

Towards a Comprehensive Dictionary of Gabonese French

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Abstract: The present article reports on the conceptualization of the *Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais*. The dictionary project is a first of its kind in Gabonese lexicography. As an outcome of the inception of Gabonese French lexicography, the dictionary project arose from a discussion on the definition of Gabonese French, which Gabonese French lexicography should account for. In this article, the project background as well as the interests for the planned dictionary are presented. The article also deals with two key aspects of the dictionary conceptualization plan, i.e., lexicographic processes and the dictionary basis.

Keywords: CONCEPTUALIZATION PLAN, DICTIONARY BASIS, DICTIONARY PROJECT, FRENCH, GABON, LANGUAGE APPROPRIATION, LEXICOGRAPHIC PROCESSES

Résumé: **Vers un Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais.** Le présent article rend compte de la conceptualisation du *Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais*. Le projet de ce dictionnaire est une première du genre dans la lexicographie gabonaise. Issu du lancement de la lexicographie française gabonaise, le projet de ce dictionnaire est né d'une réflexion sur la définition du français gabonais, dont la lexicographie française gabonaise doit tenir compte. Dans cet article, le contexte du projet ainsi que les intérêts pour le dictionnaire envisagé sont présentés.

L'article traite également de deux aspects clés du plan de conceptualisation du dictionnaire, à savoir les processus lexicographiques et la base du dictionnaire.

Mots-clés: APPROPRIATION LINGUISTIQUE, BASE DU DICTIONNAIRE, FRANÇAIS, GABON, PLAN DE CONCEPTUALISATION, PROCESSUS LEXICOGRAPHIQUES, PROJET DE DICTIONNAIRE

1. Introduction

Responding to Mavoungou's (2013) definition of Gabonese French and discussion of Gabonese French lexicography, Nyangone Assam et al. (2016) lay out among other issues the position of Gabonese French within the emerging Gabonese lexicography, "especially in terms of metalexicographical research" (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 184). As a response to the "strategic focus on Gabonese French lexicography" (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 182-183), the project for the planning of a monolingual *Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais* (henceforth DGFG), i.e., a monolingual comprehensive dictionary of Gabonese French, was launched by the *Centre de Recherche en Etudes Germaniques et Interculturelles* (CREGI) at Omar Bongo University in Libreville, Gabon. The aim of the projected dictionary is to present the full spectrum of the lexicon of Gabonese French.

The present article reports on the planning and compilation of the DGFG. It focuses on a few matters that relate to the conceptualization plan of the projected dictionary. In general, the purpose of the study is to contribute to the grounding of Gabonese French lexicography within the strategic planning of Gabonese lexicography. However, more specifically, the aim of this article is twofold. First, it seeks to present the conceptualization principles of the intended dictionary. Second, it is a follow-up to the recent debate on the content of Gabonese French dictionaries. The article starts in section 2 with an overview of the background of the dictionary project. Section 3 presents the target users and the interests of the planned dictionary, while section 4 deals with the lexicographic processes. In section 5, the dictionary basis of the projected dictionary is discussed.

2. Background of the dictionary project

The background of the intended dictionary is primarily found in the theoretical inception of Gabonese French lexicography, the debate that took a stand on the definition of Gabonese French and the contents of its dictionaries, and the language appropriation that the Gabonese have made of the French language. The outline of the background of this dictionary is therefore a response to Nyangone Assam et al. (2016), who argue to produce Gabonese French dictionaries based on an accurate understanding of the concept of Gabonese French.

The article by Nyangone Assam et al. (2016), in response to Mavoungou (2013) on the definition of the concept of Gabonese French, laid out theoretical grounds for the inception of Gabonese French lexicography.

2.1 Origins and theoretical inception of Gabonese French lexicography

Mavoungou (2013) and Nyangone Assam et al. (2016) have been regarded as the first conceptualizations of Gabonese French lexicography, i.e., "the set of theoretical and practical works done on the French language as it is spoken in Gabon" (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 178). However, it is important to note that the theoretical inception of Gabonese French lexicography started with a book chapter by Mavoungou (2002), who suggested a dictionary of French as spoken in Gabon. Based on the suggestions by Mavoungou (2002), a short dictionary manuscript followed, containing a hundred dictionary articles (Mavoungou et al. 2002). In addition, Mavoungou (2011), Nsa Ndo (2010) and Nsafou (2010) proposed that various forms of lexical particularisms of French as spoken in Gabon be identified and recommended their lexicographical treatment within a monolingual dictionary.

