

# AFRICAN MULTILINGUALISMS

Rural Linguistic and Cultural Diversity



EDITED BY

**PIERPAOLO DI CARLO AND JEFF GOOD**

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# Foreword

Gabriel Mba

This book provides useful field studies on multilingualism, and especially African rural multilingualism. Research on multilingualism has concentrated on cities and towns, and code-mixing and code-switching have been explained as the result of contact among individuals with multilingual repertoires in their daily verbal interactions. Rural areas have tended to be seen as monolingual, because they are treated as the native lands of specific languages. However, careful observation reveals that, even in rural areas, people exhibit large language repertoires, and shifting among codes does not merely reveal mastery of several languages but rather signals or expresses attitudes of togetherness with or separateness from the linguistic groups whose languages are or are not being used. Therefore, linguistic practice and socialization share natural relationships, and linguistic behaviors are linked to physical spaces and interactional situations.

One of the main questions tackled in this volume is the ways in which rural areas become multilingual. Migration—and especially forced migration due to war and other kinds of conflict, which gives rise to the creation of refugee camps and new settlements—is an important way whereby multilingualism can develop, and facilitative multilingualism arising from such circumstances may then become entrenched. Migration changes the linguistic ecology and landscape of all communities. This has far-reaching and pervasive adverse effects on some languages (through language loss or attrition) and on the stability of communities (through a disappearance of local distinctiveness in social structures, a decreased emphasis on local ethnocosmology, or other such processes).

As the studies here reveal, ethnic identity often does not coincide with language identity. Many of the rural areas discussed are hubs of extensive society-level multilingualism as a result of their position at the juncture of

more dominant and less dominant speech groups. Furthermore, it can be seen that the performance of public identity and accommodation influence language choice, given the large linguistic repertoire of a typical individual. On the other hand, communicative events whose content relates to the speaker's private life tend to be conveyed through codes that are in an iconic relationship with that speaker's social identity.

In addition to examining questions related to the presence of multilingualism in rural areas, the chapters in this volume also explore its properties. Studies on multilingualism may yield different results depending on the different conceptual approaches adopted. A distinction between essentialism and indexicality in language ideologies, which can be observed in rural multilingualism, reveals opposing ways in which language can be linked to identity. A sound description of individual-level characteristics relevant to the exploration of identity, as well as how languages can be maintained, can be established by the use of an ecological perspective. Ethnographic approaches collecting detailed metadata from research participants can serve as the foundation for a rigorous study of rural multilingualism, as has been the case for work on Lower Fungom in the northwest of Cameroon.

The various contributors to this volume have tried to present the topics on which they decided to focus with convincing arguments and sound descriptions. As well as Lower Fungom, where the KPAAM-CAM project has investigated rural multilingualism for a number of years, the sites of research include other areas in Cameroon (Ossing village in the South-West Region of Cameroon, the Babanki, Bafut, and Limbum areas in the North-West Region, Kelleng village in the Littoral Region, and the Minawao refugee camp of the Far North Region) and Senegal (Lower Casamance). One of the lessons that can be gathered from the reflections found here is the pragmatic nature of language use by inhabitants of rural areas and how language dynamics are connected to sociocultural ecologies. Culturally determined systems of governing and frameworks of behavior have a strong influence on linguistic behavior and ethnic identity.

Questions about how towns and rural areas become multilingual may have the same basic answers, though the extent of the phenomenon may be greater in towns than in some rural areas. As mentioned above, one frequent source for rural multilingualism found in the case studies of this volume is migration—whether for purposes of integration, increased communication, grazing (cattle-rearing), trade, escape from conflict, or other reasons. In addition, we see that communities that are at the juncture of dominant speech groups experience a complex multilingual situation and display a wide range of patterns of language use among their residents. In the same vein, courtrooms, for example, are at the crossroads of multilingualism in cases where not all participants are linguistically equipped to the same degree and where

there is an enormous need for translation. How do we allow people to maintain their dignity and ensure that justice is rendered in a fair manner if the accused, plaintiffs, judges, and lawyers are not communicating effectively? It is therefore imperative to explore multilingual situations to benefit all individuals, whether they live in cities, towns, or villages. As such, studying rural multilingualism is a vital necessity.

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# Editors' Preface

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors would like to acknowledge the support of the US National Science Foundation under Awards No. BCS-1360763 and BCS-1761639, which provided funding that helped see this volume to completion. In addition, the research described in a number of the chapters in this volume, namely those by Chenemo and Neba, Di Carlo and Neba, Esene Agwara, Mba and Nsen Tem, and Ojong Diba, was supported by Award No. BCS-1360763, Award IPF0180 from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme, and a grant from the Centro Linguistico di Ateneo of the University of Florence. A supplement to Award No. BCS-1360763 facilitated collaboration between the editors and the Crossroads Project (<https://soascrossroads.org>), which helped bring the chapters by Cobbinah and Sow into this volume. Support from the University at Buffalo, College of Arts and Sciences also contributed to the completion of the volume. Many of chapters in this volume stem from work carried out as part of the project Key Pluridisciplinary Advances on African Multilingualism–Cameroon (KPAAM-CAM; <https://ubwp.buffalo.edu/kpaamcam>), and we see this volume as an important outlet for the dissemination of research from that project, which has, since 2014, worked to advance the understanding of rural multilingualism in Cameroon.

A number of individuals were integral to the production of this volume, and we would like to thank Braden Brown for his assistance during early stages of editing, Clayton Hamre for helping with the production of a number of the maps found here, and Timothy Jowan Curnow for his meticulous and prompt copy-editing work. The volume would have taken much more time to see completion if it were not for his assistance. During the final stages of editing, Angela Terrill gave us crucial help by preparing the indices. We would

also like to dedicate this book to the memory of two individuals who provided us invaluable support during our own fieldwork in Cameroon, without which we would have never come to understand the richness of rural African multilingualism. These are the late Ngong George Bwei Kum of the village of Mekaf and the late Abanga Christian Mgbe of the village of Ngun.

Finally, we would like to remark on the fact that several junior Cameroonian scholars are publishing for the first time in this volume. We very much hope that this marks the beginning of successful research careers for all of them and that we will see further publications from them in the near future.

## LANGUAGE IDENTIFICATION

A volume of this kind always raises editorial concerns regarding language identification, especially when relatively little-known languages and dialects are being considered. Rather than including language codes directly in the individual chapters, we have chosen to provide this information in the index to the volume, where each named variety is associated with the closely matching ISO 639-3 code and Glottocode (see <https://glottolog.org>).

## EDITORIAL WORK

Both editors contributed to the conceptualization of this volume as well as the editing and review of chapters. However, the greater part of the work was done by Pierpaolo Di Carlo, and the ordering of the editors' names reflects his role as lead editor rather than being an alphabetical ordering by last name.

# Introduction

## *Understanding the Diversity of Multilingualisms in Sub-Saharan Africa*

Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Jeff Good

### 1. EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF VARIATION IN MULTILINGUALISM

The study of multilingualism is traditionally subdivided into two broad branches.<sup>1</sup> One branch focuses on how languages as a whole pattern with society, and is known by terms such as the “sociology of language,” “macro-sociolinguistics,” and “societal multilingualism.” The other concentrates on the behaviors of multilingual individuals, and is known by terms such as “(micro-)sociolinguistics” and “individual multilingualism.” Regardless of the important differences between—and within—these two branches, they can be seen as sharing two key features. One feature, which is relatively easy to observe due to its near universality, is a reliance on data collected in urban contexts. The other feature emerges when one carries out research in postcolonial contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa: a reliance on Western models of identity construction. The contribution that this book aims to make is connected to these two concerns, and the diversity alluded to in the volume title—*African Multilingualisms*—springs from this.

In order to stress the complementary nature of the findings discussed in the following chapters with respect to more mainstream scholarship, this introduction is structured in a sort of dialogic fashion, where succinct summaries of widely held views on multilingual phenomena in Africa are contrasted with the main findings emerging from the studies contained in this volume. We will first consider the contrast between rural and urban environments in Africa, and the relevance of this distinction to the study of multilingualism (section 2). Subsequently, we will deal with issues that more closely relate to societal multilingualism, including the significance of studying rural areas to better understand this phenomenon (section 3). This is followed by



consideration of concerns that more clearly pertain to studies of individual multilingualism and the factors that condition choice and the relationship between language and identity (section 4). The introduction concludes with a brief overview of the relevance of the small-scale multilingualism phenomena discussed in the volume from the perspective of language endangerment.

## 2. URBAN AND RURAL PERSPECTIVES

### 2.1 Multilingualism as an Urban Phenomenon

Most research on multilingualism in Africa has been done in urban centers, in some cases for good reasons and in others for more problematic ones. Two clear reasons are (a) the conceptualization of urban centers as sites of future potential for the development of African society and (b) the assumption that rural areas are linguistically homogeneous.

With respect to the first point, cities and towns have grown dramatically during the postcolonial period, mostly due to the movement of rural immigrants with diverse linguistic backgrounds into urban environments. The patterns of linguistic complexity that emerged in these environments led to the need for new language policies that would serve as powerful tools for nation-building and that were influenced by competing postcolonial political goals. Where could there be a greater opportunity to develop far-sighted policies than urban centers, where “unlike the more conservative tradition in the villages, both the social and the linguistic situation is [*sic*] highly fluid, being rapidly and violently affected by numerous contemporary pressures” (Povey (1983, 9))? Scholars’ widespread preference for urban multilingualism is thus not only understandable but also commendable in being an attempt to put knowledge to the service of the greater good.

As for the second point, the conservative nature of rural societies hinted at by Povey (1983) in the quotation above has been assumed to co-occur with a situation in which, much like in the imagined European countryside, one could find “pure ancestral codes.” That is, there was an expectation that in African villages one would encounter linguistically homogeneous communities linked to bounded “tribes,” serving as the basic political unit in the countryside.

A telling example of how the expected linguistic homogeneity was challenged by field data is provided by Myers-Scotton’s (1982) study of multilingualism in Shiveye, a hamlet in western Kenya. The author first describes Shiveye as linguistically homogeneous (p. 126) but then reports that all but 6 percent of respondents “reported knowing some other language or languages in addition to the home language” (p. 128). She concludes that “the amount

of bilingualism in such a homogeneous community may be one of the *most revealing findings* of this study, for it shows that simply reporting the ‘surface structure’ of usage at any point in time may mask the actual parameters of linguistic repertoires” (p. 129; emphasis added). Decades later, sociolinguistic research based on similar assumptions can be found, as seen in statements such as “there are . . . geographically overlapping speech communities . . . even in rural areas where homogeneity is often assumed” (Broeder, Extra, and Maartens (2002, 16); emphasis added), with some works even maintaining the use of problematic terminology that has generally been abandoned (e.g., the use of “tribe language” in Spernes (2012)).

An assumption of linguistic homogeneity has led to rural areas playing a relatively marginal role in the study of multilingual behaviors. The possibility that in rural societies one might encounter significant patterns of indigenous, small-scale multilingualism was rendered more or less “invisible.”

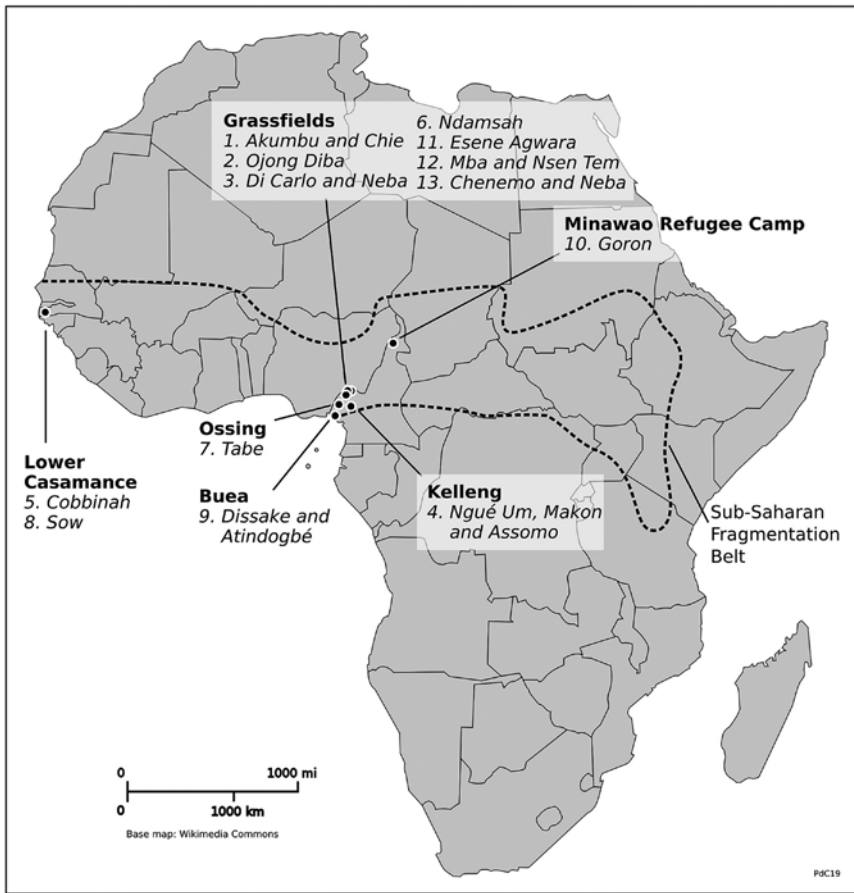
## 2.2 Rurality from a Spatial Perspective

A key unifying factor of the chapters in this volume is an emphasis on multilingualism in rural areas. This is, in part, reflected in the ordering and division of chapters in the volume, with the chapters most closely oriented around this topic appearing at the beginning of the book and constituting its largest section. How to distinguish between urban and rural environments in Africa is an issue that historians, anthropologists, and geographers have long debated (see, e.g., Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991; Mabogunje 1969; Winters 1977), and we will not try to settle the matter here. However, we believe that scholars studying African societies will generally share intuitions on how to distinguish between “rural” and “urban” environments in Africa, even if devising a clear-cut way to identify them is difficult. For present purposes, we define rural environments in geographic terms as those areas where population density is relatively low, most inhabitants are engaged in farming, and transportation and network connections to outside areas are relatively limited.

On the basis of this definition, all but three of the chapters of this volume are based on field research in settings that can be broadly classified as geographically rural. The three exceptions are the contributions of Dissake and Atindogbé, Goron, and Sow. Dissake and Atindogbé analyze the highly regimented linguistic space of the courtroom, where the opposition between colonial language ideologies and local language ideologies comes strongly into focus. Goron’s contribution describes the linguistic situation of a densely populated refugee camp where most of the refugees are from rural areas. Sow examines the linguistic practices of a student whose life history has involved movement between more rural and urban spaces. In this regard, even those

chapters not specifically focused on rural areas have significance for our understanding of the dynamics of rural multilingualism.

A separate consideration from whether or not a given region is more rural or urban in character is its local linguistic patterning. Rural or urban areas can, in principle, be linguistically homogeneous or linguistically diverse, and the chapters in this volume are focused on rural areas where significant linguistic diversity is present. This is, in part, because such areas are ideal for the study of rural multilingualism, but another reason is the fact that the volume’s geographic focus is on a part of Africa that falls within a region that has been termed the “Sub-Saharan Fragmentation Belt” (Dalby (1970, 163)) due to its overall high level of linguistic diversity (see figure 0.1). This diversity



**Figure 0.1** Map of Africa, indicating the location of the areas discussed in this volume, together with the names of the authors of the relevant chapters. *Source:* Map created by Pierpaolo Di Carlo.

has likely been present for millennia, long before contemporary processes of urbanization began to take place on the African continent.

For instance, three of the chapters in this volume, those by Esene Agwara, Mba and Nsem Tem, and Ojong Diba, focus on Lower Fungom, an area of the North-West Region of Cameroon that can be classified as a geographically rural space that is also characterized by high language density and extensive individual-level multilingualism. Two of the chapters, those of Chenemo and Neba and Di Carlo and Neba, look at the Bafut area, found quite close to Lower Fungom, which is also linguistically diverse, in particular in the Lower Bafut area. The chapters by Cobbinah and by Sow look at multilingualism in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal, a large area containing both urban and rural landscapes, once again characterized by a high language density. Cobbinah's chapter, in particular, focuses on a very linguistically diverse rural area of Lower Casamance. Other chapters, such as those by Akumbu and Chie and by Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo, focus on single villages that are located in geographically rural and linguistically diverse areas.

### 3. SOCIETAL MULTILINGUALISM

#### 3.1 Trigglossia and “the Spirit of African Multilingualism”

I talk country with my mother. I talk Pidgin and country with my sister and brothers. I talk French when I play with my friends. I talk English and Pidgin at school. (Anchimbe (2013, 82))

According to Bokamba (2018, 442), this excerpt from an interview with a ten-year-old boy living in Yaoundé “aptly capture[s] simply and elegantly the spirit of African multilingualism.” The excerpt exemplifies two significant features. First, as already discussed in section 2.1, the salience of multilingualism in urban contexts has long been noted—Yaoundé is the capital of Cameroon and its second largest city. Second, the languages involved have complementary functional ranges—this individual characterizes his multilingual usage in terms of specific domains. Clear-cut compartmentalization is partially blurred only by a local lingua franca, Cameroon Pidgin English.

This compartmentalized view of a linguistic repertoire has been a key feature of studies of societal multilingualism going back to Fishman's (1967) extension of Ferguson's (1959) notion of diglossia. As Bokamba's (2018) evocative phrasing of a singular “spirit of African multilingualism” indicates, this view has also dominated the epistemology of research on societal multilingualism in sub-Saharan Africa (see, e.g., Anchimbe 2013; Kamwangamalu 2000, 2012). Bokamba (2018), in particular, is an example of work that has seen a triglossic scheme as sufficient to account for the internal subdivision

of the sociolinguistic spaces of African societies. Triglossia, here, refers to “a language situation whereby three languages are involved, having in some areas well-defined complementary functional ranges, and in others overlapping functional ranges because of their varying sociocultural bases, and also varying stages of development” (Abdulaziz Mkilifi (1972, 198)).<sup>2</sup>

In the African context, this is most clearly seen in urban contexts where the introduction of colonial languages has meant not only the presence of additional lexicogrammatical codes in societies that were already multilingual but also the foregrounding of a language ideology that is built on a hierarchical arrangement of languages along a general dimension of “prestige,” with colonial languages at the top of the hierarchy, followed by various regional languages and lingua francas, and with small “local” languages at the bottom (see, e.g., Wolff (2016, 229)). While hierarchical ordering of languages is not unknown in environments that would generally be categorized as geographically rural (as seen, for instance, in the investigation of Chenemo and Neba in this volume), this arrangement is much more strongly visible in prototypical urban contexts, just as social stratification itself is most strongly visible within cities.

### 3.2 Prototypical Rurality: Beyond Geography

The observations in section 3.1 suggest an important refinement in our understanding of the research foci of the various chapters in this volume. Rather than simply focusing on rural areas in a narrow geographic sense (see section 2.2), most of the studies focus on what we refer to here as “prototypical” rural areas. They demonstrate that the significance of the rural/urban divide for African multilingualism is as much about settlement patterns and the nature of the local economy as it is about cultural and ideological conceptions of the role of language in structuring societies. A noteworthy point about African cities from a linguistic perspective is the extent to which processes of urbanization have gone hand in hand with the imposition of a new kind of prestige-based language ideology, largely as a result of European colonialism but also, in some cases, via the spread of Islam and, with it, of the Arabic language (see, e.g., Moore (2004) for a relevant case study in a Cameroonian context).

By contrast, in prototypical rural spaces, in addition to the geographic features mentioned in section 2.2, one finds systems of linguistic valorization where the languages present in the local social context are valued through means other than their arrangement along an idealized scale of prestige and power. To capture this distinction, Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019) distinguish between *endogenous* and *exogenous* language ideologies, with endogenous language ideologies being those that appear to be historically old, almost certainly precolonial, while exogenous ideologies represent

historically newer layers, often connected to colonialism, whether directly or indirectly. Multilingualisms that can be observed today in prototypically rural spaces are those that are most likely to represent continuations of endogenous patterns of language use, while those found in urban spaces are the most likely to have been strongly influenced by exogenous patterns of use. This historical contrast has led us to frame the distinction in these kinds of multilingualism through an opposition between “rural” and “urban” here. However, it is clear that the social and spatial reality of African societies is much more complicated than such a simplistic, binary opposition implies. This is evidenced, in part, in the structure of this volume, where a number of chapters focusing on spaces where both rural and urban patterns of multilingualism are present are grouped together under the theme of multilingualisms in contact.

Of the regions discussed in this volume, Lower Fungom is the one that adheres most closely to our rural prototype. Nevertheless, as found in the study of Ojong Diba, even there one sees the influence of urban patterns of multilingualism in the use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), which has emerged as a *lingua franca*. Historically, multilingualism itself had been the local “*lingua franca*” (see Fardon and Furniss (1994, 4)), but CPE has been playing an increasingly important role across the whole of anglophone Cameroon. Its presence has not only changed individual multilingual repertoires but has also resulted in new patterns of language use. For instance, as discussed by Ojong Diba, code-mixing and code-switching among the local languages of Lower Fungom is generally avoided, but this prohibition does not apply as strongly to CPE. This is presumably connected to its status as an “outside” language.

Cobbinah’s chapter considers another prototypically rural area quite geographically distant from Lower Fungom, a part of the Lower Casamance region of Senegal that has been referred to as the Crossroads in linguistic studies. Superficially, the Crossroads area is comparable to Lower Fungom. It is associated with many small languages, and its residents are typically highly multilingual. However, a significant difference in observed patterns of language use is that code-mixing and code-switching among local languages are pervasive in day-to-day speech in the Crossroads, unlike in Lower Fungom. In addition to the high-level urban/rural divide, differences like these seen in rural spaces have also prompted us to emphasize the plurality of African multilingualisms in the title of this volume.

Other chapters in the volume describe patterns of multilingualism in contexts that do not fit the rural prototype as closely as Lower Fungom or the Crossroads area, for different reasons. Di Carlo and Neba’s and Chenemo and Neba’s studies of the Bafut and Lower Bafut areas are focused on a region close to Lower Fungom that, while broadly rural in nature, is not isolated to the same degree since it lies along a major road and is relatively close to the

urban center of Bamenda, and similar conditions hold for the Babanki area that is the focus of Akumbu and Chie's study and Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo's consideration of the Bati community. However, these are only relatively minor deviations in comparison to other settings examined here.

Tabé's contribution, for instance, reveals the interesting case of the village of Ossing, with a relatively small population of around 2,000 people, found in the anglophone part of Cameroon. It had, until recently, been more clearly rural than urban in terms of its population distribution and social structures. Unusually for its area, Ossing has been traditionally associated with two distinct local languages, Kenyang and Ejagham; more typically, a given political unit is only associated with one local language even if most of its residents are multilingual. Ossing's status as a bilingual village is, in part, due to its geographic location at a three-way road junction that is at the border of Kenyang-speaking and Ejagham-speaking areas. Ossing's position on a junction already makes it a less prototypically rural location. However, a more critical development for its current linguistic ecology is the fact that it is an area where economically valuable forests are present, and this has resulted in significant migration to the village from other parts of Cameroon, in particular francophone Cameroon. The increased presence of outsiders has resulted in a noteworthy rise in the use of French, English, and CPE in the village, as well as other languages, and its internal linguistic ecology now more closely matches what would be expected in a Cameroonian city. Thus, this one small village appears to be undergoing a transition from a less rural to a more urban sociolinguistic configuration, and sites like this present interesting opportunities for research on what happens when rural and urban patterns of multilingualism come into contact with each other.

In a similar manner, Akumbu and Chie's chapter, based on field research in the Cameroonian village of Kejom Ketinguh, considers a comparatively neglected aspect of rural multilingualism that also results from internal shifts in populations, namely multilingualism among pastoralist communities living alongside farming communities. In areas of Cameroon around the Nigerian border, one finds traditionally nomadic pastoralists known as Mbororo who primarily speak varieties of Fulfulde. Fulfulde is only very distantly related (if related at all) to the languages of the farming communities, and its closest relatives are found centered around Senegal. Fulfulde-speaking communities have spread over wide parts of West and Central Africa, however descriptive and comparative linguistic studies tend to treat them as "outsiders" among farming groups and, as a result, the speech practices of these groups have generally been studied quite separately from those of farming communities. In fact, the Mbororo show patterns of multilingualism that are superficially similar to those of farmers. For instance, they often learn new languages because they have moved into areas where those languages predominate.

However, there are important differences. For example, unlike Babanki children, Mbororo children remain largely linguistically isolated until the age of five or so, at which point they start to learn other languages, with Babanki and CPE being what they typically learn first. Mbororo-Babanki contact in some ways resembles contact within urban settings among groups who have not traditionally interacted, but it is happening in a clearly rural space and where a key difference among the local groups is their primary food subsistence strategy, a highly salient social feature in a rural environment.

More extreme sites of contact are discussed in the chapters by Dissake and Atindogbé and Goron. As mentioned above, Dissake and Atindogbé look at language use in courtroom settings, with a particular focus on the dynamics that arise when speakers of local languages are forced to operate in a context where the hierarchical ordering of languages is not a mere social convention but a matter of law. In a research note, Goron provides what is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study of multilingualism within an African refugee camp. Her study is on the Minawao camp in the Far North Region of Cameroon, where refugees from conflicts connected to Boko Haram have fled from northeastern Nigeria. Most of the refugees come from rural areas and are multilingual in languages local to the region of Nigeria from which they arrived. Some of these languages, such as Kanuri and Hausa, have lingua franca status in parts of Nigeria, while others are quite localized in their use. Clearly, a refugee camp like Minawao cannot be easily classified as “urban” or “rural.” Its inhabitants mainly have a rural background, but they are living in an environment of high population density and internal diversity that is more typical of an urban setting.

While it has not yet been possible to conduct a systematic study of patterns of language use in Minawao, the observations provided in Goron’s chapter are of interest for what they appear to reveal about the language dynamics within a refugee camp. Deeper knowledge of this would not only be valuable from a policy perspective, by giving humanitarian groups a clearer understanding of communicative practices of refugees living within the camp, but it may also prove to be important for predicting the linguistic trajectories of the refugees when they are able to leave the camp. A noteworthy pattern in this regard is that raw numbers of speakers in the camp seem less important in determining which languages become widely used than whether or not a language was already established as a regional lingua franca outside the camp.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the chapters in this volume, in terms of arriving at a better understanding of “rural” language dynamics, is how acute the need is for more study of the kinds of multilingualism that are present outside of prototypical urban spaces. In particular, the category of “not urban” is much more diverse than a simple label like “rural” implies. Moreover, given that the growth of African cities is largely driven by



migration from rural areas, it seems clear that a full understanding of urban multilingualism will require a better understanding of the kinds of multilingualisms that people bring with them as they move to urban spaces or back and forth between urban and rural ones.

## 4. INDIVIDUAL MULTILINGUALISM AND THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

### 4.1 Domains of Use and Their Alternatives

One of the main analytical tools that has been used in the scholarly consideration of societal multilingualism that has often “leaked” into the study of individual multilingualism is that of domains of use. A rationale can be found along the following lines: If, in a society characterized by extensive multilingualism, different languages are associated with different complexes “of behaviors, attitudes, and values” (Fishman (1967, 29)), then research on multilingualism should try to identify these distinctive complexes—that is, the social domains in which each language is considered by speakers to be best suited—in order to also account for speakers’ linguistic choices in interaction. This approach has been effectively complemented by research done in interactional sociolinguistics, as evidenced, for instance, by work building on Gumperz’s (1982) proposals for a more fine-grained understanding of context as being continuously negotiated by interactants and on Auer’s insight into the interplay between discourse- and participant-related switching during interaction (e.g., Auer (1999, 311)). However, what is striking to us is that this model has been seen as central to the study of the behavior of multilingual individuals who use languages that are themselves poorly described and that are used in sociolinguistic spaces that are also little understood, as is the case for most of sub-Saharan Africa (see section 3.1).

The adoption of a nuanced definition of prototypical rural spaces, as developed in section 3.2, in order to characterize the chapters in this volume is, in part, due to the fact that the perspective many of them adopt is more complex and ethnographically sophisticated than the one that is implied by models which assume that social domains of use are the primary determinant of language choice. A particular limitation of such an approach is that it is based on the idea that it is possible to effectively analyze patterns of reported or observed language use through the lens of externally defined social domains, such as the school, the workplace, the home, the neighborhood, the media, and state institutions. As such, it not only leaves little space for the discovery of locally salient domains of language use that fall outside of well-known categories but also fails to recognize the potential role of language choice in shaping the social spaces that speakers inhabit.

Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo deal explicitly with their choice to not use social domains as foundational elements in the interpretive framework that they adopt in their contribution. Their research focuses on the multilingual behaviors of a group of women born in different rural areas in central Cameroon but who now live in the village of Kelleng, where a variety of Bati is spoken. The linguistic ecology of this village is complex and includes some nine different “lects” (a cover term we use here to encompass locally salient linguistic varieties whether or not they would be classified as distinct “languages” in scholarly terms). Only one of these, French, is exoglossic to central Cameroon. The others have widely divergent potential for facilitating intergroup communication. For instance, Basaa is used in Kelleng and across central Cameroon as a language of wider communication, while Nyambat is a variety of Bati associated with a tiny village, also called Nyambat, found not far from Kelleng.

Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo recorded interactions among more than a dozen women, with a focus on four of them, in two activities: (a) while farming and (b) while preparing cassava paste in the house of one of the women. In analyzing their data quantitatively, they do not use social domains as a primary variable but, rather, the location of the interaction and the “frame of discourse.” These frames of discourse are defined in terms of the topic of the discussion, broadly construed. For example, the “public” frame includes those turns in which speakers talk about politics and village-wide events, and the “business” frame refers to turns in which the ongoing economic activity (i.e., farming or preparing cassava) or other possible work-related activities of the group are under discussion. Using this analytical system, variation in the length of turns at talk were measured for four of the participants across six target lects, namely, Kelleng, Basaa, Bisoo, Bongo, Eton, and Ewondo.<sup>3</sup>

The study reveals that the two independent variables have an effect but are not sufficient to fully account for patterns of language use, and, therefore, that further investigation is needed. Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo further make interesting ethnographic observations when discussing the findings, implicitly suggesting that another important dimension that needs to be considered is that of audience design. Cassava preparation takes place in a house but, as is common in many other African villages, houses are, in practical terms, “almost” public spaces, open to frequent and unannounced visits by more or less distant relatives and acquaintances. The language choices of the women within houses, therefore, are likely to be conditioned in part by an assumption that they will be overheard. This helps explain why the Kelleng lect is predominantly used throughout the recordings. This is the lect associated with the Kelleng village, and these women have married into Kelleng and are expected to show respect and affection for it.<sup>4</sup> The lect that is used most often

after Kelleng is Bisoo. This is the original home language of three of the four women, and they use it especially for gossip.

The importance of such locally specific factors makes clear why Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo analyze their data using variables not directly connected to social domains to capture and analyze the dynamism of individual multilingualism in actual language use. Something similar is seen in Sow's chapter. This study is largely centered on an urban context, the city of Ziguinchor in southern Senegal, but in this case, too, it is clear that language choice and language attitudes can depend on a complex and dynamic set of locally salient factors that cannot be described by using a reductionistic and relatively static concept such as "social domain." By recording instances of the language use of a university student of Bissau-Guinean origin in different environments both in the city—such as the market, the university, the home, and the neighborhood—and during his trips to Guinea-Bissau, Sow attempts to describe the student's linguistic trajectories within a complex sociolinguistic ecology. Additional data from interviews and direct observation allows her to outline not only the motivations for the development of the student's multilingual repertoire, which are largely due to his mobility, but also to identify a tension between concrete spaces of interaction and features of the language ideologies brought by Bissau-Guineans to Ziguinchor.

As we shall see immediately below in section 4.2, other studies contained in this volume further highlight how approaches aiming to capture, to the extent possible, the lived sociolinguistic realities of multilingual research participants can lead to novel insights.

## **4.2 Language Ideologies and Identity**

"For the multilingual speaker, language choice is not only an effective means of communication but also an act of identity (Le Page and Tabouret Keller 1985). Every time we say something in one language when we might just as easily have said it in another, we are reconnecting with people, situations, and power configurations from our history of past interactions and imprinting on that history our attitudes towards the people and languages concerned" (Li Wei (2000, 15)). These remarks summarize two key points in the study of individual multilingualism. On the one hand, they make clear that language choice is a fundamental semiotic tool for the representation of identity and, on the other, that identities available to a speaker and the ways in which they are encoded depend on the language ideologies shared by the interactants. We understand language ideologies, in this context, to refer to "the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (Irvine (1989, 255)).

An important point to make in this context is that, in the existing literature, the factors that have generally been considered most salient in understanding the ways in which language ideologies are linked to linguistic identity involve what Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have labeled “categorical identification,” through which “one may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute” (2000, 15). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004, 16) place “age, race, class, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientation, geopolitical locale, institutional affiliation, and social status” among these kinds of categories.

Attributes of this kind will typically call up features at the level of moral, psychological, and other personal qualities of speakers via what Irvine and Gal (2000, 37) refer to as processes of “iconization” that are often assumed to be of universal validity. However, there are also cases in which language choice seems to be used to represent nothing more than co-membership in a given group, most commonly connected with some notion of “ethnicity.” Since Rubin (1972), researchers have rarely pushed their analyses beyond recognizing the role of such acts in the creation of bonds of solidarity when accounting for such language choices (see, e.g., Pavlenko 2005). Findings discussed in works specifically focused on language and identity in rural African contexts, such as Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019, section 5) or Lüpke (2018), show that the vagueness of a label like “solidarity” obscures the presence of more specific, locally salient sociopsychological dynamics in interaction that will not be accounted for in approaches emphasizing categorical aspects of identity.

A focus on the understanding of sociopsychological dynamics of this kind pervades a number of the chapters in this volume. For instance, Cobbinah hypothesizes that both ethnic and linguistic identities in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal have been fluid and scalable across different levels of geographic reach for centuries, and that this is indicative of the strategic uses that various populations have made of languages in order to align themselves with a given group, subgroup, or supergroup in times of need. Such fluid practices foreground the presence of multiple, potentially overlapping identities (see also Lüpke and Storch (2013, ch. 1)) and co-occur with a conceptualization of languages as being primarily associated with specific localities via what Lüpke (2018, 187) calls “patrimonial deixis,” where the founders of a village, or even a hamlet, identify themselves through the use of a certain named language, which grants to their descendants access to land rights and the ability to communicate with ancestors. That is, when speakers use a locale-specific patrimonial language, they are representing themselves as connected to the founding “clan” and, thereby, are attempting to affirm their rights to a land-based patrimony. Interestingly, the so-called strangers—that is, individuals associated with a given political unit but who are not viewed as descendants of a founding group—are not seen as illegitimate

inhabitants of these places, which would lead to them being ideologically “erased.” Rather, they simply do not have the same set of rights as those who can lay claim to the local patrimony. This ideological model is quite different from those based on a notion of “ancestral territorialization,” which assumes that the ancestral inhabitants of a place were linguistically homogeneous.

A different view is provided by Di Carlo and Neba in their discussion of the relationship between language and identity in traditional Bafut, in the North-West Region of Cameroon, in which they analyze the polity-wide endoglossic linguistic repertoire and question the kinds of identities attainable through adherence to traditional metapragmatics. This includes codes exclusively known and used by members of secret societies—an extreme form of elite closure (see Myers-Scotton 1993), one might argue—as well as the so-called Bafut royal register. These codes do not appear to reference categorical types of identities. Quite to the contrary, Di Carlo and Neba argue that all the codes populating the repertoires of individuals associated with Bafut society foreground relational identities, through which “one may identify oneself (or another person) by position in a relational web (a web of kinship, for example, or of friendship, patron-client ties, or teacher-student relations)” (Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 15)). The “royal register” is in fact shown to be quite distant from what one would normally expect from registers (see Agha 1998), and ultimately points to the ability of individuals to represent their “Bafutness” via linguistic knowledge that can only be obtained through prolonged stays in Bafut itself.

Similar findings are discussed in Ojong Diba’s chapter. Through the analysis of an extensive spoken corpus, she finds that, in Lower Fungom, local language ideologies dictate that alternations in speech between local languages during one and the same interaction are relatively rare and used to encode specific social meanings. In her analysis of a long interaction between a man named Kulani—the main participant in the research, who is a speaker of no less than six local languages plus English, CPE, and some French—and a man older than him, she observes how Kulani’s choice to stop using the older man’s primary language encodes his resentment for the older man’s subtle insinuation that Kulani is still a “child.” While accommodation theory (see, e.g., Giles, Coupland, and Coupland 1991) offers some possible hints for the interpretation of this interaction, the notion of relational identities provides a better approximation of an emic interpretation, thus facilitating further analysis of the metapragmatic knowledge of individuals from Lower Fungom.

While considerations of variation in language ideologies and processes of identity construction are found in many chapters in this volume, one important aspect of this issue that does not receive much attention is how they interact in ways that result in the creation of distinctive lexicogrammatical codes. It is hard to observe the formation of new codes directly, but the extent of

the linguistic diversity in many of the regions examined in this volume suggests that they must be able to form relatively rapidly under pressure for new identities to be expressed through linguistic difference (see, e.g., Di Carlo and Good 2014). The research note by Ndamsah included in this book contributes to our understanding of this topic by providing an initial documentation of a new code developed by speakers of a particular generation living in two villages in Cameroon otherwise associated with the Limbum language. This new code was given a specific name, *Litâ*, and it has a distinctive vocabulary, though, syntactically, it appears to be quite similar to Limbum. While *Litâ* did not become the primary language of any community, its existence is indicative of the presence of a cultural dynamic where identity construction and language construction operate in tandem and suggests that an important research priority in linguistically diverse rural areas would be to look for and document other instances of such “generational” codes. The clear similarities between a code like *Litâ* and the much better studied urban youth languages in Africa (see, e.g., Kießling and Mous (2004)) further suggests that rural patterns of language formation may be an important historical source for what has been observed in urban environments.

### 4.3 Methods and Tools

The lack of previous dedicated scholarship on both societal and individual multilingualism in nonurban contexts of Africa, together with the choice to ground research on this topic in a more strongly ethnographic approach in many chapters of this volume, has required the adaptation of existing methods and tools to fit the specific contexts under study. In order to highlight this, we have grouped several chapters together in a section focusing on research methods, though methodological considerations play a significant role in other chapters in this volume as well. Some of the methodological approaches discussed in this volume draw on work that is still in progress. However, even in such cases, they clearly represent significant advances over previous work and suggest clear directions for future research. Moreover, we hope that the diverse tools discussed in this volume—semi-structured interviews (Esene Agwara), matched-guise technique tests (Chenemo and Neba), analysis of recorded language use (Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo; Ojong Diba; Tabe), and tools to support the assessment of multilingual competence (Mba and Nsen Tem)—will provide inspiration for those who are interested in exploring patterns of multilingualism within societies that have yet to see significant investigation of this kind, both in rural Africa and beyond.

Chenemo and Neba focus on the Lower Bafut region, which is politically subordinate to the Fandom of Bafut but where languages other than Bafut predominate in demographic terms. Many individuals from Lower Bafut

speak Bafut in addition to a local language, but individuals identifying as Bafut only rarely speak the languages of Lower Bafut. In contrast to this clear hierarchical relationship holding between Bafut and the languages of Lower Bafut, there is no similar sociopolitical asymmetry among the Lower Bafut languages. This divergence has produced a sociolinguistic environment that can serve as a useful testing ground for examining language attitudes within rural communities, and Chenemo and Neba apply the matched-guise technique (Lambert et al. 1960) to explore this topic. This approach, originally developed in Western settings, involves making recordings of the same person speaking multiple languages and other people speaking just one language. These recordings are then played to listeners in a sequence that makes it unlikely that they would recognize the multilingual speaker as one and the same person. Listeners are then asked to judge the different speakers in various ways, such as whether they seemed more or less good looking, intelligent, kind, altruistic, and so on. This technique can then shed light on the stereotypes that hearing a certain language subconsciously evokes in listeners, by comparing the judgments made of the same speaker when they are speaking different languages.

To the best of our knowledge, the work described by Chenemo and Neba represents the first time the matched-guise technique has been used in a rural African setting. Being able to use it appropriately first required the administration of an ethnographically informed sociolinguistic survey, which was performed to establish a basic understanding of the local linguistic environment, including local language ideologies. These ideologies were analyzed through the contrast between two poles of potential variation, namely whether a language is associated with essentialist qualities or indexical ones. Essentialist ideologies link speakers of a given language to specific personal or moral characteristics, while indexical ideologies merely link speakers to a social group associated with the language without additional implications—that is, they are associated with relational identities of the sort discussed in section 4.2. After playing recordings of people speaking Bafut as well as Lower Bafut languages, a questionnaire was administered asking listeners for their impressions of the speaker across different dimensions, with answers classified as more essentialist or more indexical. For instance, listeners were asked whether the speaker seemed intelligent, and a strongly positive or negative answer was considered more essentialist, while an equivocal answer was considered more indexical. Among other things, their results indicate that Bafut was associated with a more essentialist ideology than the Lower Bafut languages. Their study cannot be considered definitive because the methodology employed is so new to this setting, and many details of its use need further consideration. Nevertheless, it establishes the utility of the matched-guise technique for exploring

language attitudes in rural multilingual areas and also yields insights into the interplay of distinct kinds of language ideologies among rural communities that interact closely with each other.

Chapter 11, by Esene Agwara, provides important information on patterns of multilingualism in the rural Lower Fungom region of Cameroon while also raising significant methodological points. It is clear that a key tool for arriving at generalizations about rural multilingualism is the use of sociolinguistic questionnaires. However, when working with rural African societies, which are quite different from those of the developed world that have informed most work in sociolinguistics, one must take care to ensure that the questionnaire is designed to gather information on locally relevant categories and is also administered in a manner that is appropriate in the cultural context. Esene Agwara stresses the need for an ethnographic approach that, among other things, involves spending significant time observing daily life in these communities and making use of semi-structured interviews that allow participants to answer questions freely rather than encouraging them to respond in predetermined ways. This helps reveal the locally salient sociolinguistic categories that are not only of interest in and of themselves but also allow for more consistent data collection since they draw on systems of categorization held in common across a community, which the researcher can then translate into scholarly categories as needed.

In the Lower Fungom case, this approach has been especially helpful for collecting information on individuals' multilingual repertoires. In particular, they were asked to describe their multilingual competence using local naming conventions for individual lects, which are typically applied to linguistic varieties associated with each of the region's villages. Residents of Lower Fungom have a very high awareness of lects at this level and are quite consistent in how they refer to them. It is then fairly straightforward to associate these lects with the scholarly classification of the region's languages to get reliable information on reported patterns of multilingualism, some of which are summarized in Esene Agwara's chapter. Another advantage of this approach to administering questionnaires is that their open-ended nature can also reveal interesting new areas for data collection of which the researcher would not otherwise be aware. In the Lower Fungom case, an example of this was the discovery that people of the region often have more than one set of names that are given to them by different individuals (e.g., they may have one name given to them by their father and another name given to them by their maternal grandfather). There is evidence for a connection between the number of (sets of) names an individual has and the extent of their multilingual repertoires. For instance, those with the highest number of names in the survey showed a higher degree of multilingual and multilectal competence than those with a lower number of names.



Also focusing on Lower Fungom, Mba and Nsen Tem explore an area of study that has essentially been completely unexamined, to the best of our knowledge. This is the assessment of multilingual competence in nonstandardized, unwritten, and little-known languages. The research described in the chapter was carried out by Nsen Tem and made use of three main tools. One is more or less identical in practical terms to the technique of recorded text testing (Casad 1974) but repurposed to support the testing of passive competence in multiple local languages rather than mutual intelligibility, which was the technique's original goal. Listeners were tested for their comprehension of short texts in all the lects found in Lower Fungom. Active competence—that is, the ability to speak a certain language—was tested using two other tools. The first tool made use of 200-item wordlists elicited from self-reported multilingual speakers and compared what they produced to reference wordlists obtained from native speakers of the various languages involved. The second employed visual stimuli in the form of drawings depicting scenes of daily life in Lower Fungom. Participants were asked to describe what they saw using the different languages they reported being able to speak, and their answers were judged by native speakers. Scoring systems were devised as part of this research to allow the results to be compared across participants.

From a methodological point of view, one of the most interesting aspects of Mba and Nsen Tem's chapter is that it highlights the active role that research participants must play in the work when the languages under analysis are still poorly described and where there are no researchers with mastery of all the languages being investigated. For instance, the administration of the visual stimulus task in the study required Nsem Tem to devote time to the selection of appropriate judges and to devise the best ways to work with them in the field. Mba and Nsen Tem acknowledge that their work could not consider all the details and potential risks involved in adopting this approach. Nevertheless, it seems clear that these exploratory efforts have provided the foundations of a new line of research on multilingualism in rural environments.

## **5. INDIGENOUS MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT**

A final overarching theme to the volume is the relationship between forms of small-scale, indigenous multilingualism and language endangerment. This theme is discussed explicitly in several of the chapters, and it is implicit in other chapters as well.

Multilingualism is, in fact, often cited as a precondition for endangerment. Well-known scales of endangerment—such as Fishman's Graded Inter-generational Dislocation Scale (Fishman 1991), which is also used, in a slightly

different format, in recent editions of *Ethnologue* (see Lewis and Simons 2010)—pivot around the idea that the degree of endangerment of a language is directly correlated with the number and types of domains of use in which speakers have replaced it with another language. As one might expect, this domain-oriented view posits a scale of “modern reward-power” (Fishman (2004, 427)). A language being replaced in domains associated with a higher degree of modern reward-power, such as mass media or governmental operations at the national level, is not seen as strongly indicative of endangerment. When replacement is instead found in domains associated with lower degrees of modern reward-power, such as among members of a family or within a neighborhood, this is a sign of more advanced shift and, thereby, language endangerment.

Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo consider the proposals that this domain-based view of endangerment has produced in the field of language revitalization. After raising questions about the ability of this approach to account for the dynamic unfolding of individual multilingual behaviors in actual language use (see also section 4.1), they point out that “different lects may map onto different social domains, but also onto different communicative content and ends.” They then suggest that revitalization initiatives in multilingual settings should build not only on the expansion of the domains of usage of a given language but also on “emotional factors” that may influence language choice. They place particular emphasis on the possibility that, by first identifying the frames of discourse in which a target language is used more frequently in a community, this knowledge can then be leveraged to support language revitalization endeavors.

From a slightly different point of view, Cobbinah also discusses the relevance of his findings for the maintenance of the highly localized languages of Lower Casamance. Cobbinah’s ecological, relatively large-scale approach to analyzing his field-based data allows him to consider a key concept in this regard: the different degrees of centralization of power in the various societies of the Casamance region at large. On one end of this continuum, there are highly centralized polities, of which the Mandinka and their language serve as an emblematic example. These polities have exerted pressure on previously diverse groups to assimilate, as has occurred with several formerly Bainounk-speaking and Balant-speaking populations that converted to Islam and adopted the Mandinka language, culture, and ethnic identity. On the opposite end of the continuum, there are small, independent polities of the “confederal type” that are especially common in the western part of Lower Casamance. Here the local communities are first and foremost “confederated” via ritual institutions, such as the *bukut* initiation that Cobbinah describes. These institutions bind these communities together in multiple ways, including through marriage ties and trade relations, and therefore increase the opportunities for people to be exposed to many highly localized

languages. This type of society, Cobbinah claims, favors multilingualism as a tool for reproducing the essentially egalitarian status held by the various small-scale polities and groups. Contrary to the generally held view that multilingualism is a precursor to endangerment, among such communities, multilingual practices are actually central to the maintenance of these small languages (see also Di Carlo and Good 2017).

This then leads us to a final lesson that can be drawn from the chapters in this volume with respect to rural multilingualism in Africa. The rural multilingual societies described here have potentially important insights to offer linguists and speaker communities throughout the world on how socioeconomically marginalized languages can be maintained even in cases where speakers also begin to make extensive use of other languages in their day-to-day lives. In particular, they point to the existence of diverse systems for linguistic valorization that can help ensure that languages of all kinds hold social value across a variety of cultural contexts and make them more likely to be maintained long into the future.

## NOTES

1. Di Carlo and Good both contributed to the conceptualization and text of this introduction. However, the ordering of the names should be understood to mean that Di Carlo is the first author rather than this being due to alphabetic ordering.

2. The conception of a sociolinguistic space subdivided into three macrodomains—state institutions (or prestige), intergroup communication, and “solidarity”—with one language associated with each of them has resonated across the continent to the degree that, following the case of Tanzania discussed by Abdulaziz Mkilifi (1972), other African countries have been described using the same or a very similar framework, including Kenya (Whiteley 1973), Ghana (Johnson 1975), the Republic of the Congo (Woods 1994), and Zambia (Spitulnik 1998). Recent publications such as Zsiga, Boyer, and Kramer (2014) show that this model is still seen as being applicable throughout Africa.

3. Unlike the norm for studies on African multilingualism, colonial languages are conspicuously absent from this list.

4. Participants were aware that they were being recorded, and this may have increased the perceived pressure for them to behave “properly.”

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*Part I*

**THE DIVERSITY OF  
MULTILINGUALISMS  
IN RURAL SPACES**





## *Chapter 1*

# **Multilingualism among the Mbororo of the North-West Region of Cameroon**

## *An Overview*

Pius W. Akumbu and Esther P. Chie

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This study examines the languages used by the Mbororo living in Badem, Kejom Ketinguh (Babanki Tungo), in the North-West Region of Cameroon, to shed light on the factors responsible for their multilingualism.<sup>1</sup> The North-West Region has been recognized as one of the country's most linguistically heterogenous regions (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2019), with about a hundred languages spoken by around two million people in a total surface area of 17,812 square kilometers (UCCC 2014). Many people in this region, like in the rest of English-speaking Cameroon, are multilingual in their mother tongue, Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), and at least one other language. The seminomadic Mbororo cattle-rearers dispersed throughout the region are highly multilingual, but no study thus far has sought to understand the conditions of their multilingualism.

Observations, questionnaires, and discussions with speakers reveal that most of the Mbororo in Badem above six years of age are multilingual in at least Fulfulde, CPE, and Babanki, the indigenous language of Kejom Ketinguh. The Mbororo hold a language ideology where Fulfulde is "primary" and other languages are learned for specific purposes (integration, grazing, trade, travel, etc.); for this reason, their children are monolingual during their early years before they begin to acquire other languages.

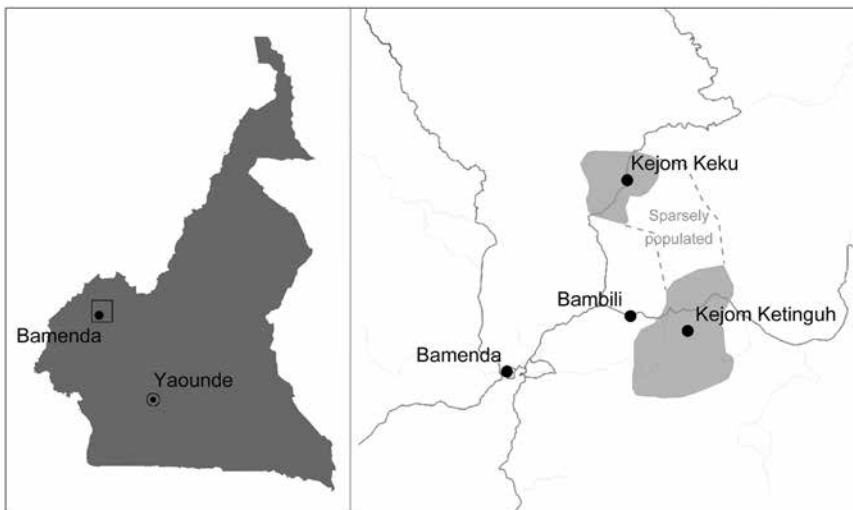
This study begins with some historical information on the migration of the Mbororo and the methods used to collect data. The languages used by the Mbororo are presented in section 2, while the conditions of their multilingualism are discussed in section 3. In section 4, we attempt to draw lessons from

the situation of the Mbororo for the understanding of rural multilingualism in Cameroon, before summarizing the conclusions in section 5.

### 1.1 Historical Background

The Mbororo are a pastoralist people who live in at least twenty-three countries across Africa.<sup>2</sup> Amadou (2017) reports that the Mbororo began to enter the Cameroonian Grassfields in the 1910s, driven by their continuous search for pastureland. They left northern Nigeria in the early nineteenth century, slowly migrating to the east and the south. Their movements were guided by ecological and political considerations, with the central goal of sustaining their pastoral economy. Because the western Grassfields provided exceptionally favorable conditions that promoted the growth of their herds, many families settled in this area. The Mbororo live in an isolated way in small remote communities and have frequently come into conflict with their majority host communities, who despise them as illegal immigrants or land-grabbing invaders. This has resulted in conflicts between the indigenous farmers and the Mbororo graziers, which in some cases have led to exploitation, oppression, harassment, and humiliation of Mbororo people.

The village of Kejom Ketinguh (see figure 1.1) was originally inhabited only by the Babanki. In 1916, it witnessed the arrival of some thirty Fulfulde-speaking Mbororo families under the leadership of Ardo Sabga. They settled in one of the quarters of Kejom Ketinguh, along the ring road that was later named Sabga



**Figure 1.1** The location of the village of Kejom Ketinguh (the lower shaded area on the right) within Cameroon (left). *Source:* Map created by the authors.

after the ardo. In 1940, some of the families moved to the more hilly outskirts of Kejom Ketinguh, settling in Badem, but they left in 1958 because of disputes over grazing land. They returned in 1970 to their present site but continued to perceive themselves as politically marginalized. The hostilities that prevailed between the two communities have dwindled over the last four decades, to the extent that the Mbororo now interact with the Babanki more closely and are generally considered to be part of the Kejom Ketinguh community. Many of them now own land and construct permanent houses for their families. It is even the case that one Mbororo was appointed as a member of the Kejom Ketinguh village traditional council in 2010 (Issa Bouba, personal communication).

### 1.2 Data Collection

In March 2017, the researchers spent two days in Badem, Kejom Ketinguh, administering questionnaires, to find out which languages the Mbororo use and the reasons why they use several different languages. The first author was born and raised in Badem, and he developed close ties with the Mbororo and interacted constantly with them until the age of thirteen when he left the area to attend secondary school. This relationship facilitated the data collection process—ordinarily, the Mbororo are highly reserved and would not easily agree to reveal information about themselves.

Of the community of approximately 200 inhabitants, 47 people—20 females and 27 males—participated in our study (see table 1.1 for a summary of the sex, age, and educational level of participants). In addition to responding to the specific questions we asked, the consultants usually stayed behind after answering the questionnaire, and we continued talking with them and hearing more about their experiences with the languages they spoke. We also

**Table 1.1 The number of participants by sex, age, and highest level of education**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Highest Formal Education</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>	
Female	1–5	None	2	
	6–10	Primary	2	
	11–40	None	3	
		Primary	7	
Male	41+	None	6	
	1–5	None	2	
		6–10	Primary	2
		11–40	None	4
	41+	Primary	12	
		None	6	
		Primary	1	

*Source:* Table created by the authors.

had the opportunity to observe interactions between the Mbororo and some Babanki who happened to be in the area when we visited.

During the two days of data collection, we spoke both CPE and Babanki. We explained to the participants that the data we collected were to be used only for academic purposes to help us understand the languages that people use and why they learn several languages. Most of the respondents were unable to write (because they lack any formal education), and so we read out the questions and wrote down the responses that they gave us.

## 2. LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

Based on the responses to the questionnaires, at least twenty languages were used by the forty-seven Mbororo consultants with whom we worked.<sup>3</sup> There were four monolingual participants who could speak only Fulfulde; however, they were all aged five or below. A further seven participants could speak only three languages: in all cases, these were Fulfulde, CPE, and Babanki. Of these seven, four were aged between six and ten years, while the three others were women aged forty-one or older. The remaining thirty-six respondents, a large majority, use at least four languages. Indeed, four of them reported using more than ten languages, and one participant listed thirteen languages that he could understand.

Before looking in more detail at some of the languages and why they are spoken, it is worth noting, based purely on the data presented thus far, that age, sex, and level of education are all factors that affect the number of languages spoken by a member of the Mbororo community of Badem. In addition to their mother tongue, the Mbororo learn CPE and Babanki when they are approximately five to seven years old, with other languages learned after that. Since most Mbororo people speak more CPE than Babanki, we assume that CPE is learned before Babanki.

### 2.1 Cameroon Pidgin English

CPE is an English-lexified pidgin/creole spoken, in some form, by at least half of Cameroon's population. It is the major lingua franca, especially in the anglophone regions but also in urban centers throughout the country. A wide range of names are used for the language—Eberhard, Simons, and Fenig (2019) list Cameroon Creole, Cameroon Creole English, Cameroonian Creole, Kamtok, Wes Cos, and “Bush English” as alternatives. Kamtok has become one of the most widely used names, and Todd, Jumbam, and Wamey (n.d.) consider that there are up to five varieties, which they refer to as Grafi Kamtok (spoken in the North-West Region), liturgical Kamtok, francophone

Kamtok, Limbe Kamtok, and Bororo Kamtok (the variety spoken by the Mbororo in our study).

CPE is a broadly dispersed language, and is spoken by both the Babanki and the Mbororo. Unless a Mbororo has learned Babanki, CPE is, generally speaking, the only language he or she can use to communicate with a Babanki. Thus, a Babanki would first speak CPE to a Mbororo who is not known to speak Babanki. If, however, the Mbororo knows Babanki, they would then continue the conversation in that language.

CPE is the language the Mbororo learn first after acquiring Fulfulde. In our data, all participants above the age of five were able to communicate in CPE.

## **2.2 Babanki**

Babanki is the language of the host community of the Mbororo of Badem. It is a Central Ring Grassfields Bantu language spoken by approximately 39,000 people, mainly in the two settlements of Kejom Ketinguh or Babanki Tungo and Kejom Keku or Big Babanki (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2019; Hammarström, Forkel, Haspelmath, and Bank 2015), but also to some extent in diaspora communities.

Those Mbororo who have learned Babanki use it when in contact with the Babanki people of Kejom Ketinguh. They consider that speaking Babanki facilitates their belonging in the community and enables them to achieve certain goals, such as hiring labor from the Babanki to work in their farms or to tend their cattle. Using Babanki also helps the Mbororo to more easily receive support from the Babanki when needed—for example, if their cattle are stolen, the Babanki can join forces with them to look for the thieves. In the event of conflict between members of the Mbororo and the Babanki, Babanki is used to negotiate, particularly when it is a member of the Mbororo that is at fault. Thus, one can say that the Babanki language serves as a uniting factor, facilitating the integration of the minority Mbororo into their host community.

All the participants aged between six and forty years claimed to speak Babanki, and we confirmed this by chatting with them in that language.

## **2.3 Other Languages**

Apart from Fulfulde, CPE, and Babanki, seventeen other languages were reported as being used by the Mbororo who participated in our study. These languages fall into a number of different types. Firstly, English is used as the language of instruction in school and French is a school subject, and consequently those participants who had been to school were familiar with these two languages.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, Hausa, Arabic, and Bamun are languages that are

used regionally in relation to Islam, and thus some Mbororo had learned them by associating with other Muslims. Thirdly, Pinyin, Bambili, Noni, Bafut, Lamnso, and Awing had been learned by those Mbororo that had lived for extended periods of time in areas where those languages are spoken. Finally, Kenswei Nsei, Vengo, Bamali, Bamunka, Nyong, and Bambalang had been learned by some of the men and boys when they moved in the dry season with their cattle to these neighboring lowland communities where there was green pasture. Many of these languages had also been learned as a result of contact with other speakers during cattle-trading. While this gives the bare outline of the reasons for the range of languages that are spoken by the participants, in the following section we consider the reasons for multilingualism as advanced by the consultants themselves.

### 3. MOTIVATIONS FOR MULTILINGUALISM

As has been noted, multilingualism among the Mbororo of Badem is the norm, and begins around the age of six. Before this age, children are monolingual in Fulfulde, and as they begin to interact with the broader community of Kejom Ketinguh they learn both CPE and Babanki. All participants who had attended school said they spoke English, while a few who had attended secondary school said they understood a bit of French. However, as we have seen, the participants reported using many other languages. Some reasons advanced by the participants themselves for this expansive multilingualism are presented here.

#### 3.1 Communication and Integration

Multilingualism is common in situations where communities who use different languages come into contact, because of the simple need for communication between human beings with different linguistic backgrounds. One of the ways in which such a situation can occur is population movement, where a group of immigrants comes into contact with the existing population of a particular location, who speak another language. In order to communicate, members of each group need to have at least some command of each other's language (Edwards 2007). The participants in this study made it clear that the primary reason they saw for multilingualism among the Mbororo is the simple need to communicate with the Babanki and become part of a community where they had found grazing land and where they wished to remain.

While the Mbororo aged forty or younger are mostly fluent in Babanki (except those below the age of six), the majority of participants older than forty are not fluent speakers of this language. That reflects the fact that as the

Mbororo finally settled and were accepted as part of Kejom Ketinguh, Mbororo children could socialize with Babanki children and learn the language. A few of the older Mbororo can understand Babanki, but are unable to speak it. They noted that they did not learn it the way their children did because, in the past, the Mbororo had many problems with the Babanki, so they were unable to interact sufficiently to learn the language. As mentioned in section 1.1, over the last four decades, the Babanki have become more accommodating and have accepted the Mbororo as part of the community. This has made it possible for most of the Mbororo who are under the age of forty years to learn the language as soon as they begin interacting more extensively with the people of Kejom Ketinguh outside their own community.

The comments of the participants in our study reflect the need for Babanki to communicate and integrate into the local community. For example, one of the consultants, aged thirty-nine, said that they learned Babanki because “Dem born me for yah and I get for talk witi Babanke pipu” (I was born here and I need to communicate with Babanki people). Another, aged fourteen, said that “Nobi dem born me na for yah? Na ma kondri” (I was born here. It is my village). A sixty-year-old man noted, “Taim whe we kam for yah, we bi get for learn Babanke for sika say we bin wan place for sitop witi we kawu” (When we arrived here, we had to learn Babanki because we wanted grazing land).

The need to communicate with other people in Kejom Ketinguh and to integrate into the community is clearly the main driver for the Mbororo to learn Babanki, the language of their host community.

### **3.2 Grazing**

As seminomadic cattle-rearers, the Mbororo move with their cattle during the dry season in search of green pasture. Kejom Ketinguh is in a hilly landscape, and the grass withers during the dry season, leaving the cattle with insufficient food. However, there are neighboring settlements in lowland areas with enough water to maintain green vegetation during the dry season, and so Mbororo men and boys move to such areas with their cattle and remain there throughout the dry season, which lasts approximately three months. During this time, they interact and communicate with members of those communities; in many cases, friendships and business networks are developed, making it possible for the Mbororo to return to those communities for visits or commercial activities.

All of this enables those Mbororos to learn the language of their temporary hosts. Twenty of the twenty-three male respondents above the age of ten could speak the language of one of the neighboring communities because they had been there with their cattle during a dry season; the other three could speak the languages of several other communities, because they had



taken their cattle to different settlements in different years. The villages of the Ndop plain, which lies below Kejom Ketinguh to the southeast—Bamessing, Bamali, Balikumbat, Bambalang, and Babungo—are the most popular dry season hosts. All twenty-three boys and men aged above ten speak one or more of the languages of these villages.

A thirty-two-year-old male consultant summed up the experience of learning languages as a result of moving with his cattle during the dry season. As he put it, “Me a di talk plenti talk. If na you you go talk da pipu dem talk. You di stay de for teri moon, you de witi dem plenti taim” (I speak so many languages. If you do it, you will learn those languages too. You live there for three months and you are with them most of the time).

### **3.3 Trade**

Edwards (2007) points out that trade is one of the major reasons for multilingualism, and this is reflected in the experience of the Mbororo. The Mbororo depend on their cattle for their livelihood. Until recently, selling their cattle was the only way in which they were able to buy other basic needs such as food and household items. However, in the last two decades, they have been involved in farming—the main crops are beans, corn, and njamanjama<sup>5</sup>—hiring others from Kejom Ketinguh to cultivate their farms. Within the community, men are responsible for selling cattle and purchasing household items and clothing for the family, while women concentrate on household chores such as cooking and laundry.

A sixty-seven-year-old female participant reported that she spoke only Fulfulde, CPE, and a bit of Babanki. She said that for the forty-seven years since she got married and settled in Kejom Ketinguh in 1970, her place had been in the home. Her husband did not allow her or his other wife to go anywhere—if she left, it was to visit a relative for a specific reason (e.g., bereavement), and the only time she had gone to a market was when she was on the way to visit her sister and needed to buy something. She indicated that this explained her relative lack of multilingualism.

In contrast, many of the male consultants learned other languages while trading, often in the cattle markets. In the markets of the North-West Region, prices are not fixed, but bargained. Speaking the trader’s language is one of the factors that influence the negotiations: the buyer is likely to get a better price if they bargain in the language of the seller. It is therefore to the advantage of the Mbororo men to speak as many languages as possible to enable them trade with speakers of different languages. As a seventy-one-year-old male participant said, “If you no know da talk dem go cheat you, dem go take you planti moni” (If you don’t understand the language, you will be cheated and they will collect more money from you).

#### 4. UNDERSTANDING RURAL MULTILINGUALISM

Early work on multilingualism in Cameroon and across Africa tended to focus on urban centers (e.g., Mc Laughlin 2009) while neglecting rural settings. Approaches to sociolinguistic studies and language documentation were also generally based on the mistaken notion that languages belong to and are spoken in specific villages or by specific tribes, and linguists sought to identify the ancestral code in each case. This left the impression that multilingualism was restricted to urban centers, whereas in fact rural multilingualism clearly existed before its urban counterpart was ushered in by colonization.

In recent years, however, the focus of such studies has often shifted to an examination of nonancestral codes (e.g., Childs, Good, and Mitchell 2014). Despite this, it seems that no study has yet attempted to understand the multilingual practices of the seminomadic Mbororo people, who do not have villages of their own but rather settle in remote areas in the outskirts of established villages, where they are considered “strangers” (Brooks 1993) or latecomers (Kopytoff 1987).

Many Cameroonians living in rural areas are multilingual, and for the Mbororo in the North-West Region, this involves controlling at least their mother tongue, CPE, and one or more indigenous languages—through the nature of their settlement pattern and their daily activities, the Mbororo have tended to learn the languages of their host and neighboring communities. Some who have been to school also understand English and French.

Multilingualism is conditioned by the language ideologies of speakers, that is “the cultural (or subcultural) system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (Irvine (1989, 255)). In the case of the Mbororo, based on the data collected for this study, they hold a language ideology where Fulfulde is “primary,” and other languages are learned for specific purposes.

Multilingualism among the Mbororo is thus similar, in some ways, to that which is brought about by migration into urban centers and so is typical of the industrialized world (García and Fishman 2002; Extra and Yağmur 2004; Clyne and Kipp 2006a, 2006b). The Mbororo brought Fulfulde with them to Kejom Ketinguh; they acquire CPE, which is the lingua franca of the North-West Region; they learn Babanki, the language of their host community; and they also pick up any other language with which they maintain contact.

This kind of multilingualism reflects what Moore (2004) has found among the Wandala of northern Cameroon. Like children among the Wandala, Mbororo children grow up in a largely monolingual world, and languages other than their traditional language, Fulfulde, are learned later in life. CPE is required for wider communication, Babanki for integration into the host village, English and French for educational purposes, Arabic for religious

reasons, and other indigenous languages for the purposes of grazing, trade, and travel.

The situation described here for the Mbororo in Kejom Ketinguh, and indeed that in most rural areas of northwest Cameroon where the Mbororo are found, is slightly different from what Matras (2009, 48) describes for “rural border areas and ethnically mixed regions,” where he says that “languages are acquired through face-to-face interaction [and] there is more frequently an equal incentive for people from all communities to acquire each other’s languages.” Instead, the multilingualism described here is largely unidirectional: while the Mbororo in Kejom Ketinguh learn Babanki, the Babanki do not learn Fulfulde; and more generally, the minority migrant Mbororo people mostly learn the languages of their host communities, rather than the indigenous peoples learning Fulfulde.

Like in many rural African settings (cf. Moore 2004), the motivation for learning different languages and the choice of which language to learn are influenced by local ideologies, driven by the need people have to belong and to successfully carry out their daily activities. There is no indication of a bias toward some idea of prestige in the language-learning process among the Mbororo. The generalization to be made is that Fulfulde clearly dominates, and apart from that, none of the languages has any greater prestige than the others. Reporting on a similar situation for the Mambila language cluster in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon, Connell (2009) points to the fact that relationships among local languages in rural settings are not based on prestige. Instead, understanding multilingual behavior in such settings requires a knowledge of the details of the specific situation in which an interaction takes place. The assumption is that one language will be preferred over another depending on the respective domain of communication (Matras (2009, 45)).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined a form of rural multilingualism among seminomadic cattle-rearers who live in the outskirts of Kejom Ketinguh, and showcases the pervasiveness of rural multilingualism. In total, twenty different languages are reported as being used by these pastoralist people, with four of the forty-seven consultants indicating that they were able to use more than ten languages each.

Mbororo children are monolingual in Fulfulde until the age of 5, after which other languages are learned for specific purposes. From this age, the need to socialize and communicate with non-Mbororo in Kejom Ketinguh motivates the Mbororo to learn CPE and Babanki. Subsequently, other languages are learned to facilitate their cattle-grazing activities, to assist them

in carrying out commerce, and to help maintain social ties with people in other communities. The relationships among the languages in this setting are not based on prestige, with the motivation to learn different languages and the choice of which languages to learn being influenced instead by local ideologies.

We believe that this kind of study could be fruitfully extended to other Mbororo settlements across the North-West Region, not only to determine the number of languages used and which languages are learned but also to examine why the communities are multilingual.

## NOTES

1. In this chapter, we will use “Kejom Ketinguh” to refer to the village, while “Babanki” will be used to refer to the indigenous people of the village and their language.

2. The Mbororo are known by different names: Cattle Fulani, Bush Fulani, pastoralist Fulani, Mbororo-Fulani, Felata, Fula, Fulbe, and so on. Approximately 80,000 of them live in the North-West Region of Cameroon (Amadou (2017, 38)), and about 200 in Badem. They are predominantly Muslim.

3. Some participants reported that they have a good command of the languages they speak, while others did not, only being able to understand and exchange greetings. As it was impossible to assess the proficiency level of each consultant to determine what would count as multilingualism, we consider everyone who could actively or passively use more than two languages in communication to be multilingual.

4. English and French are the two official languages of Cameroon, inherited from the colonial experience. English is the language of education and administration in anglophone Cameroon (the North-West and South-West Regions), while French is used in the other eight regions of the country (francophone Cameroon).

5. Njamanjama is a green leafy vegetable grown in Kejom Ketinguh in large quantities and distributed to most major cities in Cameroon, particularly Bamenda, Yaoundé, and Douala.

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## *Chapter 2*

# **Nuances in Language Use in Multilingual Settings**

## *Code-Switching or Code Regimentation in Lower Fungom?*

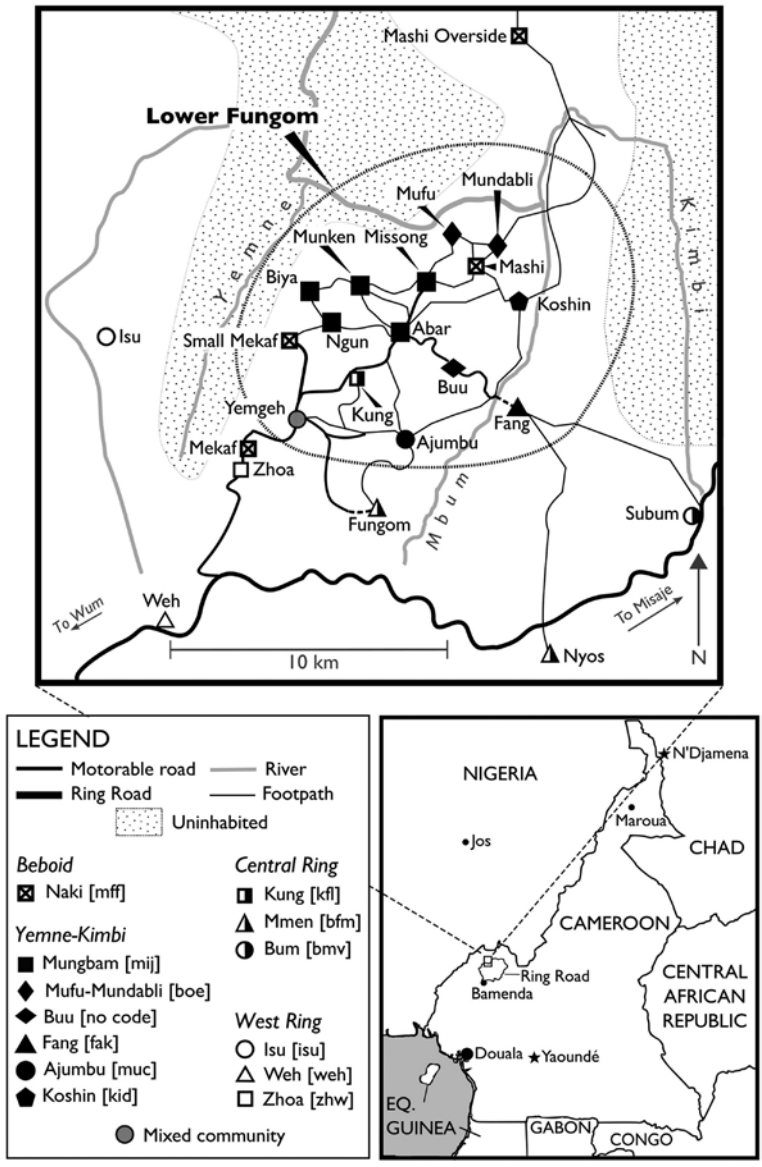
Rachel A. Ojong Diba

### **1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALIZING LOWER FUNGOM**

#### **1.1 Geographic and Linguistic Overview**

Situated in Central Africa, Cameroon is often referred to as “Africa in miniature” for its geographical, cultural, and linguistic diversity.<sup>1</sup> It comprises ten administrative regions, two of which are English-speaking (the North-West and the South-West Regions) while the remaining eight are French-speaking (Littoral, Centre, North, West, Adamawa, East, Far North, and South Regions). One of the many things that makes the country particularly interesting is its multitude of African languages belonging to three of the four language phyla existing in Africa: the Afro-Asiatic, the Nilo-Saharan, and the Niger-Congo. Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2019) list 283 individual languages for Cameroon. Of these, 274 are living and 9 are extinct.

The North-West Region of Cameroon, part of the Cameroonian Grassfields, is said to be among the most linguistically diverse regions in the world, with patterns of multilingualism that predate the spread of European languages to Africa and the emergence of the modern pidgin and creole languages in Cameroon (Lüpke 2016). It is in this region that Lower Fungom is situated. According to Good et al. (2011), Lower Fungom is a rural area of about 240 square kilometers, located in Menchum Division (see figure 2.1). They note that this district is characterized by a very hilly landscape, it is covered with forest, and it possesses an astonishing degree of language density.



**Figure 2.1** The villages and languages of lower Fungom and the surrounding regions. Note that Small Mekaf is politically part of the village of Mekaf (just outside of Lower Fungom), rather than an independent village, and that the settlement of Yemgeh is also not considered an independent village, as it is a newly populated area found on land under the control of the chiefs of Kung, Ajumbu, and Mekaf. *Source:* Map created by Pierpaolo Di Carlo.

**Table 2.1** The languages of lower Fungom, classified by subgroup, together with the villages in which they are spoken, and the approximate populations of those villages

<i>Subgroup</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Approximate Population</i>
Yemne-Kimbi	Mungbam	Abar	800
		Munken	600
		Ngun	150
		Biya	100
		Missong	500
	Mufu-Mundabli	Mufu	100
		Mundabli	400
		Buu	100
		Fang	4,000
Beboid	Koshin	Koshin	4,000
		Ajumbu	300
	Naki	Mashi	200
Central Ring	Kung	Kung	700

Source: Data taken from Good et al. (2011, 105), modified by the author.

Di Carlo (2018) asserts that there are eight different Bantoid languages spoken in the thirteen villages of Lower Fungom (see table 2.1), yielding a ratio of about one language for every thirty square kilometers. In addition, two of the languages (Mungbam and Mufu-Mundabli) have different varieties, each spoken in a different village, giving a total of thirteen varieties or lects across the villages of Lower Fungom.

## 1.2 Sociolinguistic Situation of Lower Fungom

A number of studies have been carried out in Lower Fungom since 2011 (e.g., Esene Agwara 2013; Di Carlo 2018), and none of them report a dominant language for the area. Instead, they show that all the local languages are of equal status, and multiple languages are used in the daily lives of the inhabitants of this tight-knit locality. No language is inferior and no language is superior—rather, individuals are very receptive of each of the languages of Lower Fungom. As a result, the inhabitants of this region show high degrees of individual multilingualism, many of them have varying degrees of competence across all the local languages of Lower Fungom as well as Cameroon Pidgin English, English, and French. Di Carlo (2018) shows that no adolescents or adults in the area are monolingual, and he explains that

- on average, men have passive competence in six distinct languages, and can speak about five distinct languages;
- on average, women have passive competence in five distinct languages, and can speak an average of four distinct languages;



- on average, men have passive competence in ten distinct lects, and can speak about six distinct lects;
- on average, women have passive competence in eight distinct lects, and can speak about five distinct lects.

However, as will be demonstrated in this chapter on the basis of a corpus collected in 2015 and 2016 in Lower Fungom, it emerges that these highly multilingual individuals use language in their daily interactions in ways that suggest the existence of a language ideology leading to unusual practices of multilingualism, of a kind that is unexpected in a small, tight-knit community that comprises individuals with a repertoire of more than thirteen tongues. With intense levels of individual multilingualism, we might expect to find multilingual practices such as code-mixing and code-switching. In fact, as I will show, the presence of individuals with large linguistic repertoires does not seem to co-occur with those kinds of multilingualism in this area. Instead of using two or more local languages at inter- or intrasentential level in a single segment of conversation, in Lower Fungom, individuals prefer stretches of single languages in conversations, cautiously avoiding embedding constituents from one language into another. As such, in this intensely linguistically diverse rural region, linguistic activities tend toward “monolingual” language usage—a better way to define these practices is as “single-language interactions” (Green and Abutalebi 2013). Language practices can thus be positioned along a continuum from code-mixing through code-switching to code regimentation or single-language use: the inhabitants of Lower Fungom are positioned on the single-language use end of this continuum.

Having introduced the languages of Lower Fungom and their speakers, in section 2 I will clarify the terminology adopted in this chapter, before briefly reviewing data about multilingual language use in a number of parts of the world in section 3. The core of the chapter is section 4, which contains a discussion of the findings from my fieldwork (section 4.1) exemplified in two communicative events I documented (sections 4.2 and 4.3), the first of which is extensively transcribed and discussed. In section 5, I provide some concluding remarks.

## 2. DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

Terms such as “code-switching” have been defined in a number of different ways. Myers-Scotton (1993, 47) considers that “code switching refers to the use of two or more languages in the same conversation, usually within the same conversational turn, or even the same sentence of that turn.” It is worth emphasizing that she treats code-switching and code-mixing as a continuum,

with distinctions being made only on the basis of the degree or position (intersentential or intrasentential) of the alternating variety. Auer's (1999) paper describes a continuum of phenomena that involve the alternation of languages, from code-switching through code-mixing to fused lects. Under his definition, code-switching and fused lects mark the polar extremes of this continuum, with code-mixing between them. He thus treats code-switching as one of a number of language-alternating phenomena.

In general, however, the common trend is to see "code-switching" as an umbrella term encompassing a number of related phenomena. This is how the term is used in this study as well, as a cover term for phenomena involving the alternation between two languages or two varieties within the same conversation, especially within the same sentence. However, this study is not intended to outline in a refined manner the complexities of code-switching and related notions. Here we simply need to establish a clear definition of what should be considered as code-switching in order to discuss its occurrence (or otherwise) in the natural conversation of multilinguals in Lower Fungom.

One point to be remembered with regard to code-switching is that it is an "alternating" or a back-and-forth movement in language use. Poplack (1980) goes so far as to say that for "another language" to be considered code-switched, there must be an asymmetrical relationship in which one language (the matrix language) dominates and the items of the other language (the embedded language) are inserted into it.

Code-switching has been seen to be quite typical of bilingual or multilingual speech in a number of studies. Indeed, Franceschini (1998) even feels that code-switching is a universal language behavior of multilingual speakers. However, this is not the case, at least in rural Africa—no matter how loose one's definition of code-switching is, the phenomenon is not found in Lower Fungom.

Among the multilingual speakers in Lower Fungom, the linguistic activity that is attested is not code-switching, but rather what in this chapter is referred to as code regimentation. The key difference revolves around the characterization of code-switching as "back-and-forth movement" from one code to another or "alternating use." In the case of code regimentation, there is no matrix language and no embedded language, there is no alternation, whether intersentential or intrasentential. Instead, there is a complete shift from language A to language B; language A is completely dumped for language B.

Before proceeding to further discuss and illustrate the code regimentation or absolute shift in languages in Lower Fungom, it is worth reconsidering very briefly the way in which conversations have been described as taking place between bilinguals or multilinguals in other parts of the world. We give only two examples to demonstrate language use in other multilingual societies; this is sufficient to shine a light on the atypical patterns of language usage in Lower Fungom.

### 3. PERSPECTIVES ON MULTILINGUAL CONVERSATIONS FROM ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD

The first example of code-switching is perhaps one of the best known in the field, coming from far away from Africa. Some four decades ago, Poplack (1980) studied the speech of some Puerto Rican residents of a stable bilingual community in the United States, all of whom exhibiting varying degrees of bilingual ability. These bilinguals were able to switch from their L1, Spanish, to English. Details of her work will not be discussed here but it is important to see the facility with which even bilinguals use the two languages they know in communication. The very title of her work gives the clue: “Sometimes I’ll Start a Sentence in Spanish y Termino en Español: Towards a Typology of Code-Switching.”

Over the years, similar phenomena have been observed in many parts of the world, including in rural Africa. For example, Cobbinah et al. (2016) present conversational data collected as part of documentary work on the languages of the Lower Casamance area of Senegal. The data show instances of extended single-language use (i.e., no code-switching) but also examples of intense code-switching, within sentences and even within words. They provide a particularly clear example of intense code-switching involving four languages: Gubëher, Wolof, Kujireray, and French. In the Casamance area, it is unambiguous that multilinguals freely move back and forth between languages, inserting words from other languages into the dominant one in the conversation—that is the normal pattern. However, as we will see, this is not the case in Lower Fungom.

### 4. LANGUAGE USE IN INTERACTION IN LOWER FUNGOM

#### 4.1 Single-Language Use and Relational Identities

According to Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019), the linguistic situation in Lower Fungom at first sight resembles that of Lower Casamance discussed above. Like Casamance, Lower Fungom has a large number of languages used in a relatively small area, and recent research (Ojong Diba, 2019) has shown that residents are intensely multilingual. Di Carlo (2018) and Cobbinah et al. (2016) hypothesize that in both Lower Fungom and Casamance, speakers “use multilingualism as a social strategy that maximizes alliances and protective networks through different languages providing indexical cues according to context” (Lüpke (2016, 53)).

However, rigorous analysis of the language ideologies reveals that the linguistic behavioral patterns of multilinguals in Lower Fungom differ

significantly from those of the Casamance area. Of particular importance is the fact that Lower Fungom's thirteen villages each claim to speak a different language. A linguist would recognize eight distinct languages in Lower Fungom, and the locals themselves are fully aware of the similarities between some of the languages—but they would still say there are thirteen distinct “languages,” one “language” per village.

It is this ideology that motivates them to valorize a multilingual repertoire. A village's language is a source of linguistic representation in Lower Fungom, so being multilingual in several languages means one can represent oneself or identify oneself with multiple groups: it allows for the negotiation of multiple identities. The villagers believe that a code choice indexes a speaker's membership in a particular population (Silverstein 2003); a code choice tends to affiliate the speaker to a given group, without specific moral, personal, or overall essentialist features leaking onto the speaker. This is what Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019) label “relational identification”, a construct that calls on the relationship one has with a given person or group. This relationship imposes certain sets of linguistic rights and obligations—as Myers-Scotton (1993) notes, different languages are associated with different rights and obligations. The role of each language is fixed, identifying the speaker with a particular village.

Thus, mixing these languages in the way that is typical of many multilingual settings would mean a detachment in the role played by the language; it could indicate a crack in the relationship of the speaker and his or her interlocutor(s). The language ideologies present in Lower Fungom mean that once an agreement on membership is reached, people are expected to remain faithful to the identities they have agreed to assume, with the identities being marked by and large through the linguistic choices they make. In this close-knit society, multiple alliances or relationships are of utmost importance, at times assuring one's security from physical or spiritual danger, at times helping obtain favors. Consequently, for inhabitants of this area it is important to maintain as many healthy relationships or alliances as possible.

As such, although local languages are used in both Lower Fungom and Lower Casamance as part of a social strategy to maximize alliances, the villagers of Lower Fungom have a stricter usage of language for marking alliances. With the presence of individuals with large language repertoires, all of which they use habitually, one would presuppose instances of code-switching. This is what obtains in the conversations of the inhabitants of Lower Casamance, but not in Lower Fungom. There, speakers operate with a strong preference for single-language interactions. Code-switching in Lower Fungom is largely limited to the use of words from Cameroon Pidgin English within stretches of discourse that are otherwise clearly identifiable as belonging to a single local language.

This preference for single-language interactions is reflected explicitly as an ideological orientation, as revealed through speakers' reports on how languages should be used. Deviations from that usage pattern are vehemently frowned upon—they overtly mark a crack in the pattern of alliances (if only temporarily).

#### **4.2 Analysis of Language Use: Kulani and Pa Joshua's Conversation**

To demonstrate the patterns of linguistic behavior, here we will analyze the interactions in a specific conversation. Note that during this conversation, Kulani was wearing an obvious audio recorder; as such, the participants were aware that they were being recorded. They were duly informed that the recordings were to be used for research purposes, and they consented to this. In addition, the names of the participants have been replaced here with pseudonyms.

Kulani, who is from the village of Abar, is on his way to another village (Fang) but stopped along the way in the village of Buu to visit Pa Joshua. In talking with Pa Joshua and his wife, Kulani uses Buu, Mundabli, and Abar (he also includes words from Cameroon Pidgin English in his conversation). He changes between languages almost instantaneously, within the same discussion, effortlessly and without mixing them. If Kulani had inserted words from his father's language, Abar, in the conversation, communication with these participants would not have been impeded. Similarly, if he had used only Abar or only his mother's language, Mundabli, he would have communicated successfully from the perspective of the transmission of semantic content to his interlocutors, as all three participants (Kulani, Pa Joshua, and his wife) share Abar, Buu, Mundabli, and Cameroon Pidgin English in their linguistic repertoires.

However, as we will see, Kulani changes languages in this conversation (at least initially) because he is interacting with two different interlocutors—he speaks to one in one language, and the other in another. Crucially, although people can change codes (or languages) when addressing a single person, people are not free to switch in this way with a given interlocutor without it having a very specific social significance. To put it another way: code-switching between local languages while interacting with the same person hardly ever goes unnoticed, and it always bears a clear (most commonly negative) social significance. People generally stick to using a single language with a specific person in any given "scene" of discourse, unless there is a very clear motivation not to (such as to express anger, as we will see below).

Pa Joshua, who is much older than Kulani, reportedly spoke Buu, Fang, Cameroon Pidgin English, Mundabli, and Abar; and Kulani claimed to speak all the languages of Lower Fungom. Kulani's father, according to Pa Joshua, originated from Abar but grew up in Buu. So, Pa Joshua spoke Buu with Kulani because although Kulani's mother was from Mundabli, and Kulani lived in Abar, his father was from Buu. Consequently, from Pa Joshua's point of view, Kulani's first language was Buu. Kulani himself was born in Buu and grew up there, before he was taken to Abar when his father was made chief.

Pa Joshua told the researcher that it was not normal for one to meet one's child (because he considered Kulani to be like his own child) and choose to use another man's language with them. Equally, a junior member of a family or village would be expected to accommodate to a senior. These are ideologies that are shared across Lower Fungom. So, when Kulani decided to use another language with Pa Joshua in the following conversation, it was a conscious decision that marked sourness and distancing.

In the transcription given here, the original language is given first, with a free English translation given for each line.<sup>2</sup> The three different languages that are used are represented through different typefaces: *Buu* is in italics, Mundabli in roman, and Abar both in italics and underlined. The major participants are Pa Joshua (PJ), his wife (PJW), and Kulani (K).

[Scene One: In the Village of Buu]

*K to PJ: Pa Jo! ayeneh eyike hea yike bene santo ye bene*

“Pa Jo, how are you, you are eating. What are you eating there?”

*ah! ben diā ben f<sup>w</sup>om mena*

“Ah! you people have cooked palm nut?”

*PJ to K: a f<sup>w</sup>om be amerika η yike*

“It is American palm nut that I am eating”

*K to PJ: la kanā de f<sup>w</sup>om bā amerika. amerika wa?*

“Do I lack American palm nuts? What are American nuts?”

*PJ to K: mō kā a mō:η wu*

“Take and get the taste yourself”

*K to PJ: ay! dzoη yen*

“No! Thank you [sarcastic]”

*PJW to K: ben tsi li a tfin?*

“Did you sleep well there?” [Kulani is distracted and does not respond]

*ben nia nu a tfi tfia?*

“Will you remain standing?”

*K to PJW: ben feziebe nemsijo ben tfi ne ηgoko noh*

“If you say there is something, bring it then, let me sit”

*PJW to K: ay! mbu tfi mbu*

“No! I just asked”

*PJ to K: nam fe dzuo ayena kemu*  
 “Sit down and eat child”  
*a tem eke ndie eyikə nemfe zohfoh*  
 “You are boasting with whom that you can feed yourself?”  
*nam fə dzo-fə ke a ben yi wan*  
 “Sit down and eat”

[Pa Joshua is actually shouting at Kulani, asking him to sit down and eat, and for the first time since reaching the village, Kulani completely stops speaking Buu and speaks only Abar, while Pa Joshua maintains his use of Buu.]

*K to PJ: ke lewou ləla malaya*  
 “Stop troubling me eh” [he starts reluctantly walking away from PJ]  
*PJ to K: andu ya yikə*  
 “Where are you going?”  
*K to PJ: nobo etfi ewu no tawula*  
 “To the palace with the whiteman over there”

[Kulani leaves for the palace, where Pa Joshua joins him shortly afterward. On his way, Kulani meets some old ladies (PB3) seated in front of their houses, and he greets them before talking with his friend Jumia (J), all still in Buu. It is only with Pa Joshua that Kulani spoke Abar.]

*K to PB3: atfita, te banu*  
 “Good morning, you people are alright?”  
 [The women respond in Buu and Kulani continues on his way.]  
*K to J: be buoh tabaŋ meh*  
 “Friend! Give me cigarette”  
*J to K: masa, tabaŋ bə sa ta*  
 “Man! Where is cigarette?”

[A section of the text is omitted here. In it, Kulani talks with Jumia in Buu. Note that he returns to using Abar in the following scene when he begins talking with Pa Joshua, who has now joined them at the palace. The latter continues to use Buu to Kulani.]

[Scene Two: The Palace in Buu]

[Kulani and Pa Joshua enter the chief’s house in the village of Buu. Kulani sits down and Pa Joshua remains standing. Kulani then calls on him teasingly.]

*K to PJ: Pa Jo! iyə!*  
 “Pa Jo! How are you?”  
*aboh koh daŋ koh oti corner mohngən noh*  
 “You want to sit beside me, right?”

[Pa Joshua does not respond; he simply sits down next to Kulani.]

