

The strange case of Ganang

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Languages become threatened in different ways and occasionally gender rather than generation and ethnicity form part of the nexus. Ganang seems to represent a rather extreme case of gender differentiation in the process of language loss. Ganang or Gashish is often listed as one of the dialects of Izere, a significant Plateau language spoken north of Jos in Central Nigeria. No data on this language has ever been published and no Izere informants in Jos could tell us about the language. As a consequence I decided to go to try and resolve its status.

As we approached the Ganang-speaking area, we found that the Ganang, locally known as Gashish, are considered to be Berom, and indeed culturally they share much in common with their Berom neighbours. The Ganang language is spoken in Gashish Kuk village in Plateau State, Nigeria. Gashish Kuk is one hour's drive southeast of Jos, beyond Kura falls.

We encountered an old man sitting under a tree and requested him to help us fill in a wordlist. He readily agreed, but it very soon became clear that he did not speak the language, although he claimed to be Ganang. However, a group of women had gathered around us and began answering the questions in his stead. I soon switched to using them as the principal informants and Mrs. Cundung Bulus and Mrs. Cingun Mandong were able to help me complete a basic 400-word list on the 18th of January 2001.

Despite gathering quite a crowd it became clear that none of the men present could speak Ganang, despite the linguistic competence of their wives. However, the women were unable to produce vocabulary from the male world, particularly in relation to hunting, and so I was not able to elicit words for 'arrow' or for large mammals. The men speak principally Berom, and increasingly Ron, a Chadic language of recent migrants, as well as Hausa, the *lingua franca* of the area. The men said that these other languages were 'better' or 'more prestigious' than Ganang, while the women said they would continue to speak Ganang with their children. Indeed, young male children were heard speaking Ganang, so they must stop speaking it at a certain age. Husbands and wives communicate with each other in Berom, or increasingly in Hausa. Long-term bilingualism in Berom was later confirmed by the data analysis which indicated high levels of interference between the two languages. Linguistically, Ganang turns out to be a form of Izere that has been Beromised. The phonology and noun-class system have taken on features of Berom and it is for practical purposes unintelligible to mainstream Izere.

It turned out to be very hard to gauge the number of competent Ganang speakers, as most individuals are multi-lingual, also speaking Ron, Hausa and Berom. Almost all settlements are mixed, with Ron and other outsiders. The nearby settlements of Hye and Inyo were reported to be principally Ganang but the same gender division of linguistic competence applies. Overall there are unlikely to be more than 3000 ethnic Ganang, but many fewer speakers. This unusual gender division makes it hard to predict the future of Ganang but it should definitely be regarded as threatened. A definite case for intensive sociolinguistic research.