One of the major shortcomings of the proposals by Mavoungou (2002, 2011), Mavoungou et al. (2002), Nsa Ndo (2010) and Nsafou (2010) is the exclusion of the acrolect variant of the language, i.e., the standard variety known as Parisian French. As highlighted in Nyangone Assam et al. (2016), the variety of the French language as spoken in Gabon has been recognized not only as one of the varieties of this worldwide language, but also as one of the local languages of naturally and culturally multilingual but officially monolingual Gabon. In the field of lexicography, attention has particularly been given to the lower mesolectal forms (popular Gabonese French), basilectal forms (Gabonese Matitis French) as well as to slang forms (Toli-bangando) with the production of a series of dictionaries (Boucher and Lafage 2000; Ditougou 2009; Dodo-Bounguendza 2008, 2010, 2013; Moussounda Ibouanga 2011; and Mavoungou et al. 2014, 2015).

The discussion on the content of the previous Gabonese French dictionaries has reached the conclusion that these do not represent the full scope of Gabonese French. As a core component of the emerging Gabonese lexicography, Gabonese French lexicography is expected to produce Gabonese French dictionaries, which may locally replace imported French dictionaries compiled in France. It should be noted that several metalexical studies have also been conducted on Gabonese French. These studies can be divided into three groups. The first group contains the studies that initiated the inception of Gabonese French lexicography (Mavoungou et al. 2002; Mavoungou 2002; Nyangone Assam et al. 2016). The second group of studies is that of the planning of Gabonese French dictionaries (Nsa Ndo 2010; Nsafou 2010; Mouélé 2011). The third group comprises works that critique published dictionaries of Gabonese French (Mavoungou 2002, 2011; Ondo Mébiame and Ekwa Ebanéga 2011; Nyangone Assam et al. 2016).

Unfortunately, except for Nyangone Assam et al. (2016) who suggested a strategic focus including "metalexigraphic research and corpus building for all types of monolingual dictionaries of Gabonese French" (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 184), none of the previous studies makes a case for a comprehensive dictionary of Gabonese French. The projected *Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais* is set to avoid the flaws of the previous Gabonese French dictionaries. The "strategic focus on Gabonese French lexicography" as suggested by Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 182-183) clearly advocates monolingual lexicography and monolingual dictionary production as far as Gabonese French is concerned. This principle has been adopted within CREGI for the launching of Gabonese French lexicography through the planned *Dictionnaire Général du Français Gabonais*. CREGI also intends to initiate research for a *Corpus de Français Gabonais* (CFG), i.e., a corpus of Gabonese French on the model of *Corpus de la Langue Française* (André 2017; Siepmann et al. 2016; Equipe DELIC 2004), to which the CFG should contribute.

2.2 Gabonese French: Clarifications towards concluding the debate

Mavoungou (2013: 260) defined Gabonese French as "a repertoire of a variety of lexical items and expressions". Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 167) refuted this definition as being reductive. This reductive definition is also evident in Mabika Mbokou's (2019: 2) claim that "to speak French in Gabon is to speak a French whose lexicon, meaning of words and their use is different from the norm of standard French"¹.

As Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 167) put it, "the French language that is the official language of the Republic of Gabon (according to its Constitution), the second language of the current political, intellectual and administrative elites of Gabon, and the mother tongue of the majority of the Gabonese youth cannot be a form of language made only of lexical, phrasal and pronunciation particularisms".

Furthermore, Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 176) also refute the stratification of the varieties of Gabonese French suggested by Mavoungou (2013: 259). In fact, according to Mavoungou (2013: 259), four distinct language varieties can be found in Gabonese French, i.e., Standard French, Official French (Acrolectal level), Common French (Mesolectal level) and Popular French (Basilectal level). Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 172) however believe that the term "official French" cannot be identified with a sociolect. Moreover, it appears possible to make a distinction between upper mesolect and lower mesolect within Gabonese French.

The compilation of the projected DGFG is intended to be based on the conception of Gabonese French schematized as follows by Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 176) in Figure 1 below. This schema is an actual stratification with all identified sociolectal variants of Gabonese French.

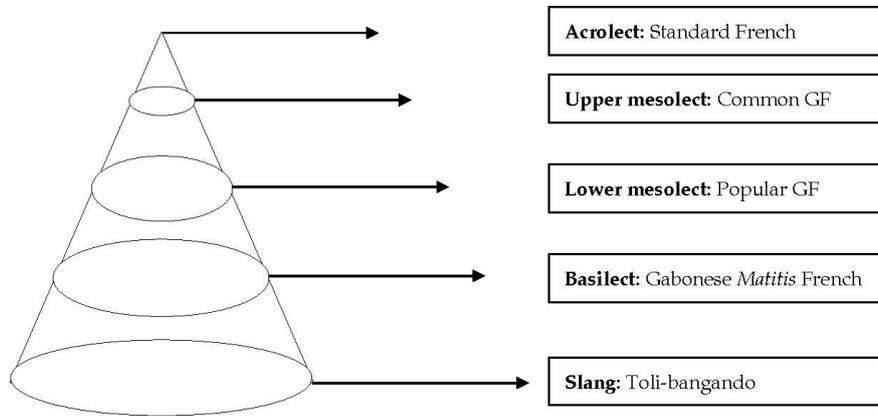


Figure 1: Sociolectal stratification of Gabonese French (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 176)

Subsequently, Nyangone Assam et al. (2016: 176) also reject the distinction made by Mavoungou (2013) between variant A and variant B where variant A is supposedly the variety of France and variant B the Gabonese French. In our view, "each French variety in a given country has to be legitimized, i.e., accepted a one of the various speech-forms of a particular language following the codification of such a variant in a determined country" (Nyangone Assam et al. 2016: 176-177).