*K to J: mboh koh mban Pa Jo but ngan*

“I want to greet Pa Jo but he won’t have it”

*J to K: nobi ye*

“I’m listening to you”

*K to J: notefia nwo, ilon yi*

“If you feel like listening you will, that’s your trouble”

[Notice that below, Kulani switches from Abar to Buu to talk to some boys who are helping to bring chairs into the palace for the guests. The addressees do not include Pa Joshua, but are limited to some Buu people who are in the same room.]

*K to PB4: ke be m-kpoko biə bə du lebin tu ke ta bebi noh*

“If there are more chairs, just keep bringing them”

*K to PB5: dzahə wantou noh . . . adena tion tizake*

“You too, go that way [to a chicken that was clucking around]. So, you say people should walk around with hunger?”

The languages Kulani used in this conversation are not his first languages per se. His father spoke Abar and his mother Mundabli, but he was born and bred in Buu. As such, as noted above, Pa Joshua asserted when we interviewed him that Kulani is a son of Buu; they are family, and Kulani is thus expected to linguistically accommodate to Pa Joshua. According to the culture shared by Kulani, Pa Joshua, and his wife (who is from Mundabli), it is expected that a junior family member should accommodate to a senior person’s primary linguistic identity. That is why Kulani, in the initial part of the interaction, carefully chooses the languages for his two interlocutors—he does not use Mundabli with Pa Joshua, nor Buu with Pa Joshua’s wife. Kulani only switched to his primary language, Abar, when the conversation with Pa Joshua became more aggressive, probably because the older participant was insisting on “thrilling” him with something that he thought was precious and hard to come by. It is worth noting that at the point where Kulani changed to Abar to speak to Pa Joshua, he did not cease using Pa Joshua’s wife’s primary language. This linguistic act of Kulani’s disheartens Pa Joshua, and communication between them is strained, with Pa Joshua refusing to act in a friendly manner toward Kulani after that.

In choosing initially to use Pa Joshua’s language to speak to him, and that of his wife to speak to her, Kulani indexes himself as a member of both villages; he preserves both alliances. This is a widespread phenomenon in Lower Fungom. This membership permits Kulani to obtain material and



spiritual security from both Buu and Mundabli, and this is highly important to Kulani. However, at a later point in the conversation, he feels that temporarily leaving aside one of these memberships is necessary—it expresses his emotions at that moment.

A neutral party (the regent of Buu) was asked to translate this conversation word-for-word into English, after Kulani himself had given a free translation of the same video recording. This confirmed that in the conversation there was no code-mixing between the languages of Lower Fungom. Kulani did not insert a single word from Buu or Mundabli when he was talking in Abar to Pa Joshua. Similarly, he did not use a single word of Buu while talking in Mundabli with Pa Joshua's wife, even though her husband is from Buu. After he translated the recording, the regent of Buu was asked about this; his facial expressions and words made it clear that such a linguistic action is not done nor appreciated in Lower Fungom.

### 4.3 Single-Language Use and Ritual

The previous section gave an example of the language ideologies of Lower Fungom around code-switching “in action,” so to speak. However, it is also the case that speakers explicitly refer to these ideologies.

In an interview with Pa Domo Linus, one of the respected men of Lower Fungom who lives in Abar, it was made clear that individuals from Abar who were performing burial rites and who had resorted to traditional methods for avenging deaths (i.e., using black magic to give powers to the dead so that they can punish the perpetrators) used the language of the village from which “medicine” was taken in performing these rites. If it were possible to start a sentence in one local language and end it in another, as was discussed for other multilingual contexts in section 3, one would expect that reference would be made to the medicine in the language of the village of its origin, but that the rest of the interaction would be Abar. This was not the case: when that part of the rite is reached, Abar is discarded in favor of the language of the people from whom the medicine was taken.

All others who were interviewed had the same opinion on this matter. They declared with confidence that code-switching, in the sense discussed in this work, is seriously condemned and unlikely to occur in people's discourse.

Or at least, this is true as far as the languages of Lower Fungom are concerned. Everyone uses Cameroon Pidgin English if they have to mix codes. For example, Ja'elle, one of the consultants for this study, asserted that the people of Lower Fungom do not use one local language and mix it with another. But she says that if she were struggling with a language that she did not fully control, like Biya, and she forgot a word or simply did not know a

word at all, she would substitute in the word from Cameroon Pidgin English; and then she would be told the word in Biya.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has set out the linguistic patterns of behavior of multilingual individuals in Lower Fungom. Linguistic practices there have been shown to be different from those described in many other places—including other rural parts of multilingual Africa, such as Casamance, and beyond Africa, such as the bilingual Puerto Rican community in the United States—in which multilinguals can freely begin a sentence in one language but insert a word from another language, or even switch in mid-sentence and finish in the other language.

Language in Lower Fungom is used to mark affiliation, and this is fixed, with a speaker assuming it as a right or an obligation. The “choice” of language is dependent on the interlocutor—one cannot decide to use a single language all the time. As such, when there is a shift in code in a conversation in Lower Fungom, it is very systematic; it is not designed to demonstrate the interlocutor’s mastery of several languages, but to mark relationships, signaling togetherness or separateness. When there is a shift, it is a complete shift—multilinguals effortlessly disassociate themselves from one group and attach themselves to another.

## NOTES

1. All the interactions transcribed in this chapter have been translated from the original languages to Cameroon Pidgin English by the author’s consultant (Kulo Rene Domo), and from Cameroon Pidgin English to English by the author.

2. The transcription provided here is very basic, and should not be taken to be completely accurate—for example, it is given without tones or any suprasegmental features. Since the present study is focused on the choice of code, this does not impact the overall analysis. While greater accuracy would, of course, be preferable, it is impeded by the difficulties involved in accurately transcribing multilingual discourse in underdescribed languages without standard orthographies.

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## Chapter 3

# The So-Called Royal Register of Bafut within the Bafut Language Ecology

## *Language Ideologies and Multilingualism in the Cameroonian Grassfields*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: ARE LOWER FUNGOM AND LOWER CASAMANCE SUI GENERIS CASES?

For decades, research on multilingualism in African countries has been mostly limited to urban settings (e.g., Scotton 1975, 1976; Myers-Scotton 1993; Dakubu 1997; Mc Laughlin 2009; Kamwangamalu 2012; Mba and Sadembouo 2012). More recently, studies stemming from the documentation of endangered languages have widened the scope of this research to include rural areas of the continent as well (Di Carlo 2016; Lüpke 2016; Cobbinah et al. 2016; Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019).<sup>1</sup> This recent development is a welcome advance toward a greater geographic coverage of multilingual phenomena in Africa. Furthermore, approaching communicative practices in rural areas—such as Lower Fungom in northwest Cameroon and Lower Casamance in Senegal—means targeting areas that are characterized, on the one hand, by high degrees of linguistic diversity and, on the other, by the presence of persisting precolonial sociocultural traits. Ways of speaking in these areas, while surely not constituting a unitary phenomenon, are nonetheless distinct from what is known from urban environments.

A key component of these previously undocumented ways of speaking is that, according to the local metapragmatic knowledge, language choice allows the indexing of types of identities that have seldom, if ever, been described in the sociolinguistic literature on multilingualism in Africa. By default, one would expect that any given (socio)linguistic fact, including language choice, would be used to index a certain population and, by association

and through stereotyping, some set of population-distinctive sociocultural and behavioral features (see, e.g., Eckert 2012; Irvine and Gal 2000). This cultural-essentialist indexical process targets what sociologists Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 15) have called “categorical identification,” through which “one may identify oneself (or another person) by membership in a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as race, ethnicity, language, nationality, citizenship, gender, sexual orientation, etc.)” Recent research has emphasized that in Lower Fungom and Lower Casamance this is only one of the possible identities selected via language choice.

In Lower Casamance,

members of the patrivirlocal groups that settle in small hamlets or larger villages have identity languages based on patrilineal descent, and villages have nominal languages based on the identity language of the founding clan. I have described this practice as “patrimonial deixis” (now found in Lüpke 2018). Claiming the patrimonial language in Casamance conveys first comer status and control over land, and in Frontier-style settlements, villages have their own patrimonial language. (Lüpke (2016, 49))

By speaking a certain language, that is, one is able to index one’s membership in the group(s) widely recognized to be the firstcomer(s) and, therefore, founder(s) of a given locale. Patrimonial-deixis identity does not bring along any other behavioral, status-laden, or otherwise essentialist traits (see also Cobbinah, this volume).

Another type of identity, equally devoid of essentialist traits, is that described for Lower Fungom (Di Carlo 2016, 2018; Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019). Here, the “‘ideological moves’ (Eckert (2012, 94)) that are called up by one’s choice of using any particular local language are limited to the representation of one’s affiliation in a given village community . . . [and] being [a] member in a given group merely means having a certain position in relation to the other members who participate in the interaction” (Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019, section 5)). The Lower Fungom case exemplifies “an ideology where the local lects . . . index not identity as categorical identification but, rather, as relational identification and whose interpretation depends on the specific position that an individual occupies within the relational web indexed by a lect” (Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019, section 5); for a definition of identity *qua* relational identification see Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 15)).

At this point, one must recall that both Lower Fungom and Lower Casamance exemplify quite extreme cases of linguistic diversity and of the pervasiveness and degree of individual multilingualism. Given that, should we look at Lower Fungom and Lower Casamance simply as rare finds? Or, can they be seen as in some way as the expression, albeit admittedly more pronounced, of language ideologies widespread across Africa?

In search of an answer to this question, and taking Lower Fungom as our reference point, we looked for a nonurban language context (a) characterized by a comparatively low degree of linguistic diversity and (b) in which the majority of speakers have multilingual repertoires limited to two or three languages. Bafut, located some fifty-five kilometers to the south of Lower Fungom in the North-West Region of Cameroon, seemed the perfect candidate for this preliminary inquiry because, on top of the features mentioned above, it also displays a much more centralized sociopolitical organization as compared to the small village-chiefdoms of Lower Fungom (see section 2.2).

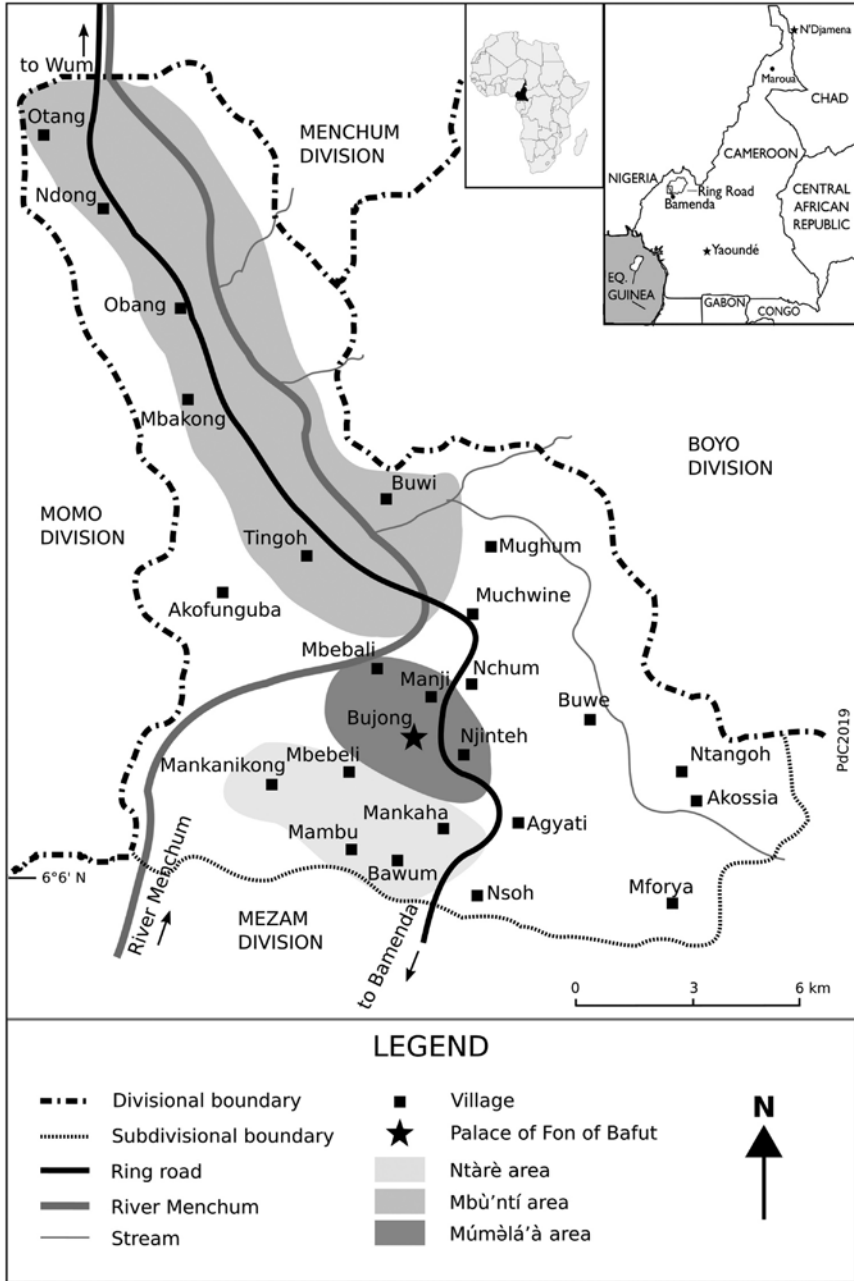
Although our research is still ongoing, the aim of this chapter is to arrive at a verisimilar delineation of the local language ecology and of some traits of the language ideologies in Bafut (section 5) and compare them with those documented in Lower Fungom (section 6). In order to do so, we will first introduce Bafut in its generalities (section 2), and then will present our preliminary findings concerning some elements of the local language ecology, that is, the so-called royal register (section 3) and other special codes (section 4).

## 2. BAFUT

### 2.1 Geography and History

Bafut is the name at once of a town, a traditional chiefdom, an administrative subdivision, a people, and their language.<sup>2</sup> Our geographical focus here is on the Bafut traditional chiefdom (henceforth fondom, from *fon*, “traditional ruler”), which includes the town of Bafut and is included in the subdivision of Bafut, in the division of Mezam, in the North-West Region of Cameroon (see figure 3.1).

The Bafut Fondom extends for about 350 square kilometers and is today home to about 100,000 people.<sup>3</sup> Geographically, it is made up of two quite distinct areas: the southern half lies between 1,000 and 1,300 meters above sea level, in a mixed forest-savanna environment typical of the hilly Cameroonian Grassfields; the northern half lies instead at an elevation between about 600 and 850 meters, is more densely forested and less populated than the southern part, and the Menchum River represents an important resource for the local economy (especially for activities like fishing and sand mining). This distinction between the two areas is reflected in Bafut toponymy: *mbù’ntí*, “the lowlands,” identifies the northern half, while the southern half includes two named subareas, *múmàlá’á*, “the heart of the land”—where the palace of the paramount Fon of Bafut is located—and *ntàrè*, “the edge area” (see figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1** Map of Bafut subdivision, Mezam division, North-West region of Cameroon, giving the approximate location of locally salient areas. For a fuller view of Lower Bafut area, see figure 13.1. *Source:* Map by Pierpaolo Di Carlo, base map from Ngwa 1981, modified.

Local ethnohistories collected by British colonial administrators and historians report that Bafut people arrived in this area around 300 years ago from areas to the east-northeast of their present site (see, e.g., Hawkesworth (1926, 5–12); Chilver and Kaberry (1962, 5–8; 1967, 19–20)). It is interesting to note that, contrary to what is stated in some reports (e.g., Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1962), those who are now commonly referred to as the “Bafut people” must in fact be considered a composite community, made up of a number of groups that trace their origins to a variety of places (see, e.g., Chilver and Kaberry (1962, 8, 19)). To cite a more recent example, during her fieldwork in Bafut, Perpetua Nngengwe (then a PhD student at the Catholic University of Cameroon at Bamenda) interviewed the chiefs of the villages of Bawum and Mambu and both confirmed that their ancestors were already there when the Bafut arrived and also that they used to speak languages different from Bafut (Nngengwe, personal communication, 2018). This is not a surprise to anyone who has a minimal interest in the history of the Bafut people; however, these ethnohistories are seldom remembered in public unless one poses explicit questions, perhaps due to the discourses that might spring from them and that might appear as potentially antagonistic to those supporting the authority of the Fon of Bafut over the whole area.

It is also interesting to note that Bafut is one of the most well-known fondoms of the Grassfields because of the war it fought against the Germans and their allies (mostly the Bali) at the end of the nineteenth century (see, e.g., Chilver and Kaberry (1962, 7–8)).

## 2.2 Society

As with any other community in the Cameroonian Grassfields, in Bafut the state administration and the traditional sociopolitical organization coexist. Following the Cameroon Chieftaincy Law 77/245, the Fon of Bafut is a first-class fon, “appointed directly” by the prime minister of the Republic of Cameroon and, as such, is a civil servant.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the fon was the supreme ruler and the main spiritual guide of the whole Bafut community, a twofold role that has been somewhat reduced by the inclusion of the fondom within the Republic of Cameroon, although the fon and the traditional power structures in general still exert considerable influence on Bafut society.

The traditional subdivision of the Bafut people into the court, on the one hand, and the commoners, on the other, seems still very much present in today’s Bafut. The court (*ñtɔʔɔ*) is made up of the fon, his many wives (including those inherited from previous fons), and their offspring, that is, the princes and princesses (*bɔʔñtɔʔɔ*). Spatially, most of the court is concentrated in the fon’s quarter, which in Bafut has reached an impressive degree of refinement in the mixture of Western and traditional architecture.



However, there are also members of the court that live outside of the fon's quarter: these are the *atanchos*—royals and nonroyals appointed as chiefs of smaller villages within the fondom, under the fon's authority—plus the *ndinfor* and the *muma*, who are male siblings of the fon elected into the political offices of, respectively, second and third in command to the fon. In the absence of the fon, the next in command is the *ndinfor* and, in his absence the *muma* is in command. Whether living inside or outside the palace, princes still have a lot of influence on the politics of the fondom because they belong to various administrative societies within the palace (see below).

As for the commoners (*bãŋŋɔ̃* or *àdzwàŋɔ̃lá?à*), one should not think that they are necessarily poorer than members of the court or powerless. Quite to the contrary, the whole political structure of Bafut, as with that of the majority of the other chiefdoms of the Cameroonian Grassfields (see, e.g., Chilver and Kaberry 1967), reflects the preoccupation that all the main families of commoners should participate to some extent in the management of the polity and, by so doing, counterbalance the fon's otherwise potentially absolute power.

In Bafut, this tension between court and commoners is realized in the presence of a number of male secret societies—in particular, Kwi'fo, Takumbeng, and Tsong—that are variously connected with the exercise of political, judiciary, and spiritual power.<sup>5</sup> It is not necessary to explore the details here (more on Bafut secret societies can be found in Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1962, Chilver and Kaberry 1962, and Kaberry 1962); for present purposes, it is sufficient to keep in mind the following points:

- Kwi'fo is the highest politico-spiritual body in the fondom: the fon is also called “the son of Kwi'fo” and can be fined or disciplined in any way as deemed necessary by Kwi'fo. Kwi'fo members are exclusively male commoners plus the fon. All other members of the royal family are strictly forbidden access to it.
- Tsong is a powerful male secret society of the fondom. It is a society of princes and is believed to draw its membership from the princes only, plus the fon.
- Takumbeng is a powerful male secret society mostly associated with the exercise of spiritual power for the protection of the fondom. The greater part of Takumbeng members come from the royal family, including the fon.

### 2.3 Languages

No sociolinguistic surveys have been carried out on the multilingual competence of the residents of Bafut (except for Lower Bafut, see Chenemo,

forthcoming and this volume). However, we do not think it would be wrong to say that everyone in upper Bafut is able to speak Bafut and, most likely, Cameroon Pidgin English. Moreover, anecdotal observations seem to indicate that only a few other local languages (such as Mankon, Meta', and Mungaka) are present in the locals' multilingual repertoires. Although more research is needed in this regard, one might say that (upper) Bafut people are quite clearly less multilingual than, for example, the people of Lower Fungom, for whom speaking four local languages plus Cameroon Pidgin English seems perfectly normal (see, e.g., Di Carlo 2018).

The Bafut language is a Narrow Grassfields Bantu language of the Ngemba subgroup. In fact, Tamanji (2009, 1) informs us that it comprises two diatopic varieties mainly distinguished at the phonological level: the "central dialect" (spoken in the central *múmàlá'à* area as well as throughout the villages in central and eastern Bafut) and the "peripheral dialect" (spoken mainly in the *ntàrè* area). By contrast, in the *mbù'ntí* area of lower elevation in the northern half of the fondom, no local variety of Bafut is reported. This is probably due to the fact that here, in contrast to the rest of the fondom, Bafut is mainly spoken as a second language: this area is home to a number of small, underdescribed languages, and multilingualism is more pronounced than elsewhere in the fondom.<sup>6</sup>

As for diastatic variation, no such thing has been documented in Bafut; instead, there is the presence of what Tamanji (2009, 2) calls "court language," which by and large coincides with what Mitchell and Neba (2019) call "royal register." This has been the main target of Neba's documentation project (Neba 2013) and of a short field trip made by both the current authors in Bafut in 2015.<sup>7</sup> Our data are summarized in sections 3 and 4.

### 3. THE ROYAL "REGISTER" OF BAFUT

In Bafut, there is a closed set of lexical items that are used to refer to the fon, to his body parts, his states and actions, and, in general, to things that pertain to him. Every member of Bafut society is expected to use this special lexical set irrespective of the context of use: as we will show, it is simply the case that "things" and actions of the fon must be referred to in a special way. The fon, too, has been reported to use this lexical set when speaking in public (Margaret Chenemo, personal communication, 2018). Data about the Bafut royal register have also been presented in Mitchell and Neba (2019). In this section we try to give a more complete account of the composition of this lexical set. The reasons for using quotes to refer to this "register" will become clearer in section 5.

### 3.1 Nouns

#### 3.1.1 The Fon's Body Parts

Table 3.1 gives a set of words used in the royal register to refer to body parts of the fon, together with their meaning and the corresponding meanings and words in normal usage. The first word in the table, *àntáámféeé*, means “firefly” in normal usage; its meaning of “fon’s eye” in the royal register is metaphorical, probably meant to emphasize the luminosity of the fon’s eyes.<sup>8</sup> Also metaphorical is *mìrìndʒʷòrì*, “fon’s ears”: in normal usage the word refers to a mushroom typical of the Grassfields whose similarity with a human ear is evident (and is reflected in the scientific name of this species, *Auricularia auricula*) and that is commonly used in Bafut cuisine. As for *òtsáʔà*, “fon’s foot/hand,”<sup>9</sup> literally referring to the rattles worn by masked dancers as anklets, the meaning in the royal register is obtained via metonymy and has the effect of connoting the fon as a spiritual agent, as the deployment of spiritual powers are the main *raison d’être* of many masquerade ritual dances.

Dealing with similar semantic phenomena in the honorific registers in some Omotic languages, Storch asserts that “deliberate semantic shifting seems to operate by essentialization, which in an almost iconic way represents, in the form of words, the essence of the powerful and magic substance of lineage elders and priests [of the fon, in the case of Bafut]” (Storch (2011, 26)). While referring to the fon’s ears as a kind of edible mushroom does not seem to bear any clear connection with a magical or otherwise powerful substance, seeing his feet as ritual rattles surely does. The cultural significance of the luminosity of the fon’s eyes, referred to as fireflies, is rather difficult

**Table 3.1 Nouns in the royal register of Bafut that refer to the Fon’s body parts, and their meaning, together with what the words mean in normal usage and the words that are found in normal usage to express the particular body parts**

Royal Register	Meaning in Royal Register	Meaning in Normal Usage	Equivalent in Normal Usage	Strategy
<i>àntáámféeé</i>	eye	firefly	<i>nìlìʔi</i>	metaphor
<i>mìrìndʒʷòrì</i>	ears	a kind of mushroom	<i>ìtòʒnì</i>	metaphor
<i>òtsáʔà</i>	foot/hand	rattle (worn on a masquerade’s foot)	<i>mìkòrì</i>	metonymy
<i>gʷìgì</i>	head	big head (insult)	<i>àtò</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>àjòó</i>	head	thing (used for taboo words)	<i>àtò</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>àmì</i>	neck	thing for swallowing	<i>òtòʒ</i>	deverbative (change of range of application)
<i>àlùmsà</i>	nose	thing that smells or sniffs	<i>nìlwí</i>	deverbative (change of range of application)

Source: Table created by the authors.

to ascertain at present, although it seems safe to assume that fireflies have a special place in Bafut cosmology.

The last four words in the table seem to escape this sort of conceptualization. In normal usage, *gyigi* is highly derogatory, as it is used to ridicule someone by emphasizing the size of their head; its use to refer to the fon's head is simply surprising. The same can be said for *àjòó*, "fon's head," since *àjòó* is normally used as a substitute for taboo words. These are cases of a distinct type of semantic shift that, for lack of a better term, we call "semantic reassignment," that is, a process of lexical expansion by which the relation existing between the form and the denotatum cannot be taken as a "linear," that is, somewhat "expected," semantic extension of its normal semantico-referential meaning but, rather, shows a high degree of unpredictability. What we want to emphasize here is that there seems to be a discontinuity between the "normal meaning" as opposed to the "royal meaning" of these words, a discontinuity that appears unrelated to the motivation to represent an "essence of the powerful and magic substance" of the fon.

The use of deverbatives like *àmi*, "fon's neck (lit. thing for swallowing)," and *àlùmsà*, "fon's nose (lit. thing for smelling)," with their merely descriptive semantics, seems equally unpredictable in a register that one would expect to index deference to the fon through magnifying his authority and power.

### 3.1.2 Objects Used or Consumed by the Fon

An equally composite picture can be observed with the nouns for objects used or consumed by the fon summarized in table 3.2. Here we find metaphors, metonyms, semantic shifts, deverbatives, neologisms, and semantic reassignments.

The words defined here as neologisms (*ntóʔʔ*, "home"; *nygi*, "mouth"; and, perhaps, *nlwi*, "clothes") are absent from Bafut common use, but in fact our data are unclear on their possible etymology: at present, we cannot rule out the possibility that some of them are loanwords from other languages or archaisms that have been lost in daily discourse. The deverbatives are, like those in table 3.1, formally regular but semantically shallow, so their presence in the fon's special lexicon remains counterintuitive. As for the cases of metonymy, "*achu*" is a kind of traditional Bafut staple, "grass" recalls the location of places where it was common to urinate and defecate (i.e., far from houses and roads), and "hoe" recalls the local past when forged iron hoes were used as a form of currency (see, e.g., Moffett, Maggs, and van Schalkwyk 2017).

Semantic reassignments are relatively numerous: *àbèrì*, "fon's chair (lit. fool)"; *kàʔà*, "fon's dish (lit. waste bin)"; *àbèè*, "fon's residence (lit.

**Table 3.2 Nouns in the royal register of Bafut that refer to objects used or consumed by the Fon, and their meaning, together with what the words mean in normal usage and the words that are found in normal usage to express the objects**

Royal Register	Meaning in Royal Register	Meaning in Normal Usage	Equivalent in Normal Usage	Strategy
<i>ñtɔʔɔ</i>	home	—	<i>ñdâ</i>	neologism (?)
<i>ñgɣɛ̃</i>	mouth	—	<i>ñtsù</i>	neologism (?)
<i>ñlwi</i>	clothes	be bitter (doubtful that this is the origin)	<i>àtsàʔɔ</i>	neologism (?)
<i>ànô</i>	cup	thing for drinking	<i>ñdɔŋ</i>	deverbative (change of range of application)
<i>àtʃirà</i>	umbrella	thing for shedding	<i>àkóŋà</i>	deverbative (change of range of application)
<i>ákɔɔ</i>	food	<i>achu</i> (cocoyam puree)	<i>mìdʒi / àtʃúgà</i>	metonymy
<i>ñgèè</i>	toilet	grass	<i>àkɔʔɔ</i>	metonymy
<i>àsɔ̃</i>	money donated to the fon	hoe	<i>ñkábâ</i>	metonymy (archaism)
<i>àbàri</i>	chair/throne	fool	<i>àlànà</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>kàʔà</i>	basket/dish	useless basket used as a dust bin	<i>ñkjè</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>àbèè</i>	residence	uncultivated yard	<i>ndâ</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>ñkɔɔ</i>	back	he who scratches	<i>ndzim</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>ñsáʔà</i>	cap	needle	<i>àtsàʔɔ tó</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>ñkàʔâ</i>	calabash	foot-cuffs	<i>àtáá</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>ñtì</i>	staff	leg(s) of a masquerade (singular and plural forms are formally identical)	<i>àtì</i>	semantic shift
<i>ñgɣɛ̃</i>	bag	jar (typically containing palm wine to be distributed)	<i>àbàà</i>	metaphor

Source: Table created by the authors.

uncultivated yard”); *ñkɔɔ*, “back (lit. he who scratches)”; *ñsáʔà*, “cap (lit. needle)”; and *ñkàʔâ*, “calabash (lit. foot-cuffs).” In contrast, there is only one example of semantic shift—*ñtì*, “fon’s staff (lit. leg(s) of a masked dancer)” —which explicitly augments the fon’s authority by connecting him with mystical activities, and also only a single example of metaphor—*ñgɣɛ̃*,

“fon’s bag (lit. jar)” — which also augments the fon’s authority by portraying him as a portentously big man.

### 3.2 Verbs

The verbs used in the royal register, given in table 3.3, behave both phonologically and syntactically as in normal Bafut usage. For example, all the verbs in the royal register can be put into two tonal groups: the LH group and the H tone group (Tamanji (2009, 109)). This is illustrative of the fact that the royal register differs from common usage only semantically. Every other grammatical feature remains the same in the two varieties.

As with the nouns, we observe a variety of semantic strategies used in the creation of the verbal lexicon. It is interesting to note that among the verbs we encounter some euphemisms, such as *bwê*, “die (lit. be missing),” and *lãǎ*, “bury (lit. keep).” It is believed that the fon does not die, but rather only travels to the land of the ancestors whence he influences the activities of the living in the village; therefore, it is appropriate to give the impression that he

**Table 3.3 Verbs found in the royal register of Bafut with a different meaning, together with what the words mean in normal usage and the words that are found in normal usage to express the actions (verbs are given in the imperative form)**

Royal Register	Meaning	Meaning in Normal Usage	Equivalent in Normal Usage	Strategy
<i>bwê</i>	die	be missing	<i>kʷô</i>	euphemism
<i>lãǎ</i>	bury	keep	<i>lʷíŋǎ</i>	euphemism
<i>ŋáŋŋǎ</i>	sit	sit comfortably	<i>tswí</i>	euphemism
<i>kóʔsálwí</i>	wear a cloth	cause (fon’s) dress to go up	<i>wéʔé</i>	euphemism
<i>tfú</i>	speak	emit sound (specifically for the secret instrument of the Tsong)	<i>ɣàá</i>	metonymy
<i>fãá</i>	see	—	<i>jǎ</i>	neologism (?)
<i>bʷárǎ</i>	reproach	—	<i>ɣàántǎ</i>	neologism (?)
<i>mòòmǎ</i>	dance	—	<i>bínǎ</i>	neologism (?)
<i>lâyǎ</i>	carry	—	<i>bìʔí</i>	neologism (?)
<i>kwíintǎ</i>	ask (the fon)	fill up	<i>bítǎ</i>	semantic shift
<i>màʔànsjé</i>	wear	throw down	<i>wéʔé</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>tsàʔǎ</i>	drink	look for (fruits)	<i>nô</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>bǎŋǎ</i>	sleep	turn	<i>bʷíí</i>	semantic reassignment
<i>tóó</i>	go out	escape (of a rodent)	<i>fêʔé</i>	metaphor

Source: Table created by the authors.

is only missing and not dead. By referring to the burying of the fon as “keeping,” the speakers are able to express the idea that a fon never dies—he is not truly buried but “kept” safely in his resting place where he will continue to live and intercede for the living. Also having positive connotations are *tíú*, “speak,” a verb that is normally used to refer to the sound produced by the secret instrument characteristic of the Tsong secret society (see section 2.2); *ḡáḡḡḡ*, “sit (lit. sit comfortably)”; and, perhaps, *kóʔsáɓwí*, “wear a cloth.” The latter is a compound word formed from *kóʔsá*, “make climb,” and *ɓwí*, “fon’s dress”; this could be seen as a way to say that the fon does not wear clothes like ordinary people do, but he somewhat supernaturally makes his clothes go up.

Apart from these verbs and the possible neologisms, on whose semantics and etymology our data remain mute, all the other forms exemplify more or less clear processes of semantic shift and reassignment that make it somewhat difficult to justify their presence in a register that one would expect to encode honor toward the fon. For example, it is difficult to explain why *màʔànsjé*, “throw down,” *tsàʔá*, “look for (fruits),” and *báḡḡ*, “turn,” have come to mean “wear,” “drink,” and “sleep,” respectively, in the royal register. Likewise, the metaphorical *tóó*, “go out,” associates the fon’s going out with the escape of a rodent from a predator: we are not aware of any myths, epithets, or customs that justify this association. If deference and politeness are encoded in the use of these lexical items, then it is unclear what mediates these values in the Bafut metapragmatic knowledge (see section 5 below for further discussion).

#### 4. OTHER SPECIAL CODES IN BAFUT

During our 2015 fieldwork, we also collected evidence of other codes that are used by specific groups of people in Bafut and that we will call “special codes,” for lack of a better term. These codes are used by members of the fondom secret societies and by members of the court.

As we indicated in section 2.2, Bafut sociopolitical organization is based on a set of male secret societies above which stands the fon. The most powerful are Tsong, Takumbeng, and Kwi’fo, which is the most powerful of all (cf. Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1962; Chilver and Kaberry 1962; Kaberry 1962). Our local consultants, most of whom were members of one or the other of these associations, reported that each secret society has its own code, known only to initiates. Moreover, all our local consultants concurred that secret societies are normally organized hierarchically in what could be described as concentric subsets of increasing power and authority, and that each of these subsets has some particular ways of communicating among its

members. Of course, details about the actual nature of these numerous secret codes were not released, as revealing the exclusive code (or any other secret feature) of the secret societies would entail heavy fines and was traditionally punished by death.

Our interviewees emphasized that, should a Bafut nonmember be present while two members of Kwi'fo communicate using (one of) their exclusive code(s), the nonmember would not realize this is happening as the interaction would be perceived on the surface as entirely "normal." We could get no further details, and it is clear that the nonverbal aspect of these metasemiotic construals plays an important role. However, what the interviewees told us gives us enough room to speculate that at least part of these special codes is similar to the royal register; that is, it contains lexical items that are used in ordinary speech, but that have been assigned a different meaning.

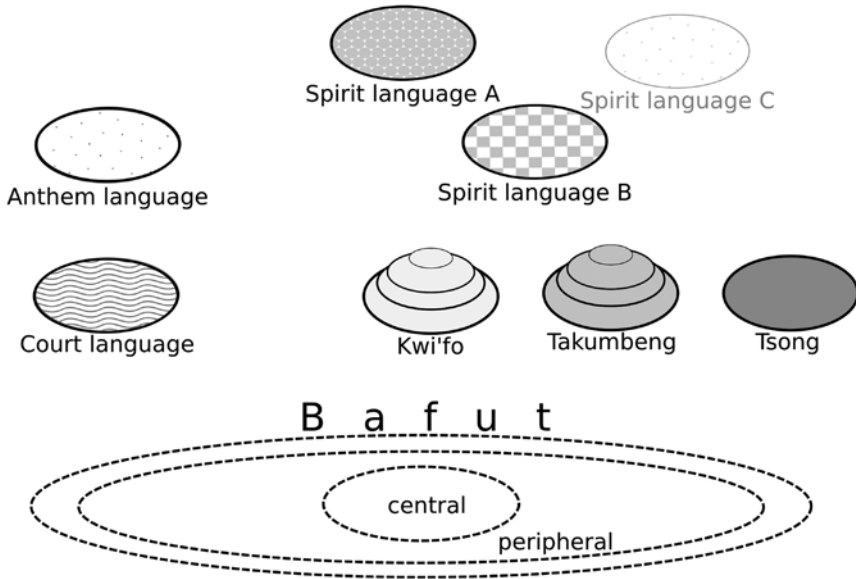
Another interesting fact we were told, which was later confirmed with other Bafut consultants, is that the royal family itself has a code of its own ("court language" in figure 3.2). In this case, however, the code is reportedly rich in non-Bafut words. Here, too, there seem to be multiple layers of secrecy: for one thing, it is to be noted that the words found in the lyrics of the Bafut national anthem are for the most part not Bafut and, according to our consultants, nor are they from the royal family "main" code, possibly indicating that there are a number of codes exclusive to the royal family and that the anthem was composed using one of those ("anthem language" in figure 3.2).<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, specific language varieties have also been reported as the necessary tools for the performance of a number of rituals, addressed to a variety of spirits and ancestors (the "spirit languages" in figure 3.2). These varieties are the exclusive knowledge of a handful of high-ranked notables, all of whom are also members in the secret societies mentioned above. The fon is locally conceptualized as the only person in the whole of Bafut who knows all the special codes as he is a member of the royal family and of all the secret societies and has a key role in all the rituals.

All this information can be graphically represented as in figure 3.2, which can be considered as a first approximation of the Bafut community's own linguistic repertoire, representing the distribution of endoglossic varieties and "special codes" within the Bafut speaker community.<sup>11</sup>

Being able to speak many of these codes is conditional on being a member of a specific subgroup of the Bafut community: this is the case for all the codes of the various secret societies (and their concentric, hierarchical subgroupings) and those of the court. Only the distribution of competence in spirit languages may follow a different, more functionally oriented rationale, but this is probably due to our present lack of data about these languages. Be that as it may, the fon is believed to be the only Bafut person able to





**Figure 3.2** Simplified graphical representation of the linguistic repertoire of the Bafut community. Bafut daily language (bottom) comprises two diatopic varieties; here boundaries are quite porous, as new Bafut speakers are welcome. By contrast, competence in all the other codes (court language, anthem language, spirit languages, and the codes of secret societies) is policed in much the same way as membership in the groups associated with them. Concentric subgroups within Kwi'fo and Takumbeng represent the internal hierarchies typical of these secret societies (see also section 2.2). *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

understand and communicate in all the codes present in the community's traditional linguistic repertoire (see figure 3.3).

## 5. CODES TO INDEX MEMBERSHIP, NOT CALL UP STEREOTYPES

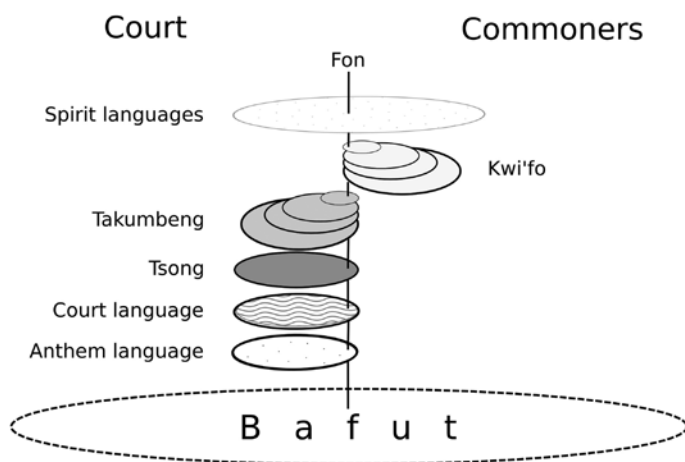
What we have reviewed so far is suggestive of two things: (a) the main motivation for the creation of all the codes populating the Bafut linguistic repertoire is the delimitation and policing of (sub)group boundaries via linguistic behavior; and (b) both the fon's expected multilingual competence (figure 3.3) and the very nature of the so-called royal register stress his uniqueness within Bafut society. It is our view that the Bafut royal register has essentially the function of distinguishing a Bafut person from a non-Bafut, without any moral, behavioral, or otherwise essentialist bearings. Two facts seem to corroborate our view and will be reviewed here.

First, in a number of interviews, both the Fon of Bafut and other nobles made it clear that knowledge of the royal register is the basic requirement for one to be recognized as a Bafut person. In the words of the fon, “[e]very Bafut man<sup>12</sup> should know that the fon *tʃú* [speaks] and a Bafut man *yáá* . . . If you tell someone that he should begin to *tʃú*, then it is an insult . . . if you say the fon is *yáá*, then it is an insult to the fon” (Neba 2013, “Interview with Fon”; those parts that were in Bafut have been translated by the second author, who is a native speaker of the language).

Second, there are two basic features that put the so-called royal register in a nonprototypical (at best) category of registers: (a) the fon is reported to use the register himself when speaking in public; and (b) many of the words used in the royal register have a normal-usage meaning that is hardly connected, even from the locals’ point of view, with the semantic mediation of values such as politeness, respect, and deference for the fon.

The former is suggestive of an honorific register that is not focused on deference but, rather, on the difference and uniqueness of the fon as a referent and actor in the Bafut world; the fact of being unique is, per se, the mediation of respect and honor (see also figure 3.3).

The latter is more difficult to deal with in the little space available here. What we can point out is that, if there is one feature that seems to connect the composite array of semantic processes at work in the creation of the fon-related lexical set—especially the dysphemisms and arbitrary semantic reassignments—then it is a sort of upside-down view of the world, of a kind



**Figure 3.3** The Fon, represented by the vertical line, is the only person who knows all the special codes found in the Bafut linguistic repertoire, both those associated with the court (i.e., the royal family) and those associated with the commoners. *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

that is similar to what has at times been associated with mythical figures such as the trickster (see, e.g., Evans-Pritchard 1967; Doty and Hynes 1993). This would open up the possibility of seeing a procedural, practical motivation rather than a semantic motivation as underlying the configuration of the fon-related lexical set: it could be seen as a sort of secret code that can be known only if one is initiated and guided by other knowledgeable members.

Another concurring aspect is that once the code becomes devoid of deference (point (a) above) and much of its lexical material does not consistently follow locally salient paths of semantic shift associated with respect or increased authority (point (b) above), then it remains unclear what kind of stereotypical features can leak from the register onto the speakers (cf. Agha 1998). The only feature that would seem to remain available for leakage onto speakers, though not a stereotype-related one, is their affiliation in the group that is known to be the only community using the code, that is, mature Bafut speakers.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. COMPARING BAFUT AND LOWER FUNGOM

What we have reviewed so far, one would contend, has little to do with multilingualism. For one thing, all the data we have presented are related to only one language, Bafut—with the possible exception of the royal family code and the language of the anthem (see section 4 above)—and this seems at odds with the most common understanding of multilingualism as the ability to communicate in *multiple* languages. Nonetheless, while in the field, we had the impression that the logic underpinning many of the phenomena we were documenting and that we have discussed above were very similar to that characterizing the language ideologies we have found in language ecologies like Lower Fungom that are linguistically much more diverse than Bafut. A succinct recapitulation is in order before we lay down our arguments.

### 6.1 Prominence of Relational rather than Categorical Identification

Lower Fungom is a small rural area of around 200 square kilometers, about five hours in a truck from Bafut, where we find at least eight Bantoid languages spoken in thirteen village-chiefdoms, most of which have a population not exceeding a thousand people. Intermarriages across village communities are the norm and this is but one of the factors accounting for the very high degree of multilingual competence found in the area: existing studies screening about 2 percent of the local population report that speaking four local languages plus Cameroon Pidgin English is normal for a resident of Lower

Fungom (Esene Agwara 2013; Di Carlo 2018; Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba, forthcoming). Lower Fungom's rather extreme form of linguistic density and political fragmentation, and at the same time the pervasiveness of individual multilingualism, is in stark contrast with what is found in Bafut, which is, as we have said, a highly centralized chiefdom inhabited by some 100,000 people, the majority of whom, we have reason to think, are fluent in Bafut, Cameroon Pidgin English, and, perhaps slightly less commonly, Cameroonian English.

The multilingualism documented in Lower Fungom can be defined as nondiglossic or, more simply, egalitarian (François 2012; see also section 1 above): people's multilingual repertoires are not organized hierarchically, that is, there are no prestigious nor otherwise "high" local languages in the language ideologies of the people of Lower Fungom. Roughly speaking, each language is associated with a village; therefore, speaking that language will have the main consequence of, on the one hand, communicating with other speakers of the same language and, on the other, representing oneself as a village community member.

It is important to keep in mind that, due to the small size of these communities and to the fact that everyone knows nearly everyone else, one's membership in a village community equates *de facto* to one's position within it. This means that the use of one or the other local language does not call up social stereotypes: in fact, there are none associated with the different village communities. Rather, in such a context, language choice allows speakers to project relational rather than categorical identities. That is, by choosing a given local language, speakers can identify themselves not as members of a class of persons sharing some categorical attribute (such as degree of education, wealth, status, political orientation, or any other essential or behavioral quality) but, rather, as members of concrete social networks in which each one is known to occupy a certain position relative to the other members. The evidence we have summarized in this chapter is suggesting that very similar ideologies are at play even in contexts, such as Bafut, where both the sociopolitical situation is much more centralized and individual multilingualism is much less pronounced.

As we have seen, at a closer look what is commonly referred to as the Bafut "royal register" shows that it cannot be considered straightforwardly as an honorific register, or at least not as a prototypical one (see section 5). While we still need more research to properly analyze this phenomenon, what seems certain is that it allows speakers to signal that they are "full members" of the Bafut community. The same holds true for use of all the special codes we have mentioned in the previous sections, as they allow their users to achieve the goal of being recognized as members of a concrete social network—like, for instance, the various "concentric circles" within a secret society—not as one of a group of persons sharing a common *abstract* feature. Thus, it is this

tendency toward relational rather than categorical types of personal identification that Bafut's and Lower Fungom's language ideologies have in common (see also Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019).

## **6.2 How Can This Affect Our Research on African Multilingualisms?**

Why could this be an important advance in our understanding of African multilingualisms? Its importance is twofold.

