) and in the area of Lalala (on the eastern side of the Estuaire River).

Fang-Mekè speakers are also called *mekè me Nkoma* because they are the group of Fang people that decided to leave and cross the Komo River when they reached the Estuaire. The name Mekè came from the Fang term "meke" (or *mekè*), which means "departure". Today, this term designates all Fang speakers in the Estuaire area, even those ones who did not cross the Komo River.

- **Fang-Atsi:** Fang Atsi is spoken by the Betsi population in three regions in Gabon: Lambaréné, Ndjolé and Bifoun.
- **Fang-Nzaman:** Located principally in the Makokou and Ouen regions.

4. Criteria for selecting a standard variety

A dictionary of which the objective is to describe the standard variety has to record the standard orthography of a lexical item where there are competing forms (Mdee 1990, 1998). A lexicographer should therefore decide which form is considered standard and which is not. In this regard, a standard dictionary should promote the standard variety.

It is a well-attested fact that the compilation of a standard dictionary can play a valuable role in the standardisation process of a particular language. Moreover, standard dictionaries must adhere to a certain set of criteria, as stated by Gouws (2001: 76):

Standard dictionaries can be regarded as products resulting from a well-established lexicographic environment. These dictionaries are the most commonly used monolingual lexicographic instruments and display a wide range of lemmata and microstructural categories. Standard dictionaries usually are single volume products in which a synchronic and normative approach prevails. The macrostructure represents the standard variety of the treated language although a number of high usage frequency items from non-standard varieties will also be included. These items will be marked by lexicographic labels indicating stylistic, chronolectic, regional or other deviations from the standard variety. Standard dictionaries include a representative selection of macrostructural items and an extensive treatment of these items. These dictionaries consequently have a high data density.

Emejulu and Nzang-Bié (1999) argue that there is no specific scientific model for choosing a standard variety. According to them, Sadembouo (1980) listed 18 criteria for selecting a standard dialect that he classed under three headings: **fundamental**, **secondary** and **marginal** criteria:

- **Fundamental criteria**
 - High degree of declared understanding of the variety.
 - High degree of predicted understanding of the variety.
 - Numerical importance of the variety speakers.
 - Advantageous geographical position of the variety.
 - The location of the variety at the centre of activity.
 - Variety prestige.
 - Pureness of the variety.
 - Mobility of the variety.
- **Secondary criteria**
 - The attitude of the government towards the variety.
 - Religious influence of the variety.
 - Socio-economic importance of the variety.
 - Written documents already existing in the variety.
 - Historical expansion of the language.
 - Expressed feeling on the ease of understanding and speaking of the variety.
- **Marginal criteria**
 - Availability of variety speakers ready to cooperate in the language development work.
 - Good working conditions for the researchers.
 - Friendship relations between the researchers and a speaker of the variety.
 - Social status of the variety speakers.

To these criteria proposed by Sadembouo (1980), Emejulu and Nzang-Bié (1999) add the following aspects:

- National languages of wider communication.
- Decentralisation of decision of choice of language to regions.
- Dominant regional languages.
- Choice left to the communities.
- Native tongue of the capital city.
- Presence of leaders engaged in the standardisation process.
- Presence of a committee concerned with standardisation.

- Endangered languages (varieties). This criterion will serve in preserving these languages. De Vries (1991: 51) cites the case of Swedish in Finland, which has been protected by a language law since the early years of the 20th century. This Swedish example can be taken as a model for protecting endangered languages (varieties).
- The mutual comprehension rate between varieties.
- Accepting the standardisation of a second variety if the varieties of the language are structurally wide apart with minimal mutual comprehension.

5. Choice of the standard variety in the dictionary with the planned dictionary

A further obstacle faced by lexicographers is the tendency of regional varieties (cf. Zgusta, 1989: 71). One of the main problems of existing dictionaries in Fang is that they fail to adhere to the standard language. Among the varieties of Fang, no variety has yet been chosen as standard variety. These dictionaries may confuse and mislead the users and would be condemned by users and reviewers.

The planned dictionary must be regarded as the authority on spelling, grammar, meaning and usage of the language. It must record the standard variety, reflecting the norm, and must include items of another norm or other varieties of Fang, and the social and geographical areas where each is spoken must be marked accordingly.