In the light of this understanding, what do we really mean by Gabonese French? Gabonese French must be understood as the total set of phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactical, and lexical features of the French language as it is spoken in Gabon. Finally, it can be said that Gabonese French is one of the varieties of French (a worldwide language), but also one of the local languages of culturally multilingual but officially monolingual Gabon.

2.3 *Français du Gabon* or *Français Gabonais*? A language appropriation approach

The above understanding of the concept of Gabonese French may also decide on its naming in French. In fact, French-language literature about Gabonese French often designates the latter in the following three ways (from the most to the least frequently occurring):

- (i) *Français au Gabon*, i.e. French in Gabon (Massinga Kombila 2013; Mindze M'Eyeghe 2001; Pambou 1998; Boucher 1997; Artigues 1995; Boutin-Dousset 1989; Moussirou Mouyama 1984),

- (ii) *Français du Gabon*, i.e. Gabon's French (Mabika Mbokou 2019; Italia 2006; Mavoungou 2002; Mouloungui Nguimbyt 2002), or
- (iii) *Français Gabonais*, i.e. Gabonese French (Mouélé 2011; Minko 2008; Mitchell 2004)

The semantics of these three terms depicts the following perceptions of the French language in Gabon:

- (i) "French in Gabon" depicts a foreign language locally used.
- (ii) "Gabon's French" refers to a sense of origins (from) or of possession (of). Is it a language that comes from Gabon or a language that is a propriety of Gabon? It is a fact that French does not come from Gabon but can be considered as a property of Gabon only on the grounds that the language is recognized as the sole official language by the Constitution of the Republic of Gabon.
- (iii) "Gabonese French" depicts language appropriation as it has been reflected in several studies (Pambou 1998; Mabika Mbokou 2008, 2012, 2019; Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2011; Massinga Kombila 2013; Boussougou and Menacere 2015).

The compilation of the projected DGFG assumes French to be a Gabonese language. It is the same sense of appropriation that transpires in the term "South African English" (*anglais sud-africain*), which may have a whole different meaning than "English in South Africa" (*anglais en Afrique du Sud*) or "South Africa's English" (*anglais d'Afrique du Sud*). The same can be said about concepts such as "Canadian French" (*français canadien*) as compared to "French in Canada" (*français au Canada*) and to "Canada's French" (*français du Canada*); and about "Belgian French" (*français belge*) compared to "French in Belgium" (*français en Belgique*) and "Belgium's French" (*français de Belgique*).

It should be noted that the terms "Canadian French" (Walker 1984; Martineau 2007; Poder et al. 2021; Attieh et al. 2022), "Belgian French" (Hambye and Simon 2012; Pedraza and Cougnon 2021) and Swiss French (Sertling Miller 2007; Racine and Andreassen 2012) are fully accepted terms in the literature in English as well as in French (Mougeon and Beniak 1989; Martineau 2005; Andreassen 2018; Pigeon 2021). About Canadian French, it may be worth mentioning the statement by Poliquin (2006: 4), a French-speaking Ontarian and linguist: "I have grown up referring to my dialect as 'français canadien' not 'français québécois'".

In the general context of Africa, Zabus (2007) views this foreign language appropriation as a form of indigenization. According to Zabus (2007), who demonstrates the indigenization process of both English and French through novels and other works of fiction, the indigenization is both in the text and in the context (Zabus 2007: 4-8). In terms of the context, Mengara (2000: 282) argues

that French "has become an African language". According to Mengara (2000: 282-283), linguistic research "has yielded results which have all pointed towards the fact that the French used in Africa now presents a certain number of structural differences from the French of France — differences that can be seen at the lexical, syntactic, semantic, phonological and cultural levels, as a result of the variety of linguistic loans, extensions, calques, reductions, transfers, etc."

This type of phenomenon is always likely to occur when a language extends beyond its original borders, and notably in a context of political, economic and cultural imperialism. This is how regional dialects are born. For French in Africa, Mengara (2000: 283) argues that these "differences were significant enough for researchers to start talking about a different code or dialect of French that they called African French". The reality is that the so-called African French is an aggregate of numerous varieties spoken in various parts of Africa, depending on the level and type of appropriation and codification each region or each country has made of the French language. This explains why besides Gabonese French we can talk about Cameroonian French (Eloundou Eloundou 2019; Djoum Nkwescheu 2008), Ivorian French (Atsé N'Cho 2018; Plahar 2017; Kouadio N'Guessan 2008), Malian French (Diarra 2018; Skattum 2010), Moroccan French (Nifaoui 2021; Benzakour 2010), Senegalese French (Fall 2021; N'Diaye Corréard 2008), etc. All of this speaks to the appropriation of the French language in the different African countries. This appropriation can be referred to as a form of "decolonizing French as a foreign Language" (Nel and Ferreira-Meyers 2020: 1).

