

Blin Dialect Survey

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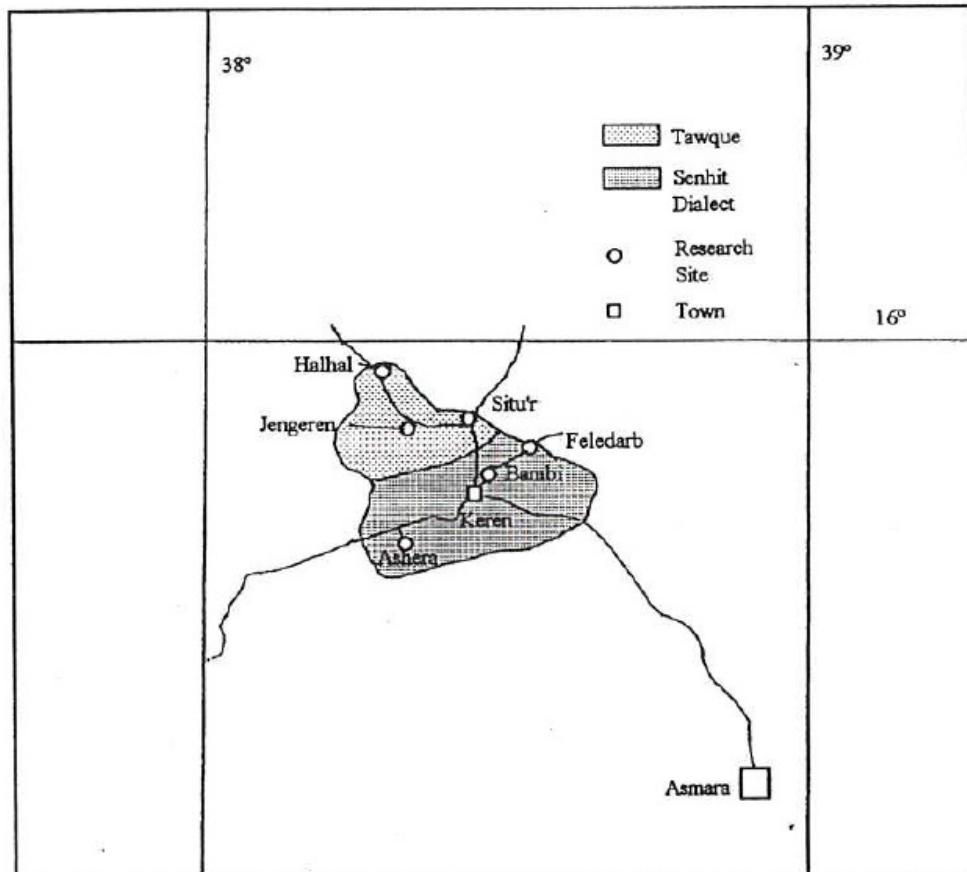
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1. Introduction

Blin has two dialects: Senhit and Taqur (Tawque). Thus, this paper is concerned with the analysis and description of relations between different groups of Blin speakers, in particular the level of intelligibility between these two varieties of Blin.

- Last but not least, the Blin cultural and language community in Keren for their valuable information and linguistic input in all matters concerning Blin as a whole.

1.1.1 MAP: Blin Dialects and Research Sites



1.2 Research Sites and Travel Schedule

The research sites were the following: NW (Tawque dialect): Halhal, Jengeren, Sit'ur (Brekentya), and SE (Senhit dialect): Ashera, Bambi, Feledarb. Our travel schedule was as follows:

1.2.1 TABLE: Travel Schedule

Place	Halhal	Jangeren	Sit'ur	Bambi	Feledarb	Ashera
Time	18-21 III 97	22-24 III 97	during the Pilot Survey	25-27 III 97	27-30 III 97	01-05 IV 97

In addition to the meetings in these places, we also met the Blin cultural and language community in Keren on 8 April 97. Beside the RTT tools we also used the other test tools with the people of these places (.e., word lists, key words, and interviews).

1.3 General Information about the Research Sites

1.3.1 Brekentya

In the school of Brekentya the number of Blin speakers is small, compared with the number of Tigre speakers.

The medium of instruction is Tigrigna.

The school was built by the government after 3 years of independence, i.e. in 1994.