First, it sheds light on the fact that language ecologies that are apparently very different in the degree of complexity of their inhabitants' multilingual repertoires may—at least in the Cameroonian Grassfields—share fundamental ideological patterns. Among the traits that are especially visible, we find the following:

- The existence of locally salient social groups is sanctioned by the existence of group-specific linguistic (and paralinguistic) codes.
- Identity is primarily relational (see also section 6.1).
- Given these two points, there is a pervasive tendency to develop multicode competences, be they aimed at increasing one's symbolic power (see the repertoire of the Fon of Bafut, figure 3.3), or at obtaining multiple affiliations (the norm in Lower Fungom (see Di Carlo 2018)), or both.

Second, looking at it from this perspective, one could legitimately say that the fact that people's repertoires are populated by different languages, dialects, or non-fully fledged languages (such as the Bafut secret societies' codes) is but an epiphenomenon of overall limited importance: paraphrasing Hymes (1972, 38), the underlying social functions that find expression in this behavior do not depend on the linguistic status of the codes involved. What we want to stress here is that the data we have presented, along with those reviewed in other works (such as Cobbinah et al. 2016 and Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019); and much of the literature on codeswitching (such as, e.g., Heller 1988 and Auer 1999), suggest that it is key to base our analyses on whatever linguistic codes are meaningful to speakers and not only on codes that have been defined as “properly different languages.” Adopting the latter perspective, it would simply become impossible to try to comprehend the complexities of Africa's multilingualisms.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, we have presented data collected during field research in Bafut, an important chiefdom of the Cameroonian Grassfields. In particular, we have

focused on what, following Hymes, we call the Bafut “linguistic repertoire,” that is, that portion of the Bafut language ecology that consists of endoglossic codes only. Among these, the code we have dealt with here specifically is the so-called royal register (section 3), while we could only briefly review the scanty evidence available about the court language and the codes used by members of the most important secret societies of Bafut (section 4).

A number of features distinguish the “royal register” from what one would normally expect from an honorific register (following Agha 1998), and we concluded (see section 5) that (a) it is not focused on deference but, rather, on the difference and uniqueness of the fon; (b) there are no stereotypical features leaking onto speakers who use this register (see Agha (1998, 163–8)); and (c) the main outcome of using the register is representing oneself as a “full member” of the Bafut community.

In the final section, we took our argument one step further by comparing the Bafut linguistic repertoire with the language ecology of Lower Fungom. The two are markedly different from each other in that the latter is linguistically very diverse and most residents’ multilingual repertoires include no fewer than four local languages plus Cameroon Pidgin English. Nonetheless, in Bafut one can find a number of language ideological features that are the same as those underpinning the language ideologies of Lower Fungom. This suggests that (a) the two speech communities, although very different on the surface, share a cultural layer that has to do with an emphasis on competence in multiple codes, and (b) the ultimate nature of the codes involved—whether these are “real languages,” dialects, or non-fully fledged codes—has little to no relevance from the point of view of the local ideologies.

These points lead us to conclude that advances in the study of Africa’s multilingualisms must necessarily take these points into consideration in an attempt to overcome established, inertial scholarly assumptions around the ontology of what counts as a language. For a study of multilingual behaviors, what counts as a language depends essentially on the speakers’ ideologies. This is, we contend, a key point that can allow further advances in the study of African multilingualisms.

## NOTES

1. How to distinguish between “urban” and “rural” environments in Africa is an issue that historians, anthropologists, and geographers have long debated (see, e.g., Coquery-Vidrovitch 1991; Mabogunje 1969; Winters 1977). For present purposes, we understand rural environments as being characterized by a relative lack of demographic pressure, where most inhabitants are engaged in food production.

2. *Bafut* is a Mungaka word that became the official administrative appellation during the German colonial era (1895–1916). The Bafut people refer to themselves and their language as *bifi*.

3. The 2005 census gives 57,930 residents in the Bafut subdivision (BUCREP 2005), but the population has continued increasing dramatically over the past fifteen years.

4. In fact, the Fon of Bafut is only appointed in an official sense. In reality, he inherits the throne from his father when the latter “disappears” (see section 3.2 for euphemisms referring to the fon’s death). The selection of the new fon from among the princes is complex and complicated. The Fon of Bafut is called either Achirimbi or Abumbi; the present fon is Abumbi II.

5. In Bafut there are also female secret societies, and some of them exert quite some influence on the social life of the fondom. While we did not collect explicit information in this regard, the evidence at hand is suggestive that male rather than female secret societies are the major foci of political, executive, juridical, and spiritual power in the fondom (confirming evidence discussed in Ritzenthaler and Ritzenthaler 1962, Chilver and Kaberry 1962, and Kaberry 1962).

6. The languages in this area are Beba, Butang, Buwi, Mbakong, Mantaa, Obang, and Otang. Obang has been described in Asohsi’s unpublished PhD thesis (2016). Chenemo’s unpublished MA (2011) and PhD (forthcoming) theses are the only sources for the other languages of the area.

7. The field trip was carried out by the authors and two PhD students (Margaret Chenemo, University of Yaounde I, and Perpetua Ngengwe, Catholic University of Cameroon at Bamenda) in November 2015 and was possible thanks to generous funding from the KPAAM-CAM project (US National Science Foundation Award No. BCS-0853981). Our sincere gratitude goes to Margaret Chenemo, who was very helpful in making arrangements for meetings at the Bafut court and, being a Bafut speaker, also contributed some of the lexical items discussed in this chapter. We also want to thank Maa (Queen) Constance for her kind help and availability to work with us, and His Highness Fon Abumbi II for his warm and welcoming attitude toward us and our students. Finally, our thanks go to Dr. Lilian Lem Atanga (a Bafut native speaker and linguist) for kindly answering a number of questions we had. The authors alone are responsible for the content of this chapter.

8. It is interesting to note in passing that at least one species of firefly present in the area does not light up intermittently, unlike most Lampyridae known in the rest of the world, but rather emits a very long (perhaps continuous) light-green glow while flying.

9. After the chapter was finalized, we realized that this curious polysemy, where one and the same word refers to both “foot” and “hand,” is probably connected with the fact that the fon is also traditionally called *nàà* “(four-legged) animal,” a term that is not mentioned in the chapter.

10. Traditionally sung in every Bafut gathering, the Bafut national anthem (Bafut *mban*) is now known and performed by very few people. It contains only a few words of modern Bafut, the rest being hardly understood. It has several preambles and, according to the Fon of Bafut (Neba 2013, “Interview with Fon”), the fon chants excerpts of this song prior to every traditional rite he performs. It is believed that, when the anthem is sung, ancestral spirits are invoked and participate in the ceremony (Neba 2013, “Mban-Bafut Anthem”).

11. We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out that Dell Hymes’s (1972, 39) notion of “linguistic repertoire” would squarely fit what we had previously

called the “Bafut internal language ecology.” By contrast, the current Bafut language habitat as a whole—that is, all the codes present in the individual repertoires of speakers living in Bafut—would include a number of other languages, beginning with English and Cameroon Pidgin English and also including the languages spoken in the surrounding areas, such as Mankon and the languages of the *mbu’nti* lowlands in the north.

12. As is clear in the rest of this sentence, “Bafut man” should be understood as “Bafut person” irrespective of gender.

13. We thank one of the reviewers for raising the issue about the sociolectal distribution of this metapragmatic competence. This is a difficult question to answer precisely: currently, use of the fon-related code seems to be decreasing, and only elderly people (both men and women) seem to be still using it. However, we were told that, traditionally, all Bafut people of a certain age (probably, all those who had children) were expected to use it correctly. In our interview with the fon, he pointed out that ignorance of the law is not an excuse.

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## Chapter 4

# Multilingualism as It Unfolds

## *Language Vitality in Naturally Occurring Speech in Kelleng, a Rural Setting in Cameroon*

Emmanuel Ngué Um, Marguérite G. Makon,  
and Célestine G. Assomo

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bati is a language of Cameroon, spoken by a relatively small community of approximately 500 to 1,000 speakers (Ngué Um, Makon, and Assomo 2017). The Bati speech community is located in three distinct villages—Kelleng, Mbougue, and Nyambat—all belonging to the same canton within the Sanaga-Maritime Division in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. Each of these villages is host to distinct sets of language repertoires. Variation in language use, though it does not hinder mutual intelligibility among speakers from one village to another, is leveraged for micro-identity construction and subcommunity demarcation; in addition, it nurtures sociolinguistic metadiscourses relating to language purism and correctness. To this effect, each village overtly claims to speak a separate tongue, named after the village. When asked what their language is, speakers of each of the three villages unequivocally answer that their language is Kelleng, Mbougue, or Nyambat, depending on the village with which they identify. However, speakers of the three “lects”—a term we use to refer to any “named language” in local use irrespective of its genealogy and relationship with other named languages<sup>1</sup>—all claim a shared ethnic identity as Mbangele (*mbǎngélê*, or *mbǎngèlè*). Ethnic identity here does not seem to coincide with language identity since we never heard any statement such as “I speak Mbangele.”

In addition to being a linguistically diversified community, those who speak Bati are an inherently multilingual group as a result of geographical,

social, and historical factors. Geographically, the territory where Bati is spoken is situated at the meeting point of four dominant languages or language groups: Basaa, Bisoo or Bakoko, Eton, and various languages belonging to the Yambasa group, such as Nubaca (or Bongo) and Mbule. The geographical proximity with neighboring groups results in regular social interaction between Bati speakers and these communities, with intermarriage occurring regularly. In addition to these languages being spoken nearby, during the time of German colonization Basaa was instituted as the medium of instruction in schools and as a means for the diffusion of the Holy Gospel.

These factors have brought many outside languages into daily use in Keleng, Mbougue, and Nyambat, to the extent that every adult speaker who has lived continuously in any of these villages is fluent in at least five different lects. This trend is, however, decreasing among people who are currently aged twenty or younger.

Bati speakers enjoy a unique “gift” for multilingualism within their broad geographical location, which lies between the Mbam-Nkam, the Basaa, and the Beti speech areas. However, fluency in more than one lect is a common skill that many individuals beyond the Bati community have naturally acquired or developed over the course of their social life, elsewhere in Cameroon and in Africa more generally. Indeed, in many regards, it is safe to say that “multilingualism has been a fact of social life in Africa for a very long time” (Whiteley (1971, 1)).

Because of its extensive social multilingualism, Africa has inspired a wealth of scholarly inquiries within the field of sociolinguistics. As Di Carlo (2015) has noted, early research works on African multilingualism were mainly concerned with urban settings (e.g., Myers-Scotton 1993; Juillard 1995; Mc Laughlin 2001). In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in investigating rural multilingualism, as illustrated by Connell (2009), Lüpke (2010a, 2010b), Cobbinah (2010), Di Carlo and Good (2014), and Di Carlo (2015), among others.

Both earlier and more recent scholarly undertakings focusing on African multilingualism have relied on mainstream sociolinguistic and ethnographic approaches that fall within Irvine and Gal’s (2000) “iconization process.” Through this process, linguistic features and the social phenomena that index them appear to be in an iconic relationship. Iconization processes further lead to a methodological constraining of the inquiry into a bidimensional bundling in which multilingualism is always stated as a default dependent variable for which such predictors as social structures, ideologies, identities, or similar ethnographic variables are called into play.

Without downplaying the importance of social and ethnographic variables in developing and shaping social multilingualism in Africa, inasmuch as multilingualism is “a fact of social life” (Whiteley (1971, 1)), it is no less relevant to

appraise its dynamics by observing the real-time distribution and choice of lects within a given repertoire through naturally occurring interactions. The issue of “who speaks what language to whom and when” (Fishman 1965), though not entirely overridden in the present study, is reconsidered in such a way that the outcome of our sociolinguistic study is stated in dynamic rather than in static terms.

## **2. RESEARCH QUESTION**

Given the language repertoire in use within the Bati speech area, in particular in Kelleng village, this study investigates the choice of lect by speakers with respect to frames of discourse as they unfold in naturally occurring speech. More specifically, this research aims to answer the question of whether real-time choice of lects by multilingual speakers within a given language repertoire can be correlated with the sociocognitive frames of discourse in which each turn of talk occurs.

## **3. OBJECTIVES**

Mainstream approaches to language revitalization, regardless of the model in which they are embedded (Hinton and Hale 2001; Grenoble and Whaley 2006), advocate an increase in the number of domains of language use among the apprentice social ecology. According to Grenoble and Whaley (2006, 50), the choice of a language revitalization model among the many existing ones around the world depends on the “language goals of a given community.” The objective of this study is therefore to identify language goals among the Kelleng speech group. By “language goals” we mean the network of discourse registers that shape naturally occurring interactions in the community. If the choice of lects in a multilingual setting is a function of discourse registers, then language revitalization initiatives can capitalize by concentrating on those registers where the specific language of interest is already more vital within the speech group.

Language vitality can thus be measured not only with regard to the social domains that a language variety fills or fails to fill, but equally in dynamic and pragmatic terms. “Social domains” is too wide and imprecise a notion in the extensive multilingual settings found in Africa, and it cannot always account for the real-time unfolding of individual multilingualism in actual language use. Equally, this notion is not convenient if one seeks to understand the internal interaction of lects belonging to the same language repertoire. Different lects may map onto different social domains, but also onto different communicative content and ends.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on data collected in language documentation fieldwork in 2017, during which five hours of oral speech were recorded. These recordings document two sessions of naturally occurring conversation among female speakers in Kelleng, one of the four villages of the Bati Canton. Some of the women participating in the recordings are native speakers of the local lect, while others originate from neighboring communities: Bisoo, Bongo, Eton, and Nyambat. The first recording session documents group work on a farm and involves six female participants; the second session documents cassava paste preparation in the home of one of the participants and involves nine speakers.

Out of these participants, the speech production of four speakers was selected. This selection was based on the fact that these four speakers were present in both sessions, while the other speakers feature in either the first or the second session only. Using this data enables a comparison of the language use of the same individuals from one sociolinguistic setting to another; however, it is important to point out that this sampling is representative neither of the language repertoire in Kelleng at large nor of the linguistic profile of the inhabitants of the village.

In fact, the women whose speech production was selected for analysis happen to all originate from two neighboring communities: three come from Bisoo and one from Bongo. By chance, then, all are non-native speakers of Kelleng. They have settled in Kelleng through marriage and have continuously lived there for periods of varying length.

The participants in both sessions are part of the same social network. The majority of them belong to a women's association called the Active Women of Kelleng. This made it possible to follow them from one social activity to another: from farm cultivation to cassava paste preparation. The farming takes place outdoors, in a field away from the village. Cassava paste preparation takes place indoors, and this is why there were more participants in the activity.

Based on the discourse across the two sessions, a grid of interactional frames was defined, where the different frames of discourse refer to the socio-cognitive paradigm in which each turn of talk is embedded. Four frames of discourse were defined and labeled as follows:

- The “public” frame refers to turns of talk whose thematic orientation relates to public affairs such as the governance by the village's chiefs, the management of local schools, public work, funerals, or public celebrations.
- The “private” frame refers to discussions of private affairs such as the participants' own families or households, personal stories, personal opinions, feelings and tastes, or personal business.

- The “gossip” frame characterizes those turns of talk where participants comment on the affairs of third parties, that is, the private affairs or business of individuals, groups, families, or villages who are not present or represented at the event being recorded.
- The “business” frame has to do with references or allusions to the ongoing activity (farming or cassava paste preparation), or to other activities of the women’s association.

These four frames of discourse constitute one of our independent variables, the “variables that influence the outcome” (Levshina (2015, 16)). The other independent variable in our study is the activity that the women are undertaking, either farm cultivation or cassava preparation.

Other possible independent variables could have been considered in the present study but have not been included. The first of these is the nominal variable “native/non-native speaker.” Logically, the profile of an individual as a native speaker of language X is very likely to influence their use of that language. This variable has been omitted in our analysis because three out of the four selected female speakers have Bisoo as their native language, and one has Bongo. If we consider a native speaker’s tendency to use their native language as a natural bias, then we can statistically expect the choice of Bisoo to dominate. The predictability of this has led to us not using native speaker status as an independent variable.

A second independent variable that we do not consider here is that of the duration of time that each selected participant has spent in the village (e.g., “less than five years” vs. “more than five years”). This variable could be meaningful because the acquisition of the local lect is, among other parameters, a function of the relative length of time the participants have spent in the village. However, all selected participants had spent more than five years in the village at the time of recording. All were married to male Kelleng native speakers and in this way can be said to have been continuously exposed to the local lect for similar amounts of time.

A third potential independent variable is the social role of the participant, which may predispose a speaker to speaking more or less during an interaction. While all the selected participants are members of the Active Women of Kelleng association, they hold different positions of responsibility within it such as president, secretary, or regular member.

A fourth variable that has been omitted is the psychological profile of each participant, in particular, whether they are more or less vocal. The analysis relies primarily on how often a given participant takes an active part in the interaction and for how long they speak. This could be connected either to the vocalness of the participant or indeed to how concerned they are with the specific discourse topic. In spite of its relevance to the analysis, however,



we have not taken the psychological profile of speakers into consideration, because of the difficulties of operationalizing this in the field; none of the authors is trained as a psychologist, and this would have required appropriate training in profiling.

We acknowledge the fact that the study which we undertake here may have been improved had we had included these other variables. There are definite limitations in carrying out a simplified analysis when dealing with such a complex reality as the dynamics of multilingualism. However, the analysis is informed by these omitted variables even though they are not explicitly included.

In order to analyze the influence of the independent variables (the activity and the frame of discourse) on language choice, we use the lects that belong in the broad language repertoire of Kelleng village as the values for our dependent variable, the variable that is subject to the influence of the independent or explanatory variables. The language repertoire in Kelleng is made up of the following lects:

- Basaa: a neighboring lect with more speakers and a broader geographical area
- Bisoo: another neighboring lect with more speakers
- Bongo (also known as Nubaca): a neighboring lect belonging to the Yam-basa group, with more speakers than Kelleng
- Eton: yet another lect with more speakers, but one that is represented in the vicinity of Kelleng by a diasporic and relatively small community (the majority of the Eton community live on the other bank of the Sanaga River, which forms a natural border between the Centre and Littoral Regions of Cameroon)
- Ewondo: a major and vehicular lect in many neighboring communities such as the Eton, the Bisoo, and the Yambasa
- French: one of the two official languages in Cameroon
- Kelleng: the local lect that Binam Bikoï (2012) classifies as a dialect of Bati
- Mbougue: a neighboring dialect of Bati (Binam Bikoï 2012)
- Nyambat: a third dialect of Bati (Binam Bikoï 2012), but one that does not share geographical borders with Kelleng

Of key importance, the identification of the different lects used during the turns of talk of the various participants was undertaken with the assistance of a native speaker of Kelleng who is fluent in all the lects represented in the recordings.<sup>2</sup>

Of the nine lects that make up the language repertoire of Kelleng village as documented in the two recording sessions, six were selected as being most representative of the language used in the two sessions: Kelleng, Basaa,

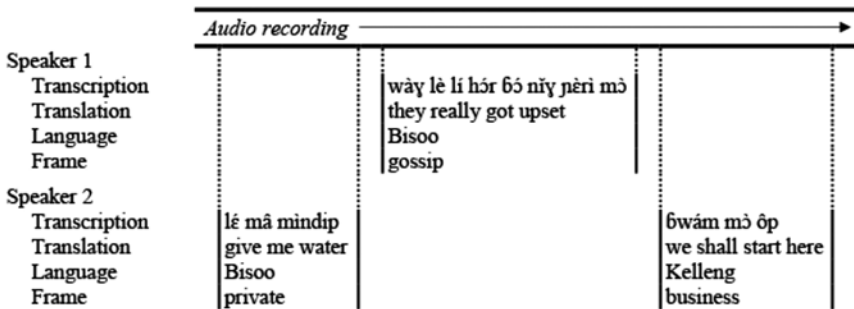
Bisoo, Bongo, Eton, and Ewondo. This was based on the total amount of time for which each lect was spoken across the two recordings, calculated using the Multiple File Processing function of ELAN.<sup>3</sup>

As in any other sociolinguistic analysis, the definition of independent variables on the one hand and of dependent variables on the other does not aim at establishing the causality of one type of variable over another. The analysis is limited to testing for possible relationships between the two sets of variables.

The two recordings were annotated using ELAN. In the annotation scheme, four tiers were created for each turn of talk. The first of these is the parent tier, and contains the phonetic transcription. The three other tiers are child tiers, and are time-aligned with the phonetic transcription tier: the free translation tier, the language tier, and the frame (of discourse) tier. Thus, each segment of talk is associated with its free translation, a language label (Basaa, Bisoo, etc.), and a label indicating the frame of discourse (public, private, gossip, business).

Figure 4.1 provides an illustrative representation of the annotation system used for this study, across three conversational turns. Two speakers are represented, and their turns of talk are linked to the times of an audio recording (represented via dotted vertical lines). Each annotation contains information relating to the four tiers mentioned above.

In order to capture in the analysis the relationships between length of talk, discourse frames, and lects, the language tier and the frame tier were merged into a third binary tier, which encapsulated the duration of each discourse frame together with the specific lect, for each individual turn.



**Figure 4.1** A representative example of the transcription system used in this study, showing three turns of talk. Each turn has the phonetic transcription (linked to the time on the audio recording, as shown by the dotted lines), a free translation, a label for the language used, and a label for the frame of discourse. *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

At a later stage of the analysis, the software environment R, developed specifically for statistical computing, was used to carry out statistical analysis and to generate plots.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to point out that not all turns have been included in the analysis. Firstly, as already discussed, only those turns of talk produced by the four selected speakers have been included. Secondly, any turns that were identified as containing code-switching have been omitted from the analysis. Instances of code-switching have been left out because the duration for which individual codes were used during a single utterance is not readily measurable. In order to avoid an arbitrary delineation of time intervals for the individual languages involved in code-switching, those turns labeled as containing code-switching have been ignored in the analysis.

### 5. RESULTS

Figure 4.2 shows the total amount of time that the selected speakers spent talking about each of the different frames of discourse in the two recording sessions. There is a very clear difference between the two sessions in the amount of time dedicated to the “public” and “private” frames of discourse.

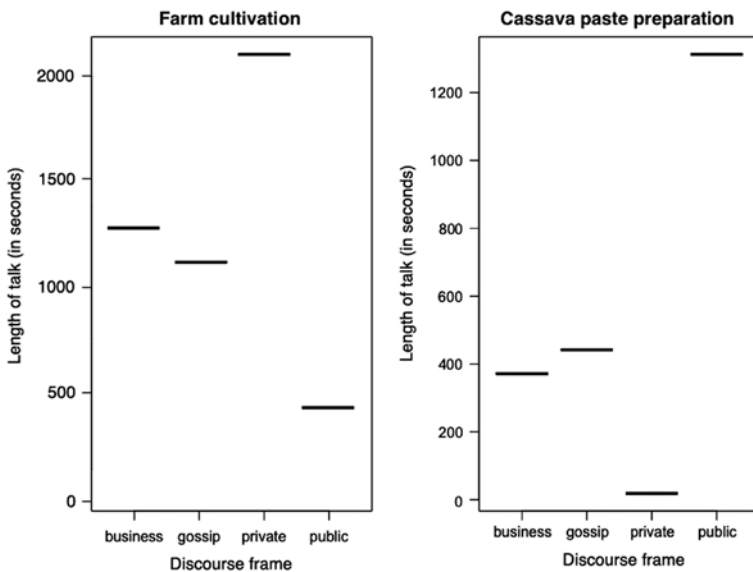
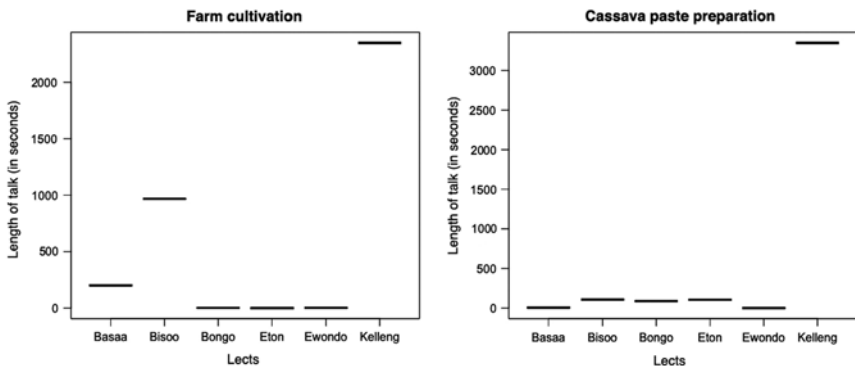


Figure 4.2 Graphs showing the length of time (in seconds) for which each of the frames of discourse was discussed in total by the selected speakers at the farm and while preparing cassava paste. Source: Figure created by the authors.

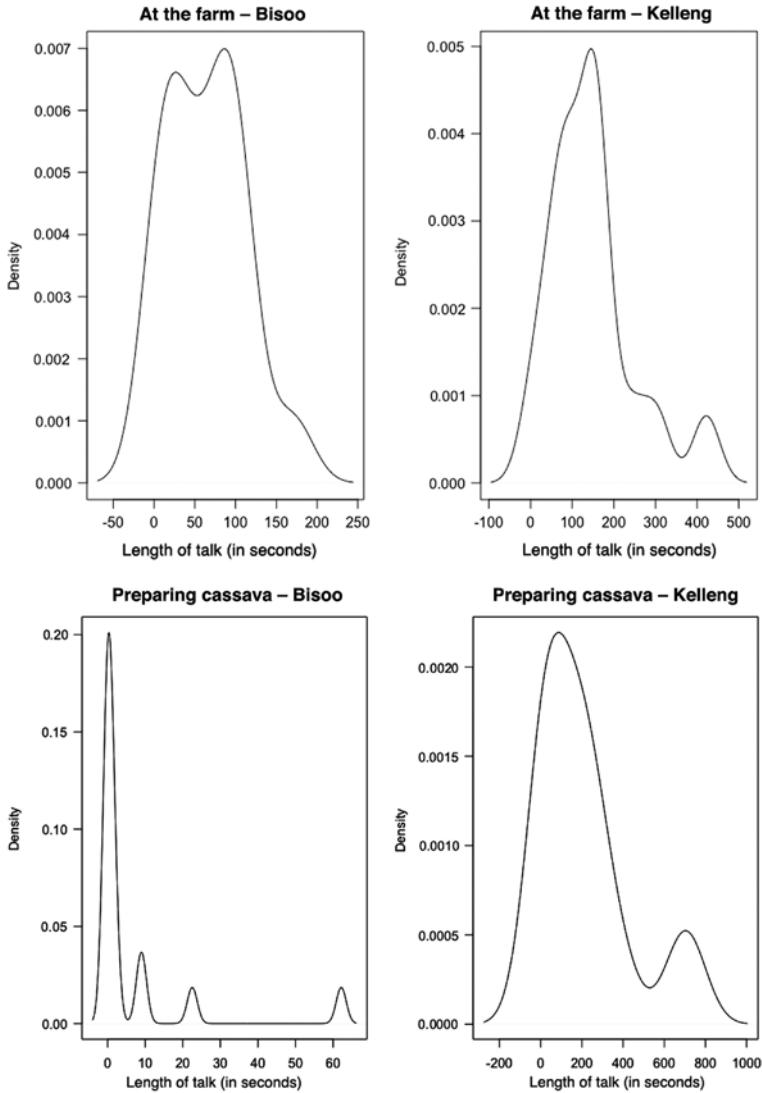
Private affairs are overwhelmingly dominant during farm cultivation, while public affairs are more prevalent in the home during cassava paste preparation. Private affairs occupy even more time during farm work, if we consider that the scales of time measurement in the two plots are different, with 2,000 seconds for farm cultivation versus 1,200 seconds for cassava paste preparation. “Business” and “gossip” occupy less time in both sessions than the most popular topic. However, these two frames have different configurations from one activity to the other: they take up a relatively greater amount of time during farm cultivation than during cassava paste preparation, and there is slightly more business than gossip at the farm and slightly less in the cassava paste preparation.

Figure 4.3 reports the amount of time for which each of the six lects was used in total by the participants, at the farm and in preparing cassava paste. Four of the six lects—Basaa, Bongo, Eton, and Ewondo—are used for less than 500 seconds in each of the recordings, and are therefore not very significant here. The remaining two lects—Bisoo and Kelleng—are the most interesting, with Kelleng being the most common language in both sessions: Kelleng is by far the most used in these conversations among the six lects.

Figure 4.4 uses density plots to present the variation between Kelleng and Bisoo. These plots attempt to reconstruct an underlying probability distribution that can account for the range of observed variation in the data.<sup>5</sup> Kelleng shows distributions that predict a high degree of gradience in turn lengths. By contrast, Bisoo shows a gradient distribution of this kind during farm cultivation but not during cassava paste preparation, where the predicted distribution is much more punctual in nature. What the distribution of these two lects tells us is that Kelleng is used on average for quite some time by each speaker in both social situations.



**Figure 4.3** Graphs showing the length of time (in seconds) for which each of the lects was used in total by the selected speakers at the farm and while preparing cassava paste. *Source:* Figure created by the authors.



**Figure 4.4** Density plot of language usage duration for Bisoo and Kelleng both at the farm (upper half of figure) and during cassava paste preparation (lower half of figure). This is based on the total lengths of time for which each speaker talked about each frame of discourse in Bisoo or in Kelleng while at the farm and during cassava paste preparation, respectively. *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

Bearing in mind that none of the four selected participants is a native speaker of Kelleng, we must modify the idea expressed in section 4 that being a native speaker of language X will trigger a frequent choice of that language. Having three native speakers of Bisoo out of the four selected participants during both sessions has not resulted in Bisoo being used over Kelleng, the local lect.

Of particular interest, however, is the fact that figure 4.3 shows that Bisoo is spoken more at the farm than in the home during cassava paste preparation. One possible reason for this could relate to the fact that each of the two settings is conducive to specific frames of discourse, as we saw earlier; and specific frames might be more frequently discussed in specific lects. It should be remembered that farm cultivation takes place in the fields, where the women enjoy more freedom and group intimacy than when they perform group work in the home. In the latter situation, they may be exposed to the presence and judgment of people who are not peer group members. Family compounds in Kelleng, like in many other African villages, are almost public spaces that, in addition to possibly hosting extended family members, are open to frequent and sometimes unannounced visits. Given this, we might therefore expect to see interesting relationships between the language choices of individuals, and the frames of discourse to which a social situation is conducive. In this connection, we have been interested in investigating what preference speakers have for specific lects, in relation to the frame of discourse in which their turn can be classified.

The plots in figure 4.5 show an uneven distribution in terms of how long each lect is used. Kelleng clearly emerges as the lect that is most used in both sessions, regardless of the frame of discourse under consideration. However, the figures also show that the participants are more likely to use Kelleng in their turns while preparing cassava paste compared with during farming. This may suggest accommodation by the speakers to the code of the group (Giles and Smith 1979; Giles 1980, 1984; Milroy 1981). Accommodation does, of course, presuppose the existence of a social network of which speakers are members or with which they identify. As noted earlier, the speakers involved in preparing cassava paste do belong, in their majority, to the same social network, namely the village women's association. As the videos documenting cassava paste preparation show,<sup>6</sup> though the interaction occurs in a nearly public space, the work takes place in the kitchen, which is located at the back of the main house and does not immediately face the courtyard where men, as well as visitors and passers-by, are frequently found.

However, the same speakers do not perform the same level of accommodation to the local lect when they find themselves in a more intimate situation, such as during farm cultivation. This is an indication of the fact that the dominant and nearly uniform use of Kelleng during cassava preparation is a function not of the appeal of a social network's code but of the selective effect of the social situation on specific frames of discourse. Cassava preparation

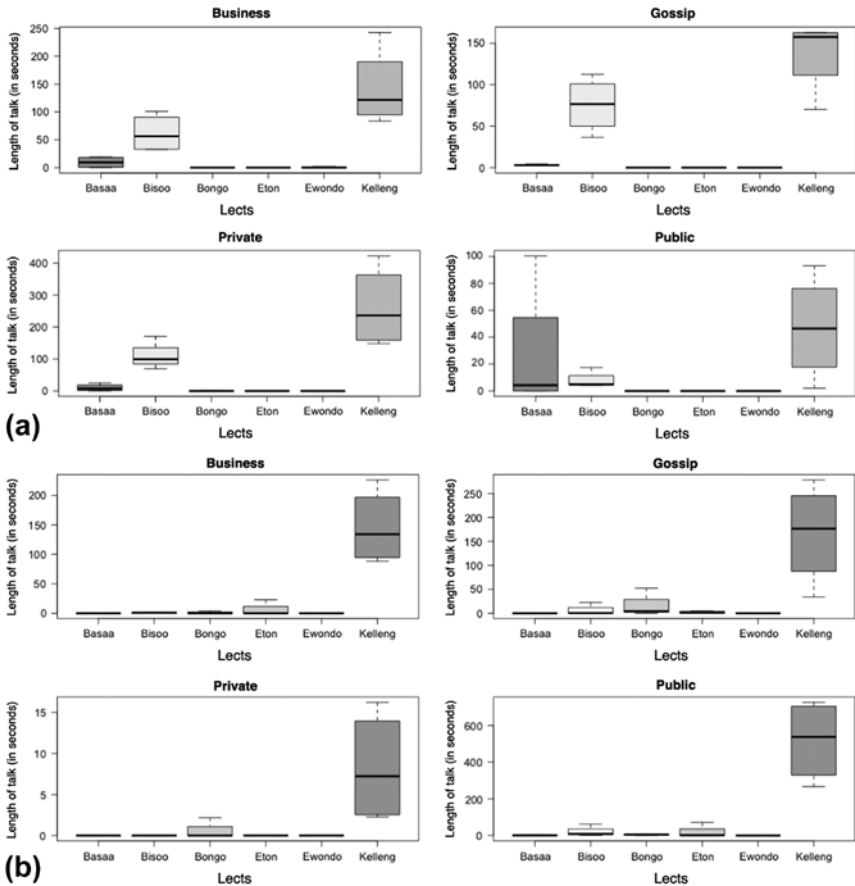


Figure 4.5 Boxplots showing the average total amount of time (in seconds) each speaker spoke in each lect while discussing the various frames of discourse: (a) during farm cultivation, (b) during the preparation of cassava paste. Source: Figure created by the authors.

was described earlier as taking place in an almost public space. As such, the context is not conducive to dwelling on private affairs. Instead, the bulk of the interaction tends to be focused on public affairs and, to a lesser extent, business, as was seen in figure 4.2. This is confirmed in figure 4.5a where there are more outliers in the amounts of time for which speakers used Kelleng, which points to the fact that the choice of this lect is less uniform during farming than during cassava preparation. This situation is further supported by the plots in figure 4.2 where the results are strongly in favor of the “private” frame of discourse while working at the farm.

In figure 4.5a, Basaa emerges as the second most used language for the “public” frame of discourse at the farm. However, the average use of this lect

among the four speakers is very low, and this indicates that Basaa is mostly used by only one speaker. The same is applicable to Bongo in figure 4.5b: only one speaker uses this lect, namely the native speaker of Bongo.

Of the six selected lects, Bisoo is the most iconically marked in the sense that its use is quite strong among the native speakers during farm cultivation, where compliance with the local group's identity language is less compelling. The use of Bisoo during farm cultivation is particularly strong and evenly distributed among speakers in gossiping, while its use is relatively insignificant for public topics.

The most significant result of this study, however, is the predominance and the distribution of Kelleng among participants both for the "public" frame of discourse and in the more public space. Taken together, the frequent use of Kelleng during both farm cultivation and cassava paste preparation shows that the choice of this lect is strongly associated with public affairs, and that it is the most salient in the public space, a space that calls for the performance of group identity and accommodation.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this study, we have sought to understand what factors constrain the language choices of multilingual speakers in the course of naturally occurring interaction. The study was based on conversations held in a rural multilingual setting. Two sessions of group work were video recorded, and the speech production of four non-native speakers of Kelleng were selected for analysis. Two independent variables were chosen for consideration, on the assumption that they might to some degree determine the choice of individual language varieties. In order to test this, we have compared how often the speakers used each lect (i.e., each "named language" according to the local ideology) in two different situations, farm cultivation and cassava paste preparation, and with different frames of discourse. The analysis shows that Kelleng—the local lect—emerges as the most frequent code even in interactions involving non-native Kelleng speakers. The analysis also shows that, within the limits of the five hours of recordings, Kelleng is by far the predominant code in public spaces and when the content of the interaction is related to public issues and in-group business. When the content of the interaction is related to private issues or gossip, Bisoo—the native language of three of the four selected speakers—is used more frequently, at least in the more private space of the farm. These observations lead us to the following conclusions:

- Public identity performance and linguistic accommodation influence language choice when speakers have at their disposal a large language repertoire.



- Communicative events whose content relates to the private life of individuals tend to be conveyed through codes that are in an iconic relationship with the speaker's individual identity.

In the light of the observations made in this chapter, we would suggest that, in addition to expanding the domains of usage for a given language in multilingual settings, revitalization initiatives should also build on emotional factors that can influence language choice. In particular, revitalization endeavors should seek to understand and to address the frames of discourse for which the language to be revitalized is already more frequently used.

## NOTES

1. Thus, French and English are two lects, just as much as the three varieties of Bati discussed here.

2. The native speaker who assisted in the identification of the languages is Gilbert Mbessi Makondo, to whom the authors of this chapter are very grateful.

3. ELAN is a tool for annotating video and audio recordings, developed at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics. Further information can be found at the Language Archive, Nijmegen (<https://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>). Version 5.2 (April 4, 2018) was used for this study.

4. Further details about R can be found at <http://www.R-project.org>.

5. Because density plots are generated in a way that does not take into account the real-world possibilities for the length of a turn, they predict that some turns will be negative in length, even though this is not actually possible. These plots should therefore not be understood as presenting an actual probability distribution for any combination of language, speaker, and frame but, rather, as a tool to visualize the differences across these combinations.

6. The video, audio, and other files are available at <https://elar.soas.ac.uk/Record/MPI1067383>.

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## *Chapter 5*

# **An Ecological Approach to Ethnic Identity and Language Dynamics in a Multilingual Area (Lower Casamance, Senegal)**

Alexander Yao Cobbinah

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

With a very high density of languages and also with high average levels of multilingualism across the region (Ndecky 2011; Juillard 1995; Dreyfus and Juillard 1995; Cobbinah 2010; Lüpke 2016b, 2017; Watson 2015), Casamance is a worldwide hot spot of linguistic diversity and an example of what is described by Lüpke (2016b) as small-scale multilingualism, a type of nonpolyglossic, nonhierarchical multilingualism often encountered in rural areas. New research shows that similar areas of multilingualism exist in other parts of Africa (see Di Carlo 2015, 2016; Good 2013; Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019; Beyer and Schreiber 2013) as well as in other parts of the world (Lüpke 2016b; Lüpke et al. 2018; Ball 2011; François 2012; Singer and Harris 2016; Stenzel 2005). The societies native to Lower Casamance are in their majority what anthropologists refer to as acephalous or egalitarian (Brooks 1993; Baum 1999; Linares 1992), based on political structures that are nonhierarchical, with power being distributed across flat structures rather than concentrated in the hands of one or a few authorities. However, both the linguistic and the political fragmentation are counterbalanced by integrating forces: a high degree of per-capita multilingualism and nested political structures on different levels ranging from households, to quarters, villages, and larger regional alliances that allow small and largely independently acting polities to activate ties to other groups in the form of political alliances and culturally defined larger confederations that constitute cultural as well as linguistic ecologies (on language ecology, see Haugen (2001), Mühlhäusler

(2000), and Mufwene (2001)). Evidence from historical (Mark 2002), anthropological (Crowley 1990; Baum 1999), and linguistic research (Watson 2018b; Goodchild, forthcoming; Goodchild and Weidl, forthcoming; Lüpke 2018) suggests that language has played—and still plays—an important role in establishing and negotiating difference and similarity between various groups, whose survival depends on their integration in culturally justified larger structures that can be mobilized in times of danger.

A variety of data on language use, sociological surveys, and interviews, complemented by data gained through elicitation and staged events, have been collected by the members of the Leverhulme-funded project “Crossroads: Investigating the Unexplored Side of Multilingualism” (2014–2018) in the directly adjacent villages of Djibonker and Brin, as well as the seven villages of the ritual kingdom of Mof Ávvi that cluster around Enampor, located a few miles west of Djibonker and Brin.<sup>1</sup> Of particular interest in the context of language ideology on a regional level were observations made during a male initiation ceremony in July–August 2014, in the villages of Djibonker and Brin. The male initiation ceremony (see section 4.1), usually referred to as *bukut* (or a phonologically related form) in most Joola languages and *rëjkiúb* in Bãinounk Gubêeher, is the defining emblem of the cultural and linguistic ecology at the center of this chapter. It is a highly secretive rite of passage that is held approximately once per generation, every twenty to thirty years, and is a prerequisite for men to fully partake as adults in the political and social life of their community.<sup>2</sup>

I consider the inhabitants of these villages (Djibonker, Brin, and the seven villages of Mof Ávvi, henceforth referred to collectively as the “Crossroads area”) as part of a multilingual and ethnically diverse cultural system that also includes to some extent the villages to the south of Djibonker around Nyasia and Dioher, inhabited by speakers of various lects from the Bayot group. In a wider sense, this system extends westward as far as the Atlantic coast, northward across the Casamance River into the areas of Buluf, Karon, and Fogny, and southward toward and across the Guinea-Bissau border. Among the cultural practices shared by the populations living in this zone (including agriculture, plant use, architecture, and social organization), the *bukut*-type male initiation (see section 4.1 for details) has a central place in defining the ecology. Although its core component, a four- to eight-week seclusion in the sacred forest, is strictly and exclusively accessible to men, the whole population is involved in preparations and communal celebrations surrounding the festivities, which draw large numbers of visitors and family members. Thus, initiation as an institution has a profound impact on political and social structures that also affect women and their social networks and language repertoires.

An example of this can be seen in the case of Suzanne. During the initiation period in Djibonker in July–August 2014, Suzanne, a woman born of

Bainouk parents from Djibonker but who grew up in Dakar and had never lived in Djibonker, started using Bainouk Gubëeher (see section 3.2) in interactions after having participated in daily cooking sessions for the initiates with the women of the neighborhood. Although she had regularly visited Djibonker previously and had some exposure to Gubëeher, I had never witnessed her uttering more than isolated words in Gubëeher and she did not seem confident enough to use it as a language of conversation. But a month of being integrated into a network of Gubëeher-speaking women engaged in a common activity improved her Gubëeher skills to a point where she used it confidently in conversation with a command of morphology and syntax she certainly did not possess before. The point is that initiation provides a platform to spend extended periods of time—usually the duration of the festivities is four to six weeks, in some villages even longer—in contexts where the identity language of the location and also a host of other regional languages spoken by outside family members or visitors are used on a regular basis. At the same time, this period of intense cohabitation naturally strengthens ties with family members or acquaintances who live outside the local circles and use other languages in their day-to-day lives. Strictly local identities are effectively downplayed, while aspects of regionally shared culture and shared secrets are foregrounded. The scope of who is considered “in” and who is considered “out” is widened to a large radius that includes most of Lower Casamance from Ziguinchor to the sea and parts of northern Guinea-Bissau.

In the remainder of the chapter I will detail the historical and linguistic situation of this geographic area, with a particular focus on the Crossroads area, and describe the dynamics of the various levels on which ethnic identity is played out and the effects this has on the language ecology as a whole and the individual languages associated with it.

## 2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### 2.1 Lower Casamance as an Instance of an African Internal Frontier Society

The coastal areas of Upper Guinea, including Casamance, have long been the periphery of the kingdoms and empires of the Sahel, populated by loosely bound trading networks composed of various groups operating across vast distances (Brooks 1993; Bühnen 1994). This state of affairs corresponds to Kopytoff’s (1987) definition of frontier societies, a type of society prevalent in Africa that is characterized by its contrast with the core political entities from which such societies have broken away. Frontier societies are noncentralized, often clan-based, political structures that are ethnically and linguistically highly diverse and display multilingual patterns.

The fragmentation of Lower Casamance's landscape into networks of salt-water rivers, mangrove swamps, and forests, which has allowed its residents to considerably restrict access to outsiders, is matched by a high degree of linguistic and political fragmentation: the linguistic, political, and natural dimensions are interconnected. The inaccessibility of the terrain has repeatedly been turned into an asset in controlling strangers' political influence on the area. This has allowed the inhabitants of Lower Casamance to retain cultural characteristics (e.g., linguistic diversity, local religious and cultural traditions, forms of agriculture, and material culture) despite long-standing contact with potentially hostile outsiders such as Portuguese traders and slavers from the fifteenth century, Mande jihadists in the nineteenth century, and French colonizers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Baum 1999; Bühnen 1994; Hawthorne 2003; Mark 1985; Roche 1985). Rather than conquering the Senegambian coast and reproducing European sociocultural patterns on it, early Portuguese and other European traders and settlers have integrated socially and culturally, laying the foundations for hybrid Euro-African societies (Mark 2002; Mark and da Silva Horta 2011).

## **2.2 Ethnicities of the Region through Time**

The establishment of European trading settlements along the West African coast from the fifteenth century onward further solidified the frontier condition of the area by turning the coastal populations into brokers between a European sphere of influence and the Sahelian empires further inland. Successions of cultural and linguistic assimilation of large numbers of autochthones into newcomer populations have profoundly shaped Casamance societies (Mark 1992, 2002; Baum 1999; Bühnen 1994).

Historical evidence suggests that the Upper Guinea Coast has for centuries been a highly multiethnic and multilingual area, characterized by complex, multiple, and highly fluid identities based on a variety of criteria (Mark 2002; Mark and da Silva Horta 2011; Hawthorne and Nafafé 2016). As a consequence of the long history of constant political and social upheaval,<sup>3</sup> the core components of a Western understanding of ethnicity—language and genetic or biological descent—have historically been and still are for the inhabitants of the Upper Guinea Coast only two of a whole range of possible parameters defining ethnic identity, including material culture, lifestyle, profession, and clan identity, as well as other religious and political factors (Mark 2002; Mark and da Silva Horta (2011, 52–4)).