The appropriation of the French language as understood in the projected DGFG is in line with the conception of the Gabonese language landscape (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2005, 2007) in which French is viewed as a local language rather than a foreign language. At the same time, the constitutional disposition making French as the sole official language of Gabon is the legal ground for the nationalisation of the French language in Gabon as a Gabonese language (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2011, 2013). As such, the term "Gabonese French" (*français gabonais*) is believed to be more appropriate to designate the language as it is spoken in Gabon.

3. Research interest and target users

Both lexicographic and metalexicographic works (Mavoungou 2002, 2013; Mavoungou et al. 2014, 2015; Nyangone Assam et al. 2016) have shown the necessity for Gabonese lexicographers to come up with a monolingual comprehensive dictionary of Gabonese French. This posits the research interest of the current project. It is a well-known fact that to date the only French dictionaries used in Gabon are the dictionaries compiled and produced in France.

Moreover, in all existing publications dedicated to the French language as it is spoken in Gabon, the historical dimension is not systematically considered. For the purpose of the projected dictionary, the historical dimension is under-

stood as the etymology for a given lemma as well as the different meanings of a particular lexical item, starting from the most recent sense to the oldest one.

Considering such a research interest, the question of the specific target users of the DGFG does arise. The target users of the planned dictionary are the Gabonese public at large. This group of envisaged users is basically composed of second-language speakers of Gabonese French as well as first-language speakers of Gabonese French. It is a very heterogeneous group which may have different lexicographic needs and reference skills that should be catered for in the dictionary design. The speakers of the French language in Gabon are indeed very diverse. Pambou (1998) and Ndinga-Koumba-Binza (2011) highlight the fact that the language has multiple statuses in Gabon. Being the sole official language of the country, there are speakers who use it as a foreign language, some as a second language and some other as their mother tongue. Apart from the 10 000 and plus French citizens who have settled in Gabon (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2011: 138), Mabika Mbokou (2012: 172) indicates that the majority of the younger Gabonese generations, especially those in urban areas, have French as their initial language or mother tongue. The existence of a group of target users for the DGFG is therefore a certainty.

To add on the heterogeneity of the target users' group in which many ethnolinguistic groups can be found, there are some common traits among Gabonese, namely the worldview, the value system, traditional beliefs, native languages, and cultures, etc. Among Gabonese, migrants and foreigners (from Europe, Africa, America, Asia, etc.) living in Gabon and knowing French, there might be a lot of differences regarding their ways of life, traditions, common beliefs, institutions and collective activities.

The planned dictionary should assist both second and first-language speakers of Gabonese French (pupils, students, civil servants, politicians, journalists, business people, missionaries, militaries, etc.). To be successful, the publication of a given dictionary project must be the result of proper planning (Gouws 2001: 64). The following sections present the main features of the dictionary conceptualization plan of DGFG.

4. Comprehensive lexicographic processes

Gouws (2001) agrees with Wiegand (1998) that the dictionary conceptualization plan can be divided into five phases, namely:

- (i) the general preparation phase,
- (ii) the material acquisition phase,
- (iii) the material preparation phase,
- (iv) the material processing phase, and
- (v) the publishing preparation phase.

The dictionary conceptualization plan of a given lexicographical project forms part of a lexicographical process. Gouws and Prinsloo (2005: 9) indicate that a lexicographic process is a "comprehensive set of activities" of which the compilation of the dictionary is the culminating result. A lexicographical process refers to all the activities leading to the publication of a given project. It is "part of a comprehensive historical process which coincides with the development of a language" (Gouws 2001: 65).

A distinction is usually made between primary and secondary lexicographical processes. The primary comprehensive lexicographical process (Gouws 1999: 7-10) refers to all the decisions taken at State or Government level in order to plan, promote, guide, and develop lexicographical activities (language policy issues, the establishment of National Lexicographical Units or NLUs, the training of staff members for a particular NLU or a specific dictionary project, the use of a unified orthography for all the NLUs, etc.).

The decision to declare French as the sole official language of Gabon was arguably in itself the commencement of the lexicographic process towards a dictionary of Gabonese French. This has never been followed by any other official recognition of French as an item of the local linguistic heritage of Gabon. Remarkably, the government of Gabon has, since attaining independence, never made any public decision in favour of the French language other than the constitutional provision. Nevertheless, the late President Omar Bongo repeatedly voiced his opinion that the French language, being the only tool for interethnic communication, was the foundation of national unity in the country (Bongo Ondimba 1998) and publicly referred to French as "our national language" (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2011: 146). Ultimately, in terms of planning at a macro level, the compilation of the DGFG is the result of these unconfirmed government processes with regard to the French language in Gabon.