Based on the fact that Fang is a language with dialectal variants, we present, through a questionnaire, a population of approximately 200 individuals from the different areas (50 Fang-Ntumu subjects, 50 Fang-Atsi, 50 Fang-Nzaman subjects, 50 Fang-Okak subjects, 50 Fang-Mekè subjects and 50 Fang-Mvai, so that they could decide on the choice of the reference dialect. The people gathered unanimously chose the Fang-Ntumu variant (their first choice) and the Fang-Atsi (their second choice) as being the most representative variants.

Many studies have been done regarding the regional variety of Fang, including those by Nzang-Bié (2004), Afane Otsaga (2004) and Ekwa Ebanéga (2001). These authors give the following reasons for choosing Fang-Ntumu as the standard variety model:

- Fang-Ntumu is the most vital variety because of its number of speakers. If one takes into account the criteria for choosing the standard dialect set out in the previous section, Fang Ntumu meets the conditions for being chosen as a standard dialect given its number of speakers, which is greater than those of other Fang dialects.
- Fang-Ntumu is the most homogeneous variety; it is found in the province (Woleu-Ntem) where Fang is the only language. In Woleu-Ntem province, Fang-Ntumu coexists with other Fang varieties, Mvai and Okak. While in other provinces, the Fang language coexists with other Gabonese languages.
- Fang-Ntumu in the province of Woleu-Ntem does not coexist with other foreign languages, as is the case with Fang-Ntumu, which is found in Oyem, while Fang-Ntumu, which is spoken in Bitam, coexists with Haussa, a foreign language spoken in Cameroon.
- Fang-Ntumu has an advantageous geographical position and it plays an important economic, cultural and social role in the province of Woleu-Ntem. The main activities in this province take place in Oyem and Bitam, which are original regions of Fang-Ntumu. A lot of people from the other parts of this province and from neighbouring countries (Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea) go there to work, study and do business. Fang-Ntumu is the language of communication between members of the Fang population in this part of Gabon.
- Of all the varieties of Fang, works published in Fang-Ntumu are more accessible to people today. Most of the works in the other varieties are not readily available in

Gabon. For instance, dictionaries compiled in Fang-Atsi and Fang-Mekè cannot be found in any library in Gabon.

- Fang-Ntumu is the Fang variety used most in the audiovisual media (radio and television) in Gabon. Fang-Ntumu also is the first variety of Fang in which an entire movie has been made.

Once the standard language (Fang-Ntumu) and other varieties of Fang are known, the lexicographer(s) would have to pose the following question: Which existing writing system is the best for Fang language?

6. Variation and variety of writing system in Fang

Two periods characterise the writing system of Gabonese in general, and Fang in particular. The first period is the period of pedagogical writing. It starts from 1850 to 1960 (Raymond, 1990: 67; Nzang Bié, 2024: 23). It was successful for the writing of Gabonese languages, and probably of Fang through the publications of Catholic and Protestant missionaries. This period, rich in the publication of dictionaries in Gabonese languages saw not only the proliferation of 'targeted' literature, but also the schooling of young people in the Fan language. It corresponds, as Medjo (1997: 22) underlines, to a moment when the transmission of the biblical message in local languages and the work of alphabetization are intimately linked. The school and the missionary church had tools and pedagogical materials whose equivalent does not exist today.

Unfortunately, despite this literary proliferation, no orthographic system has been established for writing Fang, nor for any other Gabonese language. The writing systems used depended on the origin of their various authors. Thus, the first Protestant missionaries in Gabon adopted an English-type orthography, while the French Catholic missionaries who disembarked later resorted to an orthography similar to that of their native language. This confusion persists to this day. The different "amateur authors" of the Fān language write using a spelling inspired by that of French.

The period of independence with the introduction of French as the official language led to a lethargy in the pedagogical plan of Gabonese languages. However, since 1990, there has been a renewed interest in national languages through scientific works, as well as national

consultations advocating the revalorization of Gabonese languages. But, on the production plan, no study has yet been established to fix the orthographic system of Gabonese languages.

6.1. The Ndong's system(1962, quoted by Nzang-Bié, 2004)

Vowels :

a, i, o, é, è are pronounced as in French;
e are pronounced as in French in the article 'le'
u is pronounced as the 'ou' in French
ü is pronounced as in French in 'lu'

Consonants :

b, d, f, k, g, l, m, n, p, r, t, v, z, s are pronounced as in French;
c is pronounced as ch in German in 'ach' ;
h is pronounced as ch in Herman in 'sachen' or a french r French guttural r ;
ng is pronounced as 'ng' in English in 'singing' ;
ny is pronounced as in French in 'agneau'.