It has to be kept in mind that the ethnic labels used in the past are in some cases altogether different from present-day categorizations, and this is the case for “Joola” as well as for the labels “Baïnounk/Bañun/Baynunk” and “Manding/Mandinka.” The current interpretation of these terms as ethnic in

a European essentialist sense, which is largely based on linguistic criteria, is a nineteenth-century innovation, even though the terms may have been in use with different connotations earlier (De Jong 1995; Nugent 2008; Mark 1992). For example, before the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authors would have used a variety of terms such as “Arriate,” “Flup,” or related forms to refer to populations and languages that are nowadays understood as Joola. However, it is not clear to what extent these different practices of nomenclature across time (e.g., Joola vs. Arriate or Flup) are congruent. We have to assume that they are not and that other criteria defining these groups and membership in them were applied.

According to Mark (2002, 81, 85), Vintang, an area on the southern bank of the middle reaches of the Gambia River, had a cosmopolitan population as early as the seventeenth century. In places like it and others in the Upper Guinea area, people who would today be assigned the ethnic labels of Mandinka, Bañounk, Portuguese, and Joola cohabited, and the population included Jews, Catholics, and Muslims, as well as followers of local religions. Integration between these populations had already progressed so far down to the personal and family level that the resulting culture, characterized by high degrees of mutual assimilation, is described by Mark (2002, 84) as “mixed.”

As Hawthorne (2003, 12) and Baum (1999) make clear, group identity in the area of the Upper Guinea Coast has most probably never been tied to primarily linguistic parameters, but was based fundamentally on very small-scale entities, such as villages or village wards, which were the basic units of solidarity. Religious artifacts and practices, as well as material culture, were passed on between allied lineages, wards, or villages by travelers and migrating segments of the population, so that people speaking the same language or even inhabiting the same village would not necessarily share these traits, let alone a common group identity. As a consequence, genetic and linguistic umbrella constructs such as “the Balant” or “the Joola” were largely irrelevant in Senegambia before the nineteenth century (Hawthorne 2003).

Prolonged patterns of migration and the merging and splitting of populations eventually led to the diffusion of cultural artifacts, practices, and innovations over large areas, creating compatibility and similarity across a large area irrespective of ethnicity understood in the narrow sense modeled on Western concepts of a genetic and linguistic community within a nation-state. Temporary or stable alliances would be made with people in close proximity, and this would foster multilingualism based on the need to communicate with alliance partners speaking a certain language. Multilingual repertoires and multiple identities allowed actors to swiftly adapt to changing circumstances and shifting constellations of power and influence and were therefore an



invaluable asset, maximizing the speed at which innovations could be integrated and translating directly into access to material wealth and assurances of personal well-being.

### 2.3 Traditional Forms of Sociopolitical Organization

Political power in Djibonker, as is typical of many places in Lower Casamance, is highly distributed; the position of *chef de village* (village chief) is a colonial invention that was established in Casamance by the French colonial authorities in the early twentieth century (Méguelle 2012). The precolonial political structures are based on councils, and relevant decisions are reached in meetings at all levels of society—the family, the household, the ward, the extended family, the quarter, the village, the village youth, the elders, the men, and the women—each of which has its associations and ritualized ways of making decisions and solving conflicts.

The institution of the rain king—still alive in Oussouye and Mlomp, although vacant at the moment in Enampor (i.e., in Mof Ávvi)—has symbolic and spiritual power but no means of enforcing political power (Baum 1999). The rain king can, however, be instrumental in keeping the peace and in mediating in cases of conflict between populations that act independently (e.g., if they belong to different villages or wards) but are under joint spiritual jurisdiction. The kingdom of Mof Ávvi itself is held together not only by a common language but also by spiritual ties personified by the rain king of Enampor. The villages of Brin and Djibonker can be considered spiritual vassals of Mof Ávvi, as Djibonker used to have a spiritual “embassy,” now in disuse, in form of a spirit shrine (*karik ewwi*) that was dedicated to affairs related to the rain king:

Unam hani edëeti bimbi guroŋ a karik ewi. Umër edëegëkërëx gëdëeti acóogun igini andëëkëx gumukuna ha karik ewi an alóbeenen honi umër ewúlobim a gumukunahanam. Gëtijini gajuñi imereŋ aŋgu andëëk andëëk amukuna aŋga gubëeher. (Charles Acebo Sagna, Djibonker. DJI291015AC)<sup>4</sup>

“The king [of Mof Ávvi] if he comes here [to Djibonker] it is not to the shrine of Karik Ewi [lit. the king’s shrine/the rain shrine]. He comes here and he assembles those who are responsible for the shrine and he tells them what he saw there in his ceremony. Afterwards when he has left, those ones they go there [to Karik Ewi] and do the ceremony in Gubëeher.”

The use in Djibonker of Joola Banjal, the language of Mof Ávvi, for the genre of songs is similarly an indicator of the cultural and spiritual hegemony of Mof Ávvi over Djibonker. Songs composed in Gubëeher are a recent

phenomenon of the last few decades, and most composers of these songs are women, addressing or commenting on social issues, which makes the songs unsuitable for cultural purposes that are of a spiritual nature, such as male initiation (Edouard Békot Sagna, personal communication).

### 3. LANGUAGES AND IDENTITIES IN LOWER CASAMANCE

A variety of languages coexist in Lower Casamance in stable and historically developed multilingual and multiethnic patterns: there are languages from the Mande phylum (Mandinka and Soninke); Bak languages (many varieties and languages from the Joola and Manjaku clusters, Balant, and Bayot); other Atlantic languages such as the Baïnounk languages, Pulaar, and Wolof; as well as French- and the Portuguese-based creoles native to Ziguinchor and Guinea-Bissau (here referred to as Kriolu). These are summarized in table 5.1. Note that the genetic classification of Atlantic languages is still controversial. I adopt the proposition of Segerer and Pozdniakov (forthcoming) that classifies Baïnounk languages together with Wolof, Pulaar, and Seereer as North Atlantic and the Bak languages together with Bijogo as a distinct subgroup of Atlantic. The naming of Joola lects is not uncontroversial either, as language names based on linguistic judgments do not always coincide with locally used labels (see section 3.3). Many of the lects spoken in Casamance have not yet been described, so that language references made by speakers of a specific lect based on a place name (e.g., Youtou) cannot always be associated with a variety of Joola known to linguists.

#### 3.1 Lingua Franca Languages

The use of Wolof as a lingua franca across the entire territory of Senegal, and increasingly in Casamance, is a rather recent phenomenon that has accelerated

**Table 5.1 Languages of lower Casamance, arranged by language groups**

<i>Language Groups</i>	<i>Named Languages</i>
Bak Joola	Kaasa, Fogny, Banjal or Eegimaa, Kwaatay, Karon, Buluf, Kujireray, Her, etc.
Bak (other)	Manjaku, Mankanya, Pepel, Balant, Bayot
Bainounk	Guñaamolo, Gubëeher, Gujaher, etc.
North Atlantic	Pulaar, Wolof
Others	French, Kriolu, Mandinka, Soninke

*Source:* Table created by the author.

since independence (Dreyfus and Juillard 1995). Other large languages like Mandinka and Pulaar still function as *lingua francas* on a regional level in some areas within Casamance but have not been observed to be widely used within the Crossroads area.

Some of the larger lects<sup>5</sup> of Joola have a wider distribution and are used for intergroup communication, most notably Joola Fogny and Joola Kaasa in the western parts of Casamance, on the north and south banks, respectively, of the Casamance River. Most inhabitants of the Crossroads area have at least a passive knowledge of these regionally important Joola lects.

The Portuguese-based creole of Casamance and Guinea-Bissau, Kriolu, is not very prominent within the Crossroads area, but there are some elderly speakers, reflecting the importance of Kriolu as a *lingua franca* in Ziguinchor in the past.

### 3.2 Local, Patrimonial Languages

Local languages, such as all of the Baïnounk languages and some of the Joola lects (Kwaatay, Kujireray, and Karon), are usually reserved for in-group communication and rarely learned by outsiders. They are usually associated with a specific locality—in Lüpke’s (2016a, 2017) terminology, each of these languages is the “patrimonial language” that via patrimonial deixis comes to express the “identity” of that place. While the patrimonial language is the language of the founders, giving access to land rights and ancestors (i.e., the patrimony), it does not necessarily express the total linguistic identity of a place, since strangers are not totally erased—they are just not reflected in the patrimonial deixis. This is different from ancestral territorialization models, which treat the ancestral inhabitants as linguistically homogeneous (see Lüpke and Watson 2019; Watson 2018b).

The Crossroads area, as defined here, has three patrimonial languages. The patrimonial language of Djibonker is (Baïnounk) Gubëeher. Once again, it is important to note that this does not mean that all inhabitants of Djibonker speak it, nor that it is the only language spoken in the village. Gubëeher is, however, the anchor of local culture and religious activity and its speakers consider themselves the autochthones and landowners of Djibonker. The identity language of the village of Brin, immediately adjacent to Djibonker, is a language from the Joola group called Kujireray (or also known as Kulunay), which is specific to Brin and which most inhabitants of Brin speak. Natives of the Mof Ávvi area mostly identify as Joola and speak a variety usually referred to as Joola Banjal or Eegimaa (see Goodchild, forthcoming). Joola languages and Baïnounk languages are not closely related genetically and are not mutually intelligible.

### 3.3 The Case of the Joola Languages and the Difficulty of Establishing “Language” Boundaries

Naming and distinguishing between languages, especially the varieties of Joola, is problematic for various reasons, reflected in the fact that linguists have come to very different estimates as to how many Joola languages can be distinguished, ranging from five to eighteen (see Sapir 1971; Carlton and Rand 1993; Barry 1987; Segerer and Pozdniakov, forthcoming). Recent research suggests that the linguistic label “Joola” might not refer to a family of distinct and nameable varieties at all, but to an ensemble of linguistic practices that has prototypical traits (Watson 2018b, forthcoming; Goodchild, forthcoming; Cobbinah et al. 2016). Instead of viewing the Joola lects as closed systems with fixed boundaries, it is more appropriate to consider them, in line with François’s (2014) unbounded perspective on dialect clusters, as “feature bundles without clear demarcations, and with uneven distribution of features or clusters of features over spaces and speakers” (Lüpke 2019). Active and passive users of “Joola” often have highly developed skills in adapting the local or regional Joola lects in their repertoire to match or differ from that of their interlocutor, creating hybrid forms and ad hoc as well as stable vehicular varieties (Watson 2018b).

The following example, a playful dialogue between two women, illustrates this practice. The women are, like most speakers of lects of the Joola continuum, skillful in signaling alignment or differentiation of their speech to their interlocutors who use a different Joola lect. Here, speaker RD uses traits typically associated with LT’s Joola lect (Banjal) in order to make fun of her, even though in other contexts she would be more likely to use her own lect (Kujireray) when conversing with LT:

*LT:* Aw ñer ban ufogi tay?

“So where will you be buried?”

*RD:* butëm ni bage

“I’m not from Butëm.”

joice aw may gula gulet ro sicup bare bare

“And you Joice, you have no buttocks in there, just nails.” (Watson 2018a)

The strategic switching between lects of Joola has facilitated large-scale borrowing of phonological, semantic, morphological, and syntactic traits to the point where it has become difficult for linguists to group them according to genetic criteria (see Segerer and Pozdniakov, forthcoming) or even to establish clear-cut distinctions between some of these lects (see Watson (2018b, 2019) for a detailed discussion). Migration and historical patterns of inter-Joola borrowing have contributed to the difficulty of isolating distinct varieties of Joola

that can be named unequivocally. This hybrid linguistic practice fits well with the ethnic fluidity characteristic of Casamance and with the flexibility allowed for through the multiple and shifting alliances that are a defining feature of Lower Casamance political organization, as mentioned in section 2.2.

### **3.4 Multilingualism and Linguistic Repertoires in the Crossroads Area and Beyond**

Multilingualism in Lower Casamance is nonpolyglossic (Lüpke 2016b), with little or no hierarchical layering of the languages involved, and its function is largely indexical, that is, language choice is used by the speaker as a tool to situate themselves socially or politically (Di Carlo 2016; Watson 2018b; Lüpke 2016a).

I will illustrate the extent of multilingual practice in the village of Djibonker, which is representative in this respect of many locations in Lower Casamance, by presenting the sociolinguistic survey data of Jacqueline Biagui, who lives in Djibonker. Her impressive self-reported repertoire contains twelve languages that she claims to speak to different degrees and the knowledge of which mirrors her migration history: Wolof, French, Gubêeher, Joola Kaasa, Joola Fogny, Joola Eegimaa, Joola Kujireray, Joola Kwaatay, Seereer, Mandinka, Kriolu, and Pulaar. With the inhabitants of her house, including her partner, sons, nieces, nephews, and her cousin, she uses five of these on a regular basis (Joola Kwaatay, Joola Fogny, French, Wolof, and Gubêeher). Although all members of the household, except Jacqueline's partner, are related to each other by blood, they have a variety of ethnic and religious identities and very different biographies and residential trajectories. Almost everybody in the household speaks and understands Gubêeher, but some individuals choose to use other languages in their interactions.

Jacqueline is by no means exceptional within Djibonker. For example, the household of the Sagna family, Jacqueline's next-door neighbors, had between ten and thirteen members at the time of inquiry (2010), and they used French, Wolof, Gubêeher, and a variety of Joola lects (Banjal, Fogny, and Youtou) between them in various constellations. Within the Crossroads area, but also within the larger cultural and linguistic ecology of Lower Casamance, multilingual practices within households are widespread. Marrying and adopting children within the larger ecology, across linguistic borders, increases the linguistic diversity of households, and this is often passed on to the younger generation, who as a rule grow up speaking a variety of languages from their earliest childhood. All inhabitants of Djibonker whose linguistic repertoire has been recorded report mastery of at least one Joola variety, often acquired during childhood through contact with Joola-speaking family members, neighbors, or people from surrounding villages.

Linguistic repertoires are a result of an individual's heritage, migration history, and other personal factors. The reasons for using specific languages in specific situations with specific people can vary due to various factors, such as the inclusion or exclusion of bystanders, politeness in accommodating to group dynamics or respected people, habit, and so on. For an individual growing up in Djibonker, for example, it is a reflection of the communicative needs within the larger ecology to speak various local languages (Baïnouk Gubëeher, Joola Kujireray, Joola Banjal, and Bayot) as well as regional and national languages that are of importance at the regional level in the context of the regionally integrated cultural-linguistic ecology of Lower Casamance, such as Joola Fogny, Joola Kaasa, Wolof, and French. The use of small local languages is protected through their being part of a large linguistic repertoire, which keeps them from being replaced by larger lingua francas (see section 4.3 for detailed discussion).

I use the following example, adapted from Weidl (2019), from yet another highly multilingual household in Djibonker to demonstrate the ease with which speakers rapidly switch languages within a conversation, in this case reflecting patterns of language use that have been established with specific people. As is often the case in Djibonker, the two women of the household (coded here as LOG and KS2) have married in from outside the village and have acquired Baïnouk Gubëeher since their arrival in the village. However, KS2 frequently addresses her children in her native variety of Joola Fogny, her patrimonial language, and as a result they have grown up trilingually from birth (in Baïnouk, Wolof, and Joola), adding French once they started visiting preschool. In this example, we witness the use by KS2 of Baïnouk Gubëeher, Wolof, and Joola when talking to her children (LAM and JCM), her brother-in-law (JPS), and a family friend who frequently visits them (IPS). For more details on this example and the patterns of multilingual communication observed within this specific household in Djibonker, see Weidl (2019) and Goodchild and Weidl (forthcoming). In the transcription, *Baïnouk Gubëeher* is represented in italics; Joola in roman type; Wolof is in italics and underlined; and French is underlined.

Multilingual conversation, Djibonker (DJI040217MW; adapted from Weidl (2019, 241))

*LOG (to children): ukaan dëdú*

“put them there” (Baïnouk Gubëeher)

*KS2 (to LOG): emukenoruti*

“this is not sorted out yet” (Joola)

*KS2 (to LAM): iseni ebol yay uye*

“I gave you which bowl, the one over there” (Joola)

- KS2 (to children):* úwúlen úwúlen mun usenoom ebolai ebol yékóon  
 “put it down, put it down and you give me the bowl, there is only one bowl” (Joola)
- JPS (to all):* orange orange legi  
 “orange [Senegalese phone company] orange at the moment” (Wolof)  
dey deplane ññi  
 “it makes people not fulfill their plans” (Wolof, French)
- IPS (to JPS):* orange moom mooy loolu  
 “orange that is what it does” (Wolof)
- KS2 (to children):* ulax úděěk unooh  
 “take it and sit down” (Baïnouk Guběeher)  
 gunohuro [incomprehensible]  
 “if you do not sit [incomprehensible]” (Baïnouk Guběeher)
- KS2 (to JPS):* mu ne ko bilahi  
 “He told him, I swear to god” (Wolof)
- KS2 (to JCM):* jean-sena uwulol wai  
 “Jean-Cena give him some” (Joola)

In Djibonker, as in all other parts of the Crossroads area and probably beyond, attitudes toward multilingualism are very positive, as reflected in individuals’ large language repertoires and strong tendencies for linguistic accommodation and code-switching, and multilingualism is generally perceived as an asset. Specifically in Djibonker, knowledge of as many languages as possible is a source of pride and even ideologically constructed as an essential component of “Baïnoukness” (see Lüpke 2010). This contrasts with some other communities, where the self-image of members is monolingual, despite multilingual practices being equally attested; this is the case for Mof Ávvi, for example, as described by Goodchild (2019, forthcoming).

### 3.5 Identities Based on Different Geographical Ranges

It is almost a cliché within Senegal and beyond that the inhabitants of Casamance are deeply immersed in practices of religion, architecture, social organization, and so on that are described as “traditional” (i.e., local, non-Western, non-modern)—although many of these “traditions” are actually constantly modernized and adapted to very contemporary needs and circumstances, or have been profoundly shaped by the contact over centuries with European traders, settlers, and raiders (see Hawthorne 2003; De Jong 2007). The regional and local ideologies accessible to the Casamançais are characterized by fluidity and multiplicity and based on flexible conceptions of ethnicity that have a long history in this part of West Africa. This enables actors to realign with or distance themselves from other communities

whenever necessary or opportune. As will be shown through the example of Djibonker, the inhabitants of Lower Casamance very deftly shift between identities based on three broadly defined geographical levels—the micro-local, the regional, and the national—in a highly strategic manner in order to cater for their needs by drawing various sets of boundaries between ethnic groups and languages, and, in some cases, boundaries that seem to conflict with each other.

### *3.5.1 The Local Level*

By reverting to highly local linguistic or cultural differences, which are not generally known to or used by outsiders, actors can index their difference from neighboring populations (see Di Carlo (2015, 2016) and Lüpke (2016a) for a discussion of the indexical use of languages in a multilingual repertoire). These local differences can be invoked in order to express firstcomer rights to land and resources, and this is reflected in the use of language in religious ceremonies. The language of prayer at holy shrines, for example, is usually the one associated with the founding clan of the village, ward, or lineage, as expressed in the following:

Ubëëxer ëlóbuni gubëëxer mata ani ilóbne buyenka ñamboshënitó. Duñonj kum gulób gukooren anju ulóbëla anja uboshen. Hëbëëxer gimbilóbëlaho. Bëmër imaline num guhupox siruun mata fi iyeni ñamboshen inguna uñonj num gubëëxer an ulób anja imerej. (Charles Acebo Sagna, Djibonker. DJI291015AC)

“The Ubëëher [person from Djibonker] will speak Gubëëher [at the shrine], because as I have said, it is about our ancestors. You wouldn’t use an outsider language to talk to your family. We speak Gubëëher. This is why, when we pour at the shrine, we say that our ancestors dwell there, so you’ll speak Gubëëher to them.”

### *3.5.2 The Regional Level*

The regional level, symbolized by shared cultural practices such as male initiation, is much more inclusive in character, creating cohesion between communities across a larger area. By stressing shared features and simultaneously downplaying cultural and linguistic differences, small communities can define themselves as part of a larger whole, while at the same time being able to maintain their difference by reverting to micro-local definitions of identity and language when necessary. Historically, this would have been relevant for forging (and dissolving) alliances in times of war, and for strengthening otherwise vulnerable small communities through association with other small communities, for example in the pooling of resources and manpower to defend against outside threats and ensure food surpluses.



### 3.5.3 *The National Level: Essentialist Identities*

Actors in Casamance are also well versed in and aware of discourses and activities that clearly belong to the sphere of the nation-state and the essentialist ideologies connected with it. “Essentialist” is used here as a term denoting those ideologies that consider there are fixed relations between a language, an ethnicity, and a culture, and treat these as being part of the essence of a person. On the national level, alliances are constructed with communities sharing essentialist labels but not necessarily cultural traits, mainly in order to guarantee visibility on the national linguistic marketplace where linguistic rights are negotiated.

### 3.5.4 *The Layered Nature of Identities*

Essentialist and local ideologies of identity construction have been well described elsewhere (see Cobbinah et al. 2016; Lüpke 2016a, 2017), so in what follows I will focus on the description of the regional aspects of identity, represented by one of its most powerful emblems, the male initiation. However, understanding the layered nature of the way in which linguistic and ethnic difference or similarity is constructed and manipulated is crucial for analyzing observations that would otherwise seem contradictory or nonsensical. Thus, before discussing these regional identities (see section 4), I will briefly illustrate the impact of the three levels on how a Gubëeher-speaking person from Djibonker might identify in different contexts using examples and scenarios based on observations made in the field.

Acting in a local context, a Baïnounk-identifying person from Djibonker would probably construct themselves as an Ubëeher (pl. Ñambëeher), a person from Djibonker (implying a speaker of Gubëeher), and would place great emphasis on the difference between Ñambëeher and members of neighboring populations. I have collected various accounts of wars, raids, and other types of violent conflict or competition between people from Djibonker and either Brin or Mof Ávvi, with such events continuing until relatively recently.

However, this construed difference, which is reflected in the linguistic distance between Gubëeher and the languages spoken around Djibonker, is conspicuously absent when looking at cultural traits like agriculture, religion, and material culture. In fact, despite the shows of difference, Djibonker is totally integrated regionally on a social and a cultural level, and Ñambëeher happily downplay or background their particularity when traveling regionally (as I have witnessed several times), priding themselves on being able to adapt linguistically to almost anywhere in Lower Casamance.

The ties with other “Baïnounk” groups, and indeed the use of the label “Baïnounk” in the first place, only become relevant on the national level, when the Ñambëeher and others join forces to campaign for official recognition and

language rights. Here they are adapting to the prevalent essentialist ideologies used in government circles for the definition of languages in the national constitution. There is no correlate of an umbrella term equivalent to “Baïnouk” in any of the languages that are Baïnouk from a linguistic point of view, and the various populations have almost no regular social contact between their members. On the national level, however, concerted efforts to codify “the Baïnouk language” bring activists and supporters from otherwise unconnected groups together to defend a “Baïnouk” identity and common culture, even while everyone involved is aware that a common language as such simply does not exist—there are such massive differences in vocabulary and grammar between the languages of different “Baïnouk” groups that it is impossible for them to understand each other’s languages. The lobby group BOREPAB (Bureau d’organisation de recherches et d’études du patrimoine baïnouk), founded in the early 1980s, draws mostly on historical accounts to conjure a common past in the face of the lack of a shared present (Bühnen 1994; Lüpke 2010). When in Dakar, outside of language rights campaigns and folkloristic carnivals, I have overheard Ñambëeher even waive their “Baïnoukness” altogether and state that they are Joola, describing their language as Baïnouk-Joola, knowing well that the distinctions that are relevant on a local level are irrelevant to their interlocutors, who are probably only vaguely aware of local definitions of identity meaningful in Casamance.

### **3.6 The Flexibility of Linguistic Identities**

Long-standing discrepancies in counting and cataloging languages, as well as in establishing their genetic relationships, can be reevaluated in light of this extended view of how actors strategically use the various layers of identity based on different geographical reaches to apply different levels of granularity, either naming and distinguishing—and defining—linguistic varieties on the basis of almost each individual village or clustering them together into quite large entities with considerable internal variation. The crucial point is that a local lect may sometimes be considered a discrete and nameable language, while at other times it is not, even in the terminology of the speakers themselves, depending on their strategic goals of creating identification with or difference from other communities. The discrepancies in the naming and counting of Joola lects mentioned in section 3.3 testifies to this state of affairs.

Another notorious point of dispute among both locals and researchers is the geographic origin of populations or cultural features (dances, ceremonies, material culture, etc.). The Kumpo masquerade dance, for example, has been variously considered as being of Joola or of Baïnouk origin (Girard 1965; De Jong 1999). In fact, of course, the attribution of the dance to specific groups

might change depending on whether a strategy of foregrounding cohesion among groups or one of emphasizing differences between groups is at play.

All of these conundrums dissolve when one keeps in mind that the use of labels and the drawing of boundaries is always dependent on the specific context and the strategic use of a specific conception of identity; this allows seemingly conflicting notions to coexist. The strategic use of ethnic and linguistic affiliation through the use of fluid, flexible, and multiple ethnicities is historically attested in the Casamance region. This ethnic flexibility has encouraged linguistic flexibility, which is crucial for strategic reorientation by enabling actors to adapt linguistically to various groups or clients. I argue that it also provides ecological niches and vital functions for small and locally restricted languages to survive, notably strengthening claims of land rights based on knowledge of patrimonial languages; spiritual dominance is often established by tying ancestral languages to the land via spirit shrines and the ancestors that inhabit them.

#### 4. REGIONAL ECOLOGIES

The linguistic identities defended on a local level (usually inherited from the father and defined by birthplace and lineage) have the purpose of connecting people to their patrimonial identity and they are used strategically in order to index difference from other neighboring groups. The regional identities, on the other hand, group people of different languages and villages together—or construct them as speakers of the same language and practitioners of the same traditions—under culturally or spiritually defined superstructures. These superstructures include the rain kingdoms (see section 2.3), which structure villages into larger spiritually defined entities on an extended local level. Larger regional cohesion is provided by the common practice of male initiation of the *bukut* type (see De Jong 2007; Baum 1999; Mark 1992). The cyclically held initiation festivals are held once a generation (approximately every twenty to thirty years) and are timed in relation to each other, following a certain geographic order. Initiation festivities are attended by guests from the whole region, who have access to public rituals in the village but also to the sacred forests. The sharing of secrets establishes a connection among the participating populations by erecting a wall of taboo between them, as insiders, and outsiders. From the perspective of the Crossroads area, the outsiders par excellence are the Mandinka or any population that is (or is perceived to be) under the influence of Mandinka language or culture. The Joola-dominated cultural space in the west of Ziguinchor—with *bukut*-type male initiation, egalitarian societies, and strong elements of traditional religion—is opposed to a Mandinka-dominated sphere to the east with a predominantly Muslim

population and the masked dance of the Kankuran as an emblematic cultural trait (see De Jong 2007).

The existence of these regional superstructures that unite smaller populations with different languages and narrowly defined ethnic labels has already been recognized for Casamance by historians and anthropologists. For example, Brooks (1993) discusses regional trade networks, Mark (2002) describes fluid identities, Hawthorne (2003) considers the ethnogenesis of the Balant, and Baum (1999) writes about regional integration in the history of the Esuulaluu region. Indeed, Hawthorne (2010) explicitly attributes the ease with which people deported as slaves from the Upper Guinea Coast to the Amazon region of Brazil reconstituted themselves as a new ethnic group to preexisting cultural similarities and regional identities that already existed in the homeland.

#### 4.1 The *Bukut* Confederation of Western Lower Casamance

The people of Djibonker share most (if not all) aspects of material culture and cultural practices with their immediate neighbors and, to some extent, with some of their more distant neighbors—all of whom would in essentialist terms be classified as either Joola or Bayot—rather than with other Bañounk populations such as the Ñanjaher living to the east of Ziguinchor. The people cohabiting this culturally coherent zone are either fluent in each other's languages or have established lingua francas. Their traditions and ritual calendars are aligned to each other, and they interact closely through marriage and mutual visits. The villages and kingdoms of the area resemble a confederation, in which the smaller entities form a larger whole but are not ranked according to prestige or political power.

The wider cultural ecology to which Djibonker belongs is best embodied in the institution of male initiation (*rëñkùb* in Gubëeher, *bukut* in Joola). *Bukut*-type initiation is today practiced by most of the communities inhabiting western Lower Casamance—it is not identified with any specific local ethnic group. Acquaintances and family from other parts of Casamance and even beyond can participate in it. The main events of the initiation ceremony occur when the male participants enter the sacred forest and when they exit from it, at which times there are lavish feasts and singing, dancing, and drumming involving thousands of visitors. The sacred forests are patches of untouched land in or around villages—ideally situated some distance from the nearest houses—where the initiates spend the duration of the event in total seclusion from the outside world, for between one and two months. Some sacred forests are said to have been used as military headquarters for the guerrilla fight against the French occupation, and one of the largest sacred forests of Djibonker is still called *état major* (military headquarters). The conveying of values

such as discipline, righteousness, and a work ethic, as well as the teaching of taboo knowledge around sexuality and death, are generally known to be central to the event. However, details of any activities in the forest are kept strictly secret, and during the period of seclusion, contact between initiates and the uninitiated, especially women, is severely forbidden and believed to have extremely severe consequences. The initiation is a rite of passage that enables young men to take part in the political organization of their community—by giving them a voice in village meetings, for example—and it also prepares them for marriage.

An older form of male initiation called *kahat* is, according to sources in Djibonker, still practiced in some parts of Lower Casamance that are predominantly inhabited by people identifying as Joola Kaasa, in villages in the area around Oussouye and Mlomp. This form of initiation has shorter periods of seclusion for the initiates and the separation between initiates and noninitiates is much less strict than it is for *bukut* (Baum 1999). The reasons for the shift from *kahat* to *bukut* are unknown, though some researchers hypothesize that the more elaborate and secretive *bukut* might have spread as a reaction to colonial expansion and the need to unite and militarize young men (Girard (1969, 105)). Roche (1985, 39) dates the appearance of *bukut* as a reaction to colonial dominance to as late as the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas Baum (1999, 187) provides a list of names of people who underwent *bukut*-type initiation from the Esuulaluu area north of Oussouye that goes back nine generations, on the basis of which he calculates that *bukut* replaced *kahat* at some point in the late eighteenth century. He suggests that the change might be related to the extended control it allows over the male population through longer seclusion periods, a preference for the surgical aspects of circumcision, a separation of male and female spiritual power, and the disengagement of newcomer populations of the time from a more autochthonous stratum of society that was associated specifically with *kahat* (Baum (1999, 102)).

The community in which *bukut* originated and from which it spread out is unknown. Baum (1999, 101) reports oral history sources that claim that it was brought to the Esuulaluu area by Joola visitors from the Mof Ávvi kingdom, but that it might have Mandinka or Manjaku origins.

As witnessed during the *bukut* initiation festivities held in Djibonker and Brin in July and August 2014, the initiation is today a cultural institution with a strong focus on regional integration, tying together populations living within a vast area extending west from Ziguinchor to the Atlantic Ocean, including parts of northern Guinea-Bissau and areas north of the Casamance River between the ocean and the town of Bignona including the regions of Buluf and Karon. Symptomatic of the situational character of the use of essentialist labels is the fact that the neighboring villages of Brin and Djibonker planned

and executed the initiation together, despite the fact that the people of Djibonker might on other occasions construct themselves as ethnically different from the inhabitants of Brin, invoking micro-local differences of heritage and language or an essentialistically defined distinction based on the labels “Baï-nounk” versus “Joola” (see section 4.2 for a treatment of the ethnic dynamics between Brin and Djibonker observed during the 2014 initiation).

In Djibonker, about 600 young men entered eight sacred forests scattered around the outskirts of the village, with slightly smaller numbers in Brin of approximately 500 men in six sacred forests. The distribution of young men across the various forests is dependent on family membership and ward of residence: certain families of certain wards share a sacred forest and there is a committee consisting of each family’s initiated heads of household that is responsible for the organization and the logistics of their forest.

The opening of the forest took place on July 19, 2014. The initiates were shaved, washed, and covered with an indigo cloth, and then they were led into the forest accompanied by dancing and prayers. The women of the families associated with the particular forest danced the candidates off, and while the initiates were in the forest, the women prepared their food, which was brought to them by designated initiated men. Latecomers were able to enter the forest on specific days, after being shaved, clothed, and accompanied by dancing, singing, and prayers in their turn. Valid reasons for late entry included school exams, the inability to get leave from a job for the entire duration, and other such inconveniences. The day of the release of the initiates from the forest, August 16, marked another major event drawing massive crowds from a wide area, and was celebrated with dancing, drinking, parading, and singing.

Although seemingly a local event—in 2014 only the adjoining villages of Djibonker and Brin initiated their men—the affair had a decidedly regional character. The two villages were brimming with thousands of visitors—family, friends, acquaintances, and the curious—from places as far as seventy kilometers away, some of whom stayed for the entire period of seclusion, others of whom came only for the highlights, that is, the opening and the closing of the forest.

The regional nature of the event can also be seen in the fact that the various instances of *bukut* throughout the entire region are timed with respect to one other and are held in a precise order. In the vicinity of Djibonker, for example, the villages of Mof Ávvi to the northwest begin the cycle (in this case, in 2008), then the festivities are held in Djibonker and Brin (2014), next in line are the villages of the Bayot Kugere area around the town of Nyassia (2016), and then the villages of the Bayot Kuhinge area around the town of Dioher. Similar patterns across large areas have been observed in the Buluf, north of the Casamance River, where villages or clusters of villages also organize their initiation according to a fixed order (see De Jong (2007, 37)). How and

whether the various subregional cycles are synchronized is at this point not known. The initiates of a particular cycle are considered as a generation that receives a single name: the generation that includes those initiated in 2014 has been baptized *bakamiñ* or “the unruly ones” in Joola Eegimaa.

All initiated men from any village that practices *bukut*-style initiation have the right to enter the sacred forests of other villages during initiation and visit friends or take part in the activities in the forest without violating any taboo (*běsóság* in Guběeher). Any nonvillager who is accepted by the committee of elders responsible for the initiation can be initiated together with the villagers for a small fee (a sacrificial animal); this occurs when someone could not take part in the ceremony at his own locale and does not wish to wait another twenty or thirty years to be initiated. A prominent case is the politician Robert Sagna, who attended the initiation in Thionk Essil, a Joola town to the north of the Casamance River, rather than in his patrimonial village of Brin, for reasons of political timing (see De Jong 2007).

The knowledge and the secret songs of the initiation are thus the property not only of the community where the initiation is held but of the whole community of initiates across the region, as far afield as the areas of Fogny and Buluf, the seaside towns of Cabrousse and Diembereng, the village of Youtou close to the Guinea-Bissau border, and the islands of the Karon. As a consequence of the regional character of the initiation ceremony, many of the visitors to the 2014 event came from Joola-speaking villages and a wide variety of Joola languages could be heard in the houses and on the roads of Djibonker during the entire period. Most of the publicly performed songs were in various Joola languages (Kaasa, Fogny, Eegimaa, etc.) and participants tended to stress commonalities between all the communities practicing *bukut*, thereby situating Djibonker and its inhabitants squarely within the same cultural universe as their largely Joola-speaking neighbors. Local idiosyncrasies between populations that might in other circumstances be used to index difference were downplayed during the festivities. As someone put it, when the discussion touched upon the different ethnic and linguistic groups of the area: “Nous sommes tous les mêmes” (We are all the same).

In the past, this might have been useful for creating cohesion between allied populations. Nowadays, this downplaying of micro-local indices of identity enables the integration of those community members that are not born in the village, allowing them to participate in village affairs and identify the village as their place of origin without having to possess linguistic or cultural knowledge that is largely inaccessible to them. Many residents of Dakar and other cities in Senegal whose parents or grandparents migrated from Casamance maintain ties to the village where their family originated, but do not necessarily speak the local vernacular. For example, many members of Djibonker’s diaspora, especially beyond the second generation, have

no knowledge or only limited knowledge of Gubëeher but may nevertheless identify as “Baïnouk.” For the village, these ties linking it to the urban centers of Senegal are extremely important as they guarantee a flow of monetary resources and access to valuable networks that can be exploited for political or educational purposes. Integrating the large diaspora in a network that is regional rather than local, through initiation, is thus a strategically advantageous move. The participants’ identification with Casamance is cyclically refreshed and reinforced through initiation, a highly formative and intense experience loaded with spirituality and mythical overtones that forms a bond for life between the fellow initiates based on secrecy, taboo, and commitment to one’s generation and community.

The dissolving of essentialist labels is reflected in the use of mixed labels such as those I witnessed on several occasions when inhabitants of Djibonker, who might in other circumstances insist on distinguishing Baïnouk from Joola, referred to themselves as Baïnouk-Joola or simply as Joola when asked about their ethnicity by outsiders. By doing this they move to an identity defined on a regional level and acknowledge the ties of culture and identity that they share with the dominant majority population surrounding them. In their own perception as well as on an objective level, the people of Djibonker share their material culture and cultural practices with these populations, who in essentialist terms would be Joola or Bayot, rather than with other “Baïnouk” populations.

#### **4.2 Case Study: Brin**

The village of Brin, immediately adjacent to Djibonker, will serve at this point to exemplify several points made in this chapter: the fluidity and flexibility of identity, the layeredness of identity, the influence of shared history on language, and the overall complexity linking all of these parameters. The two villages could in many ways be perceived as two parts of one entity as they share a church, a school, various shops, and other infrastructure that caters to the populations of both. This is reflected in the fact that inhabitants of other locales in the region often refer to “Djibonker-Brin.” Nevertheless, there is a sharp (though semipermeable) linguistic division along the border between the two villages, and some very interesting identity issues.

While most inhabitants of Djibonker speak and understand Joola Kujireray (the patrimonial language of Brin), very few inhabitants of Brin are able to understand or communicate in Gubëeher. However, the influence of Gubëeher on Kujireray is extensive and undeniable. There is a high frequency of shared vocabulary with probable Gubëeher origin: a list of 506 lexical items with translations into Gubëeher, Kujireray, and other languages of Lower Casamance that was compiled by the author in collaboration with Rachel Watson in order to detect lexical borrowings contains about 50 Kujireray



**Table 5.2** Examples of shared vocabulary between Baïnounk Gubëeher and Joola Kujireray

<i>Baïnounk Gubëeher</i>	<i>Joola Kujireray</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
<i>bu-neer</i>	<i>bu-ner</i>	to make a ceiling
<i>bu-cex</i>	<i>e-keh</i>	to castrate
<i>bu-ñëëj</i>	<i>bë-ñëj</i>	to wash clothes
<i>bu-ñóóp</i>	<i>e-ɲop</i>	to hide
<i>gu-fudd</i>	<i>e-fuud</i>	kernel of maize
<i>gu-kaabil</i>	<i>fu-kabul</i>	(stick of) bamboo
<i>ñaatat</i>	<i>ka-ñatat</i>	chameleon
<i>gu-jënd</i>	<i>ka-jend</i>	hair
<i>gu-bil</i>	<i>fu-bil</i>	lip

Source: Table created by the author.

items that are most likely of Gubëeher origin; various examples are given in table 5.2.<sup>6</sup>

Some Djibonker locals go so far as to consider Kujireray something close to a mixed language, or at least a Joola variety heavily influenced by Gubëeher.

The spirit of this observation, made in Djibonker, is reflected in Brin, where according to Watson (2018b) many speakers of Kujireray native to Brin consider themselves “Baïnounk” or “Baïnounk-Joola.” The influence does not stop there. Many inhabitants of Brin have clan names such as Diandy and Biagui that are widespread among and associated with Baïnounk populations; and of course, as mentioned above, important cultural events of Brin such as male initiations are held in tandem with Djibonker. Interestingly, the Baïnounk Gujajer–speaking people of Jegue in Guinea-Bissau claim family ties to the inhabitants of Brin, considering them as Baïnounk.

The outwardly projected dichotomy of (ethnic and linguistic) Joola in Brin versus Baïnounk in Djibonker becomes even more doubtful when one digs more deeply into questions of ethnic identity, as more and more inhabitants of Brin start to openly assume a Baïnounk identity by claiming a Baïnounk heritage. The history of settlement of the villages is less than clear, but it does seem likely that a large amount of blending of the populations has occurred, whether through forced settlement and integration of slaves, intermarriage, or voluntary change of identity. Folklore gathered in Djibonker has it that Brin was once a village where slaves were settled after Ñambëeher from Djibonker had captured them from the other side of the river; this village was surrounded by villages inhabited by the Ñambëeher to keep the slaves from escaping (see also Watson 2018b):

Ganlatti ñënsóóg anworeenej jegenej bijaan, nah imuyminne guhuy guŋgoon  
 “birééj,” bin ayenine birééj. Guyégi ayena ñimeni “Brin,” ululum indeformene.

Gubëeher faŋ faŋ faŋ ahuya birééŋ. Ayen indëëk' indéeneen biŋaan birééŋ una gufit guŋgoonj kum fall, duway xum usaat fall an ujir upax. Bimbi këëbëy arooki, bi eñuun jibëëher arook, bi erin butimun arook. (Charles Acebo Sagna, Djibonker. DJI291014AC)

“When they [people from Djibonker] captured slaves, they installed them there in the middle, this is where the name ‘Bireeŋ’ [Gubëeher for ‘down there’] comes from. If you hear that they call it ‘Brin’ nowadays, it is because the whites have deformed it. In Gubëeher they used to say Bireeŋ. They say that they put them down there by the riverside. You wouldn’t be able to cross the river in order to run away. On this side Këëbëy blocks the way, on the side of Bayot Djibonker blocks it, and on the side of Mof Ávvi Butimun blocks the escape.”

According to this version of local history, the current population would be a mixture between the capturers and the captured, hence the idiosyncrasies of Kujireray.

The inhabitants of Brin can be seen as reacting to political and social factors, strategically using their dual Baïnounk/Joola history, reaping the advantages connected to an emphasis on one or the other component of their history. Until recently, it was inopportune to be Baïnounk because there was a widespread and regionally well-known myth about a curse allegedly thrown upon the Baïnounk by the mythical Baïnounk king Sira Bana Biagui. The myth, which is probably a post hoc justification for the decay of the Baïnounk kingdom, says that the subjects of King Sira Bana built a trap with which they killed him when he demanded a certain number of young men and women as a sacrifice in order to bring prosperity to the kingdom. The curse the king threw on his disloyal subjects specified that the Baïnounk would disperse and be forever poor (see Bühnen (1994) for one version of the myth). This made being Baïnounk very unattractive on the marriage market; and so maximum distance from being Baïnounk was the order of the day. I have learned from conversations with people from Djibonker, but also from other localities, that until recently many multilingual Baïnounk speakers would go to great lengths to be rather discreet about that aspect of their identity by speaking Joola in public and avoiding any association with the label “Baïnounk” and the associated curse. However, the activities of a politically minded population and well-connected elites in Dakar have contributed to the material well-being of the group, and the Baïnounk of Djibonker have experienced a surge of confidence and newfound “ethnic pride” that seems to be contagious; this pride is also compatible with the growing ethnonationalist visions in Senegal and in Casamance specifically, notably Joola nationalism in the wake of the Casamance rebellion (Foucher 2003, 2005).

The inhabitants of Djibonker are firmly rooted in the land and in local traditions, with a greater attachment to shrines and practices considered traditional. This increases the attractiveness of assuming a Baïnounk identity

for the more extensively christianized inhabitants of Brin.<sup>7</sup> This became obvious leading up to and during the male initiation ceremonies in July and August 2014, when traditional knowledge became the currency of authenticity. Despite the fact that the two villages are approximately the same size, the public events surrounding the initiation in Djibonker drew larger crowds and were more elaborate, as various people from both villages commented during and after the initiation. This difference was attributed by several people to the superior expertise and knowledge that those of Djibonker had of both practical and spiritual aspects of tradition and religious practice.

The resurgence of a Baïnouk identity among the population of Brin is thus an expression of strategic realignment. This is further facilitated in a situation where a layer of “Baïnoukness” already existed beneath a layer of Joola identity—or where it can be constructed post hoc if necessary—and, more importantly, where identity is by no means fixed and identities are not mutually exclusive.

### 4.3 Ecological Effects on Language Maintenance

Although the cultural area where *bukut* initiation is practiced has no political or administrative reality, it has a strong impact on people’s mobility, the composition of their social networks, their marriage patterns, and their multilingual repertoires. Existing social ties are likely to be reinforced over time as the social motivations for interaction also reinforce each other: having in-laws in a particular place increases the chance that one will attend social functions and spend extended periods of time in that place, and this in turn leads to more social contacts. These shared structures and frequent interactions clearly influence people’s perceptions of outside and inside and define how they relate to each other and with whom they can share certain sacred information, such as the secret songs and teachings passed on between men of different villages during seclusion in the sacred forest as part of initiation. As a consequence, the cultural and linguistic ecologies of which communities are a part determine which populations are considered as insiders or as outsiders and which languages are likely to form part of a person’s linguistic repertoire. The following paragraphs thus consider notions of who is perceived to be an insider or an outsider that are expressed by inhabitants of various sites of the Crossroads areas and how ecological factors might influence language vitality (for other discussion of language vitality in similar contexts, see Mufwene (2017), Lüpke (2017), and Di Carlo and Good (2017)).

The emblem of “the other” in Djibonker and indeed in the surrounding areas is “the Mandinka” and anyone perceived to be “colonized” by them. The Mandinka have a remarkably bad reputation among the people of Djibonker and Brin, and also in other nearby areas such as Mof Ávvi. This became evident in

a study conducted by Myfyr Prys in 2012, which revealed very strong negative stereotypes around the Mandinka and their language, centering on them being lazy, deceitful, imposing, and untrustworthy and, therefore, completely unfit to be engaged with in any type of social activity. Although Mandinka is an important lingua franca in Casamance, knowledge of it is marginal in Djibonker-Brin and even many who speak it claim that they do not like to speak it, or avoid interactions with Mandinka. This intense aversion has historical as well as cultural roots. A series of violent jihads and attempts at occupation and economic dominance by Mandinka rulers and traders peaking in the nineteenth century (see Mark 2002) has created deep-seated mistrust.