The secondary comprehensive lexicographical process refers to all the activities conducted within a given lexicographical unit at national level or within a particular dictionary project. These activities may include editorial work or issues such as the formulation and implementation of the organisation plan of a given dictionary project, the identification of short-, medium- and long-term objectives within a project, liaisons with publishers, the planning of the marketing of each project, the logistics of the project and all the managerial aspects (Gouws 2001: 65).

It should be noted that in Gabon no lexicographical unit has been set at national level despite numerous pleas from Gabonese lexicographers (Emejulu 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003; Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2005; Mavoungou 2010). Three noteworthy initiatives in this regard have however been put in place at academic level. The first is the adoption by GRELACO² of a programme for the development of lexicography as a research discipline and a career (Emejulu 2000, 2001) that can contribute to the promotion of Gabonese native languages. This programme, which is still running, has resulted in the training of Gabonese lexicographers at doctoral level, the development of lexicography as a teaching

and research discipline, the inception of Gabonese lexicography and the advent of a modern era of Gabonese language dictionary production (Ndinga-Koumba-Binza 2006). The projected DGFG can be viewed as the result of this lexicographic process initiated by GRELACO in 1998.

A second initiative is the recently established GREDYLEX (*Groupe de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Linguistiques et Lexicographiques*), a research unit within the Institute for Research in Human Sciences (IRSH) of the National Centre for Science and Technology Research (CENAREST). GREDYLEX is the first of its kind within IRSH and CENAREST, following numerous attempts to boost linguistic and lexicographic research. The mission of GREDYLEX can be clearly summarized as the development of lexicography practice and a dictionary culture within Gabon. It is therefore no surprise that the research and community engagement activities of GREDYLEX are mainly centered on pedagogical lexicography and schools. This is clearly reflected in their three periodicals, namely *Kabi*, a journal for practical lexicographers; *Likayi*, their newsletter and academic information bulletin; and *Ilongo*, a magazine for information aimed at the general public. The first volumes of the three publications were released soon after the launching of GREDYLEX at the end of 2021.

Understanding that French is the sole language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in Gabon's education system, research at GREDYLEX has a strong focus on French and the use of French dictionaries encyclopedias and textbooks. The consideration of the French language alongside the Gabonese native languages is evident in the publications and mission of GREDYLEX. This process is taken into consideration in the planned DGFG. The editorial team and the compilers of the projected DGFG intend to collaborate with GREDYLEX in various aspects of the production of the DGFG.

Finally, as initially mentioned, the DGFG project originates from the CREGI (*Centre de Recherche en Etudes Germaniques et Interculturelles*) within the Department of German Studies at Omar Bongo University. CREGI was launched in January 2013 with the aim to serve as the research wing of the Department of German Studies. The fact that the Department has four lexicographers (two permanent and two associates) who are also founding members of CREGI contributed to retaining lexicography and lexicology as one of the research areas of CREGI's activities. In addition to the annual dictionary colloquium, the DGFG project is one of CREGI's main lexicographical activities and projects.

In our view GRELACO, GREDYLEX and CREGI constitute potential springboards or starting points for the establishment of national lexicography units (NLUs), based on the model of the South African NLUs. While the contribution and the role of NLUs in South Africa have been analyzed (Kumalo 1999; Gouws 2003; Mongwe 2006), Madiba and Nkomo (2010: 322) believe that "The establishment of the NLUs remains a commendable idea which has undoubtedly improved lexicographic practice in the country". Within the DGFG project, the South African NLUs model is recommended. What may be missing is an

organization such as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) to coordinate between the NLUs and provide government tutelage.

5. The dictionary basis of DGFG

A dictionary basis refers to the set of sources "used for the compilation of a dictionary" (Svensén 2009: 39). It can also be said that the dictionary basis is the total of the source language material for a specific lexicographic project. Three types of sources can be identified, namely *primary sources* (both written material and oral sources), *secondary sources* (all available dictionaries in the specific language) and *tertiary sources* (all other linguistic material such as grammars, scientific articles, and books).

5.1 Primary sources: written materials

As far as primary sources are concerned, the written material of DGFG will be extracted from various newspapers published in Gabon. The major source amongst these publications will be the sole national daily newspaper, namely *L'Union*. Figure 2 below presents a screenshot from the website of this media.