The parents of this village want their children to be taught in Arabic (as medium of instruction)

The population of the village is about 7000.

The number of students in the school is 256. Of these, about 75 are females.

1.3.2 Halhal

The town was partially built after the liberation of the country.

The residents of this city were mostly refugees who had fled to the Sudan for fear of the Derg regime.

Most of the citizens are speakers of the Tawque dialect.

The population of the town is around 13000.

In this village there is an elementary school of 10 classrooms. The school is run by the government.

The number of teachers is 13, 11 male and 2 female

The number of students is 684, about 25% of them female.

1.3.3 Bambi

The village is located 7 kms NE of Keren

The population of the village is about 350

They speak the Senhit dialect.

In this village there is an elementary school run by the Catholic church.

The school has 4 teachers (including the director)

All teachers are from the Blin group, and as a result of this, the teaching/learning process seems effective and productive compared to other Southern Blin schools where the ^{teachers} ~~speakers~~ are Tigrigna speakers.

1.3.4 Jengeren

The residents of this village are - like in Halhal - recent re-settlers who came back from the refugee camps of the Sudan.

From 1988 to the liberation, not a single human being was living where the town now is.

Only after 1991 has the life of this town started to emerge into the Tawque area.

The government built an elementary school with Arabic as the medium of instruction.

In this school, there is only one teacher whose mother tongue is Blin. He was one of our respondents for the primer story modification.

1.3.5 Feledarb

The residents of this village - like the neighbouring people - were also victims of the war:

The people left their village in the end of 1987 and fled towards Keren and Halibmentel.

After the liberation they returned back to their village and rehabilitated themselves.

The population of the village is about 730, and ^{all of them} ~~half of the people~~ are speakers of the Senhit dialect.

In this village there is a big hospital run by the Catholic mission sisters

The village has an elementary school run by the government.

1.3.6 Ashera

This is a semi-town sized village with a population of 3772 people.

The people speak the Senhit dialect.

There is an Elementary school, and a Junior school run by the Catholic church

In the Catholic school, all teachers with the exception of the director are Blin speakers

As we have observed in the Bambi Elementary School already, the teaching/learning process here also was productive. The reason for the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process lies in the fact that the Blin teachers give the students their explanations in Blin.

In the school of this village, the students from 8 surrounding areas regularly walk long distances to attend class.

2. Purpose

With a view to the main purpose of this project - i.e., to ensure that the curriculum materials will be prepared in the most appropriate way - the "Survey Proposal" has stated the following objectives: (a) To recommend which dialect should be the language standard for written materials in educational affairs, and (b) to determine if one writing system will work for all dialects, or if two writing systems are necessary.

3. Word Lists

3.1 Data Gathering

The informants for the word lists were chosen from 6 research sites: about 30 parents. From each research site we selected 5 to 7 parents at random. The selection was done with the cooperation of the administration at the respective sites. Our sample included village elders, administrative people, merchants, religious leaders and villagers of both sexes.

In implementing this tool, we grouped the informants in one place and we asked them independently to give us the Blin translations of the terms. Most of the time, the answer of the respondents were similar to each other, and because of the length of the list it was difficult to avoid boredom.

3.2 Data Analysis

In the word list of 321¹⁰ items, the only ones which were different are those given in the Table below.







3.2.1 TABLE: Differences

No.	Form 1	Form 2	Gloss
007	wilwal e'six	shemal e'six	blow
030	e'nte'b	h'mbrira	navel
064	a'uffuna	a'sherib	maize
080	ke'rtana	sefritna	hungry
126	sim	h'sset	chief
135	semowat	a'e'dlorra	bat
154	kanfi	dember	wing
174	we'h' yux	bowux	bark
187	derb	gug	path
224	mariamr qenat	ges debella	rainbow
245	bit'et	kurkuma	yellow
256	waxtina	ke'rīna	fight

269	teqaxw	jewanqaxw	heavy
306	seheyna	kaxesna	yawn
317	derb	gug	road
058	uh'uyinna	unqunna	cough
250	e'nshix	h'xlle	bow
163	h'ambesna	bambna	swim
009	golitna	qaleyna	sing
017	nekek	wyjhim	chin
255	waxa	inshix	war

There were about 20 items where we were given more than one response for the same meaning. These words must be considered synonymous, and they are used by speakers of both dialects.