Semi-vowels :

w is pronounced as 'lui' in French in 'lui' ;
y is pronounced as 'y' in French in 'bayard'.

6.2. The Galley's system (1964)

Vowels:

a, é, è, i are pronounced as in French;
ü is pronounced as 'u' in French français ;
e is pronounced as the french mute 'e' in 'école' ;
o in pronounced as in French 'or, ordre' ;
ô is pronounced as in French 'dos, beau, côté' ;
u is pronounced as the 'ou' in French;
i is a sibilant with the consonants b, f, g, k, et v.

Consonants :

b, d, f, k, g, l, m, n, p, t, v, r are pronounced as in French ;
gh is pronounced as the guttural french 'r' ;
kh is pronounced as the final german 'ch' as in 'nach' ;
ny is pronounced as 'gn' in French in 'pignon' ;
ng is pronounced as in the English word 'singing' ;
ny is pronounced as a ny se prononce comme un ny plus guttural ;
z is pronounced dz ;

zh is pronounced as 'z' in French;
h is found in some exclamations.

Semi-vowels
y, w, et \hat{w}

6.3. The Raponda Walker's system (1998)

Vowels

a, e, è, i, o are pronounced as in French;
u is pronounced as 'u' in French (menu, pointu) ;
e is pronounced as in 'été, péle'. But at the end of the word, it is pronounced as a mute 'e'.
ô is pronounced as in French in 'pomme, homme' ;
u is pronounced as the 'ou' in French.

Consonants

b, d, f, g, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, z are pronounced as in French;
c is pronounced as k ;
`c is pronounced as the german 'ch' or the spanish 'j' ;
ç preceded by t, it is pronounced as french 'tch' in 'Tchèque' or English ch in 'church' ;
gh is pronounced as the french 'r' ;
ñ is pronounced as 'gn' in 'agneau' ;
ñ is pronounced as in the english word 'singing' or in the german word 'bringen' ;
r roulé ou grasseyé.

Semi-vowels

y is pronounced as in French (yeux) or in English (yes, you).

The various comments accompanying the symbols presented above are those of the authors. They highlight that some of the proposed symbols as described were not suitable for the fan. This is the case for the consonants:

*r, which is pronounced rolled or grasseyé as in French;
*h, which is pronounced as the German 'ch' (sachen) or the French 'r'.
None of the linguistic descriptions of the Fang dialects mentions the existence of a rolled or grasseyée consonant¹⁴; or that of an h (grasseyée) consonant. This confirms the propositions mentioned above, namely that the writing systems used depended on the origins of their various authors.

6.4. The April 1999 system

From 8 to 10 April 1999, consultation sessions of experts were held in Gabon by the Department of Education and the national commission of UNESCO within the framework of establishing spelling for the Gabonese languages. During these sessions, the Gabonese people were advised to bear in mind the vowels and consonants given below:

Vowels

The experts proposed nine vowels: i, u, e, e, ∂ , a, o, o and u.

The length of these vowels is represented by the reduplication of the vowel.

Consonants

The experts retained monographs and diagraphs

Monographs:

b, c, d, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y and z.

Diagraphs:

gh, jh, sh, vh, ny

Mid-nasal consonants and complexes with glides are spelled with the help of two or more letters.

The only criticism that can be made of the above proposition is the symbol ∂ . The question is: Which typographical structural marker the lexicographer(s) of the dictionary with the planned ditionary is going to use to aid or help fast and effective identification of all the lemmata? Will the words selected as lemmas in the planned dictionary be written with capital letters or a small letters?

6.5. Nzang-Bié's system

Within the frame of the orthographic system, Nzang-Bié (2004) proposes 18 vowels in terms of the diagram below:

Small letter	Capital letter	Examples
i “interdit”	I	eki
ii “faire descendre”	II	asii
e “arbre”	E	ele
ee “soif”	EE	evee
ɛ “lèvre”	ɛ	eyɛ
ɛɛ épouse”	ɛɛ	ngɛɛ “son
a “dépecer”	A	aba
aa sait”	AA	aayəm “il
ə “aller”	ə	akə
əə “donner”	əə	akəə
u bas”	u	olu “Là-
uu “incline”	uu	luugə
o “couteau”	O	okə <u>n</u>

oo	“contaminer”	OO	akoo
ɔ	“amant”	ɔ	ebɔn
ɔɔ	“est assis”	ɔɔ	atɔɔ “il
u	“commencer”	U	asum
uu	“poison”	UU	nsuu