On the other hand, the centralized character of Mandinka statehood has had a strong integrational power elsewhere. Many formerly Baïnounk- or Balant-speaking populations, originally non-Muslim, have converted to Islam and adopted the Mandinka language, culture, and ethnic identity (Bühnen 1994; Hawthorne 2003; Creissels, forthcoming; N'Diaye-Corréard 1970). The negative attitudes toward the Mandinka registered in Djibonker were not encountered in the village of Agnack, ten miles east of Ziguinchor, where speakers of Baïnounk Gujaher cohabit with people identifying as Mandinka (Samantha Goodchild, unpublished notes). It appears, however, that these specific Mandinka populations are not associated with the jihads of Pakao, but with more recent clan-based migration and old ties to Kaabu in Guinea-Bissau (Cornelia Giesing, personal communication; Alpha Mane, personal communication), which might explain the difference.

The following sentences were uttered by an inhabitant of Djibonker that identifies as Baïnounk, in reference to other groups of Baïnounk. The short passage reveals several important aspects of the cultural and identity concepts prevalent in Djibonker.

Imeeŋ an-*colonisé-a par les mandeŋ* dënlob bëlob banyen ŋko mino gubëeher *pur* ginlobe. (AB, male, aged over sixty, inhabitant of Djibonker. DJI121109AC)

“They are *colonized by the* Mandinka, they don’t say a word without saying ‘Nko’ [‘yes’ in Mandinka]. We speak the *pure* Baïnounk.” (Italicized elements from French)

A negative attitude toward Mandinka and their perceived subjugating power is very obvious here. Other Baïnounk-speaking communities are constructed as “other,” by invoking a real or imagined closeness to Mandinka culture, which excludes them from the cultural sphere in which the Baïnounk of Djibonker operate. Interestingly, the use of French lexical and syntactic material (indicated in italics) seems to be unproblematic, even in a statement invoking linguistic purity. The oppositions between cultural spheres on the

regional level of identity conception here cut across an otherwise solidly established essentialist ethnic identity as Baïnouk.

A similar observation has been made by De Jong (2007), who reports that a man described as Joola Fogny was not admitted to the sacred forest of Thionk Essil—which itself has a large Fogny population—on the grounds that his native village was situated in an area further to the east considered as “mandinguized.” It is the cultural criterion, not the essentialist label, that led to his exclusion from the ceremony.

The cultural and social models prevalent in a population directly influence linguistic behavior and the manifestation of ethnic identity by creating a specific type of language ecology, which can be either conducive or detrimental to high levels of stable multilingualism and the maintenance of minority languages. The confederal type of society observed in the western parts of Lower Casamance allows for small communities to maintain their independence as part of a larger whole and releases small societies and language communities from the burden of maintaining a distinct culture all on their own. The smaller languages have their fixed place in the communities that use them, usually for religious functions or local events during which the use of the patrimonial language corroborates land rights and autochthonous status.

Given that, it is interesting to compare this confederal type of society with the more hegemonic, Mandinka-influenced ecology of the eastern part of Lower Casamance and especially Middle Casamance. I hypothesize that it would be harder for small communities to maintain their differences of identity and language in the type of society found there. The areas in Middle Casamance around the old Mandinka capital of Sedhiou and in Mandinka-dominated parts of Gambia and northern Casamance previously had large Baïnouk-speaking populations, but are nowadays Mandinka-speaking with only memories of a Baïnouk past and isolated pockets where Baïnouk is used or remembered (Denis Creissels, personal communication).

It can be plausibly argued that in a hierarchically organized kingdom it is beneficial for a minority population to convert ethnically and linguistically to the dominant population in order to gain equal access to privilege and power. Equally, the Muslim religion, which does not require local languages for religious purposes and which rather levels differences by unifying a population under the roof of a religion with a universalist aspiration, favors homogeneity over multiplexity. The exact ethnic and linguistic composition of the traditionally Baïnouk-speaking areas east of Ziguinchor is unknown, but the Baïnouk languages for which data exist are minority languages even within their patrimonial locus (for Guñun of Djifanghor, see Quint (2015); for Gujaher of Agnack, see Lüpke (forthcoming)).

Further research might reveal that the claims of Mandinka hegemony in these parts of eastern Lower Casamance are exaggerated, given that evidence

of long-standing confederations between non-Mandinka groups exist (e.g., between the Bainouk Gujaher and the Kasanga (Lüpke, personal communication)). We already know that other languages such as Kriolu, Balant, Manjaku, and Mankanya are important lingua francas that can index identities different from or even opposed to Mandinka (Ndecky 2011; Nunez 2015). However, it is remarkable that both of the Bainouk languages (Guñun and Gujaher) spoken outside of the *bukut* confederation have innovated their noun-class systems toward animacy and have reduced prefixed agreement (see Cobbinah, forthcoming). The high levels of variation observed in noun-class agreement in Bainouk Gujaher might be a result of heavy contact with non-noun-class languages such as Kriolu and Mandinka.

On the other hand, the confederal type of society found west of Ziguinchor, with its small-scale and very local organization of political power, favors multilingualism as a tool for ensuring the balance of power and the negotiation of difference and unity between small-scale entities on the most local level (cf. Mühlhäusler's (2000, 341) ideas of "language as [a] buffer protecting small communities" and "complex language ecologies preventing asymmetric power relations"). Its shared culture and high levels of intertranslatability reduce the cost for small communities to maintain their particular language and cultural traits, as many aspects of culture are not group-specific and social networks extend across linguistic frontiers. Exogamy within the same cultural sphere is therefore less of a threat to smaller language communities, as the languages involved would be less alien and less incompatible and therefore less problematic to maintain even outside their patrimonial space. The chance of frequent exchange and established ties between the host community and the community of provenance and the continued exposure to members of the community and language of one's local identity also favor the maintenance of one's identity language even after moving away.

The extension of culturally based regional ecologies also has a profound effect on which languages and varieties come into contact through being part of the multilingual repertoires of a large number of people. As a result, languages that are genetically only very remotely related can through prolonged contact and shared culture share remarkable amounts of vocabulary and many structural features, while other languages that are closely related genetically can develop substantial structural differences through integration into different cultural spheres with a different portfolio of contact languages. This might explain the substantial differences in grammar and lexicon between the languages of the Bainouk family (for grammatical descriptions of these languages, see Cobbinah (2013), Quint (2015), Lüpke (forthcoming), and Bao Diop (2013)), which are closely related genetically but have been geographically separated for at least 500 years (the decline

of the regionally relevant Baïnouk kingdoms has been set around the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century (Brooks 1993)) and whose speakers have since used different sets of contact languages. Identification with geographically and culturally close communities creates a situation where the continuous exposure of highly multilingual individuals to their neighbors' languages means that vocabulary items, grammatical structures, and semantic mappings from genetically unrelated languages stop being perceived as foreign and are readily incorporated, since they already coexist in the multilingual speaker's mind. The layered structure of multilingual modes observed in the Crossroads area might even create a situation going much further than simple borrowing, but lead to some sort of symbiosis, where code-switching becomes the norm and different communicative domains require the use of different languages.

As a result of widespread language mixing, languages such as Baïnouk Gubëher, Joola Kujireray, and Joola Eegimaa, which are spoken in close vicinity and coexist in people's multilingual repertoires, show the effects of congruence, in their lexical semantics, grammatical constructions, and noun-class systems (see Cobbinah 2010; Watson 2018b, 2019). Future research will establish this in more detail, but the following points are likely candidates for being shared among the three patrimonial languages of the Crossroads area:

- Borrowed noun-class prefixes
- Semantic correspondences in noun-class systems
- Noun classes with collective semantics
- A high proportion of null objects
- Lexical borrowings
- A copula reminiscent of the demonstrative with a duplicated noun-class marker
- Identical subject agreement prefixes in the singular

Considering that the genetic relationship between languages of the Baïnouk and the Joola groups is so far removed that it can hardly be expected to explain this degree of similarity, the coexistence over many generations in close geographical and cultural proximity—a result of the linguistic and cultural ecology—must have contributed to aligning these languages. Given the long history of multilingualism and ethnic multiplexity throughout the greater region, the impact of areal influences on language change has to be given consideration by historical linguists working in the area. It would not be surprising if contact-induced change turned out to be at least as influential in the differentiation of Atlantic languages as those sorts of internal changes that form the basis of genetic classification.

**Table 5.3 The levels and dynamics of identity in the crossroads area**

	<i>Local Level</i>	<i>Regional Level</i>	<i>National Level</i>
Strategy	Maximum emphasis on differences from any community beyond the immediately local level	Inclusion, downplaying of differences within a defined area while maintaining autonomy	Emphasis on affinity with groups sharing essentialist labels
Purposes	Maintenance of independence and potential for strategic realignment claim of firstcomer status	Power of the many through strategic alliances integration of diaspora	Negotiation of linguistic rights within a national-political framework
Effect on language naming	Naming of languages on a very fine-grained level	Mixed labels (e.g., Bainounk-Joola) local varieties becoming invisible	Clustering of languages according to essentialist labels, ignoring differences within these clusters
Language use	Local language or variety	Regional lingua francas	National lingua francas and local varieties

Source: Table created by the author.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the remarkable levels of societal and individual multilingualism attested in Lower Casamance are connected to conceptions of historically attested and still-practiced patterns of fluid and multiple ethnic identity that allow the strategic use and rapid restructuring of intergroup alliances. In the past this has allowed small acephalous groups to react quickly to outside threats and changing political situations. Nowadays it might be useful in tying diasporic populations to the “homeland” while participating in discourses about language and ethnicity at the level of the nation-state. Multilingualism in the Crossroads area, and probably across larger areas of Lower Casamance, is a correlate of multiple identities and thus a strategic necessity. As a consequence, the layered character of fluid identities protects small languages from extinction by allocating them a niche where they have a particular function in local contexts, such as in religious contexts that create connections to the ancestors and reiterate land rights. Table 5.3 sums up the various levels on which identity operates and the various dynamics that are involved.

An understanding of the language ecologies in Lower Casamance (and probably elsewhere) and their anthropological and political parameters is



highly relevant for linguists, as these constellations have direct effects on language repertoires, contact phenomena, language maintenance, language-naming practices, and multilingual practices.

## NOTES

1. The data reported in this chapter were collected by the author during six field trips to Djibonker in 2009–2015, each of between one and six months, for a PhD project and as a postdoctoral fellow on two multidisciplinary research projects funded by the Leverhulme and Volkswagen foundations and led by Prof. Friederike Lüpke of SOAS, University of London. Although the research was primarily linguistic in nature (looking at noun classes, grammatical description, and multilingualism), a wealth of cultural observations was acquired through lived experience in the village, conversations and interviews with research consultants and friends, and direct observation of the events surrounding male initiation ceremonies in 2014.

2. See De Jong (2007) and Baum (1999) for descriptions of initiation ceremonies in other parts of Casamance.

3. Among this history, to mention just the most important events, are the transatlantic slave trade and its repercussions; large-scale migrations and the resulting conflicts over agricultural land; the Mandinka expansion toward the west establishing new hegemonic and centralized structures; and in modern times, jihadist movements in the nineteenth century and French colonial administrators invading the area collecting taxes, drafting soldiers for war, and forcing their administration on the local populations.

4. The reference here indicates the speaker, where he was recorded, and the audio recording from which this quote is extracted. The numerical part of the audio recording code indicates the date of recording, in the format DDMYY. The corpus containing that portion of my data collected between 2009 and 2013 is hosted on the Language Archive at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, at <https://archive.mpi.nl>.

5. I follow Watson (2018a) in using the more neutral term “lect” to refer to varieties of Joola, due to difficulties in establishing a definitive list of distinct and stable varieties of Joola; see section 3.3 for further details.

6. Watson (2018b) also provides examples of nouns that have been borrowed into Gubêeher from Kujireray or other Joola lects. The dynamics between the two languages have clearly shifted several times.

7. Brin is the seat of the largest church in the area, as well as being the location of a Catholic seminary. According to local sources, at the time of the first conversions to Catholicism in Djibonker in the 1940s there was already a substantial Catholic community in Brin.

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## Chapter 6

# Multilingualism and the Paradox of Language Creation

## *The Case of Lítâ (Research Note)*

Gratiana Ndamsah

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Limbum is a Grassfields Bantu language of the Northern group.<sup>1</sup> It is spoken by the greater part of the population living on the Nkambe plateau of the North-West Region of Cameroon and is associated with the Wimbun community. There are more than thirty Limbum-speaking villages, including Binka and Mbot, which are found in Nkambe Central Subdivision. Individuals who have grown up in these villages typically speak a number of languages other than Limbum, their primary language, and these include: Fulfulde, Hausa, Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE), and English. Thus, the majority of the inhabitants of these villages are multilingual. Cenoz (2013) makes a distinction between additive multilingualism, when languages are added to the linguistic repertoire of speakers as they are learned, and subtractive multilingualism, when a new language that is learned replaces the use of another language; the multilingualism practiced in the villages of Binka and Mbot is additive, as none of the languages spoken by this group of people has replaced another.

Though the Wimbun of Binka and Mbot are already multilingual, some of them have created a new language called Lítâ to add to this rich repertoire. This language is understood only by speakers of a particular generation—those who are now between the ages of forty and fifty—and has very little resemblance to any of the other languages typically spoken in Binka and Mbot.

This chapter examines the structure of Lítâ and compares it with that of the other languages spoken in the villages to make its distinctiveness clear.



First, section 2 presents the words of Lítâ, juxtaposing them with words with the same meaning in the other languages spoken by Lítâ speakers. Then section 3 compares the structure of Lítâ sentences to those of the other languages spoken in the two villages. Section 4 offers a brief conclusion.

## 2. THE WORDS OF LÍTÂ

In this section, I present words of Lítâ alongside the corresponding words in the other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot. Table 6.1 contains a sample of nouns collected in the various languages. An examination of the words in this table shows that there are no clear resemblances between the nouns in Lítâ and those of the other languages. For instance, if we take the word for “mother,” which is *è?* in Lítâ, we notice that, while this word is disyllabic in Limbum, Fulfulde, Hausa, CPE, and English, the corresponding word in Lítâ is monosyllabic. Furthermore, none of the words in the other languages has the mid-low front unrounded vowel [ɛ]. Similarly, of the words for “girl,” only the word in Lítâ ends in a nasal. The word for “shoes” is disyllabic in Lítâ, like the words in Limbum and Fulfulde, and ends in an open syllable, like the words in Fulfulde and Hausa. Indeed, there is a clear resemblance to the Fulfulde word, following a pattern seen below of occasional matches between Lítâ words and words with the same meaning in other languages of Binka and Mbot. However, even when these matches are found, there is no clear pattern to them.

Considering the other words in table 6.1, those for “money” are disyllabic in all of the languages except for Lítâ and Limbum, and the two forms for “money” in Lítâ are both relatively different from the Limbum word. The words for “house” in Lítâ and Limbum both begin with prenasalized stops, though Lítâ has a bilabial while Limbum has an alveolar stop. In the other

**Table 6.1** Examples of nouns in Lítâ and other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot

<i>Lítâ</i>	<i>Limbum</i>	<i>Fulfulde</i>	<i>Hausa</i>	<i>CPE</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>è?</i>	<i>Màmí</i>	<i>dáda</i>	<i>uwa</i>	<i>mami</i>	<i>mother</i>
<i>zúm</i>	<i>múndzē</i>	<i>débo</i>	<i>yariɲa</i>	<i>gəl</i>	<i>girl</i>
<i>pàndè</i>	<i>lábá?</i>	<i>padé</i>	<i>takarmi</i>	<i>fus</i>	<i>shoes</i>
<i>ɲkwèr / ɲvè</i>	<i>mbà:</i>	<i>ƴedéθ</i>	<i>kudī</i>	<i>məni</i>	<i>money</i>
<i>mbóɲ</i>	<i>ndāp</i>	<i>sudú</i>	<i>gída</i>	<i>haus</i>	<i>house</i>
<i>fòb</i>	<i>mrò?</i>	<i>mbal</i>	<i>abinfa</i>	<i>mimbo</i>	<i>drinks</i>
<i>hò?</i>	<i>tū?</i>	<i>déradzo</i>	<i>mayita</i>	<i>wit/kraft</i>	<i>witchcraft</i>
<i>íyé</i>	<i>rkwē</i>	<i>wadé</i>	<i>mutowa</i>	<i>déθ</i>	<i>death</i>
<i>ɲgéré?</i>	<i>tū</i>	<i>hɔre</i>	<i>kai</i>	<i>hed</i>	<i>head</i>
<i>líki</i>	<i>mū:</i>	<i>biɲgel</i>	<i>yara</i>	<i>pikin</i>	<i>child</i>

Source: Table created by the author.

languages, the equivalent words begin with simple consonants. Except for the single vowel of the Limbum word and the final vowel of the CPE word for “(alcoholic) drinks,” which are both [o] like in Lítâ, none of the other words for “drinks” contain this vowel. The remaining elements in the other languages do not resemble those of the equivalent word in Lítâ. The word for “witchcraft” in the languages are all disyllabic or trisyllabic, except in Limbum and Lítâ, but those two words otherwise only have a final glottal stop in common. The word for “death” is expressed by a disyllabic and a trisyllabic word in Fulfulde and Hausa, respectively, while the other languages have a monosyllabic word; but the CPE and English words each have a coda, while the Limbum and Lítâ words have an open syllable. The difference between the Lítâ and the Limbum words is still great, however: there is a difference in the tones (high in Lítâ and mid in Limbum); the Limbum word takes the noun-class prefix *r-*, while the Lítâ word does not; and their stems begin with different consonants. The Lítâ word for “head” has no clear resemblance with the equivalent word in the other languages, and the same is true for “child.”

Table 6.2 contains a sample of verbs from the various languages that are spoken in the villages of Binka and Mbot. This table shows that, just like nouns, verbs in Lítâ may have no obvious relationship to verbs in the other languages that the speakers master and use in their daily lives. For example, there is no simple way that one can relate Lítâ *ì?* “eat” to *yé, namu, tʃi*, or *tʃɔp* in Limbum, Fulfulde, Hausa, and CPE, respectively. There is a partial resemblance to the English word, but this is not part of any clear pattern of resemblance to English. Along the same lines, there is no relationship between the Lítâ verb *tɔbé* “be” and *yū, dɔn, na, de*, or *be* in the other languages. There are some apparent resemblances between some Lítâ verbs and the corresponding Limbum verbs, however, as seen in the forms for “hear,” “come,” and “buy.”

**Table 6.2** Examples of verbs in Lítâ and other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot; the forms shown are second-person singular imperatives

<i>Lítâ</i>	<i>Limbum</i>	<i>Fulfulde</i>	<i>Hausa</i>	<i>CPE</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>kyù</i>	<i>dù</i>	<i>dʔilu</i>	<i>tepi</i>	<i>go</i>	<i>go</i>
<i>ì?</i>	<i>yé</i>	<i>namu</i>	<i>tʃi</i>	<i>tʃɔp</i>	<i>eat</i>
<i>fê</i>	<i>yé</i>	<i>Laru</i>	<i>geni</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>see</i>
<i>hú</i>	<i>lɔr</i>	<i>hɔsu</i>	<i>dɔka</i>	<i>tek</i>	<i>take</i>
<i>tʃê?</i>	<i>fá</i>	<i>hɔki</i>	<i>ba</i>	<i>gi</i>	<i>give</i>
<i>tɔbé</i>	<i>yū</i>	<i>dɔn</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>be</i>
<i>zù?</i>	<i>yú?</i>	<i>nanu</i>	<i>dʒi</i>	<i>hiə</i>	<i>hear</i>
<i>vɛ?</i>	<i>vɛ</i>	<i>war</i>	<i>zo?</i>	<i>kam</i>	<i>come</i>
<i>ʒɛ?</i>	<i>yú:</i>	<i>sɔdu</i>	<i>seya</i>	<i>bai</i>	<i>buy</i>
<i>fúsí</i>	<i>mísí</i>	<i>timini</i>	<i>gama</i>	<i>finif</i>	<i>finish</i>

Source: Table created by the author.

**Table 6.3** Examples of adjectives in Lítâ and other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot

<i>Lítâ</i>	<i>Limbum</i>	<i>Fulfulde</i>	<i>Hausa</i>	<i>CPE</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>kpǒr</i>	<i>bǝŋ</i>	<i>bǝʔdum</i>	<i>kyɔ</i>	<i>fain</i>	<i>nice</i>
<i>kpǒr ayn</i>	<i>bép</i>	<i>wodi</i>	<i>dekyɔ</i>	<i>bad</i>	<i>bad</i>
<i>mawu</i>	<i>kòʔ</i>	<i>mawni</i>	<i>kato</i>	<i>bik</i>	<i>big</i>

Source: Table created by the author.

Table 6.3 contains a sample of adjectives from the various languages that are spoken in Binka and Mbot. There are only three examples because adjectives are a relatively closed class of words in Lítâ. The same pattern that was seen with nouns and verbs holds for adjectives as well, in that the Lítâ words cannot be clearly linked to words in the other languages, though there is some resemblance between the Lítâ and Fulfulde words for “big.”

Table 6.4 presents the numbers from one to ten as expressed in the languages of Binka and Mbot. As can be seen, on the whole, the Lítâ words for the numbers cannot be connected to the words in other languages, though the Lítâ word for “three” shows some resemblance to the words for “three” in Limbum and Fulfulde, and there is also some similarity in the Lítâ, CPE, and English words for “four.” The Lítâ word for “seven” is also possibly connected to the Limbum word, via an inversion of syllables. The data in table 6.4 do show that Lítâ, like Limbum, Hausa, CPE, and English, has distinctive words for the numbers one through ten, unlike Fulfulde where the numbers six through nine are compounds based on the word for “five.”

Table 6.5 presents some of the pronouns found in Lítâ and the other languages of Binka and Mbot. Pronouns represent the one area of the Lítâ lexicon where there is clear overlap between the Lítâ words and those in one of the other languages, namely Limbum. Except for the first-person singular,

**Table 6.4** The numbers from one to ten in Lítâ and other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot

<i>Lítâ</i>	<i>Limbum</i>	<i>Fulfulde</i>	<i>Hausa</i>	<i>CPE</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>pwí</i>	<i>mǝʔsír</i>	<i>gǝʔɔ</i>	<i>dayaʔ</i>	<i>wan</i>	<i>one</i>
<i>pyàʔ</i>	<i>bǝ</i>	<i>dǝdǝ</i>	<i>byuʔ</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>two</i>
<i>tàʔ</i>	<i>Tár</i>	<i>tati</i>	<i>uku</i>	<i>ðre</i>	<i>three</i>
<i>fúr</i>	<i>kyè</i>	<i>nain</i>	<i>hudú</i>	<i>fɔ</i>	<i>four</i>
<i>vèb</i>	<i>tâ</i>	<i>dʒwei</i>	<i>byar</i>	<i>faif</i>	<i>five</i>
<i>ntwí</i>	<i>ntúfù</i>	<i>dʒwei gǝʔɔ</i>	<i>fɪda</i>	<i>siks</i>	<i>six</i>
<i>mbāsà</i>	<i>sàmbâ</i>	<i>dʒwei dǝdǝ</i>	<i>bakwɛ</i>	<i>seven</i>	<i>seven</i>
<i>liwá</i>	<i>wāmí</i>	<i>dʒwei tati</i>	<i>takwes</i>	<i>et</i>	<i>eight</i>
<i>wùbwùʔ</i>	<i>bùʔú</i>	<i>dʒwei nain</i>	<i>tara</i>	<i>nain</i>	<i>nine</i>
<i>zén</i>	<i>rǝ</i>	<i>sapo</i>	<i>goma</i>	<i>tɛn</i>	<i>ten</i>

Source: Table created by the author.

**Table 6.5** Examples of pronouns in Lítâ and other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot

Lítâ	Limbum	Fulfulde	Hausa	CPE	English
<i>pè</i>	<i>m̃ / m̃è</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>à</i>	<i>à</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>ke</i>	<i>yu</i>	<i>you</i>
<i>é</i>	<i>é</i>	<i>haɲko</i>	<i>wanaɲ</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>he / she</i>
<i>wèr</i>	<i>wì:</i>	<i>enen</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>wi</i>	<i>we</i>
<i>wòwì:</i>	<i>wòwì:</i>	<i>hambe</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>de</i>	<i>they</i>

Source: Table created by the author.

the pronouns are the same in these two languages (with the small exception of the vowel and coda in “we”). This is presumably connected to the fact that Limbum is the primary language of Lítâ speakers, and potentially also relates to the fact that pronouns are a closed class of words.

### 3. LÍTÂ SENTENCE STRUCTURE

The data in (1)–(5) provide examples of sentences with similar meanings in Lítâ and the other languages of Binka and Mbot.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen, Lítâ’s syntax does not diverge greatly from that of the other languages in contrast to the way that its lexicon does, and, on the whole, it is quite similar syntactically to Limbum.

- (1)
- |    |          |                          |             |             |             |  |  |  |
|----|----------|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--|--|--|
| a. | Lítâ     | <i>pè</i>                | <i>à</i>    | <i>ìʔ</i>   | <i>ptĩ</i>  |  |  |  |
|    |          | I                        | TMA         | eat         | food        |  |  |  |
| b. | Limbum   | <i>mè</i>                | <i>yē</i>   | <i>byē:</i> |             |  |  |  |
|    |          | I                        | eat         | food        |             |  |  |  |
| c. | Fulfulde | <i>mi</i>                | <i>namu</i> | <i>jiri</i> |             |  |  |  |
|    |          | I                        | eat         | food        |             |  |  |  |
| d. | Hausa    | <i>na</i>                | <i>tʃi</i>  | <i>two</i>  |             |  |  |  |
|    |          | I                        | eat         | food        |             |  |  |  |
| e. | CPE      | <i>I</i>                 | <i>dɔŋ</i>  | <i>tʃɔp</i> | <i>tʃɔp</i> |  |  |  |
|    |          | I                        | TMA         | eat         | food        |  |  |  |
| f. | English  | <i>I have eaten food</i> |             |             |             |  |  |  |
- (2)
- |    |          |           |             |             |             |             |             |
|----|----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| a. | Lítâ     | <i>pè</i> | <i>à</i>    | <i>ìʔ</i>   | <i>ptĩ</i>  | <i>mbé</i>  | <i>mbóŋ</i> |
|    |          | I         | TMA         | eat         | food        | in          | house       |
| b. | Limbum   | <i>mè</i> | <i>yē</i>   | <i>byē:</i> | <i>mbé</i>  | <i>ndàp</i> |             |
|    |          | I         | eat         | food        | in          | house       |             |
| c. | Fulfulde | <i>mi</i> | <i>namu</i> | <i>ha</i>   | <i>sare</i> |             |             |
|    |          | I         | eat         | in          | house       |             |             |

- d. Hausa *na tɸi abintɸi a dayki*  
I eat food in house
- e. CPE *a dɔŋ tɸɔp ɸɔ haus*  
I TMA eat in house
- f. English *I have eaten food in the house*

Examples (1) and (2) show that all of the languages exhibit a basic SVO word order, including Lítâ. In addition, in sentences containing a ditransitive verb, as can be seen in (3), all languages allow for an alternation in how the two objects are expressed, in a manner quite comparable to English—it should be noted, however, that the variant making use of a preposition is less typical of Fulfulde and Hausa than it is for the other languages.<sup>3</sup>

- (3) a. Lítâ *é tɸè? mɸvè nè zûm / zûm mɸvè*  
he give money to girl / girl money
- b. Limbum *é fâ mbâ: nè mûndzê / mûndzê mbâ:*  
he give money to girl / girl money
- c. Fulfulde *u hoki fedê ha biŋgel dɛbɔ / biŋgel dɛbɔ fedê*  
he give money to child female / child female money
- d. Hausa *na ba kudî a yariŋa / yariŋa kudî*  
he give money to girl / girl money
- e. CPE *e gi moni ɸɔ de gɛl / de gɛl mɔni*  
he give money to the girl / the girl money
- f. English *He gave money to the girl / He gave the girl money*

Negation in Lítâ, Limbum, and Hausa is coded with a sentence-final marker, as can be seen in (4). Fulfulde, on the other hand, codes negation with a verbal suffix; CPE places a negator before the verb; and English is known for its relatively complex use of a preverbal negator and auxiliary.

- (4) a. Lítâ *pè à fè zûm àin*  
I TMA see girl NEG
- b. Limbum *mè yê mûndzê kâ?*  
I see girl NEG
- c. Fulfulde *mi laray biŋgel dɛbɔ*  
I see.NEG child female
- d. Hausa *ba ŋga yariŋa matɸe ba?*  
I see girl female NEG
- e. CPE *a nɔva si de gɛl*  
I NEG see the girl
- f. English *I have not seen the girl*

As seen in (5), question words are placed in various positions in the languages of Binka and Mbot. However Lítâ and Limbum show essentially the

same syntactic structure, where a focus marker precedes a sentence-final question word.

- (5) a. Lítâ      *wè tǎbé ɲvè à fú*  
                   you put money FOC where  
 b. Limbum    *wè nǎɲsē mbà: bá fě*  
                   you put money FOC where  
 c. Fulfulde    *ha twe a resi fede / a resi fede ha twe*  
                   in where you put money / you put money in where  
 d. Hausa      *ia na kiɲ adze kudi*  
                   you TMA put where money  
 e. CPE        *wusai u put moni / u put moni fɔ wusai*  
                   where you put money / you put money in where  
 f. English     *Where did you put the money?*

There is at least one difference between Lítâ and Limbum with respect to question formation, however. Limbum allows questions to be formed with a cleft-like construction involving a sentence-initial focus marker that immediately precedes the question word, but this is not permitted in Lítâ. This can be seen in the contrasting examples in (6).

- (6) a. Lítâ      *\*à fú wè tǎbé ɲvè*  
                   FOC where you put money  
 b. Limbum    *á fě wè nǎɲsē mbà:*  
                   FOC where you put money

#### 4. SUMMARY

The primary objective of this chapter was to show that the rich linguistic repertoire of the speakers of Lítâ has not played a direct role in the formation of Lítâ lexicon. While some resemblances can be seen between Lítâ words and those of other languages spoken in Binka and Mbot, these are few, and the forms are rarely equivalent for nongrammatical words (i.e., for content words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives). The Lítâ pronouns, however, are largely the same as the Limbum pronouns, and the syntax of Lítâ also generally corresponds with that of Limbum.

#### NOTES

1. Editorial note: Due to difficulties with communication, it was not possible to get the author's input on the final version of this chapter, which represents an edited

version of an initial submission. The text has been revised for readability and shortened, with a focus on retaining those elements needed to provide context for the data provided. The data themselves have not been adjusted beyond changes to formatting. This chapter has been retained in the volume as a research note due to the interest of the pattern of language creation that it presents.

2. Glossing abbreviations in these examples are as follows: FOC, focus marker; NEG, negative marker; TMA, tense-mood-aspect marker.

3. All the data in this chapter (except the English) were collected in Binka and Mbot. Consequently, the examples from languages such as Fulfulde and Hausa cannot necessarily be expected to match what would be found in these varieties in other communities or for speakers for whom these are their primary languages.

## REFERENCE

Cenoz, Jasone. 2013. "Defining Multilingualism." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33: 3–18.

*Part II*

**MULTILINGUALISMS IN CONTACT**





## Chapter 7

# Multilingualism in Rural Africa

## *A Case Study of Ossing Village in Cameroon*

Tabé Florence A. E.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is often used to identify, characterize, and differentiate one ethnolinguistic group from others. It translates the thoughts and habits of a people (Whorf 2001; Lee 1996), the implicit and explicit manifestations of self in response to the routine material and immaterial practices of the community. Stubbs (1976, 20) maintains that “we hear language through a powerful filter of social values and stereotypes.” People use language to communicate their shared knowledge and responsibilities and their mutual beliefs, and their patterns of language use give order and meaning to their social, political, and economic norms, distinguishing them from their neighbors (Taylor 1958).

Many ethnolinguistic communities in Cameroon today are centers of multilingual and multicultural practices, as a result of migration and the effects of globalization and, in particular, as the outcome of migration from one rural area to another. Before the colonial era, the movement of people in Cameroon from one geographic area to another was generally related to either marriage or banishment. In the former case, following the norms of traditional marriage practices in these communities, a woman would leave her parents and home community and join her husband in his community, where she would spend the rest of her life. In the latter scenario, individuals who had been exiled from their home community for crimes such as murder or witchcraft practices were forced to relocate to a different community, and would often take their family with them if they were married; men were more vulnerable to banishment than women. Migration resulting from marriage was generally “within-group,” in the sense that the communities of both parties often shared strong linguistic and cultural features—intermarriage between ethnolinguistic groups with similar cultural and linguistic affiliations was encouraged

to increase personal and communal security. On the other hand, the pattern of migration of those banished from their communities could be said to be “out-group” migration—those who were exiled preferred to move into communities that had as few linguistic or cultural ties as possible to their home community, for fear of being identified and exposed for their crimes.

In contrast, migration during the colonial period was more diverse in its motivations, and today continues to involve not just a few people or families, but sometimes whole groups of a particular age or sex or from within a defined geographic area. From colonial times on, migration has often had an intensely socioeconomic dimension. The colonial rulers initiated development projects in some areas in Cameroon (such as agricultural plantations, road and rail infrastructure, and the construction of hospitals and schools), and the associated remuneration for workers substantially redefined the way that people in many ethnolinguistic groups thought about self- and communal development. The need for a huge workforce to keep colonial projects functioning attracted many people from their local communities to work in other communities. The income people received for their labor was used to improve their social and economic well-being. As a consequence of globalization and the corresponding socioeconomic pressures on the living standards of many communities today, the movement of people continues to be massive, perhaps more pronounced than ever, and occurring as both within-group and out-group migration. Generally, different social, religious, and economic constraints or ecological changes force people to move from one area to another, and migration tends to occur in waves, with the vacuum left as one group of people moves out later being filled by a countercurrent of people moving in.

The impact of trans-rural migration in Cameroon has resulted in the breakup of many ethnolinguistic communities—ecologically, culturally, and linguistically—and the emergence of radically heterogeneous societies: the clustering of many languages and cultures from different ethnolinguistic groups in a single community. In particular, migration has drastically changed the language ecologies of communities. In the Cameroonian context, the movement of people generally involves the movement of a language from one geographical location into a new language ecology. When the migrants interact with locals and other immigrants, different configurations of individual identity and language usage may ensue, depending on how linguistically diversified the host community is, the degree of linguistic proximity between the immigrants’ languages and the contact language, and what registers are available to use to identify with a speech community or distance oneself from it.

As the world becomes more economically linked, we may see smaller languages replaced by larger languages, with the smaller languages becoming

endangered and eventually disappearing as they are not transmitted from one generation to another. However, generally speaking, the expansion of the economy of any community remains a favorable condition for multilingualism, since there is a need for distinctive communication codes with divergent functional matrixes in any linguistically diversified community. Multilingualism can reflect the social stratification of a population, based on wealth or education.

Frequently, the lack of proximity between the language of a host community and the languages of migrants leads the latter to forge compartmentalized communication codes enabling them to adjust their speech forms depending on their audience. Adopting such communication strategies allows them to express solidarity or intimacy with their listeners on the basis of shared language ideologies, or retreat from them to express distance.

Knowledge of the strategies used to accommodate one's speech is indispensable in defining one's membership of particular speech communities, as proposed by accommodation theory (see Giles and Powesland 1975; Giles and Coupland 1991; Le Page 1997; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Johnson-Weiner 1998). As Giles and Coupland (1991, 60–1) point out, “accommodation is a multiply-organized and contextually complex set of alternatives, regularly available to communicators in face-to-face talk. It can function to index and achieve solidarity with or dissociation from a conversational partner, reciprocally and dynamically.” Accommodation requires a shift in behavior as individuals and groups relate to each other. When there is convergence or symmetry in behavior in intergroup communication, an individual gains the social approval of membership. Alternatively, divergence or asymmetry in behavior is considered unfavorable for membership. Importantly, as Le Page (1997, 28) emphasizes, “we do not necessarily adapt to the style of the interlocutor, but rather to the image we have of ourselves in relation to our interlocutor.”

While the presence of multiple languages can confer a dynamism to the social fabric of a community, attempts to characterize and quantify the language ideologies and attitudes of speakers in multilingual communities are enormous and challenging. For example, individuals' attitudes toward a particular language can change as the topic of the discourse changes. The increasing need to cultivate multiple identities with different groups of people for various purposes—identification, solidarity, security, and so on—means that multiple communication codes can be used by a single speaker, depending on the setting and time frame. With an increase in the number of affiliations that individuals have, there needs to be a corresponding enlargement of their linguistic repertoires to ensure that speakers are symmetrically integrated into the various speech communities (Di Carlo 2016; Di Carlo and Good 2014; Gumperz 2001; Giles and Powesland 1975; Goffman 1959).

This chapter is a contribution to the documentation of rural multilingualism in Africa, and is based on a longitudinal ethnographic survey of the situation in the village of Ossing, a multilingual community in Cameroon, from 1995 to the present. It provides a snapshot that maps out the ways in which speakers in Ossing exploit the extensive linguistic repertoire at their disposal for identity-marking, security, and solidarity purposes, and the way the local languages—Kenyang and Ejagham—are slowly changing due to language contact with people from different sociopragmatic, geolinguistic, and ecolinguistic structures.

The following section presents a sociolinguistic overview of multilingualism, considering the properties of multilingualism along several dimensions. Following the presentation of the methodology used in the study, section 4 then situates the study area, locating Ossing demographically and ethnographically and presenting the linguistic ecology of Ossing and its status as a multilingual community. Section 5 discusses the effects of multiple languages in Ossing on the individual, on the languages themselves, and on the community and its traditional aesthetics. Finally, the conclusions are presented in section 6.

## **2. SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE CONTACT**

This section presents an overview of the topic under discussion, which is multilingualism. To do so, it briefly examines in section 2.1 the concept of sociolinguistics as the domain of linguistics that incorporates the study of multilingualism. The definition and presentation of the topic *per se* is the objective of section 2.2.

### **2.1 Overview of Sociolinguistic Research**

Much of the knowledge a native speaker has about his or her language involves the unconscious ability to understand complex grammatical relationships within sentences. However, there is much more to language than grammatical structure. As Hymes (1967, 16) puts it, “a child capable of any and all grammatical utterances, but not knowing which to use, not knowing even when to talk and when to stop, would be a cultural monstrosity.” According to Hymes, the knowledge of how to use language appropriately in social situations is vital for speakers of a language, and he refers to this as “communicative competence.” The study of such relationships between the use of language and different social situations and social relationships is the main objective of sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics has been approached in a variety of ways. According to Wardhaugh (2002), there are several possible relationships between language and society: “social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior” (p. 9), “linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure” (p. 10), or “the relationship may be bi-directional whereby language and society may influence each other” (p. 10). For Holmes (1992, 16), “the sociolinguist’s aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices people make when they use language.” Or, as Chambers (1995, 207) puts it, “upon observing variability, we seek its social correlates. What is the purpose of this variation? What do its variants symbolize?”

In many modern societies, groups with widely different regional, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds live together in close geographic proximity. They interact freely and regularly in many contexts—in trade, at school, in religious rites, and so on. In many cases, individual groups see a need to preserve their separate identities, traditions, values, and loyalties through a range of internalized behavioral patterns in order to ensure that there is a continuing link between them and their home and kindred.

The behavior of individuals in heterogeneous societies is constrained by the nature of the activities at their disposal and their ability to perform such activities. That is, the projection of a pattern of behavior as indicative of a specific activity is governed by what anthropologists have referred to as role specificity (e.g., Bruner 1956; Duranti 2001). Of course, as the individual switches from one role to another, the number and kinds of communication codes that can be employed also change: there are co-occurrence restrictions across the choice of discourse, the mode of communication, and the speakers involved in a speech act.

This chapter adopts Wardhaugh’s (2002) bidirectional approach in the study of sociolinguistics, believing that language and society may influence each other, and also takes the views of Holmes (1992) and Chambers (1995) into account in the discussion. To understand the way an individual switches from one code to another, and how he or she manages to sustain his or her multiple identities, we need to understand the properties of multilingualism and language contact, to which we now turn.

## **2.2 Multilingualism and Language Contact**

Multilingualism is a linguistic phenomenon that is often associated with urban societies or what have been called plural societies, where there are more than two languages in a single community. However, in recent years, many rural communities, including those in the southwestern corner of Cameroon,

appear to be becoming multilingual and are gradually reflecting some characteristics of plural societies. For example, we can consider the rural communities of the South-West Region of Cameroon. This area has huge agricultural potential to act as the breadbasket for urban Cameroon, as the fertile soils are financially attractive for both extensive subsistence farming and cash crops. In part because of this, these rural areas have seen substantial migration from different regions of Cameroon over the past decade or two, thereby giving the communities a different flavor: they are now linguistically and culturally diversified. The languages of the local ethnolinguistic groups coexist with other languages brought by migrants from different communities.

The use of many languages in these communities corresponds to the nature of their social systems, which exhibit an intense degree of social stratification and occupational specialization. There are many communication roles in any society, and in multilingual communities the communication matrix—the totality of communication roles within a society—can lead to significant differences in linguistic repertoire between different members. Each role has as its linguistic index a distinctive code that serves as the defined norm for the particular ritual and behavioral conventions of that role. A combination of migration, social stratification, and occupational specialization produces the interaction of many languages in one community. The most widespread stance of scholars is that such a situation allows for polyglossia, where the languages in question become identified with a specific status or specific strata: a formal, standard, and highly prestigious language is identified with the administration and education, while informal, nonstandard, and less prestigious languages serve casual purposes, such as daily interaction for trade or among family and friends.

In multilingual communities, multilingualism is considered an integral component of social interaction and indispensable for full participation in community life (Gumperz (1971, 206–7)). Individuals use a variety of communication codes to reflect different stances vis-à-vis their listeners: identity, solidarity, power, security, distance, and so on. However the range of affiliations in which an individual engages affects the variety of linguistic repertoires employed, and can influence the degree of linguistic overlap in intergroup communication as speakers adjust from one discourse topic to another. Further, the linguistic repertoires provide an insight into the relationship between social factors and language, and whether the language of a particular group is discrete and symbolic of the group's identity: the language ideologies and attitudes of a group can be mapped from the linguistic coding of social information.

Thus, language is a social artifact, a symbol of identity, and an individual who speaks a variety of languages has multiple identities. Multilingual societies, with their intense linguistic diversity, are fertile grounds for such

multifaceted identities, although the nature of the communication matrix in multilingual communities varies depending on whether there are distinct languages or dialects of the same language involved.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

A number of different techniques were used to gather the data on which this study of multilingualism in the village of Ossing is based: language attitude questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation.

Beginning in January and November 1995, questionnaires that assess the attitudes toward and perceptions of individual and communal multilingual practices were administered to people in Ossing, including participants with a local background and those with a migrant background. The participants were selected at random from different occupations, including farmers, hair-dressers, bicycle repairers, local traders, primary school teachers, and clergymen. A combination of questionnaires and participant observation has been regularly used in the village since 1995. In the most recent survey, there were fifty participants, of whom thirty-five could neither read nor write, and whose questionnaires were administered orally. (See table 7.1 for full details of the number of participants in each round of questionnaires.)

Between 2003 and 2016, unstructured interviews including ten main discussion items were conducted with two previous heads of the local primary school, two Catholic clergymen (a priest and a catechist), and two traditional healers. In addition to these interviews, a process of participant observation was used with these informants.

Of particular importance in the present study is the ability of those living in Ossing to manipulate multiple language codes in communication. An

**Table 7.1 The increase in multilingualism in Ossing over the period 1995–2015, based on language attitude questionnaires and the author's observations. the number of participants is given for each period, together with the number and percentage of participants whose repertoire included three or more languages**

<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>	<i>No. with 3+ Languages</i>	<i>Percentage with 3+ Languages</i>
1995	15	3	20%
2003–2005	27	16	59%
2005–2007	35	22	63%
2007–2009	38	25	66%
2009–2011	44	31	71%
2011–2013	48	39	81%
2013–2015	50	44	88%

*Source:* Table created by the author.



examination of this was enabled by recording a stretch of conversation involving one main participant and three auxiliary participants in 2017. The conversation was transcribed and analyzed on the basis of the discourse topics.

## 4. OSSING VILLAGE IN CAMEROON

In order to evaluate the multilingualism of Ossing, it is important to understand the context in which these multilingual practices occur, geographically (section 4.1), socioculturally (section 4.2), and ecolinguistically (section 4.3). It is then possible to consider the patterns of small-scale multilingualism across the community and examine the structural patterns of the range of linguistic repertoires and their semantic import in conversation (section 4.4), with a particular focus on code-switching and the lexicon.

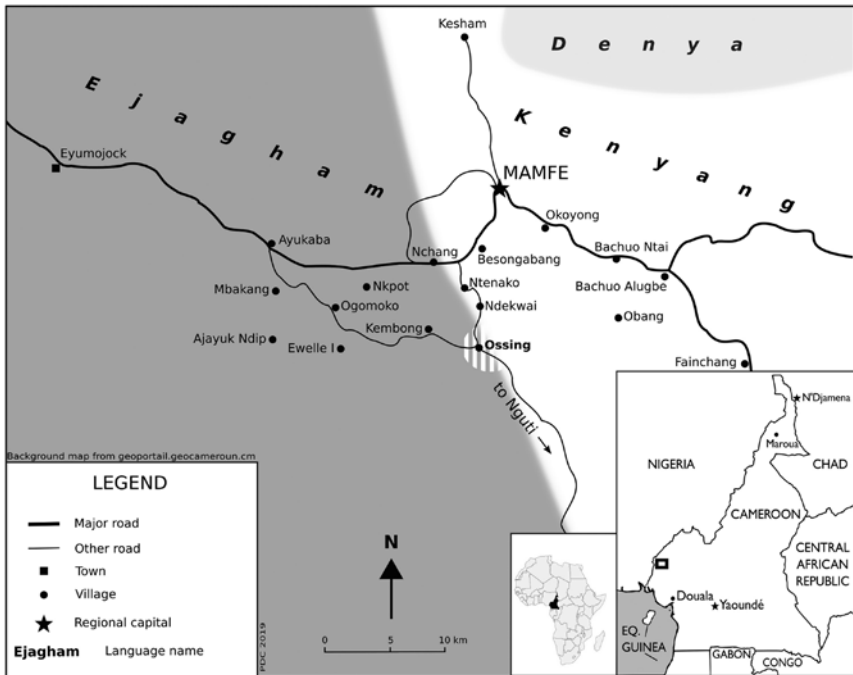
### 4.1 Location of Ossing

The village of Ossing is located in Eyumojock Subdivision, Manyu Division in the South-West Region of Cameroon, and in 2005 it had a population of 2,375 (BUCREP 2005). The village is within the equatorial zone and thus has a dense equatorial forest and an equatorial rainforest climate, characterized by two distinct seasons (dry and rainy) that are almost evenly distributed in the year. Figure 7.1 presents the village of Ossing in its local area, and shows the distribution of the three local languages spoken in the region: Ejagham, Kenyang, and Denya.