3.2.2 TABLE: Multiple Responses

Gloss	Form 1	Form 2	Form 3
forehead	gesh	bsot*	
sing	glitna	quleyna*	
eyebrow	shefashif	h'ojob*	
buttocks	gwello	findot*	
skin	axxa*	genorra	
farm	kidiñ*	h'dar	
fool	hasis	a'wed*	mt'e'mus
child	jina*	qola'a	
teach	meherma*	kinsna	
animal	mal*	h'iyayet	
wing	kanfi	denber*	
swim	h'ambesna	bambna*	
bark	wuh'yix	bow'wux*	
sand	bta*	qusha	
yellow	bill  et	kurkuma	bit'a
war	waxa	h'arb	e'nshix
crooked	a'ngul	luleysux	     uy
yawn	seheyn	kaxesna	
pull	weterna	gossesna	

(*) Note: In these 20 responses, we were given more than 1 word for the same meaning.

The above synonymous responses were provided by speakers of the Senhit dialect; but Tawque dialect speakers also use these words - in nearly synonymous ways. It should also be noted that the list contains 2 loan words:

3.2.3 Loan Words

pig	xendir	(Arabic)
hoe	dabbet	(Italian)

3.3 Results

Based on the word list of 320 item, the following percentages can be given:

Same (cognates or "look-alikes")	93%
Different (lexically different)	7%

3.4 Interpretation and Conclusion

To sum up these percentages it can be said that no intelligibility problem exists. Even where there were differences in the word lists, the respondents would usually say that while the different words were "more common" in the other dialect area, they themselves were still familiar with these words.

3.5 Recommendation

Based even on the results of this one test alone, the Blin dialects should be considered very close to each other.

4. Key Words

4.1 Data Gathering

As was stated in the proposal, the research sites were *Halhal*, *Jangeren*, *Brekentya* (*Su'tur*), *Feledarb*, *Bambi*, and *Ashera*. In the first three areas, the Tawque dialect is spoken, whereas in the last three it is the Senhit dialect.

For our investigation of "key terms" we worked with residents from the locations listed above. They were chosen randomly from all walks of the population. During our entire survey on key terms, we did not experience any problems which hindered our research. In the task of choosing our samples, for instance, we had the help of school administrators as well as town and village administrators. We gratefully acknowledge their good cooperation.

At every research site, we worked with 5 to 7 parents and 10 students.

As far as the work with the parents was concerned, we found female respondents only in *Feledarb* and *Bambi*, but none in the other research sites.

As far as the work with students was concerned, about 45% of the respondents were female. All of the students were selected at random by the respective school directors.

4.2 Data Analysis

A total of 62 key words was given to us by these various respondents, where 31 represent one dialect, and the other half, the other dialect. In the table below, the terms are arranged according to phonological vs. lexical differences:

4.2.1 TABLE: Key words that differ phonologically

English	Senhit	Tawque
give me	naxle	naxiye
said to me	yixule	yuxuye
expressing sympathy	dibah'	zibah'
how are you?	werkemma	werkmama
tell me!	diwile	diwiye
small	gnay	gntora
etc.	...	

4.2.2 TABLE: Key words that differ lexically

English	Senhit	Tawque
tree species	weyberra	inkimma
lizard	wabrira	gia'a
path	derb	gug
take this side	geledi	mukdi
burn	h'awyix	be'rbrux
fight	waxituxule	kirñixuye
girl	a'ñifi	e'ei
pull	weteri	sededi
shy	semarna	xejelna
start	ter	brf
my mother	adde	yimma
plot, farm	kiishiñ	kerementa
together	lad-himbew	angeb-gebohimbew
tree species	sebkan	a'bert'et'a
termite hill	bxua	arbesha
tree species	tenfia	gindea'erra
keep aside	newsti	besti / ac'ñeññss i
water place	newat	mt'n
elder than	behe'r	q'idax
village	angeb	digge
climb a mountain	tereqesi / atkebi	fii
wait	ñeñberri	diwi
snake	mrawa	fuferru
heavy	teqaxue	jiwanqaxue
pillar, pole	messuna	takiyat
friend, peer	madda	messurk

how are you?	ḡḡarrim a	jihlanma
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Concerning grammatical differences, it should be noted that the possessive form "me" is different in the two Blin dialects. Most of the time the possessive construction "verb+me" occurs in two different ways: Senhit speakers use "...le" while Tawque speakers use "...ye".

