

# The transition of language policy in Benin

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Research Area: Republic of Benin

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## **Background and objective of my research**

In Japan, few researchers have done socio-linguistic studies about Africa in general, and about Benin in particular. Also, as Benin was a colony of France, we don't have many Japanese or English theses on the matter. So, it is difficult to understand the linguistic situation of Benin deeply using literature.

This study aims to clarify the transition of the language policy and facing problems after Benin's independence in 1960. Also, I study the current language situation, the language policy and the Beninese thoughts about national languages.

Benin has 54 languages (ref. Ethnologue), though its size is one third of Japan. So, Beninese people often speak their native languages and other languages. They do not speak non-native languages well, and they sometimes misunderstand similar words of other languages which have different meanings or nuances from their own languages, especially in their childhood. Moreover, Beninese people live in a multi-linguistic environment, so they are accustomed to face with multi-linguistic problems. For that reason, many Beninese people have some opinions about the language policy in their country. In addition, Beninese people are proud of their own ethnic languages, so many of them want to study their own languages at school. Moreover, they hope to introduce the education of Beninese languages in school. But their hope is not to have one particular Beninese language but several or all Beninese languages.

To understand more, it is necessary to study Beninese history; what kind of background do

they have in this current language situation? It is also necessary to check ethnic relations as well as their distribution. One should understand what ethnic group had authority over other groups and built a kingdom in the past, or what kind of relation they have had in their history in Benin.

## Reference

Ethnologue. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_country.asp?name=BJ](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=BJ) (23/04/2009)



Plenty of bikes in the cities in Benin



There aren't high mountains but hills in Benin.



Beninese geography textbook (left) and history textbook (right) written in French.