Consonants

Small letters	Capital letters	Examples
b “hommes”	B	b <u>ɔ</u> t
d “tromper”	D	aduk
g femme”	G	ngɛɛ “sa
t “prix”	T	tan <u>g</u>
k “peau”	K	ekob
m “puits”	M	etam
n “bras”	N	enam

ŋ		ŋ		aŋu
	“bouche”			
kp		KP		akpoo
	“faire tomber”			
f		F		fam
	“homme”			
s		S		asoŋ
	“dent”			
v		V		avak
	“réjouir”			“se
z		Z		zalaŋ
	“tonnerre”			
l		L		alat
	“coller”			
r		R		kara
	“crabe”			
y		Y		oyəm
	“langue”			
w		W		awu
	“mort”			

With regard to Nzang-Bié’s system, the only question one could ask is: how are the lexicographer(s) going to write the source language item? Are they going to use small or capital letters? If one takes the system proposed by Nzang-Bié, the only criticism that can be made relates to the symbols ə, ŋ, ɔ which are identical, whether written as small or as capital letters. This can be a problem for the lexicographer(s) of the

dictionary with the planned dictionary, who have to write the words selected as lemmas either with small letters or with capital letters.

Considering that vowels and consonants are not identical when they are written as small or capital letters in the system proposed by Nzang-Bié, words selected as lemmas will be written with a small letter in the dictionary with the planned dictionary.

6.6. Writing system in the planned dictionary

It can be suggested that the need and demand for spelling data would also be great in the dictionary with the planned dictionary. The results of the questionnaire show that 58% of the respondents consult a dictionary to look up spelling data. It could be postulated that the respondents are aware of the importance of spelling data in the dictionary.

As far as the alphabet is concerned, the model for the proposed dictionary will be the April 1999 alphabet because it is the one that involved so many experts (linguists, sociologists, anthropologists, etc.). In this regard, it deserves consideration and also has a chance to be considered by the entire Gabonese community. Furthermore, ongoing research uses the April 1999 alphabet, including that done by

The model for the proposed dictionary will be explained in the front matter of the dictionary. All the vowels, consonants, digraphs and monographs will also be presented and discussed in this functional part of the dictionary.

7. Variety of tones

One of the main problems of existing Gabonese dictionaries in general, and existing dictionaries in Fang in particular, is the lack of tones in the written transcription of oral productions (cf. Nyangone Assam & Mavoungou, 2000). Very often, lexicographers compiling dictionaries for African languages have been guilty of ignoring this basic component of the phonological analysis of the language (cf. Mavoungou, 2001: 133).

One cannot discuss phonetics and phonology without mentioning the question of “tones”, because tones play an important role. This point is

supported by Matthews (997: 379, quoted by Ekwa Ebanega, 2007)). According to him, a tone is a phonetic or phonological unit belonging to a set of units distinguished or primarily distinguished by levels of or changes in pitch. For Baylon and Fabré (1990: 101), tones are used as distinctive units. Every work on Gabonese languages recognises the important part that tones play in these languages. It has already been stated that lexicographers compiling dictionaries for African languages have been guilty of ignoring this basic component of the phonological analysis of the language. It is important to assume that in order to read fluently, one must become familiar with tonal units, just as one must be familiar with consonants and vowels (Nzang Bie, 2024: 31). The *Dictionnaire Fang-Français/Français-Fang* (DFFFF) presents a range of tone heights, namely the high tone (h), the low tone (b) and the medium tone (m). Furthermore, one of the front matter texts gives an account of tonal features. The tonal indication is usually followed by a paraphrase of meaning in the target language, namely French (cf. Mavoungou, 2001: 132). Up to now, the different descriptions of tones in the Gabonese languages are divided into three categories. These are main tones, intermediate tones and secondary tones.