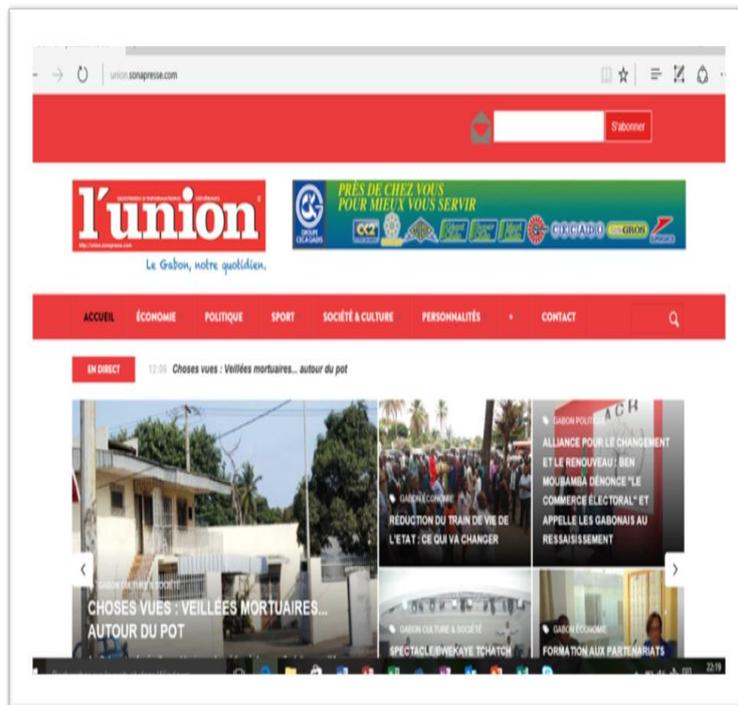


Figure 2: Homepage of *L'Union* website³

As in most newspapers for the public at large, articles in *L'Union* are broad in topics and very explanatory. The online version of the newspaper is the exact copy of the printed version in terms of content, structure, and length of articles. This provides an available source for electronic texts for lexicographic works such as corpus building and dictionary compilation.

Figure 3 below gives an illustration of an article in the online version of *L'Union*.

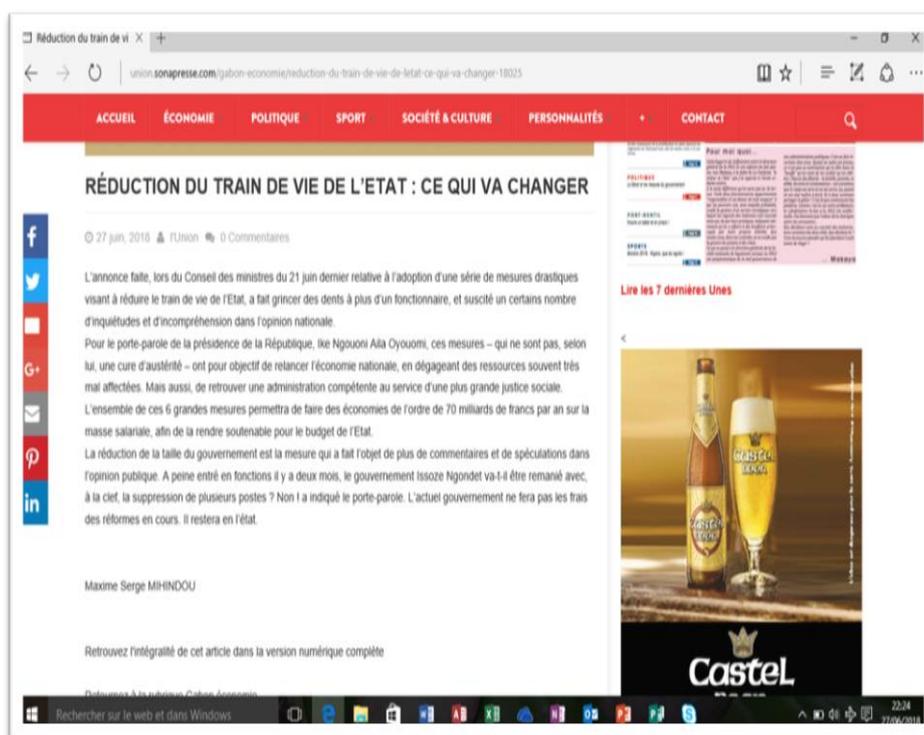


Figure 3: Extract from *L'Union* website⁴

Apart from *L'Union*, Gabon's first and biggest newspaper, written data can also be obtained from the weekly *Gabon d'Aujourd'hui*, which is published by the Ministry of Communications, as well as from other periodicals. There are several privately owned periodicals, which are either independent or affiliated with political parties.

Table 1 below provides a list of Gabonese online media and Gabonese newspapers that use Gabonese French. A number of these newspapers are only online publications. Most of the paper newspapers are also published numerically either through their own respective websites or on the e-kiosk of their common distributor⁵.