### 4.2 Sociocultural Structures of Ossing

The people of Ossing believe in a supreme being, God, and uphold fundamental human values that are incarnated through traditional religion (with a belief in shrines, sacred places, and art works, as well as traditional symbols, myths, and legends) and also Christian beliefs.

Members of the two local ethnolinguistic groups, the Bayang and the Ejagham, actively participated in the buying and selling of slaves during the period of the slave trade. The biggest slave market was located in Kem-bong (a local district close to Ossing). A man's wealth and authority were measured by the number of slaves at his disposal. The people of Manyu Division sold as slaves their children and other family members who were stubborn and thus considered untrustworthy by the entire community. They also bought slaves from other communities (see Ruel (1969), Chem-Langhee (1985), and Ngoh and Fomin (1998) for detailed discussions about the slave trade in Manyu). Slaves were stripped of many social rights, prevented from



**Figure 7.1** The village of Ossing in relation to nearby villages and towns. Shading indicates the approximate distribution of the three local languages spoken in Manyu Division: Ejagham, Denya, and Kenyang. The location of the area within Cameroon can be seen on the inset map. *Source:* Map created by Pierpaolo Di Carlo. Base map from [openstreetmap.org](https://www.openstreetmap.org).

intermarrying with those whose ancestors were not slaves, and lived at the entrances to the community so that they could serve as foot soldiers to check any attack or invasion of the community by strangers.

Once slavery was abolished, the structure of the social system became more fluid. The bulk of the inhabitants now have similar social backgrounds, all being treated as “freeborn,” the descendants of nonslaves. Occupationally, the inhabitants of Ossing fall into various groups—farmers, diviners, artisans, small merchants, and so on—and each has a distinctive authority.

However, the customs and values of the community have been undergoing widespread, radical, and often pervasive changes in the twenty-first century in response to globalization. Innovations such as the ever-accelerating development of new technology, the increasing use of computers in a variety of aspects of daily life, more sophisticated and efficient systems of communication, and medical technologies are having profound effects upon the languages and cultures of the members of this community. As traditional ways of behaving are gradually becoming interpreted as obsolete, the languages that once conveyed

the ideologies of the speakers are losing vitality in their usage. In recent years, the cultural norms are flouted for being derogatory and archaic, and the languages of Ossing are adulterated by extended code-switching.

### 4.3 Linguistic Ecology of Ossing

As seen in figure 7.1, Ossing is the only village in Manyu where individuals are typically bilingual by birth due to its geographical location on the boundary between two distinct Southern Bantoid languages belonging to the Niger-Congo family: Kenyang, a language of the Nyang group,<sup>1</sup> and Ejagham, a language of the Ekoid group (Williamson and Blench 2000). Its position divides the linguistic ecology of the Nyang language group to the east from the Ekoid group to the west.

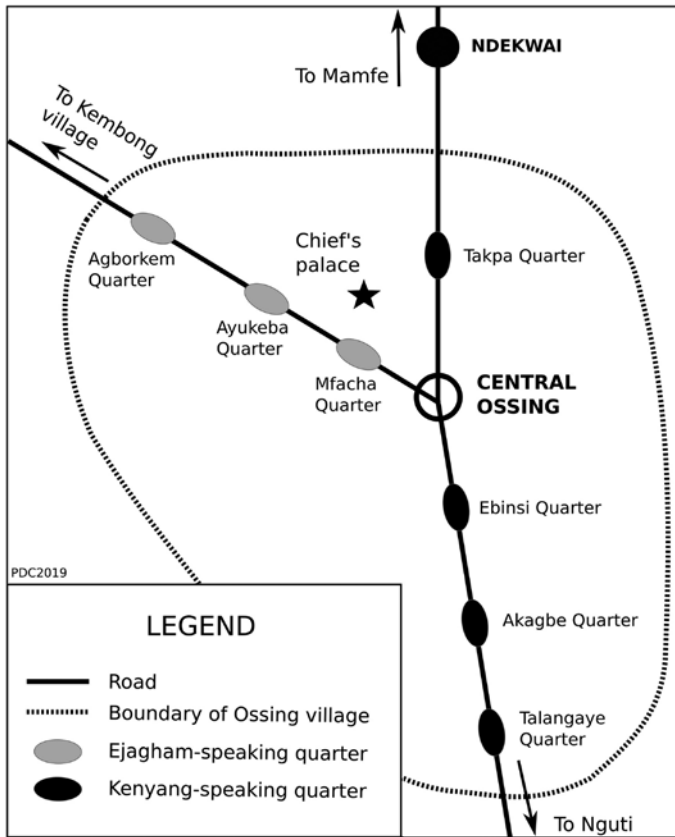
In fact, there are three major languages spoken in Manyu Division: Ejagham, spoken in Eyumojock Subdivision; Kenyang, spoken in both Mamfe Central Subdivision and Upper Bayang Subdivision, as well as in some areas of Eyumojock Subdivision; and also Denya, another language of the Nyang group, spoken in Akwaya Subdivision and some areas of Mamfe Central Subdivision. Despite their linguistic differences, the traditional people in these areas share fundamental sociocultural values: belief systems, dress, names, and so on.

Kenyang has three main dialects: Lower Kenyang, Upper Kenyang, and Kitwii. Lower Kenyang is spoken in Mamfe Central Subdivision and in Ntenako and Ndekwei, which are historically Kenyang-speaking villages found in Eyumojock Subdivision. Ndekwei is the closest Kenyang-speaking village to Ossing, where Lower Kenyang is also spoken. Upper Kenyang is spoken in Upper Bayang Subdivision, while Kitwii is spoken in Manyemen in Nguti Subdivision of Kupe-Maneguba Division.

Ejagham also has three dialects: Western Ejagham (which includes Etung and Ekwe), Babong-Mbakem, and Eastern Ejagham (which includes Keaka and Obang). Eastern Ejagham is the variety spoken around Ossing.

As seen in figure 7.1, Ossing is located at a three-way road junction. One road leads toward Nguti, which is not in Manyu Division and is associated with the Bassosi language; one leads to Kembong, which is primarily Ejagham-speaking; and the third heads to Mamfe, where Kenyang is spoken.

The people of Ossing live in unconsolidated and independent homesteads. As can be seen in the schematic representation in figure 7.2, the residential structure is linear and follows the main roads into and out of the village, a settlement pattern typical of traditional Bayang and Ejagham communities during and after the colonial era (Oben 1987). Each quarter represents members of a particular lineage and is controlled by a quarter head, and these heads together form the council. The community as a whole is led by a chief, who promulgates laws in the council and puts them into effect through its members.



**Figure 7.2** Schematic representation of the location of the quarters of Ossing and their main linguistic affiliation. *Source:* Map created by Pierpaolo Di Carlo.

Every native of Ossing is perfectly bilingual in the two languages—all speak and understand both Ejagham and Kenyang. However, the settlement pattern reflects two distinct language ecologies in a single village. As figure 7.2 shows, some quarters speak mainly Ejagham, while others largely speak Kenyang. The quarters located along the Ossing–Mamfe road speak Kenyang, and the neighboring villages along this road are traditionally inhabited by Bayang people who speak Kenyang. The quarters along the road to Kembong, deeper into Eyumojock Subdivision, have close affinities with the Ejagham people and the Ejagham language. Along the road heading to Nguti Subdivision, the inhabitants speak Kenyang. The settlement pattern of Ossing perhaps accounts for the acquisition of both languages by the locals, and thus its bilingual status. The linguistic repertoires of locals in Ossing indicate that Kenyang and Ejagham have equal status; what we find in this community is a sort of egalitarian bilingualism.

Aside from Kenyang and Ejagham, the other main languages present in the local ecology are the two colonial languages, English and French; Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE); and Camfranglais. In terms of the relative status of these languages, English and French rank highest, with international prestige and global economic utility. They are followed by CPE, which is used by people native to the village as well as non-natives. The local languages occupy the lowest position in terms of prestige and economic utility; however, they rank highest for traditional ceremonies.

The different languages play different roles in the daily activities of the villagers of Ossing:

- English and French are used in government-sponsored socioeconomic and political development, and are the languages of instruction in the educational system (nursery, primary, and secondary schools). English (but not French) is also used to write and archive local administrative documents, and is also one of the languages used in churches. Local people have been exposed to English from the colonial period, since the part of Cameroon in which Ossing is located was under British rule; many locals from Ossing have little or no knowledge of French.
- Kenyang and Ejagham are used by their native speakers in their homes and for intergroup communication with other native speakers of the languages. These are also the languages of diviners in traditional ceremonies and occult practices. Both are also used in churches.
- CPE is a lingua franca with a wide functional load (see Echu and Kiwoh Nsai 2012; Ngefac 2016; Ayafor and Green 2018). It is used for interaction between local villagers and those who are not native speakers of Kenyang or Ejagham, and is one of the languages used in churches. Children interact more with their peers in CPE than in Kenyang or Ejagham, and the younger generation of Ossing appears to have CPE as their first language, with Kenyang and Ejagham now functioning as second languages.
- Camfranglais, a “mixed” variety incorporating elements of French and CPE as well as other languages, is used mostly by a group of individuals who are not native speakers of Kenyang and Ejagham.

There are also a few other languages used in the village by a few speakers. For example, the small merchants in the village are largely native speakers of Igbo, a language from neighboring Nigeria; another language heard in the village is Efik, an Ekoid language from the Cross River State of Nigeria, which is closely related to Ejagham.

An informal ethnographic survey of Ossing from 1980 to the present shows that it has had a dramatic demographic surge that, like its recent multilingual nature, is a consequence of recent migration processes resulting from globalization and socioeconomic development, with many non-natives being

attracted to the area to live or for trade. The economic potential of Ossing lies in the huge forest resources in and around the villages of Manyu Division, as Ossing functions as an important transit depot for the intense exploitation of that timber. Many of the explorers connected with the forestry work are francophone Cameroonians who lack mastery of CPE, the usual lingua franca of the community when dealing with outsiders. Instead, they use a broken form of English and French to communicate with the locals, who themselves have had little or no exposure to French—as indicated above, the villagers are accustomed to hearing English because it was introduced into the area during the colonial era, but French was introduced long after (see Ngoh 2019).

The presence of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Ossing has far-reaching implications for the sociopragmatics and languages of this local community ranging from the socialization patterns of the languages of the host community and those of the migrants, to code-switching in intergroup communication, to language shift. Indeed, the sociolinguistic situation of Ossing has changed over the last twenty years from bilingual to multilingual, in response to the growing need for communication between the migrants and the local community for the purposes of identity, solidarity, and security outside the home environment.

It should be noted that before the recent economic development, the various languages discussed here other than Ejagham and Kenyang were present in Ossing, but only marginally so. English was the language of instruction in the primary school, and was restricted to that—pupils would switch into their mother tongue after school; CPE was used to help the locals understand biblical ethics and biblical references; and French was taught as a school subject.

#### **4.4 Status of Multilingualism in Ossing**

The current status of multilingualism in Ossing is presented here in two different ways: section 4.4.1 details the changing patterns of how people represent their own multilingualism; while section 4.4.2 presents a conversation involving the use of multiple language codes.

##### *4.4.1 Self-Evaluation of Multilingualism*

The Ossing community is gradually moving from being inherently bilingual to multilingual, as evident from the statistics collected between 1995 and 2015 given in table 7.1. As discussed in section 3, inhabitants of Ossing have been completing language attitude questionnaires every few years since 1995. On each questionnaire, the participants were asked how many languages they spoke. Table 7.1 presents the relevant data from those questionnaires. Here it can be seen that the number of participants that report being able to speak three

or more languages has increased in each survey, not just in absolute terms, but also as a percentage of those surveyed, rising from 20 percent in 1995 to 88 percent by 2013–2015. The table shows that Ossing is now linguistically diverse. It is gradually moving from being bilingual to being multilingual: the majority of the community use multiple codes in communicating.

#### 4.4.2 Patterns of Multilingual Repertoires

As well as collecting data on the different languages that people claim to have as part of their repertoire, it is possible to consider how they use their repertoire “in action,” so to speak. Here we present a highly multilingual stretch of talk, showing how participants with differing repertoires interact.

The conversation presented here was recorded in April 2017. The council of elders of the women of Ossing had issued a traditional ruling against adultery. A local woman, Mayok, had been accused of cheating with a married man. Mayok was found guilty of adultery on the third day of the trial, which infuriated her. The penalty was a fine of 6,500 Central African francs (around €10) and two jugs of palm wine, to be given to the council.

In the recording, Mayok is on her way to the local market to sell a bunch of plantains to try and raise some money to pay the fine. She meets Etaka, an intimate female friend, and recounts the episode to her, cursing the man’s wife.

Mayok was not aware she was being recorded at the time when the recording was made, but participants in the conversation were consulted after the recording was made and gave their permission for it to be used for the purposes of research. The names have been changed and some light editing was done to the original text to help ensure anonymity.

The conversation is characterized by high levels of code-switching involving Kenyang and Ejagham, the two local languages, and also English, French, CPE, Camfranglais, Igbo, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Duala (another language of Cameroon). The different languages involved in this conversation are identified based on the following typographic conventions: italics for *Kenyang*; italics and underlining for *Ejagham*; roman type for English; roman and underlining for French; bold for **CPE**; bold and underlining for **Nigerian Pidgin English**; bold and italics for *Camfranglais*; slanted brackets and roman for <Duala>; and slanted brackets and italics for <Igbo>. Low tones are unmarked in those languages that have tone.

*Etaka: mm̩ nyé n chí kaɣaa! á-ré nsik ékwá! m báá, ntiki epa ó βóŋ náy? m̩ ʃwó ɨ́ kém m̩ɛɛ*

“My sister [Ejagham] I am greeting! What a bunch of plantains you have with you! Are you organizing a party, if I may ask? I will certainly be there to fill my stomach [Kenyang].”

Mayok: *η kέzi ehóm. n dók n tí nsik ekwá m bóη fí ηkáp be kwə bekwéné <nnyangó> mbwéré Sunday*

“I am going to the market [Ejagham]. I want to sell the bunch of plantains and have some money to enable me to pay the fine levied on me [Kenyang] because of that woman [Duala] tomorrow [Kenyang] Sunday [English].”

*Etaka: ɔ βí? ɔ fɔt sezeé? ɔ ké wá mbí keyó ngóá?*

“What did you say? [Kenyang] What did you say? You are looking for money to pay a fine? [Ejagham]”

Mayok: *ε έ, nǝǝréó kè afánǝfán! nǝ nǝǝré á sí ká! nɔ ɔ βíkí rí yókó ntu á-né ηgɔré [word removed for anonymity] á báy mé a mwét? Madam a ti me etok bé mé were ne nmem ε-yi si yi deh God people!*

“Yes, [Kenyang] trouble, it is complicated! A big trouble I am into! [Ejagham] I am surprised you are not aware of the trouble that the [Kenyang] man’s [CPE] wife has plunged me into. She, madam accused me to the council for adultery with her husband [Kenyang]. Unbelievable are they, God’s people! [CPE]”

*Etaka: dùm ε nwé? [word removed for anonymity] mé βerá, mbák bá pay mbɔη baβayánem fà Ossing London tetétep, mpyáré ηkwó? a-ré balock a fú fá? a beg no di wori your skin with dat ηgwúmenem, ɔ ke pe wori mwet ε-ye, á saη ne wɔ? a βíkí nɔ rihí βé wɔ ɔ deal fí ne bɔ-**imported bobo***

“Her husband, you mean? [Ejagham] That man? [CPE] Let me ask a question [Ejagham] If we were to count the able men in Ossing London,<sup>2</sup> would that man too, with his tiny legs like a palm bird, be considered truly as one? This kind of [Kenyang] bad luck! [CPE] Where is it coming from? [Kenyang] Please, you don’t have to worry yourself as regards that [CPE] ghost, do not worry about her again. She must be teasing you out, Isn’t she? She doesn’t know that you date only [Kenyang and English] imported men [Nigerian Pidgin English].”

Mayok: *mbélé nǝ! ηyéé! erítí ηgóre mbò me, queen, ever ready, fine baby, <nwányi-áfá,> n dɔ messié, général, atout casser ne skyline be kóηó ahá? taper, church rat, èβóyó àkók, mbé, mbló, nnyá mnbiri éyé? Oh oh oh! mé ki fɔη yi a fɔηti ηkáp á-ne á fú áwá a swear God!, you know me fine nɔ?*

“Look here! [Ejagham] Look here! A beautiful woman like me, [Kenyang] queen, ever ready, fine baby, [CPE] white woman [Igbo], should I abandon the mister/ man, the general, and, the one you can count on [French] and [Kenyang] my skyline [English] and have a date with [Kenyang] a palm wine tapper, a church rat [English], a lizard, a pig [Kenyang], a rat, a dog, an animal? [Ejagham] Oh oh oh! I am going to ensure that this woman spends more money than what she has made me do [Kenyang]. To God, I swear, you know me, don’t you? [CPE]”

At this point in the conversation, Mayok notices two young men about twenty meters away, walking in their direction. As they approach, she recognizes both: one is a francophone and an admirer of hers, whom she fondly refers to as *Messié* (an adapted pronunciation of the French word *monsieur*), and the other is Ntui, a native of Ossing. Excited to see *Messié*, Mayok



switches her discourse and focuses on him. However, she warns Ntui not to betray her flirty behavior to Messié, who doesn't know much about her character when it comes to men. Ntui promises he won't betray her, just like he hasn't before. They understand each other very well, as can be seen in the proverb in Ejagham that Ntui uses. Unsurprisingly, Mayok uses the local languages to plead with Ntui to keep her secret from the francophone, who does not know the local languages.

At the beginning of this segment of talk, Mayok naturally changes languages from those used in the previous conversation with Etaka to accommodate Messié and Ntui in the new conversational space. The languages used in this setting are constrained partly by the linguistic identities and knowledge of discourse shared by the three of them: love, intimacy, and security. There is the desire on the part of Mayok for intense socialization with Messié, which may lead to intimacy and personal security. Her enlarged linguistic repertoire in this part of the conversation confers her with multiple affiliations, which she needs in order to have the negative side of her social life hidden by Ntui.

*Mayok: Messié cheri, bonsoir! **How nɔ cheri!***

“My dear sir/Messié, good evening! [French] How are you, dear? [Camfranglais]”

*Messié: ça va ma chérie*

“I'm fine, my dear [French]”

*Mayok: [to Ntui] **longtime nɔ see! how you loss so?** βélélé ka ká ywé áminé ká nnik mwét ɔ ke ka yí á díné mé*

“[to Ntui] It has been long since we saw one another, I hope all is well with you?

[CPE] Don't betray my character to Messié [Ejagham], please, don't let him know me [Kenyang].”

*Ntui: ɔ ké dén mwét, fɔ́ŋ ń kwuti wɔ as usual ɔ fòntí má áfón, ɔ fiŋ ntí ma ákám me and you deh boh*

“You don't have to be worried, I will protect you [Kenyang] as usual [English].

You and I [CPE] are birds of a feather [literally, ‘We both have many things in common in life’] so there is need to shield our poor behavior in public and in particular to strangers [Ejagham].”

*Mayok: **Messié we go for bar nɔ***

“Messié, shall we go to the bar? [CPE]”

*Messié: on pars alors **but I not have drink cherie because I sick malaria. Come we go my shine shine baby** ɲgɔré dík*

“We can go then to the bar [French]. However I will not have a drink because I am sick with malaria [Camfranglais]. Come on, let's go my beautiful lady [CPE], my beautiful queen [Kenyang].”

Messié, like many other nonlocals in Ossing, does not know Kenyang or Ejagham. However, he understands and uses a handful of expressions in the

local languages, ranging from single lexical items to phrases. For example, the last two words in this excerpt, *ngoré* (“woman”) and *ndík* (“white man”), are two Kenyang words that form a compound which translates as “a beautiful woman.”

The conversation presented above reveals the extensive use of code-switching involving the two local languages, Kenyang and Ejagham, and also CPE, English, French, Camfranglais, and sporadic lexemes from other local languages, as well as Nigerian Pidgin English. There is both intersentential and intrasentential code-switching. The choice of what languages to use in switching is largely constrained by individual local ideologies.

As indicated above, migration involves the transposition of the ideologies (attitudes, perceptions, and language) of a people from their original community to a new place. The host community is often considered to provide the fundamentals for sustainable development, not available in the home community. However, there are also challenges that migrants must overcome to be fully integrated into their new environment. For example, linguistic and cultural differences may provoke a sense of insecurity when the two parties interact. As a result of communication difficulties, a participant may yield to a pledge just to enable him to be accommodated as a member of a group. Messié, for instance, agrees to take Mayok to the bar and offer her a drink, despite his ill-health. He perhaps believes that it is an obligation on him as a stranger. He might have wanted to reject the demand but did not know how to express his refusal, since he lacks basic communication skills in any of the traditional languages used in Ossing. Mayok exploits Messié’s incompetence in the local languages for her own interests, pleading with Ntui—with whom she shares common language ideologies—to hide her immoral activities.

While multilingualism facilitates the construction of fluid identities in different groups, it can also give rise to fear and insecurity when there are discrepancies in language use.

## 5. IMPACT OF RURAL MULTILINGUALISM IN OSSING VILLAGE

The advancing use of multiple languages in rural Ossing, demonstrated in the previous section, could affect the current linguistic and cultural vitality and individual and ethnolinguistic group identities. Thus, in this section we consider the impact of multilingualism in indexing and enhancing the language ideologies and attitudes of speakers in Ossing, and also contemplate what the linguistic waves affecting Ossing might mean in terms of the future of linguistic groups and languages.

## 5.1 Effect on the Individual

Multilingualism is a source of strength, for it enables speakers from various language communities with a common language ideology to maintain contact with one another, to reveal their multifaceted identities in different sociopragmatic contexts, and to accommodate to others or distance themselves from others in intergroup communication. For example, Mayok switches from CPE to Ejagham and Kenyang in talking with Ntui, in order to hide another of her identities: an unappealing character that may send people away from her. In Ntui, she finds security, as both use their linguistic repertoires in the same way: the proverb Ntui quotes confers solidarity and security on Mayok.

Your choice of code reflects how you want to appear to others and how you want others to view you. Thus, there are advantages for those who are able to control a number of communication codes over those who lack such control. For Schegloff (2000) and Finlayson, Calteaux, and Myers-Scotton (1998, 417), speaking several languages is an indispensable social skill in a multilingual space. A speaker who can switch codes can access different identities and accommodate to others. He or she can meet someone halfway, establish common ground, and show flexibility and openness in communicating. This projects the individual as a cooperative person, someone who can recognize that everyone has a similar background.

But in the example in section 4.4.2, Mayok also has the ability to manipulate by using her linguistic codes, different to those of Messié. This enables her to exclude Messié from parts of the conversation, to her advantage. Until he gets to know the different repertoires that she controls, Messié remains unprotected in Mayok's company. This observation demonstrates the potential negative aspects of multilingualism when participants in a conversation fail to share corresponding codes of discourse.

## 5.2 Effects on the Languages Involved

Despite multilingualism providing advantages for individuals, multilingual situations can produce adverse effects on some of the languages involved. It can lead to language loss among immigrants and even among the locals in the multilingual communities in question. Sometimes the diffusion or spread of linguistic features from one language to the other(s) fails to respect the grammatical rules of the language(s) involved. The conversation in section 4.4.2 shows that individuals can produce whole sentences in a single code, switching only at sentence boundaries (intersentential code-switching), or they can switch intrasententially, placing single lexical items or phrases from one language into another (Myers-Scotton 1993). In Ossing, currency is talked about in English rather than in the local languages. People speak more

in terms of *fifty*, *a hundred*, or *six thousand five hundred* (the word *francs* is normally omitted)—it is probably much easier for Mayok to talk about her fine of 6,500 francs in English rather than in Ejagham or Kenyang.

The social conditions prevailing in multilingual societies create a number of often conflicting tendencies. The need for frequent code-switching on the part of a large number of individuals tends to reduce the language distance between codes (Gumperz (1971, 207–8)), and it is true that the degree of intelligibility between the two languages is very high: every native of Ossing tends to code-switch between Ejagham and Kenyang in their day-to-day interactions. However, it has been observed that the younger generation of the Ossing community lacks a full mastery of either Ejagham or Kenyang due to such frequent code-switching. They cannot sustain a conversation in either of the languages for ten minutes without mixing in features of the other language. This makes it difficult for non-native speakers to distinguish the two, and learn each language independent of the other. It does not facilitate intergenerational transmission of the local languages.

### 5.3 Effects on the Community

Neither languages nor cultures of the world are stable today. The pressures of globalization, the glory of the twenty-first century, have far-reaching and pervasive effects on languages and the cultures of their speakers. It is responsible for the rapid disappearance of local distinctiveness in the social structures of many communities; environmental destruction; and individuals having multiple identities within a single community. Like many other communities in Manyu Division, Ossing is under pressure to cope with an increasing globalization within which cultural and linguistic pluralism is gaining steam over traditional customs and values. Members of the younger generation seem to be drifting away from their local identities in favor of modernization. They are not interested in “exotic” occupations and ceremonies practiced in the community like hunting, fishing, farming, traditional healing, participation in ceremonies involving local masquerades, being members of secret societies, and so on. Horcart (1984) maintains that the best way to understand alien and exotic institutions is to concentrate upon the terms used by the people themselves. The younger generation needs the local potential to sustain traditional values in rural communities. How can this approach be communicated to the people of Ossing, whose ecology is changing at an accelerated rate, in line with a pattern that rural communities are gradually disappearing from the world?

## 6. CONCLUSION

The globalization of socioeconomic development in the world today is transforming the social fabric, demography, and ecolinguistics of many rural communities in Africa. Communities that have remained monolingual for centuries are fast becoming centers of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Ossing, a traditionally bilingual village in the South-West Region of Cameroon, is rapidly embracing this diversity in different ways. For example, the nonuniformity of communication codes in group interaction reflects the community's attempts to cope with the developing system of linguistic and cultural diversity. Individuals can converge or diverge on the basis of their language ideologies for various purposes such as solidarity or intimacy, security, identity, and so on. While there are obvious advantages to having command of many languages, multilingual societies face a number of problems: in particular, the possibility that the languages, customs, and values of communities will be undermined or endangered if they do not serve a significant function for the majority of people.

## NOTES

1. Kenyang is spoken in the Bayang areas. The speakers of Kenyang refer to themselves as *ma-nyang* (a person who speaks Kenyang) and *ba-nyang* (people who speak Kenyang). Studies by linguists affiliated with SIL International (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics) refer to the Mamfe group rather than the Nyang group of languages. However, the term *Mamfe* is foreign, a distortion based on the Kenyang expression *mam fye (fa)* "they should put (here)" or "it should be put (here)" that was used by the colonial powers. Unlike Nyang (or Anyang, as their Ejagham neighbors refer to them), Mamfe has no sociocultural connection for the local people.

2. The people of Ossing see themselves as the most educated and civilized in Many Division. They compare themselves to the British colonial masters whose lifestyle they had admired and seemingly tried to copy; hence the title "Ossing London."

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## Chapter 8

# Spaces and Interactions in Multilingual Repertoire Construction

## *A Case Study in an Urban Area of Casamance (Senegal)*

Ndiémé Sow

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the humanities, the notion of space has been analyzed from the point of view of various fields: geography, anthropology, and sociology. Within sociolinguistics, space and linguistic behavior have been looked at in relation to the construction of forms of identity, and many different aspects of this relationship have been described, including (a) the attitudes of speakers according to spaces, (b) the relationship between sociolinguistic spaces and speech acts (Juillard 2016), (c) the representation of linguistic borders (Boutet (2018, 183)), and (d) the border crossing of languages in interaction (Ledegen and Leglise (2013, 321)).

The central hypothesis followed in this chapter is that language contact in a highly multilingual region (Lower Casamance in Senegal) is characterized by parameters of mobility in a population whose linguistic behaviors are intimately linked to the spaces in which they socialize. I am especially interested in the interactional dynamic and linguistic practices of young students and their evolution in an urban environment (Sow (2016, 263)). In this chapter, I proceed following an ethnographic approach (Hilgers (2009, 61)) in order to describe the linguistic ecology of migrant youths in the multiethnic and multilingual region of Lower Casamance. The study examines the speech of 123 participants from the network of social relations of Ynot, a young student, in order to explain how multilingual repertoires are related with the spaces that students occupy. All individuals discussed in this study gave permission for their names to be reported in the chapter, in the form in which they appear.



This chapter is divided into four main sections. After a brief introduction to the area of Lower Casamance, section 3 gives the theoretical framework for the multiple choices of repertoire in Senegal, looking at the difference between participant-based and location-based perspectives on multilingualism. Section 4 introduces the case study, and describes and analyzes the link between physical spaces and the creation of multilingual repertoires in Ziguinchor based on interactional dynamics. The final sections then look at the construction of multilingual repertoires, interpreting the sociosymbolic functions of languages in interaction (section 5), considering the role of ideologies and linguistic attitudes (section 6), and the part that space plays (section 7).

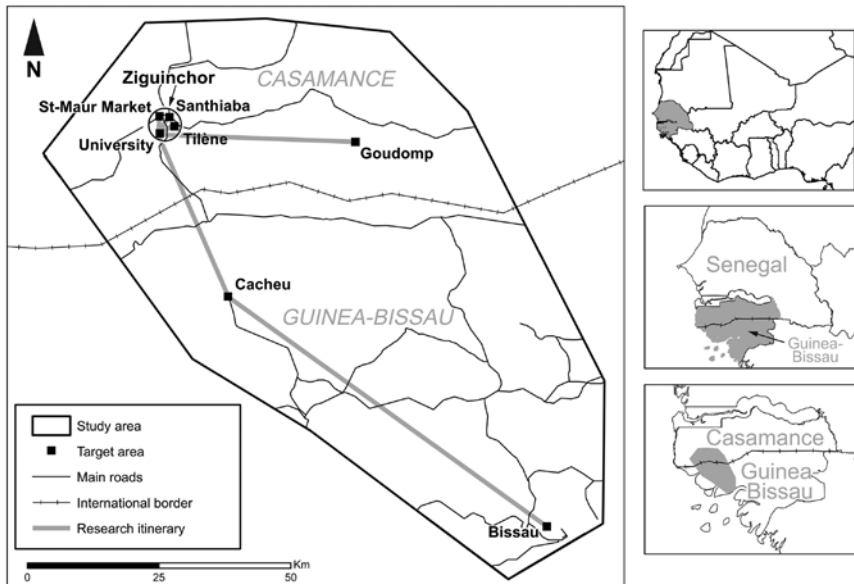
## 2. LOWER CASAMANCE

Casamance is the name of the southernmost strip of Senegal, to the south of the Gambia River, and is made up of three administrative regions: Ziguinchor (Lower Casamance), Kolda (Upper Casamance), and Sédhiou (Middle Casamance).

The whole macro-region is multicultural and multiethnic and is characterized by high degrees of both linguistic diversity—Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2019) list more than twenty languages from both the Atlantic and the Mande families of the Niger-Congo phylum in the area—and individual multilingualism (see, e.g., Cobbinah et al. (2016, 86)). This makes Casamance an ideal object of research in the social and historical sciences in general, especially those dealing with ethnographic and ethnological data.

The westernmost part of Casamance—that is, Lower Casamance, of which Ziguinchor is the capital—is a former Portuguese colony that provides a great many sociological and linguistic reflexes of its status as a buffer zone between Senegal (French-speaking), Guinea-Bissau (Portuguese-speaking), and Gambia (English-speaking). This situation overlaps with a preexisting scenario in which a multitude of African languages were spoken, now made more intricate due to primarily colonial and postcolonial patterns of urbanization (see, e.g., Juillard 2005)—these languages are now in contact with foreign languages such as Portuguese, English, and French, and they are used together by speakers in a single interaction, with code-switching a very frequent phenomenon.

Lower Casamance has, for a long time, been stigmatized and marginalized, and conflict has been ongoing there for more than three decades. Historically, there has been a north–south opposition in Senegal, but this has recently been blurred, and the “deconstruction” and “reconstruction” of social groups, as well as the rapid development of urbanization, have changed the social map of this space. The establishment of national structures and national



**Figure 8.1** The location of the major sites that are relevant in the present study, in lower Casamance and across the border in Guinea-Bissau. Note that within Casamance, most of the sites fall within the city of Ziguinchor. *Source:* Map created by the author.

infrastructure (schools, hospitals, universities, roads, etc.) encourages northerners to settle in Casamance, thus promoting intense migratory dynamics. These have led to unprecedented social and linguistic diversity and make this cross-border space a multidimensional melting pot at many levels, including ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously.

Figure 8.1 gives the location within Lower Casamance and across the border in Guinea-Bissau of the major sites that are relevant in this study.

### 3. PARTICIPANT-BASED VERSUS LOCATION-BASED PERSPECTIVES ON MULTILINGUALISM

In the 1980s, a team of French researchers working on questions related to Senegalese multilingualism emphasized the copresence of distinct languages in Casamance (Juillard (2007, 239)). These early works already commented on the “growing wolofization in urban environments” (Manessy (2000, 36); my translation). The expansion of Wolof is a result of mobility and migration dating back to French colonization. These days, it is the lingua franca in Senegal, and coexists in Casamance with a host of languages native to the region.

Along with this expansion, the use of a mixed Wolof-French variety (Auzanneau and Juillard 2012) has become the norm in everyday language

practices, notably among young people. Such practices can be observed from two main perspectives, participant-based and location-based. A participant-based perspective positions the speaker at the center of the construction of the repertoire and idioms (Juillard (2016, 99)), and views the context of interaction as well as the participants involved as determining the choice of language and the way in which these languages are used. For example, Juillard wrote:

Ziguinchor, la langue du groupe d'origine reste très présente entre jeunes gens. Elle est la langue de base des mélanges observés chez de jeunes locuteurs scolarisés; le français, le wolof et éventuellement d'autres langues ou dialectes locaux sont les langues imbriquées. (Juillard (2016, 99))

"In Ziguinchor, the language of the group of origin remains very present among young people. It is the basic language of the mixing observed in young students; French, Wolof, and other local languages or dialects are the interwoven languages."

On the other hand, years earlier, Dreyfus and Juillard (2001, 684) had stated:

Ziguinchor, grande ville du Sud sénégalais, a évolué d'un plurilinguisme généralisé dominé par l'usage des variétés de diola et de mandingue, les principales langues régionales, à une configuration où le wolof, langue véhiculaire importée du Nord, est au sommet de la hiérarchie linguistique, pour les jeunes et les femmes.

"Ziguinchor, a big city in southern Senegal, has evolved from widespread multilingualism dominated by the use of Diola and Mandinka varieties, the main regional languages, to a configuration where Wolof, a lingua franca imported from the north, is at the top of the linguistic hierarchy for young people and women."

A location-based perspective, like the one adopted in this quotation, is one in which the urban environment as a macro-space constitutes a defining parameter influencing the linguistic choices made by those who have several languages in their repertoires (Calvet 2005; Juillard 2016).

## 4. INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS AND THE CHOICE OF LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE: A CASE STUDY

### 4.1 Theoretical Background and Rationale of This Study

Many researchers treat the problem of the social construction of meaning in interaction by being sensitive to forms of nonverbal communication in their interactionist approaches (Boutet and Heller (2014, 8)). In the style

of Gumperz (1989), they relate “situated” linguistic practices to cognitive processes of space-time structuration. Other researchers more strictly follow a line of connection between the use of linguistic resources in the permanent construction and/or deconstruction of social and linguistic borders (Auzanneau and Greco 2018, cited by Boutet (2018, 182)) and their role in the mechanisms of the mobilization of symbolic and material resources.

Humans—from whatever society they may come—meet, communicate, and interact with each other by making use of multiple languages and language varieties, whether social varieties, regional varieties, or others. Thus, they do not necessarily share the same conventions of conversation, interpretation, or interaction. Gumperz (1989) introduces a pragmatic approach into sociolinguistic methodology. In his analysis, he emphasizes certain micro-phenomena in context (conversations), which allows him to recognize a fundamental autonomy of speakers: their choices cannot be explained by simply correlating them with “independently determined social and contextual categories” (Gumperz (1982, 9)). By the same token, Gumperz’s interactional approach also recognizes that speakers’ intended meanings may not match perfectly with hearers’ understandings; from this perspective, Gumperz’s emphasis lies more on the receiver (interpreting hearer) than on the sender (speaking subject).

In other words, linguistic choices are made by speaking subjects, but interpretation of choices is guided by the sociocultural background of receivers. Thus, in any societal and social context, the same conversational content can have various meanings depending on whose perspective one takes. For example, in the data collected for this study, Michel—a friend of Ynot, the main participant—often uses the Wolof word *koñe* to mean “changing direction”; however, in another context, in discussions with students coming from northern Senegal, the same term was perceived by some of those northern students to mean “to obstruct.”

In addition, Gumperz includes in his method a fine-grained analysis of aspects of communication that are traditionally neglected in research and demonstrates their importance. These include prosody (rhythm, intonation, accentuation, etc.) and the visual-gestural modality.

Gumperz’s model places a high value on the factual events connected to the conversation. Meaning in an interaction emerges to some extent from the backgrounds of the participants of the interaction. However, even if those social variables that allow the determination of one’s sociological profile are indeed determinative of linguistic choices, the situation surrounding the interaction plays a further role. Indeed, it is language contact that favors what Blanchet (2008) calls “the continuum phenomenon.” He rightly considers that “la compétence linguistique d’un locuteur forme une palette continue de plusieurs variétés d’une ou plusieurs langue(s) dans laquelle il choisit pour

s'exprimer en réalisant des mélanges” (the linguistic competence of a speaker provides a set of several varieties of one or more languages from which he picks and mixes to express himself).

The linguistic situation in Casamance is very pertinent for the application of Gumperz's model, and this will be demonstrated here through the concrete example of the language use of the student Ynot and members of his network of social relations. As I will illustrate below, Ynot's language use is linked to the spaces he crosses.

Gumperz (1989) proposed that analysis should concentrate on the following foci:

- The way in which interlocutors use different varieties of a language, or various languages, during exchanges (the principles of code alternation and covariation established by sociolinguistics)
- How these choices contribute to communication strategies
- How these choices build cultural settings for the interpretation of statements and utterances
- How these choices are significant
- How these interactional modalities work in cases of contact between speakers belonging to different ethnolinguistic and sociolinguistic communities

My analysis focuses on the last two points.

## **4.2 Project Design and Methods**

This chapter is based on data that I have collected in the context of a research project carried out in collaboration with Michelle Auzanneau (Paris Descartes University, France). It uses an in-depth ethnographic method to allow for the description and analysis of the relationships between the experiences of young people (in terms of their identity, morality, customs, social origins, ethnic membership of families, etc.) and the construction of their repertoire.

The major participant in the project was Ynot, a student studying applied foreign language at Ziguinchor University. He carried an audio recorder with him, and recorded some of his daily interactions over a period of seventeen months (from August 2016 to December 2017), producing a total of around seven hours of recorded data, including more than two hours in Guinea-Bissau. Within the city of Ziguinchor, he made recordings at the university; at the Saint-Maur market (also known as Boucotte); in the suburb of Santhiaba, where he plays soccer; and in the suburb of Tilène, where he grew up and where his family still live. He also recorded conversations in Goudomp, a town in the neighboring Senegalese region of Sédhiou, about forty kilometers

from Ziguinchor. As well as these locations in Senegal, he made recordings in Cacheu and Bissau in Guinea-Bissau.

The recordings that Ynot made included his conversations with a total of 123 other people: his family, friends, relatives, neighbors, and so on. These conversations were then analyzed to examine the linguistic practices of the participants, following the interactional dynamics of different spaces of socialization. In what follows, I analyze various sequences collected in these interactional contexts by starting with the behaviors that control language choice in the diverse communicational situations.

In addition to the conversations themselves, semi-directed interviews were a key element. These facilitated the collection of linguistic biographies of the young people involved, and of other portions of the population of the study, in order to determine any relationship between their social circumstances and their linguistic usages. These interviews are also vital in bringing to light the differences between the actual repertoire used by speakers in different spaces and the repertoire that they reported using.

### 4.3 Ynot and His Languages

At the time of data collection, Ynot was a first-year student studying for a master's degree in Applied Foreign Languages at Ziguinchor University. He is a native of the town of Goudomp in Senegal, and has three sisters and one brother. They are all Senegalese of Bissau-Guinean origin and grew up in the same household. He declares: "J'ai la chance de parler plusieurs langues parmi lesquelles le mankagne, le manding, le créole, l'anglais, l'espagnol et un peu le wolof" (I am lucky to speak several languages, among which are Mankanya, Manding, [Guinea-Bissau] Creole, English, Spanish, and a bit of Wolof); and in addition, of course, he speaks French.

He explains how he came to speak each one of these languages.<sup>1</sup>

Je parle Mankagne parce que c'est la première langue que j'ai acquise depuis ma naissance, c'est la langue de mes parents et de mes aïeux \*\*\* le Manding, c'est dû à mon passage à Goudomp / dans le balantacounda / c'est la langue du milieu \*\*\* le Créole vient de mon passage en Guinée et des nombreux allers-retours à Bissau \*\*\* le français \* l'anglais et l'espagnol sont des langues que j'ai apprises à l'école \*\*\* le wolof c'est à Ziguinchor /// Là-bas, toutes les langues sont imbriquées ou mélangées. C'est comme un melting-pot quoi. (NS-140917\_zig-tln)

"I speak Mankanya because it is the first language that I acquired from birth, it is the language of my parents and my ancestors \*\*\* Manding, that is due to when I lived in Goudomp / in Balantacounda / it is the language of the environment \*\*\* Creole comes from when I was in Guinea and my trips back and forth from Bissau \*\*\* French \* English and Spanish are languages that I learned at school

\*\*\* [I learned] Wolof at Ziguinchor !!! There, all languages are interwoven or mixed. It's like a melting pot.”

The diverse functions that Ynot himself assigns to the different languages emerge from his statement. Even if the relation between language and mobility is striking in this quote, what was actually observed in conversations provides a glimpse into the rhythm of code-switching as a function of the nature of the interaction. In reality, Ynot’s code-switching and his manipulation of discourse forms make clear his own ethnic identity, as they do for any speaker (Gumperz (1989, ch. 4)). Mankanya is considered to be a minority ethnic language in Senegal (in statistical terms); however, the frequent interactions that Ynot recorded in this language show that it is far from being a minority language in his life. (Note that my participation in the interview given here is responsible for the extract being exclusively in the French language.)

Other data that emerged from the interviews allow for a schematic representation of Ynot’s view of his linguistic trajectory, with four places tied to four major periods in his life, each being associated with a distinct linguistic repertoire: see figure 8.2.

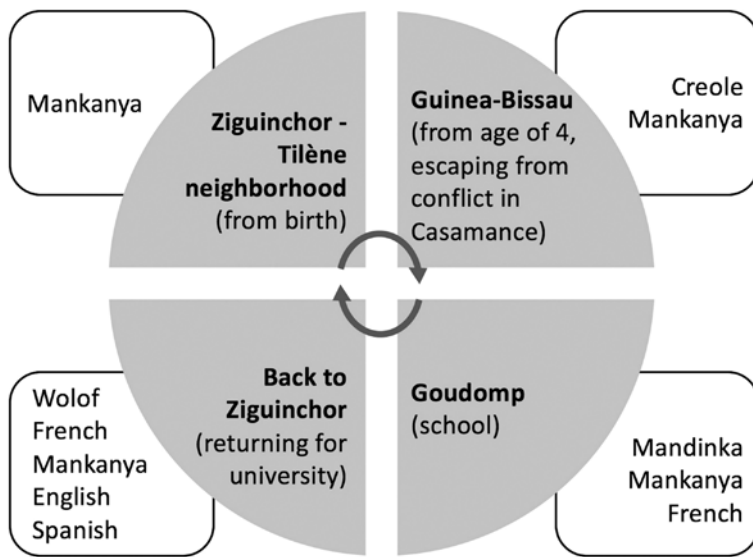


Figure 8.2 The major events that Ynot associates with the different stages of his linguistic trajectory, and the different locations and Languages Associated with Each. Source: Figure created by the author.

## 5. SOCIOSYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF THE LANGUAGES THAT CONSTITUTE A LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE

The precis of Ynot's language repertoires suggests the determining factor is location. However, a discussion with Syma—Ynot's best friend, whom he has known since childhood—makes it very clear that language choices are highly linked to the person to whom young people are talking. Syma uses several languages depending on his conversational partner: for example, he uses mixed Wolof-French with me; Wolof with Fatuh, a woman who sells fruit, who comes from the Gambia and is married to Waly, a Wolof from Thiès who works as a nurse at the regional hospital; mixed French-Mankanya with Ynot and other childhood friends who live in Tilène; and Creole with Justin, a Guinean neighbor in Tilène.

Thus, language used in interaction can have several meanings. Habitual language choice is far from being a random matter of momentary inclination (Fishman (1965, 73)). Based on the interviews with Ynot, and keeping his network of social relations in mind, Ynot's repertoire will be progressively constructed through the following discussion of the various sociosymbolic functions of the languages he uses.

### 5.1 Feelings about Languages

The language to which one is most attached is often the language of the core family, or that of the most influential parent in the household. For Ynot, this language is Mankanya; his parents are both Mankanya. He describes this language as the one through which he identifies himself, and the one that allows him to be part of a community: "Je suis fier de parler mankagne parce que ça montre que je ne sors pas de nulle part" (I am proud to speak Mankanya because it shows that I don't come from nowhere).