7.1. Basic tones

Fang is a tone language with two distinctive tone levels, high (H) and low (L):

- High punctual tone: The highest point of the melodic curve with high-pitched sound ('). For example, one could have: *mvám* “generosity”
- Low punctual tone: The lowest point of the melodic curve with low-pitched sound ('). For example, one could have: *zùm* “bird”

7.2. Tone melodies

There are two tone melodies in Fang, a falling tone (HL) and a rising tone (LH):

- Rising tone: This melodic curve takes two successive lines. It goes down towards the lowest point before going towards the highest point. It is about an opposite circumflex and is noted as (˘), as in *àsø* “tooth”

- Falling tone, noted with the circumflex ('). It is a melodic curve that takes two successive lines. It goes up towards the highest point before going down towards the lowest point, as in *èvñ* “the door”

7.3. *Intermediate tones*

Intermediate tones occur less in Fang than main tones. Their presence in the Gabonese languages is significant and relevant:

- Mid tone: noted with vertical line (|). According to Hombert (1990: 102), these tones are realised at the lowest level, which is similar to medium tone, but, contrary to a real medium tone, cannot be followed by a higher tone, as in *áwi'ny* “to kill”.
- Medium punctual tone: noted with a horizontal line. This point is situated in the middle of the melodic curve, between the lowest point and the highest point of the melodic curve [-], as in *ásõn* “tooth”.

This inventory of tones in Fang is not exhaustive, because Fang is not yet fully described. But it helps to note that there are a great deal of tones and one should bear their presence in mind, as it is of importance in the description of this language.

It goes without saying that the previous dictionaries did not generally take tones into account. One could take as example some of the catechisms compiled by missionaries. These works are proof that they taught the word of God without understanding the pronunciation of these languages. The only problem of this so-called method used by missionaries and colonial administrators is that, when pronouncing certain Gabonese words, some Christians could feel disappointed. They did not know how to pronounce some Gabonese words, hence this problem. This is proof that tonality is very important in Gabonese languages, and not indicating tonality could cause embarrassment.

The dictionary with the planned dictionary will include spelling variants. The spelling variants of the words will be shown after the lemma. Consider the following modified article of the lemma **abi** drawn from the DFFFF showing how the pronunciation and spelling variants will be placed in the planned dictionary:

Abi *Ntumu abe* [ábè]

→ In the modified article of the lemma **abi**, the item of the lemma **abi** is provided, followed by the *Ntumu* spelling variant **abe** in bold and the pronunciation [ábè]. The label *Ntumu* tells the users of the existence of these pronunciation and spelling variants in Nutumu (one of the dialects of Fang).

8. Labels

In lexicography, dictionary labels are used to indicate variation in a word, whether geographical, temporal, social, or stylistic. These usage markers help us understand how a word is used in different contexts and by different groups of speakers. Lexical variation is an important aspect of lexicography because it reflects the richness and complexity of the language.

8.1. Geographical labels

Geographical labels indicate the region or country where a word is commonly used or originated.

KUNA (h) n.3, pl. *bekuna* (Atsi). 1. Bleu, couleur du touraco bleu. 2. Touraco bleu lui-même. Voir *m̩̫na*. (DFFFF : 163)

KWAÑ (h) n. », pl. *bekwañ*. 1. Merle métallique, oiseau bleu soie. Syn. *Ngoghnyo* (Atsi) [...] (DFFFF : 165)

KYEN (b) vb ; Couper un arbre bien à l'équerre (avec la hache ou la scie). *Ma kyen éli*. Syn. : *ken* (Atsi). Voir *ñgyena*. (extrait du DFFFF : 167)

In the above lemma articles, we observe that after the presentation of the lemma, the tonal indications and the parts of speech, the author specifies the Fang language variety (atsi) or the spatial distribution of the lemma.

8.2. Technical labels

Technical labels do not refer only to technical or academic matters, but to all other restricted disciplines, i.e. sport and hobbies. They play an important role in dictionary articles in which polysemic senses of a lemma and the specific technical use occur. These labels are aimed at the user who is a layperson and not an authority with regard to a specific discipline. The *Major Dictionary/Groot Woordeboek* includes labels like (argeol.) for “argeologie”, (chem) for “chemie” and (fot.) for “fotografie”. English labels include (cr.) for “cricket” and (mus.) for “music”. In this category of labels one also finds botanical labels, which indicate botanical names. These are illustrated by the following example taken from *Lexique FAN-Français*:

Oyem. Langue (anatomie) *Děm.*

The user is automatically informed about the professional field to which the lemma belongs after the lemma sign in bold and the translation equivalent. With regard to the treatment of the article mentioned above, it is noted that the word **oyem** is labelled as belonging to the field of *anatomie* because it deviates from the default subject matter of the DFFFF (cf. Gouws & Prinsloo, 2005). When a term of a special-field dictionary is selected for inclusion in the macrostructure of a general dictionary, it will typically be labelled to indicate that it deviates from the default value of the dictionary, i.e. the general lexicon.