Name	Language	Frequency	Ownership	Notes
<i>7jours Infos</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Coopération Internationale</i>	French	Monthly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>Dépêches241</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Echos du Nord</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>Ezombolo</i>	French	Bi-monthly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>Gabon Actu</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Gabon d'Aujourd'hui</i>	French	Weekly	Government	Paper
<i>Gabon Eco</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Gabon Libre</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Gabon Matin</i>	French	Daily	Government	Paper
<i>Gabon Media Time</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Gabon Review</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Gabonews</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Infos Plus Gabon</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>Infos241</i>	French	Daily	Private	Online
<i>L'Aube</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>L'Union</i>	French	Daily	Government	Paper & digitized
<i>La Calotte</i>	French	Bi-monthly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>La Cigale Enchantée</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>La Loupe</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>La Lowe</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper
<i>La Nation</i>	French	Bi-monthly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>La Nouvelle République</i>	French	Bi-monthly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>La Relance</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper
<i>Le Mbandja</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>Le Temoïn</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper
<i>Le Temps</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper
<i>Moutouki</i>	French	Weekly	Private	Paper & digitized
<i>Tango</i>	French	Bi-monthly	Private	Paper & digitized

Table 1: List of the most important periodicals using Gabonese French⁶

These media, especially those that are independent, are full of cartoons and therefore include a wealth of words and expressions representing lower mesolectal forms (popular Gabonese French), basilectal forms (Gabonese Matitis French) as well as slang forms (Toli-bangando). As such, these cartoons are actual linguistic and cultural containers of knowledge (cf. McArthur 2006).

The works of well-known Gabonese cartoonists will also contribute to the dictionary basis for both texts and illustrative pictures — cf. the cartoons by Patrick Essono (Pahé) (Figure 4) and Landry Békale (Lybek) (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Extract of Pahé in the online newspaper *Gaboneco*⁷

The decision to consider the work of cartoonists in the dictionary basis is based on three considerations. First, it portrays the Gabonese society on a daily basis with a particularly biting/sharp sense of humour. Figure 5 below shows the heading "Gabonitudes" by Lybek in *L'Union*. It is believed that "Gabonitudes" is the most consulted text of the newspaper.



Figure 5: A cartoon by Lybek⁸

The best of *Gabonitudes* has been published in a comic book entitled *Gabonitudes Tome I*. Figure 6 below shows the front cover.



Figure 6: The front cover of *Gabonitudes Tome I*

Figure 7 below presents the back cover of the same comic book by Lybek.



Figure 7: The back cover of *Gabonitudes Tome I*

Secondly, Gabonese cartoonists play a major role in popular education, particularly in raising awareness about social phenomena or public policies. In this context, the French language in use will be localized although maintaining the same grammatical and orthographic rigor as standard language in formal or common speech. Figure 8 below is a cartoon by Jeff Ikapi raising awareness on the enforcement of a recently signed law against begging.



Figure 8: Raising awareness of the law against begging (by Jeff Ikapi)⁹

Finally, cartoons, because they are mostly published in the media (online and on paper), are also involved in the popularization of Gabonisms and the circularization of a certain social culture in Gabon.

For instance, Figure 9 below, another work by Jeff Ikapi, while it denounces the endemic unemployment in Gabon, also deplors both the nepotism in job offers and the lack of humanism in friends and acquaintances.



Figure 9: An aspect of Gabonese social culture (by Jeff Ikapi)¹⁰

In Figure 10 below, the term "moupohou", a Gabonism, is being propagated. In most languages of Southern Gabon such as Gisir, Yilumbu and Yipunu, the word **moupohou** [mùpóhù] designates a vegetable, consisting of the young leaves of the taro plant (*Colocasia Esculenta*). Like the taro root, the vegetable is very common and popular in Gabonese cuisine. As a Gabonism in French, the term designates the way of making a lot of money easily, and mostly by manipulation or trickery or simply by fraudulent means.



Figure 10: Vehicularization of a Gabonism (by Oneil)¹¹

5.2 Primary sources: oral materials

Up to now, we have only considered the collection of written data as part of both the material acquisition phase and the material preparation phase of the planned dictionary project. In many cases, a corpus compiled only from written sources will not be fully representative of the lexical stock of the language (Gouws 2001). That is the reason why we will also collect data (debates, informal face-to-face conversation, etc.) at grassroots level through fieldwork. Government broadcasts in French as well as in the indigenous languages will also provide oral data from *Gabon Télévisions* and *Radio Gabon*, which are owned and operated by the Gabonese government through the Ministry of Communications.

The recordings of the orature as primary sources have been completed for the following provinces: Estuaire (Libreville in particular, see No. 1 in Figure 11), Ogooué-Maritime (Port-Gentil in particular, see No. 8 in Figure 11) and Ngounié (Mouila in particular, see No. 4 in Figure 11).