In addition to this difference we were given an archaic word where speakers from both dialects made the claim that "we do not use this word, but the others use it". The word is "*ketet*" - with a corresponding word "*tawine*", which means "veil".

We also got a word which is said to be extinct in the Senhit area: The word is still used by speakers of the older generation, while speakers of the younger generation have shifted to using a word from the other dialect. The word which is now commonly used in both dialects is *digge* "village", while the corresponding word *angeb* is extinct in one of the dialect areas. We found no examples of words which were in normal use in one dialect area, but taboo in the other.

4.3 Results

Our findings clearly indicate that dialect intelligibility is no problem for Blin speakers. Speakers of one dialect understand the speakers of the other dialect without any problems.

While our respondents were both parents and students, our main concern was to identify eventual intelligibility problems among students - given the overall objective of the survey, which is concerned with text book preparation.

4.4 Interpretation and Conclusions

With a view to these questions, we came to the conclusion that - even for students - there is no problem of mutual understanding.

Even as far as these "key words" are concerned, we found that most of such words which had been given to us by speakers of the Senhit dialect were the same as those which had been given to us by speakers of the Tawque dialect! This shows that even those words which are thought to be typical of *one* dialect are familiar to speakers of *both* dialects!

4.5 Recommendations

Thus, with a view to selecting the vocabulary suitable for school text books, no serious problems of intelligibility should be anticipated. As far as intelligibility is concerned, it does not really matter whether words are considered "typical Senhit" or "typical Tawque" - but to avoid appearing biased or partial, school book writers may have to choose synonyms from both dialects in a balanced way.

5. Recorded Text Testing

5.1 Data Gathering

We recorded two stories for each dialect, Senhit and Tawque.

For each story we devised 10 questions. The story which was designed to test the Senhit dialect was recorded in the researcher's own voice, while the second story - designed to test the Tawque dialect - was recorded by a speaker of the Tawque dialect. But the 10 questions from the story were recorded by the researcher.

Before we proceeded to our test, we first made a home town test for each story. The answers in the home town test for the Senhit story were 100% right. The home town test for the Tawque story however contained 1 question which probably was too difficult and vague, because not even a single respondent from that dialect was able to answer this question in his own language. For this reason we exchanged the question for another one which was more appropriate.

For our RTT tool we randomly selected the respondents: from 5-7 parents and from 7 to 10 students for each research site. Our sample included respondents of different age, sex, occupation and education. As it is shown in the presentation of the survey data, our main target group for the RTT were students, since the goal of the survey was to gather data concerning the preparation of school textbooks. In addition, since parents may have had more exposure to the neighbouring dialect, it was preferable not to use their data. Elementary school students, on the other hand, obviously have had less opportunity to move in the neighbouring dialect area.

Before we presented the test stories to our respondents, we explained the aim of the survey in general, and the aim of the RTT test in particular. Then we played the introductory text to them and the sample story with its questions and answers, which was recorded on tape. After this step, we played to them the whole recorded story. When they had heard the entire story, we proceeded to the next step, i.e., presenting the story to them with questions in the intervals. As we have already indicated, there were 6 research sites, and these 6 villages (or semi-towns) with their respective elementary and junior schools were the sites for the RTT tests. (See map.)

There were no serious problems in administering the tests, except for a slight problem of nervousness especially of female respondents when they worked on these tests.

5.2 Data Analysis

The percentages for each test are displayed in the Table below.

5.2.1 TABLE: Responses and Percentages

Sites	NW: Tawqye respondents listening to Senhit texts			SE: Senhit respondents listening to Tawqye texts		
	Sit'ur (Brak.)	Jangeren	Halhal	Ashera	Bambi	Feledarb
Total Respds.	5	10	10	10	10	10
Home town	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Results:						
A	84%	90%	90%	96%	92%	94%
B	10%	8%	5%	2%	2%	2%
C	6%	2%	5%	2%	6%	4%

5.3 Results

The results of the "home town tests" were 100% correct on both cases. Most of the respondents from the Tawqye dialect did not respond correctly to question number 9, because the question asks for the name of a tree which is not commonly known in the Tawqye area. Except for a few respondents, most of the students missed this question. The parents, however, responded correctly. In the Senhit area the tree is called "ᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁ" whereas in Tawqye it is called "ᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁᄁ". (This difference was one of the few distinctive items which demarcate the two dialects.)