8.3. Labels indicating a special field of activity

Labels in this category identify the special area of knowledge to which a lemma or an entry applies. The following labels indicating special field of activity are well known in French dictionaries: *Littér.ora./liter.ora.* (*littérature orale*), *rélig.trad.* (*réligion traditionnelle*), *agric.* (*agriculture*), *astron.* (*astronomie*), *pharm.* (*pharmacopée*), etc.

The following is an example of the label (agric.) indicating *agriculture*, from a modified article taken from DFFFF:

EFAK . [...] (agric.) *Vom ba ben bidzi, Endroit où l'on plante la nourriture.*

After the lemma sign (in bold), the user is automatically informed about the professional field to which the lemma belongs. The word **EFAK** (agricultural field) is labelled as belonging to the field of *agriculture*.

9. Loanwords

In lexicography, dictionary labels are used to indicate variation in a word. Loanwords bring new words and expressions in a language. In Gabon, according Ekwa Ebanega, (2007), the most common linguistic borrowings are those from French into Gabonese languages (such as Fang, Ypunu, or Omyéné), but also borrowings between Gabonese languages or other languages such as English and Portuguese. These borrowings are often linked to new concepts, social integration, specific economic activities (such as trade), or the presence of foreign populations.

The UNESCO (Libreville) and the UNESCO Chair conducted a field survey in Libreville from April 6 to July 17, 2021, and in the Bitam region from July 19 to 26, 2021. These surveys were conducted as part of the multidisciplinary research project entitled "Diversity and Promotion of Bantu, American, German, and Spanish Cultures in Northern Gabon (Medjo Mvé, 2022: 184)." These surveys revealed for Fang language several grammatical categories of borrowing (see addendum for the list of loanwords in Fang).

- In the category of nouns, we find the existence of words like **sikol** "school" (French), **oles** "rice" (English), **etable** "table" (French)
- In the category of verbs, we find the presence of words like **go** "to go" (English), **wět** "to wait", **asoman** "to summon" (English)
- After the category of verb, one can find the category of adjective. The word like **abi** "big" (English)

- The other category that can be identified is the interjection.
Nous notons des mots comme **ya** ! "yes !" (German) and **oowé** "yes !" (French)
- The last category that can be identified is the numeral, like the words **ntet** "hundred" (English) and **miliyon** "million" (French)

Dictionaries represent a phenomenon of enrichment and evolution of languages. In some dictionaries compiled in Fang, one can find loanwords. Dictionaries, such as the DFFFFF treats these words of foreign origin as lemmata and Fang language adapts them to its linguistic system.

Etable (h) n.5., pl. *bitable*. Table (c'est le mot français). (DFFFFF)

After the lemma or the main entry in the source language Fang, the tonal indication, the word classes and translation equivalent of the word in the target language French, the origin of the word (*c'est un mot français* "it is a French word") is given. It is introduced by the parentheses.

Consider the following example taken in the *Encyclopedie pahouine* (abbreviated EP)

Cheval ... nkalbena, pl. mi nkalbena....(Venu du portugais) (EP)

After the lemma **Cheval** in the source language French, the translation equivalent of the word in the target language Fang, the origin (*venu du portugais* "from portuguese") of the word *nkalbena* is given. It is introduced by the parentheses.

In the planned dictionary, loanwords will be presented as lexical lemmata. They will be introduced by the parenthesis

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, linguistic variation is a ubiquitous phenomenon in dictionaries, influenced by internal and external factors to the language. This study on the Fang language, spoken in Gabon, aims to show how dictionaries can faithfully reflect linguistic diversity by effectively planning

for variation. Based on the theoretical framework of Ladislav Zgusta and examining the dialectal varieties of Fang, the standard variety, the variety of writing system, the tonal variety, the variation in a word, this research highlights the importance of considering different competing dialectal forms in dictionary development. Ultimately, this study contributes to improving the representation of linguistic diversity in dictionaries, ensuring a better consideration of the linguistic realities of speaker communities.

Bibliography

AFANE OTSAGA Thierry, 2004, *The standard translation dictionary as an instrument in the standardization of Fang*. Unpublished D.Litt. dissertation. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.