Number	Province	Capital City
1	Estuaire	Libreville
2	Haut-Ogooué	Franceville
3	Moyen-Ogooué	Lambaréné
4	Ngounié	Mouila
5	Nyanga	Tchibanga
6	Ogooué-Ivindo	Makokou
7	Ogooué-Lolo	Koulamoutou
8	Ogooué-Maritime	Port-Gentil
9	Woleu-Ntem	Oyem



Figure 11: The nine provinces of Gabon¹²

The following provinces have not been covered yet, namely Woleu-Ntem (see No. 9 in Figure 11), Ogooué-Ivindo (see No. 6 in Figure 11), Moyen-Ogooué (see No. 3 in Figure 11), Ogooué-Lolo (see No. 7 in Figure 11), Haut-Ogooué (see No. 2 in Figure 11) and Nyanga (see No. 5 in Figure 11). As far as this point is concerned, an early identification of short, medium and long-term objectives is necessary for future successful data collection.

As part of both the material acquisition phase and the material preparation phase, the prospective editor-in-chief of the planned dictionary project should be responsible for the planning and conducting/overseeing of prospective fieldtrips in order to collect data as well as logistics and managerial aspects to facilitate the material collection phase.

5.3 Secondary and tertiary sources

The secondary sources of the DGFG are all available dictionaries in French as it exists in Gabon. Two kinds of these dictionaries exist in Gabon:

- (i) the formal dictionaries produced in France, and
- (ii) the dictionaries of localized French produced in the last two decades.

The formal dictionaries produced in France are those that the *Académie Française*¹³ currently recognize are the *dictionnaires de la langue française moderne* (dictionaries of modern French language)¹⁴. The current major dictionaries are produced by French publishing companies such as Larousse, Hachette and Dictionnaires Le Robert. These dictionaries are used in Gabon as premium dictionaries in all domains of life and primarily in the education sector.

The dictionary basis of these dictionaries is indeed the French language as it is spoken in France, and more certainly the Parisian French which is standard language in France. The use in Gabon of these French dictionaries and of the Parisian French as the acrolectal variant of Gabonese French may be at the origin

of the belief that the French language spoken in Gabon is in Africa the closest to Parisian French (Boussougou 2011; Minko 2008).

The dictionaries of localized French are the so-called dictionaries of Gabonese French as successively presented and analyzed in Mavoungou (2013) and Nyangone et al. (2016). The two kinds of dictionaries as well as the tertiary sources (all other linguistic material such as grammars, scientific articles, and books) and the primary sources presented earlier form not only the basis of the projected dictionary but also the initial framework for the corpus of Gabonese French.

6. Conclusion

The discussion above has sought to share some reflections on a few theoretical perspectives for a general dictionary of Gabonese French. The planned dictionary will be a comprehensive one in the sense that it will list words and expressions attested in Gabonese French, namely acrolectal forms (standard French), upper mesolectal forms (common Gabonese French), popular Gabonese French and Gabonese Matitis French. The article has discussed some steps of the dictionary conceptualization plan towards the projected dictionary.

Copyright issues should be clarified before starting with the digitization of all the data that are only available in paper format as well as the use of semi-automatic extraction of terms from all identified online sources. Once data collection and data processing are done, the planned dictionary will be refined and tested in relation to the needs and reference skills of its prospective users. Finally, the planned dictionary as well as the current paper will contribute to laying the foundation for Gabonese French lexicography. Equally, the availability of such a dictionary (published online or in paper format) may be an important step towards the codification of the French language variety of Gabon.

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Notes

1. Translated from Mabika Mbokou (2019: 2) "parler français au Gabon, c'est parler un français dont le lexique, le sens des mots et leurs usage est différent de la norme du français standard".

2. GRELACO (*Groupe de Recherche en Langues et Cultures Orales*) is a research unit within the Department of Language Sciences at Omar Bongo University.
3. Source: <https://www.union.sonapresse.com/gabon-economie/reduction-du-train-de-vie-de-letat-ce-qui-va-changer-18025>. Consulted on 27-06-2018.
4. Source: <https://www.union.sonapresse.com/gabon-economie/reduction-du-train-de-vie-de-letat-ce-qui-va-changer-18025>. Consulted on 27-06-2018.
5. The digitized versions of most Gabonese newspapers and magazines can be found on the e-kiosk of SOGAPRESSE, which is the only distributor of press publications in Gabon: <https://www.e-kiosque-sogapresse.com>
6. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_of_Gabon. Consulted on 27-06-2018.
7. Source: <http://www.gaboneco.com/gabon-pahe-victime-de-ses-caricatures.html>. Consulted on 25-07-2019.
8. Source: <https://www.bedetheque.com/serie-50587-BD-Gabonitudes.html>
9. Source: <https://www.gabonmediatime.com/la-mendicite-penalisee>
10. Source: <https://www.gabonmediatime.com/violences-en-milieu-scolaire-rira-bien-qui-rira-le-dernier>
11. Source: <https://web.facebook.com/MadLight241/photos/a.1955739911325554/3215597432006456/?type=3&theater>
12. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subdivisions_of_Gabon
13. *Académie Française* or French Academy is France's linguistic watchdog for the French language.
14. Cf. <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-dictionnaires-du-francais-moderne>

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