5.4 Interpretation and Conclusions

Based on the data presented above, we do not foresee any serious problems in dialect intelligibility. Most of the questions that were not answered by the respondents involved the names of trees, people, places, or clans.

5.5 Recommendation

Blin should be considered one homogeneous communication area. The dialect differences are noticed by the speakers, but they have no effect on communication. Attitudes may still need to be considered.

6. Primer Story Modification

6.1 Purpose and Goals

As has already been explained in the Proposal, the main objective of the "primer story modification" was to see how similar the two dialects are with regard to the use of a text from a school textbook.

6.2 Data Gathering

This was done by means of comparing the words which the respondent provided in response to a school book text.

First of all, it should be noted that there are no Blin schools in the Blin area, and we do not yet have school textbooks prepared for Blin. But for our purposes we translated a story from a Tigrigna second grade textbook. The translators are from the Senhit dialect.

In gathering the data, we selected 6 teachers randomly. Of these, 4 were from the Tawque dialect area, and the other 2 from the Senhit area. Each teacher was given a copy of the story from the primer, and he was asked to write the story in his own way of speaking (his own dialect).

6.3 Data Analysis

The 6 stories which the teachers gave back to us were scored only in terms of their relationship to the original primer story - not in relation to each other. We scored them in two areas: grammar and vocabulary differences. We did not find any changes of the word order.

6.4 Results

The results of the modifications are displayed in the Table below.

6.4.1 TABLE: Modifications

Dialect		Vocabulary differences	Grammar differences	Word Order differences
Senhit	Respondent 1	2%	-	-
"	Respondent 2	3%	-	-
Tawque	Respondent 1	4%	1%	-
"	Respondent 2	6%	1%	-
"	Respondent 3	5%	-	-
"	Respondent 4	4%	1%	-

6.5 Interpretation and Conclusions

Most differences are in the area of vocabulary changes. Grammar differences are rare, as the data show. The primer comparisons can, of course, give some indication about which dialect is the most appropriate dialect for the preparation of school text books.

Our conclusion is that the communication between the two dialects is not impeded by grammar problems. The only difference which we found in the present test is the use of suffixes in verbs - a difference which we had already seen in the study of key words. For example, as has been said below, Senhit speakers uses -●። where Tawque speakers -።። as a verb suffix.

There are, however, some lexical differences which show a clear demarcation of the dialects.

6.6 Recommendations

As we were evaluating the primer modifications, we have not observed any dialect intelligibility problems for the Blin speakers. But in the preparation of school texts, the most suitable word should be chosen from both dialects. We should not discard the words of one dialect and take only those of the other. Since the enrichment of the language as a whole lies in the wealth of its vocabulary, we should take words from both dialects.

7. Interviews

7.1 Data Gathering

At each research site, 5-7 parents were selected at random by the school directors and the village or town administrators. The directors and administrators also co-operated in doing the interviews.

In addition to the parents, we also interviewed students from each research site.

As far as possible, the respondents were chosen from different backgrounds, they were of different age, education and sex - but at some research sites, it was not possible for us to interview the female section of the population, especially mothers. In Jangeren, Halhal, and Ashera, for example, the only females we could interview were students.

All respondents actively participated in the interviews.

The data were gathered in the following way: While the interviews were held, one of us wrote down the main points of the talk. In some cases, it might have been helpful to record the talk on tape; but because of the lack of tapes, this was ~~no~~ option. ✓

7.2 Data Analysis

It is difficult to score the responses or to display the answers in brief.

There were 10 interview topics. Topic number 1 had three supplementary questions, and topic number 8 had two additional questions. In the charts (below), these supplementary responses of numbers 1 and 8 are given below the respective numbers.