BAYLON, C. & FABRE Paul, 1990, *Initiation à la linguistique*. Nathan Université.

EKWA EBANEGA Guy-Modeste, 2007, *Microstructural programme for dictionaries in Fang*. Thèse pour le Doctorat en Littérature, Stellenbosch, Université de Stellenbosch, 540p.

GALLEY Samuel, 1964, *Dictionnaires Fang-Français et Français-Fang, suivi d'une grammaire*. Fang, Neuchâtel: Henri Messeiller.

GOUWS Rufus Hjalmar and Danie J. PRINSLOO, 2005. *Principles and practice of South African lexicography*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.

GOUWS Rufus Hjalmar, 2001, The general theory of lexicography. Unpublished MPhil in Lexicography. An Introduction Course, Department of Afrikaans and Dutch and Department of Africa Languages. University of Stellenbosch.

(GW) Kritzinger, M. S. B., Schoonees, P. C., Cronje, U. J., and Eksteen, L. C. (eds). 1977. *Groot woordeboek/Major dictionary*. Cape Town: Pharos.

HOMBERT, Jean Marie, 1990, Les langues du Gabon: État des connaissances. *Revue Gabonaise des Sciences de l'Homme* 2: 29–36.

MARTINET André, 1991, *Éléments de linguistique générale*. Paris: Armand Colin.

MAVOUNGOU Paul-Achille 2001. La Mondialisation et la lexicographie trilingue ou plurilingue au Gabon, in: Emejulu, J.D. (ed.). *Éléments de lexicographie gabonaise Tome I*. New York: Jimacs-Hillman Publishers. 160–183.

MEDJO MVE Pither, 2022, «Esquisse de description de quelques procédés des emprunts lexicaux du fang aux langues indo-européennes». In Collection *Recherches et Regard d'Afrique* Vol no2, Lomé, Togo.

NYANGONE ASSAM B.lanche& Mavoungou Paul Achille. 2000. Lexicography in Gabon: A survey. In *Lexikos* 10: 252–274.

NZANG-BIE Yolande, 2004, *La codification de l'orthographe Fang*. Unpublished paper. Université Omar Bongo. Libreville.

RAPONDA-WALKER André, 1998, *Langues du Gabon*. Libreville: Editions Raponda Walker.

ZGUSTA Ladislav, 1971, *Manual of lexicography*, The Hague: Mouton.

Addendum

Fang	Source language
Yobo	Job (English)
Lama	Lamp (English)
Debele	Devil (English)
Tawol	Towel (English)
Sobo	Soap (English)
Angel	Engel (English)
Fura	Franc (French)
Misini	Machine (English)
Afep	Paper (English)
Alaman	Amende (French)
Ekamelo	Cheval (Spanish)
Nomo	Number (English)

Ewalo	Wallet (English)
Fiè	Peat (English)
Fara	Father (English)
Fofo	Papaw (English)
Fulasi	Français (French)
Dokira	Docteur (French)
Ngues	English (English)
Foto/ Fora	Photo (English/French)
Filiya	Prière (French)
Kafé/Kofi	Café, cofee (English/French)
Kaffina	Carpenter (English)
Kayié	Cahier (French)
Keza	Kaizer (French)
Kisini	Kitchen (English)
Mesis	Matches (English)
Miliyon	Million (French)
Ntet	Hundred (English)
Ngoman	Komandant (German)
Oles	Rice (English)
Lama	Lampe (French)
Etable	Table (English/ French)
sim	Slim (English)
Bank	Bank (English)
Tulasi	Trouser (English)
Opital	Hospital (English)
Edzakas	Jackass (English)
Ndzaman	German (English)
Masa	Master (English)
Toyini	Tausend (German)
Asan	To sign (English)
Elam	Lamp (English)
Asoman	To summon (English)
Apom	Pump, Fountain, Faucet (English)
Tawol	Towel (English)
Pom	To pump (English)
Vot	Vote (French)

abig	Big (English)
Alwas	Lose (English)
Avot	To vote (French)
Ekot	Coat (English)
Pagna	Pana (Spanish)
Anguele	Angel (English)
nguini	Engine (moteur)
Elas	Glass (English)
Wunu	Window (English)
Waya	Wire (English)
Sono	Sunday (English)
Barelo	Bad luck (English)
Tsimi	Dteamer (English)
Agnuan	Onion (English)