

International Training Program (ITP)

On-site Education of practical Languages for Area Studies

Report in 2010

—BAKA, Yaoundé University, Cameroon, 2 Aug. 2010 – 23 Sep. 2010—

Year of enrollment:2010

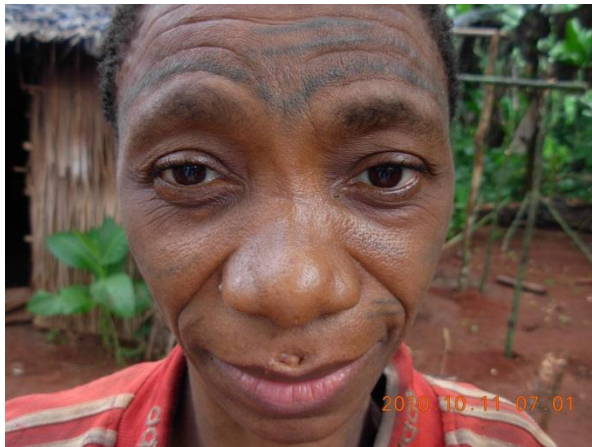
Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies

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Theme of my study

Baka hunter-gatherer people often injure their face and apply medical plant to the sore to treat their illness, and they often tattoo as fashion and to celebrate some events as well. Although there are many researches for the traditional medicine of Pygmy hunter-gatherers, the research about tattoo, except focusing on medical care, is limited. In addition to that, researches about tattoo on African Pygmies in the field of anthropology have not been conducted so far.

The following questions have not been researched yet; 1) What is the meaning of the tattoo and its design for Baka?, 2) Are the way of tattooing different from their sex and ages?, 3) When and why do they tattoo? The modification such as injuring their body, uncolored tattoo, and shaving incisors are often conducted by Baka. By researching about modification including tattoo, it is expected to clarify body consciousness and aesthetics of Baka.



1Tattoo and piercing of BAKA women



2Sharpened tooth

Feature of the language

In the language of Baka, a lot of words about rainforest are similar to the language of Aka which is used by Aka pygmy hunter-gatherers. Because of the different living areas and different neighborhood, these Pygmy hunter-gatherers' languages are totally dissimilar. The language of Baka has many onomatopoeic words, and because of their extremely rich knowledge of plants and animals, the

vocabulary of plants and animals is amazing.

Contents of the course

Over three weeks in September, I was receiving a lecture about 1 hour every noon at The University of Yaoundé 1. It was a private lecture. I had two teachers, who taught me sentence structure and word of the Bantu languages, and about the characteristics and sounds of the African languages. In the last time, I had a presentation about what I learned and how different between African language and Chinese.



In the classroom of university

But there is no teacher who knows the language of Baka in The University of Yaoundé 1. So, based on the lecture on African language at the University, I had to learn it from native speakers while I was researching in my field. The general way to learn the language of Baka is asking Baka people and studying the book of words and grammar of the language of Baka produced by my seniors. I also wrote essay in the language of Baka and let them mark it often.



Learning with BAKA people

Overall impression of the course

It was a private lecture, so I thought I couldn't make any friend in Cameroon. But my teachers introduced me a Cameroonian student. He helped me many times when I had some problems because I am not a good French speaker. Though we

didn't understand our studies each other, but we always enjoyed our conversation.

In my research field, I was surprised at the passion of Baka people. In the rainforest, there are many Baka people who don't know French or English. I doubted that I could communicate with them, but they were all willing to help me for everything, like recording pronunciation of words, marking my writing, and my research. Fortunately, I could do basic work in the language of Baka on September.

Self-assessment of the extent of achievement

There was no one who can teach The language of Baka in The University of Yaoundi 1. Instead of that, I learned it in my field. Some traditional methods of learning foreign language had no effects in this situation. But as I have written above, I actually wasn't learning as hard as I expected.

However, I am deeply regretting that I didn't learn French very well before going to Cameroon. If I were a good French speaker, I think I could learn the language of Baka faster and more, and might interview those farmers smoothly.