7.2.1 TABLES: The Interview Questions

1. Are there any dialects in your language?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
There are	19	16	35
There are not	-	-	-

1.1 If yes, in what ways does it differ?

1.2 Show the difference by giving examples.

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
The differences are in the pronunciation and in words	19	16	35
-	-	-	-

2. Which dialect do you speak?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
The Senhit dialect	19		19
The Tawque dialect	-	16	16

3. Which dialect do you think is easily understood by the majority of Blin speakers?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
The Senhit dialect	15	-	15
The Tawque dialect	-	15	15
Both dialects	4	1	5

4. Do you see any contact between your dialect and the other (e.g. at markets, funerals, or festivals)?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
Especially at the market	19	16	35

5. Which dialect do you think gives more / wider services?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
The Senhit dialect	14	-	14
The Tawque dialect	-	12	12
Both dialects	5	4	9

6. If a dialect other than your own is spoken, do you face problems in understanding?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
We will not have such problems	19	16	35

7. If it is used in writing, do you face problems in understanding?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
We will not have such problems	19	16	35

8. Have you seen any literature material in Blin? If yes, which dialect was used?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
We have seen materials, it was in the Senhit dialect	most		
We have not seen such materials		most	

8.1 What might be the reason for using it?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
The speakers of that dialect got more chances for education than the speakers of the Tawque dialect	most		
(Does not apply)		16	16

9. Which dialect do you suggest (or prefer) for the text-books to be prepared in?

Answers	Senhit area	Tawque area	Total (parents)
We prefer Senhit	11		11
We prefer Tawque	-	10	10
You (MoE) should find out the best and make the choice	8	6	14

10. If someone wants to learn your language, which village do you think is the best to learn it? What is the 1st / 2nd choice?

<i>Answers</i>	<i>Senhit area</i>	<i>Tawque area</i>	<i>Total (parents)</i>
Sequinabara	10	2	12
Deka	-	12	12
Ashera	7	-	7
Hager	2	-	2
Ghebey Alebu	-	2	2

7.3 Results

If we take the above data (no. 10) into consideration, the speakers of both dialects say that their own is the best for them. But they agree that there is not much likelihood of misunderstanding between the speakers of the two dialects.

On the other hand, most speakers of the Senhit dialect assume that theirs has the role of a standard dialect, because most of the Blin books have used this dialect.

Finally, the interviews confirm that there is no problem in mutual intelligibility.

7.4 Interpretation and Conclusions

Our general conclusion from the interviews is that whichever dialect is chosen, there will not be problems for the speakers from either dialect area.

Even though the books basically use the Senhit dialect, they also contain a large number of words which are typical for the Tawque dialect ("typical" in the sense that the word is said to come from the Tawque area, but it is known by speakers of both areas). This again shows that the two dialects have much interaction with each other.

7.5 Recommendation

There is enough interaction between the dialects, to allow for writers to use words from both dialects - with the intention to "enrich" the vocabulary of the language as a whole.

8. General Conclusion

Based on the findings from the 5 instruments - i.e., word lists, key words, primer story modifications, recorded text tests, and interviews - we conclude that in spite of some clear demarcations between the dialects of Blin, there is no problem of dialect intelligibility or mutual acceptance in the language as a whole.

From the data gathered by means of these 5 instruments it is obvious that the main difference lies in certain phonological and lexical aspects. But in spite of this, each dialect is easily understood by, and entirely familiar to, the speakers of the other dialect.

The differences which have been mentioned include sounds and words which are typical for one dialect - which however does not mean they are "strange" or "unfamiliar" for the other.

The reason for the pervading familiarity of all these features is, of course, the fact that the entire Blin area is relatively small, and that all Blin people live close to each other. They are not far away from each other (like in some of the other groups of Eritrea); they have a common market place, and they have frequent contact with each other.

9. General Recommendations

Therefore, as far as the preparation of school text books is concerned, we do not need to be hesitant or apprehensive about dialect issues. Whether we choose the Senhit or the Tawque dialect does not constitute a problem for school books.

So far, the books which have been written were basically written in Senhit Blin - even though they contain a large number of words from Tawque Blin. To enrich the vocabulary we suggest that both dialects should be used in our texts.

10. Appendices

10.1 *Field Data*

- #1.1 Word Lists
- #1.2 Key Word - Forms
- #1.3 Recorded Text Testing - Scores
- #1.4 Primer Story Modifications - Forms
- #1.5 Interviews - Forms

10.2 *Sources*

- #2.1 Major publications on the language
- #2.2 General source materials
- #2.3 Descriptions of the research instruments