Ynot's childhood friends also justify why they are most attached to this particular language. All of them are Mankanya, live in the same area, and are students.

*Michel:* *linga doon sooko bañee dafa fek dang si ñaaw<sup>2</sup>*

*"He who denies his roots does no honor for his kin."*

*Malamine:* *je parle mankagne spontanément parce que xamnaa ni ñëpp dina ñu comprendre . . . moo gën yomb quoooo fii nii, finalement, mooma gënël si sama xol<sup>3</sup>*

*"I speak Mankanya spontaneously because I know that everybody will be able to understand . . . It's easier here. Finally, it is the one in my heart."*

*Ndecky:* *ah moi c'est par habitude rek. Avant nak, dama ko bëggoon torop, mais legui damako tamm<sup>4</sup>*

*"Ah for me, it's just a habit now. But years ago, it was because I liked it so much."*



*Faustin:* j'ai le réflexe de parler Mankagne, car mes parents l'exigeaient à la maison quand j'étais plus jeune

"I have the habit of speaking Mankanya because my parents demanded it when I was younger."

*Other friend:* mooy tax ma gëm lima doon ak kima doon!

"It makes me feel what I am and who I am." (NS-211017\_zig-tln)

The common point among these five young people is that they all have much affection for Mankanya, one of the first languages they understood, spoke, and used. It is certainly true that Mankanya, as an important element of their repertoires, is a good instrument for affirming their family identity. It also seems to be the best implement to show how they love themselves and their community by loving and using that language. Thus, they use Mankanya each time the opportunity presents itself.

## 5.2 Realities (Social Context) of Languages

Individuals are formed and forged through communities. Being young implies knowing how to identify oneself as such, through language behaviors recognized by peers and, often, only by peers—the meaning of actions and interactions may be understood by everybody, but the real meanings are better perceived by people inside the same social group (Frath and Daval 2019).

In the Tilène area,<sup>5</sup> older people often do not like to use Wolof, as the ideologies surrounding Wolof are negative. The emblem of ethnicity (Cobbinah et al. 2016) ensures that each language conveys a different sociocultural reality, and speakers use them on that basis. Wolof is considered by many inhabitants of Casamance as a vulgar language, because it is often used to insult people.

However, Wolof is in fact the most used language in social interactions. Choosing Wolof in order to reach a greater audience is thus justified by the social reality of the location. It is this language that assures the swift diffusion of expressions of reality. Wolof is becoming more and more vehicular in Casamance, like in Dakar or Saint-Louis or any other place in northern Senegal.

Syma thinks that Wolof is now an unavoidable language: "I don't want to speak Wolof, but I am obliged to, when I play football. If not, I can't talk to my university friends" (NS-211017\_zig-uasz; my translation).

## 5.3 Uses of Languages

The most commonly spoken language for any pair of interactants in this study depends on the relationship between them—whether they are childhood friends, university colleagues, acquaintances from the soccer field, and

so on. It is the context that defines the choice of language during any specific interaction.

The particular relationship Ynot has with any given friend conditions the languages they use with one another. For example, Ynot often uses French while talking to other students even if the conversation happens outside the confines of the university; the language is denoting their membership in a particular community. Attitudes toward French are often positive, as it is considered as a symbol of knowledge and rapid social ascension, while Wolof is used to facilitate integration into the youth environment. These usages allow for the demarcation of the opposition between an institutional language (French) and a relational language (Wolof).

## 6. IDEOLOGIES AND LINGUISTIC ATTITUDES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MULTILINGUAL REPERTOIRES

Ideologies are not fixed. They can vary depending on the space where an interaction takes place, or on the participants in the interaction, or on both. For example, data about the perception of Wolof as a vulgar language were collected while Ynot was recording conversations with people of his own Mankanya-speaking community, who in such circumstances do not hesitate to talk about the negative aspects of Wolof. By contrast, the very same people avoided criticizing Wolof when I, a Wolof native speaker originally from northern Senegal, participated in the conversation. Accommodation and politeness are ideologies, too, that may be more or less foregrounded depending, in this case, on the identity of interactants.

Among the youth of Casamance, the relationship between language choice and the image that they have of people they have met and who are associated with one or the other language leads to the interaction's interpretative setting. Certain languages may seem more dynamic to speakers than others; one language might be expanding geographically more quickly; another might serve purely to report cultural facts; a further language appears more useful for communication; and so on. For members of the Mankanya and Manjak communities of the Tilène area of Ziguinchor, the various languages in the environment do not operate in the same manner or evolve with the same rhythm. They do not have the same functions; and they help with the construction of micro-societies that do not see themselves in the same way that outsiders do.

The particular micro-society of most interest here is the one constituted by the Mankanya community of Tilène, who have very strong associations with Bissau-Guinean nationals, the inhabitants of the district, Christians, and people sharing various other social features. In this micro-society, language is

not the only identity marker, and we have already seen that there are several languages spoken by members of the community whose uses are situational. It is therefore interesting to see how, in this particular micro-society of Casamance, languages are perceived and represented from the inside, as well as the outside. In other words, it is revealing to study the “attitudinal fluctuations,” following Canut (2000, 79), who proposes “une dimension interlocutive dans l’ajustement des imaginaires” (a dialogical dimension in the mutual adjustability of ideologies; my translation; Adamou (2002, 87)).

In the case of Ynot’s family, as recorded for the study, one observes that whenever an older person is present—often the chief of the family and his friends of the same generation—people stop using Wolof. This fluctuation in attitude surrounding the Wolof language in Casamance is explained by a diachronic observation of the perceptions of Wolof. While the language is in a phase of expansion (Juillard 1992), the older generation continues to think that those who use Wolof are rejecting those from Casamance and their linguistic and cultural foundations. An excerpt from an interview with JPG, the district manager of Tilène, supports this view of Wolof:

alors // si je ne peux pas utiliser le créole ou le manjak, j’utilise le français \*\*  
 euhh \* je ne parle wolof que si (si vraiment) je n’ai pas d’autre choix +quoi //  
 tu comprends? // c’est ça /// c’est comme quand je te parle à toi \*\*\* le wolof  
 insulte trop:: (NS-MM070418\_zig-tln)

“So // if I cannot use Creole or Manjak, I use French \*\* uh \* I speak Wolof only  
 if I don’t (I really don’t) have any other choice +what // you understand? // that’s  
 it // it’s like when I’m talking to you \*\*\* Wolof is very insulting::”

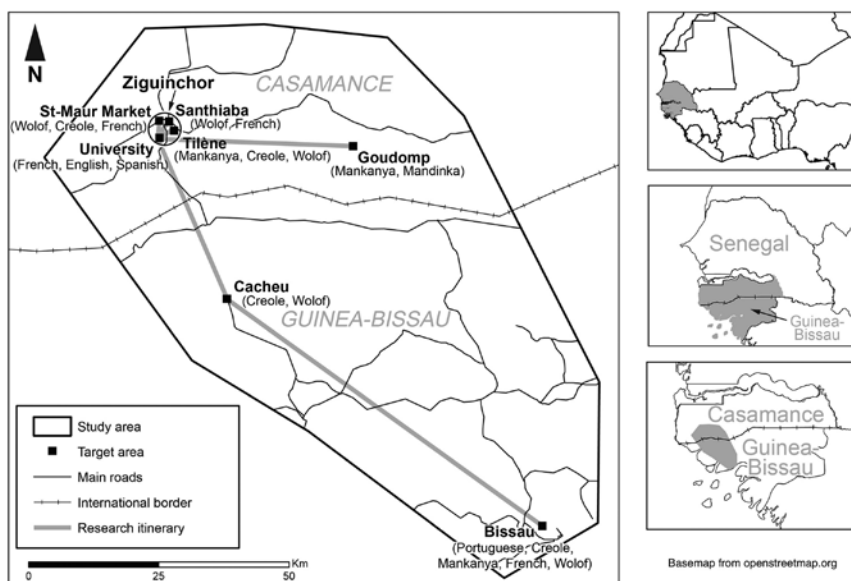
Unlike JPG and many people of his generation, the young people I met consider Wolof a key language that can help open many doors: it is a language of identity affirmation for youth, it is what allows them to be recognized by their peers, it symbolizes access to other parts of the country, and it is an index of “urbaness” and of personal validation. In the Gambia, to the immediate north of Casamance, Wolof and Mandinka are the most widely spoken languages, so its mastery is an economic asset for young people, especially those that have not done any advanced studies and who may become traders or street vendors there, in the city of Banjul. Potential mobility and its reasons can help define the image of languages.

In the particular case of Wolof, the differences in language ideology between the older and younger members of the Mankanya community of Tilène is striking. In Ynot’s family and his wider network of social relations, the attitude toward Wolof is generally negative among older people and positive among the young. This influences their choices of language repertoire.

## 7. SPACES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF MULTILINGUAL REPERTOIRES

Typically, the fact of having to cross several linguistic spaces favors knowing several languages. However, knowing languages can also drive or influence an interest in crossing these spaces (Gumperz (1989, 13)). So, multilingualism both contains the rationale for the segmentation of repertoires and, at the same time, enables one to navigate through linguistic boundaries, making them somewhat translucent. It is during multilingual interactions that represented space, physical space, and interactional space converge as a single event, where interactional space refers to space as it is configured by the disposition of participants' bodies and by their relative (im)mobility (Mondada (2012, 16)).

The data from the recorded conversations show that, in Ynot's case, the segmentation of repertoires is related to physical space (see figure 8.3). For example, Mankanya is his most commonly used language overall in Ziguinchor (there is more than an hour of Mankanya, in a total of less than two hours of interactions); while for him the city of Bissau is linked to Creole—of the two hours and six minutes of interactions collected in Bissau, there is one hour and twenty-three minutes of Creole, thirty-nine minutes of Mankanya, and four minutes of unidentified languages among which Wolof, Portuguese,



**Figure 8.3** The linguistic repertoires that are associated by Ynot with each of the major sites in the present study. *Source:* Map created by the author.

and French words are found. On the other hand, for the majority of speakers in the recordings, the segmentation of repertoires seems to be related to the situation of the interaction—their identity, their link with the people who are present, their intention, the theme of the discussion, and so on.

Focusing on Ziguinchor in a more detailed fashion, it is clear that for Ynot the town represents a macro-setting that can be broken up into micro-spaces, each of which is symbolized by its own linguistic repertoire—the Tilène district, Ziguinchor University, the Saint-Maur market, and the soccer field in Santhiaba.

As the neighborhood of his early childhood still containing his family home, Tilène is the symbol of Ynot's early identity. It reminds him of his parents and his childhood friends, with whom he speaks Mankanya. Thus, Mankanya is perceived by Ynot as a language that allows him to affirm his cultural roots. He links identity, language, and culture together as a natural grouping. Family language politics insist on the use of Mankanya. In Ynot's home, even children who speak Wolof well have a tendency to automatically switch to Mankanya or French as soon as they are in the presence of an elder (such as their father, uncle, or aunt); they are afraid to speak Wolof in front of those individuals, above all in front of their parents.

The university is, of course, a place for the acquisition of knowledge. Ynot speaks French when he is at the university. Whenever I tried to talk to him in Wolof there, he answered in French. The following interview excerpt shows how he views language at the university.

*Ynot:* vous savez madame // je n'aime pas parler une langue autre que le français ou l'anglais ou même l'espagnol à la fac \*\*

*NS:* pourquoi?

*Ynot:* parce que je ne veux pas qu'on sache d'où je viens ou qui je suis.

*NS:* comment ça? si vous parlez français on ne sait pas d'où vous venez?

*Ynot:* non \*\*\* euhhh \*\* ça ne donne aucun renseignement sur mon ethnie ou ma langue maternelle. français c'est pour tout le monde quoi ///

*NS:* ok je vois. (ns+mm\_060418\_zig-uasz)

*“Ynot:* You know madame // I do not like speaking a language other than French or English or even Spanish at the university \*\*

*NS:* Why?

*Ynot:* Because I do not want anyone to know where I come from or who I am.

*NS:* How come? If you speak French people don't know where you come from?

*Ynot:* No \*\*\* uhhh \*\* It gives no information about my ethnic group or mother tongue. French is for everyone ///

*NS:* Ok I see.”

University is therefore a space that symbolizes linguistic neutrality. It is a place where everybody can remain without being identified. The languages

mentioned by Ynot are always foreign languages within Senegal. I therefore understand that speaking “imported” or foreign languages allows a speaker to blend into the background, to remain anonymous and impersonal.

The market of Saint-Maur or Boucotte is the biggest market in Ziguinchor, and is a highly cosmopolitan place. It is the part of the city that best illustrates its linguistic diversity. The combination of the opening up of Casamance<sup>6</sup> and the peace processes of the past few years has led to Ziguinchor becoming a hot spot for urban multilingualism with northerners from Senegal and Bissau-Guinean traders, and the market is the center of this activity. Ynot goes there to shop, but also to meet friends, with whom he speaks in Wolof, in Creole, and also in French. He remarks that the Saint-Maur market is considered as a “little Bissau” by his community.

Like the market, the soccer fields in Santhiaba are a place where Ynot meets people from diverse origins. Urban Wolof dominates in the interactions here. For him, it is the ideal place to acquire a good level of competence in Wolof. It is a place for affirming oneself as young, and it is an urban place, which is highly important because it allows one to be at the same level as one’s peers. It is also a place where one can keep up with the rhythm of rapidly changing technologies. At the soccer field, switching between Wolof and French is the rule: French is the opening language while Wolof is the language of assured integration.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have described the mechanisms through which young people in Casamance construct, use, and represent their multilingual identities. The underlying assumption is that “language” is rooted in the materiality of contact between individuals, mediated through the effects of historicity produced via the actualization of our lives (Nicolai (2007, 3)). In other words, I posit a relation between language and identity understood as a process and not as a given fact (Juillard (2007, 183)).

Conversations were recorded by a university student, Ynot; he held these with 123 people from his network of family, friends, and acquaintances. These people were mostly from the Tilène district of Ziguinchor, but their high mobility allowed me to analyze their language behaviors in various communication situations, on the one hand, and in different spaces in Ziguinchor and even in Bissau, on the other. I was able to interpret language repertoires in relation to the spaces crossed and the participants in the interactions.

The choice and acquisition of repertoire are both evolving and strongly dependent on sociolinguistic trajectories. At any age, one learns a language whose usage evolves as a function of the people one has met, which places are frequented, and the families with whom one has lived.

Based on a case study, I have demonstrated that when it comes to linguistic choices, the interaction itself is as vital as the space in which the interaction takes place. Even if the physical setting sometimes influences the choice of linguistic repertoire, the situation surrounding the interaction is more important.

In the urban setting of Casamance, older people consider that certain less widely used languages (like Mankanya or Manjak) are essential for perpetuating cultural practices, but among young people code-switching is the general rule. Even though the use of Wolof is expanding rapidly in Ziguinchor, young students often mix it with French and local languages like Diola, Mandinka, Mankanya, or Manjak in order to maintain their identity as young, urban students.

## NOTES

1. Transcriptions are normally given in the original language, followed by a code for the recording in parentheses, and an English translation. The following conventions are used in the transcriptions: /, //, /// short, medium, long pause; \*, \*\*, \*\*\* short, medium, long silence; ? interrogative intonation; ! exclamatory intonation; :: vowel lengthening; + consonant gemination.

2. Michel is adapting a Wolof proverb here.

3. Malamine mixes urban Wolof and French.

4. Ndecky, too, uses mixed urban Wolof and French.

5. Tilène is one of the most multilingual districts in Ziguinchor. Many Bissau-Guineans who have settled in Casamance are concentrated in this area. This makes Guinea-Bissau Creole highly present, along with Wolof, Mandinka, Mankanya, Manjak, Diola, and Peul.

6. After thirty years of armed conflict in Casamance, the state of Senegal is promoting the implementation of the peace process by applying a policy of opening up the south of Senegal. To this end, a university was established, together with a large modern hospital (the *hôpital de la paix* or “hospital of peace”); there are boats that now shuttle between Ziguinchor and northern Senegal, and so on.

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## Chapter 9

# Analyzing Court Discourse in a Multilingual Setting

## *The Case of the Buea Court of First Instance*

Endurance M. K. Dissake and Gratien G. Atindogbé

### 1. INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that courtrooms across the world are crossroads where languages meet (Coulthard and Johnson 2010). Indeed, court participants—judges, lawyers, the accused, plaintiffs, witnesses, and so on—often have different linguistic backgrounds. Thus, courts are not only legal settings, but they are also multilingual milieus where contact between languages is inevitable. The multilingual nature of courtrooms becomes even more obvious in a plurilinguistic continent like Africa. Unfortunately, the linguistic dispensation in Africa has always been a factor hindering courtroom discourse.

Cameroon is an African nation that experiences language-related issues in judicial settings. Cameroon has two official languages—English and French—and more than 250 national languages, as well as various lingua francas, including Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE). However, the linguistic plurality of Cameroon is rarely acknowledged in public spheres. In particular, the Constitution of Cameroon institutes English and French as the languages of discourse in courtrooms. Unfortunately, only 60 percent of the population of Cameroon is able to use those two languages effectively (Essono 2001). Cameroonians lacking the ability to use those languages that find themselves in court—whether in the position of an accused, a witness, or a plaintiff—face various linguistic difficulties.

We analyze here five sets of court discourse collected in the Buea Court of First Instance to illustrate the linguistic problems encountered by nonlegal

experts (the accused, plaintiffs, and witnesses) in the discourse of court procedures. In order to complete the analysis of the court cases, we also interviewed some legal practitioners of the Buea Court of First Instance. However, before presenting the analysis of court discourse and the comments of the legal practitioners, we need to describe the legal system and language policy of Cameroon.

## 2. LEGAL SYSTEMS OF CAMEROON

“The legal ‘system’ describes the law and the machinery provided for adjudication and implementation” (Hazel (2015, 20)). There are two major traditions governing legal systems across the world: Civil law and Common law. Both systems promulgate the role of law in society and the manner through which those laws are applied (Tetley 2000).

The tradition of Common law traces its origin to England. This legal system operates on the basis of “precedent.” In other words, “when a court gives a verdict, that verdict becomes part of the law. Judges look at past cases to resolve the current case” (Aqil 2017). Civil law, for its part, is the oldest legal tradition of the world (Hazel (2015, 20)), and originates from Roman law, the legal system used in the Roman Empire. The tradition of Civil law relies on codified laws enacted by legislative bodies, and is the most common legal system used across Europe, Asia, South America, and in many African countries (Aqil 2017).

### 2.1 Bijuralism

Cameroon is unusual in that it combines both Common law and Civil law, a situation usually referred to as bijuralism. Cameroon’s bijuralism is the result of its colonial past. After the departure of the colonial masters, France and Britain, the nation retained the legal traditions of both countries: Civil law from France and Common law from Britain. Despite their differences, then, Civil law and Common law coexist in Cameroon, as they do in Canada, for similar historical reasons. However, neither Cameroon nor Canada has overcome all the challenges of bijuralism, in particular, the linguistic challenge. Because Common law in these countries originates from English law (Bastarache 2000), most of its concepts are solely expressed in the English language and any attempt to translate them into another language may result in a distortion of meaning and significance. A similar situation holds true for Civil law, which, in Cameroon, is associated with French.

## 2.2 Legal Language Policy in Cameroon

Article 1, section 3, of the Constitution of Cameroon clearly presents the country's language policy:

The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. (Constitution of Cameroon 2008)

Moreover, in article 31, section 3 the Constitution states that “laws shall be published in the Official Gazette of the Republic in English and French.” Thus, all official legal documents, as well as decrees and laws, are published in both English and French, and only in those languages. As mentioned above, though, Essono (2001) notes that only 60 percent of the population is able to use those two official languages—even though the official languages are used all over the national territory, the degree of proficiency of many Cameroonians in those languages is lacking. There are still Cameroonians who are unable to sustain a conversation in either French or English; in general, they communicate in their day-to-day life using one or more of the national languages.

In an attempt to solve the potential language problems encountered by nonlegal Cameroonians in the courtroom, section 183, part 1, of the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code prescribes the use of interpreters during court proceedings:

- (a) Where a witness does not speak one of the official languages which the registrar and Examining Magistrate understand, the latter shall call on the services of an interpreter.
- (b) The interpreter shall not be less than twenty-one (21) years of age.
- (c) The registrar, witnesses and the parties shall not perform the functions of an interpreter.
- (d) The interpreter shall take oath to give a true interpretation of the statement of any person who speaks in a different language or dialect. The facts of his having taken oath shall be mentioned in the record of the proceedings. (Criminal Procedure Code, Law No. 2005 of July 27, 2005)

This law does not determine the skills of interpreters; it specifies only their ages, without prescribing the degree of proficiency required from them. In other words, as long as a person understands both languages, he or she can serve as interpreter. Unfortunately, the poor performance of court interpreters frequently creates tensions during trials. Indeed, Rosendal (2008) has shown how the presence of an interpreter in a Cameroonian courtroom can be the

single most problematic thing. During judicial proceedings, the whole audience may be able to detect many translation errors and, thus, find it difficult to rely on the interpretation.

### 3. CAMEROON MULTILINGUALISM

Cameroon is one of a set of sub-Saharan countries whose inhabitants speak a very high number of African languages, and three of the four African-language phyla—Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo—are present in the country. The total number of Cameroonian national languages is controversial (see Atindogbé 2017), with a range of published figures. Dieu and Renaud (1983) state that 237 languages are spoken in Cameroon; Breton and Fohtung (1991) and Binam Bikoï, Ndongo-Semengue, Tourneux, and Tourneux (2012) propose 248, while Bitjaa Kody (2003) suggests 285. The most refined figure is from the *Ethnologue* (Simons and Fennig 2018), which gives 283 languages, of which 277 are living languages; this figure is then divided in turn into 273 Cameroon national languages and 4 nonnational languages. Of the 277 languages, Simons and Fennig (2018) consider that 12 are institutional languages, 101 developing, 88 vigorous, 56 in trouble, and 20 dying.

The official languages and the more than 250 national languages of Cameroon are distributed across all ten regions of the country. French is the administrative language in eight regions (Centre, Littoral, West, East, South, Adamawa, North, and Far North), and English in two regions (North-West and South-West). This distribution is in accordance with the territorial administration of the former colonial masters, with France having administered approximately eighty percent of the modern territory of Cameroon, while the remaining twenty percent was administered by Britain.

However, even though French is used in the eight francophone regions and English in the two anglophone ones, the promulgation of official bilingualism all over the national territory means that both French and English are spoken in all ten regions. In addition, internal migration boosts the use of both English and French in the various regions—francophone civil servants, for example, are transferred to anglophone regions, and anglophone civil servants are transferred to francophone regions. Thus, both francophones and anglophones can be found in all ten regions of Cameroon.

In addition to the two official languages and the various national languages, CPE is also used throughout the country (although it is more common in the two anglophone regions, with quite a distinct variety spoken in some francophone regions).

All in all, then, there are at least four languages (French, English, one or more national languages, and CPE) spoken in each region of Cameroon, and

the data we collected in Buea in the South-West Region attest to this. In the data we collected, we have identified five languages that are used in the Buea Court of First Instance: English, CPE, Mokpwe, French, and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE).<sup>1</sup> Judges, state counsels, clerks, lawyers, the accused, witnesses, and plaintiffs were often of different linguistic backgrounds. Many used CPE, others English, and a few used French.

The Court of First Instance in Buea falls within the Common law district, and, as such, has English as the language of instruction. Indeed, all legal authorities—judges, state counsels, lawyers, clerks, and so on—are compelled to use English for courtroom discourse. This rather unfair language policy puts many non-English-speaking Cameroonians involved in judicial matters in a very difficult situation, as will become clear in the court cases analyzed in section 5.

#### 4. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND SPEECH ACT THEORY

Discourse analysis is the study of “texts, whether spoken or written, whether long or short, and is interested in the relationship between texts and the contexts in which they arise and operate” (McCarthy, Matthiessen, and Slade (2010, 53)). As a result of interdisciplinary interest in discourse, many different approaches to discourse have been formulated and reformulated (Eggins and Slade 1997). The approach chosen for the analysis of the data presented here is speech act theory (SAT).

Searle (1975, 16) defines the act of speaking in the following way: “Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises . . . all linguistic communication involves linguistic (speech) acts.” According to Searle, then, when performing a speech act, a speaker makes a statement, gives a command, or makes a request or promise. In fact, SAT enables us to see speech not only from a linguistic point of view, but also from cultural, psychological, and social angles. In addition, SAT advocates for the position that words do not just “say” something, they also “do” something—hence the reference to speech “acts” in the name of the theory.

Searle’s work was based on that of Austin, who developed the initial idea of SAT. Austin (1962) divides utterances into two categories—constatives (which describe something) and performatives (which do something), and considers that any performative utterances can be analyzed in terms of three types of acts: the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary. The second of these, the illocutionary act, is considered the core of a performative. According to Austin, an illocutionary act is complete and carries some force. Austin classifies the illocutionary act into five categories: verdictives,

exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives (Oishi (2006, 4)). Within the legal setting, verdictive, exercitive, and expositive speech are particularly employed.

In addition to classifying speech acts, Austin created the concept of felicity conditions. Felicity conditions are the conditions necessary for the success of a speech act. Just as something will not be considered to be a “verdict” if it is not pronounced by a judge, or a “law” if it is not passed by the relevant parliament or other body, a speech act will fail if it does not respect certain felicity conditions. Austin proposed the following:

- (A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,
- (A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.
- (B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely.
- (Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further (Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (Austin (1962, 14–15))

In general, all these conditions stipulate that in a speech act, the speaker should know the language to use, know the rules of the language (phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), be sincere, and be prepared to fulfill future responsibilities. Oishi (2006) describes these conditions as the “conventionality, actuality, and intentionality of speech situations” (Oishi (2006, 7)).

*Conventionality* relates to Austin’s felicity conditions A.1 and A.2; a violation of these conditions is described by Austin as a “misinvocation” (Austin (1962, 18)). According to these conditions, for a speech act to be successful, it must first of all be made in a language that both parties understand and properly use. Thus, what a speaker says should be audible and should make sense to the hearer. Another element of conventionality is an appropriate level in a hierarchy—in a given speech act, a speaker’s speech should correspond to his position. In the case of a court, for example, only judges can give verdicts. In other words, for a speech act to succeed, language should be properly used and the right speech should be uttered by the right person.

*Actuality* is relevant to Austin’s felicity conditions B.1 and B.2, a violation of which is described by Austin as a “misexecution” (Austin (1962,

18)). These conditions stipulate that when a speaker utters a speech in a specific manner to a hearer, the hearer should respond appropriately (e.g., by acknowledging the act or by behaving in an appropriate fashion).

Austin's felicity conditions  $\Gamma.1$  and  $\Gamma.2$  are related to *intentionality*, and a violation of these conditions is described as an "abuse" (Austin (1962, 18)). To fulfill these conditions, a speaker's utterance should be sincere—that is, the speaker should mean what he or she says—and in cases where the speaker's utterance involves future responsibilities, those responsibilities should be respected.

The above felicity conditions are used to analyze the court discourse collected in the Buea Court of First Instance. We demonstrate that when communicative conditions are violated during discourse, various language issues arise and communication fails.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF COURT DISCOURSE

In July 2018, we observed five interesting court cases in the Buea Court of First Instance. The first case concerned a young man aged twenty-six, who was accused of stealing a phone. The second case concerned another young man, aged twenty-seven, a Nigerian accused of entering Cameroon without a visa. The third case involved a land dispute, but neither the accused nor the plaintiff captured our attention; it was rather a witness for the plaintiff, a woman of forty-two, who was most of interest. In the fourth court case, the accused was an old man of eighty-six. In the fifth and last case, there was once more a foreigner, a Chadian accused of abusing a two-year-old baby girl.

In almost all these court cases, two sets of felicity conditions were violated: the conventionality conditions and the actuality conditions.

### 5.1 The Conventionality Conditions

As earlier mentioned, the conventionality conditions call for the use of a language during an exchange that both parties understand and can use properly.

In the first court case, two languages were used during the discourse.<sup>2</sup>

*J:* The accused was found guilty of phone-stealing and of moving without a national ID although he is more than twenty years old.

*CK:* Court don find you guilty, beg so that court punish you just small. <*The court found you guilty. Beg the court to be given a light punishment.*>

*AC:* I beg that court punish me small. <*I am begging the court for a light punishment.*> */he kneels down/*



*J:* Stand up! Sentence count 1: convict shall pay a fine of 30,000 francs, count 2: convict shall pay to the plaintiff an amount of 70,000 francs and to the government 44,000 francs.

*CK:* *Repeats the sentence in CPE!*

We can identify two languages in this court discourse: English and CPE. The judge (J) used English and the clerk (CK) translated the judge's utterances into CPE. In this particular case, the clerk had realized that the accused (AC) had difficulties in understanding English, and then decided to help him by translating the judge's utterances into CPE. In doing this, the clerk was violating the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code given in section 2.2: "The registrar, witnesses and the parties shall not perform the functions of an interpreter." We make this point not to criticize the actions of the clerk, but rather to clarify how the dissociation between the communicative needs of individuals and official procedures in court settings can easily lead to violations such as this one.

The conventionality conditions were equally not respected in the second court case. The accused was a Nigerian, who was being judged in a Cameroonian court. Even though CPE and NPE are, to an extent, mutually intelligible, they are two separate languages, each with its own characteristics. However, the differences between the two were not taken into consideration by the legal authorities, who went ahead with the proceedings without calling for an interpreter.

*AC:* I don already suffa too much since I enter Cameroon. *<I have already suffered a lot in Cameroon.>*

*DL:* If dem nobi catch you after four days weti wey you fo do? *<If they did not arrest you after four days, what would you have done?>*

*AC:* I fi look for job for security company. *<I would have looked for a job in a security company.>*

*DL:* After the job? *<And after the job?>*

*AC:* Stay for Cameroon. *<Remain in Cameroon.>*

*DL:* You no for look for resident permit<sup>†</sup> *<You would not have looked for a resident permit?>*

*J:* Lawyer don't put words in the accused's mouth.

In the third case we also had two languages used during a court discourse: English and CPE.

*J:* What is your name?

*PW:* (. . .)

*J:* How old are you?

*PW:* (. . .) */she gives the wrong age!*

*J:* Where do you live?

*PW:* (. . .)

*J:* Do you know the accused? Is he a relative?

*PW:* Yes.

*J:* *Imentions all the other parties and asks PW if she knows them!* [. . .] Do you know why you are in court?

*PW:* Yes.

*SC:* Say why you are here. Do you want to speak in Pidgin or in English?

*PW:* Pidgin *Innarrates the event in CPE, giving the wrong dates!*

After the state counsel (SC) realized that the plaintiff witness (PW) had some difficulties using English, as seen in the fourth line where she gives her age incorrectly, he gave her the opportunity to express herself in CPE. Throughout the proceedings, the judge questioned the witness in English and she answered in CPE.

In the fourth case, the accused was aged 86, and could not adequately respond to the legal authority's questions at the beginning of the trial.

*J:* Pa you have three options: remain silent, give evidence, or give evidence on oath. Remember if you give evidence on oath all what you will say will be considered as the truth.

*AC:* (.)

*J:* Lawyer, he is your client, what do you choose?

*DL:* Third option.

*CK:* Pa you wish to talk for which language? *<Old man, what language do you wish to speak?>*

*AC:* (.)

*CK:* You wan talk for which language, Pidgin or English? *<You want to speak which language, CPE or English?>*

*AC:* Pidgin.

As we can see, the accused answered neither the first question nor the second question put to him, by the judge and the clerk, respectively. The silence of the accused could be considered as a defense strategy. However, if we consider that AC responds not only when the question is asked in CPE but also in a discursively clearer form (i.e., an explicit question, with two simple options), we understand his silence was rather a result of both his incompetence in English and his overall unfamiliarity with formal communication.

In the final case we observed, English was not opposed to CPE, but to French, the other official language of Cameroon. The accused was a Chadian who could express himself only in French, even though he could understand English to an extent.

*SC:* You are a Chadian resident in Soppo

*AC:* Oui monsieur! *<Yes sir!>*

SC: What is your plea?

AC: Pardon? <Sorry?>

SC: Are you guilty or not guilty?

AC: Non coupable. <Not guilty.>

Based on what was presented in the five court cases above, we can argue that the linguistic background of nonlegal participants (the accused and the witness for the plaintiff) was rarely taken into consideration by legal authorities (the judge, the clerk, and the state counsel). In other words, the court did not consider the multilingual nature of the Buea Court of First Instance.

## 5.2 The Actuality Conditions

Austin's (1962) actuality conditions call for the hearer to respond after a speaker speaks in order to assure the success of the communication. We can see instances of failure of these conditions—in the fourth case discussed above, for instance, the accused remained silent after being questioned; we argue above that the silence was the result of his incompetence in the English language.

Another example can be seen in the third case, when the plaintiff witness violated the actuality conditions by not responding adequately to the question of the state counsel.

SC: Is there anything for addam? <Do you want to add anything?>

PW: About waiti? <Concerning what?>

All: (^^^)

SC: Do you want the court to do anything to the accused?

PW: I want everything to be settled.

It is common practice in court proceedings to ask witnesses if they have something else to add after their testimony: they can either say yes and continue with their testimony or say no and leave the witness chair. In the above extract, we see that the plaintiff witness did not respect this code of conduct, and this caused laughter in the audience. According to Austin, failure to respect the code of conduct for a given discourse can lead to either a momentary fail in communication, or bring the communication to an end. In this case, the discourse failed momentarily.

## 6. INTERVIEWS

As mentioned in section 2.2, the Cameroon Criminal Procedure Code (section 183, part 1) instructs the judge to introduce an interpreter into the courtroom whenever necessary. However, even though it was clear during the observed

court cases that an interpreter was necessary, we never witnessed the presence of a court interpreter in the Court of First Instance of Buea.

In order to understand why interpreters were not used during these court cases, we interviewed some of the legal authorities. The interviewees revealed that they always find it difficult to lay their hands on good interpreters, and if they succeed in finding one, the amount of money demanded by the interpreter is never available, since Cameroonian courts have limited funds. As one judge added: “Government officers sit in their offices and instruct us to use interpreters in the courts. Have they ever sent us money to pay those interpreters? Are they expecting us to take money from our pockets? How much are our salaries?”

## 7. CONCLUSION

The multilingual nature of courtrooms is a norm in Cameroon, and the Buea Court of First Instance is no exception to that rule. The five court cases briefly examined in section 5 allow us to identify four languages used in the Buea Court of First Instance: English, CPE, NPE, and French. However, English is the one and only prescribed language of court discourse in the legal district of Buea. Being aware of the linguistic plurality of Cameroon, the government has instructed court authorities to use interpreters when necessary. Unfortunately, this instruction was not respected in the cases studied here.

It is therefore evident that the multilingual status of the Buea Court of First Instance affects the proper functioning of judicial proceedings and, as such, throws some doubt on the fairness of those proceedings. A solution to this problem would be the strict implementation of the law prescribing the presence of interpreters in Cameroon courtrooms, although as we have seen, the legal authorities indicate that there are financial issues blocking that. We would suggest that the government should not limit its task to the formulation of laws, but should also be providing the means for the implementation of these laws.

## NOTES

1. We are not suggesting, of course, that these five languages are the only languages used in Buea or indeed in the courts—there are also other languages, like Isubu. Here we are simply giving an indication of the issues arising from the linguistic situation of Buea, which is further complicated because of the inclusion of elements from southeastern Nigeria by virtue of its geographical proximity to the border.

2. The following abbreviations have been used for participants in the data extracts: AC, the accused; J, judge; SC, state counsel; CK, clerk; PW, plaintiff witness; DL, defense lawyer. In transcriptions, the following symbols are used: [ . . . ], utterance cut because unimportant; ( . . . ), utterance removed for ethical reasons; †, rising tone of voice; (.), silence; (^^^), laughter. English translations are in italics and enclosed in < >; explanations are in italics and enclosed in //.

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## Chapter 10

# Multilingualism and Language Ideologies in the Context of War

## *The Case of Refugees from Boko Haram in the Minawao Camp in the Far North Region of Cameroon (Research Note)*

Amina N. Goron

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria-Cameroon borderland is well known for its high degree of linguistic diversity.<sup>1</sup> Since 2010, the war led by the Boko Haram terrorist group in the northern half of this area has deeply impacted local societies, forcing tens of thousands of people, especially Nigerians, to leave their villages and seek refuge in safer areas. Linguistically, the creation of refugee camps has resulted in situations with unusual concentrations of languages in a limited space.

Focusing on the Minawao International Refugee Camp in northern Cameroon, this chapter aims to present firsthand data about an extremely complex example of multiethnic and multicultural cohabitation, with a special emphasis on the sociolinguistic dimension of this, seen from a language ecology perspective (Calvet 1999). The camp is thus viewed as a biocenosis (an ecological community; see section 2.2) where species (in this case, languages) originating from elsewhere have suddenly come to live in one and the same environment. My goal is to look at the ways in which languages are adapting to this new environment despite the climate of war and the suspicion and psychosis that this evokes. This means looking especially at the new “niches” where these languages are found, which implies not only questioning the role and the place of languages within the biocenosis, but also the types of relations that they maintain among each other and the communication strategies of speakers in both formal or informal situations.



After a discussion of the methodology of the study (section 2), the camp and the languages within it are introduced (section 3). Section 4 briefly outlines the different roles that these languages have in the wider world in contrast to the camp; the following section then concentrates on their distribution and use within the camp itself. Finally, section 6 focuses on the presence of exoglossic languages in the camp.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Participants and Tools

The data presented here were collected during fieldwork in 2016 and 2017 using three methods: participant observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The complexity of this extremely multilingual and multicultural field site required ensuring that data were collected from a wide variety of participants. The first step involved selecting six interpreter-guides, whose combined multilingual repertoires included all the key languages present in the camp. This allowed us to contact forty-seven heads of families, many of whom were women (see section 3.1), as well as fifty-nine girls, thirty-eight of whom were illiterate in English while the other twenty-one had been educated at least to the end of primary school. By further enlarging the sample in various ways, I eventually gathered information from 200 refugees (129 females and 71 males). Most of the participants that had received an education—generally only in primary school—were men, while the least-educated participants tended to be girls under the age of eighteen. Overall, the age of participants varied between fifteen and sixty years.

Participant observation was targeted at those contexts in which multilingual young people and adults interacted. Interviews with knowledgeable people were then crucial in complementing the data obtained through participant observation; in particular, interviews allowed me to gather precise knowledge of the linguistic behaviors of the different ethnic groups inside the camp in different contexts of interaction. As for the questionnaire, it was administered by the multilingual interpreter-guides, and this facilitated the collection of data from a relatively high number of people representing all of the ethnic groups living in the camp as a whole.<sup>2</sup> The three methods together contributed to the creation of a corpus that could be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### 2.2 An Ecological Perspective

In analyzing data and presenting findings, I have been inspired by models derived from studies in linguistic complexity, specifically Calvet's linguistic ecology (Calvet 1999) and Blanchet's ethnosociolinguistics (Blanchet 2000).

In this short chapter, I will use their terminologies—or other terms derived from their studies—and will provide some preliminary discussion of the possible significance of my data within these research frameworks.

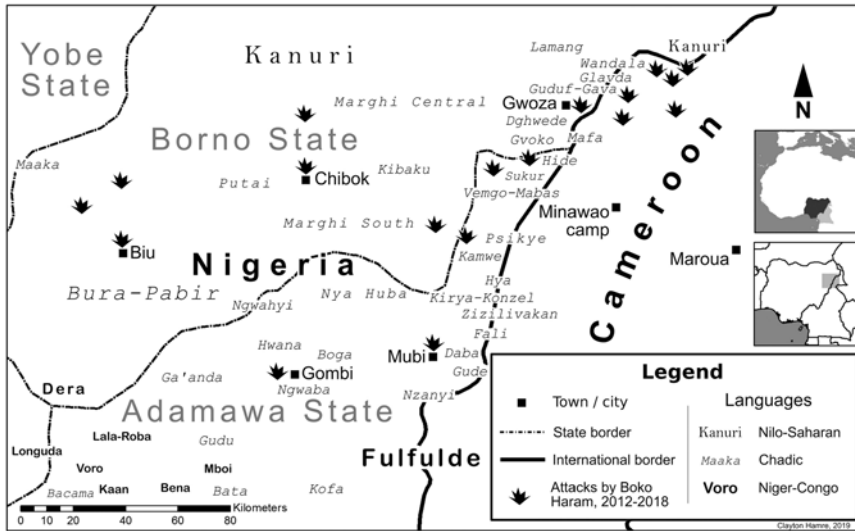
Key components of these models are the notions of *langues en présence* (the languages that are present or the languages that are involved), the ecolinguistic niche, and acclimatization. The first term stresses that the main research target should consist of the actual languages as they are used in the context, together with the relations between these language practices and their social, political, and economic environment. The idea of an ecolinguistic niche metaphorizes languages as living organisms that, through prolonged interactions with other organisms of the same kind—that is, other languages—end up occupying a certain place and playing a certain role within the biocenosis, the community of interacting organisms and their mutual relations. This process of adaptation is by and large what Calvet refers to as acclimatization.

### 3. GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHY

#### 3.1 General Remarks

Located in the Mayo-Tsanaga Division, Mokolo Subdivision of the Far North Region of Cameroon, the Minawao camp bears the name of the village on whose land it has been constructed. It extends over more than 500 hectares of semidesert plain seventy kilometers from the northwestern border of Cameroon with Nigeria and twenty-seven kilometers from the city of Mokolo via Zamai. With an estimated population of about 60,000 individuals (UNHCR 2019), the camp is inhabited exclusively by Nigerian refugees—mainly from the three Nigerian states of Borno (96 percent of the population of the camp), Adamawa (3 percent), and Yobe (1 percent)—who fled the atrocities of the terrorist group Boko Haram. The location of these Nigerian states with respect to the border with northwest Cameroon is given in figure 10.1, together with many of the languages of the region and the sites of major attacks by Boko Haram between 2012 and 2018.

The Minawao camp consists of four sectors, each of which is subdivided into eighty-two blocks. Each block is headed by a leader called a *blama* and is further subdivided into twelve communes; and there are an average of twelve shelters per commune. The UNHCR (2019) reports that at present the population of the camp is relatively balanced between the genders. However, during my fieldwork in 2016–2017, I collected evidence that the population at that time appeared to be mostly female: in June 2017, I estimated females to make up around 62.5 percent of the camp's population, compared to 37.5



**Figure 10.1** Languages along the Nigeria-Cameroon border, many of which are spoken in the Minawao camp by refugees from these areas of Northeast Nigeria, and the approximate locations of attacks made in the period 2012–2019 by groups variously affiliated with Boko Haram. *Source:* Map created by Clayton Hamre. Based on data from Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig (2019), and on information published in various online resources including [aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com), [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), [sunnewsonline.com](http://sunnewsonline.com), [dailypost.ng](http://dailypost.ng), and [thisdaylive.com](http://thisdaylive.com).

percent for males. This gender imbalance could be explained by the fact that most women lost their husbands or other male members of their family before joining the camp—the male population was Boko Haram’s primary target.<sup>3</sup> This also resulted in more women taking on traditionally male responsibilities, like that of head of the family, a role that was played by women in more than half of the families in the data.

### 3.2 Ethnolinguistic Groups

There are a number of ethnolinguistic groups in the camp. According to our questionnaire data, and considering mother tongue as the essential trait of ethnic identity, these groups include first-language speakers of Kanuri, Hausa, Glavda, Chadian Arabic (also known as Shuwa Arabic), Mafa, Cineni, Dghwede, Wandala, Pulka, Chikide, Srata, Zalidva, Showo, Aguibo, Kotoko, and Fulfulde.<sup>4</sup> Table 10.1 indicates the estimated percentage of members of each community in the camp, based on the data from the 200 participants and other information.

These languages come from three different phyla: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Congo. Moreover, they are quite different from each other in

**Table 10.1** The main languages in the Minawao camp, together with an estimated percentage of participants that would have each language as their first language based on data collected in this study

<i>Language</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Kanuri	55
Glavda	19
Mafa	8
Hausa	6
Wandala	5
Chadian Arabic	2
Pulka (see note 4)	2
Chikide	1
Srata (see note 4)	1
Zalidva	< 1
Showo (see note 4)	< 1
Cineni	< 1
Aguibo (see note 4)	< 0.5
Kotoko	< 0.5
Fulfulde	< 0.5

*Source:* Table created by the author.

their respective ecologies of provenance in terms of both absolute number of first-language speakers and degree of diffusion as a vehicular language (see sections 4 and 5): table 10.2 summarizes the data available about the genetic classification and number of first-language speakers.

#### 4. LANGUAGES EN PRÉSENCE

From a comparison of tables 10.1 and 10.2, one can see that the ethnolinguistic groups found in the camp are not represented in proportion to their overall size. For instance, there are populations that include a sizable part of the language population as a whole. This is the case for languages like Glavda and Wandala: a percentage of about 19 percent of the camp population means there are about 11,000 first-language speakers of the former language, amounting to about one-third of the total Glavda-speaking population of 30,000; as for Wandala, the 3,500 or so first-language speakers found in the Minawao camp, while accounting for a small portion of the overall population of the camp, represent about 17 percent of the whole Wandala speaker population. These facts, like the presence of a majority of Kanuri people (around 55 percent of the camp population),<sup>5</sup> relate to the intensity and duration of Boko Haram's violent attacks in the respective areas of provenance of these groups (compare figs. 10.1 and 10.2).

Within this multitude of languages, there are transregional, vehicular languages such as Hausa. This language has a large geographical distribution, as

**Table 10.2** The main languages in the Minawao camp, listed in terms of their genetic classification, together with an estimate of the number of first-language speakers of each language in the refugees' areas of provenance

<i>Language</i>	<i>No. of L1 Speakers</i>
Afro-Asiatic	
Semitic	
Chadian Arabic [shu, chad1249]	100,000
Showo (see note 4)	?
West	
Hausa	10,000?
Biu-Mandara	
Glavda [glw, glav1244]	30,000
Mafa [maf, mafa1239]	5,000
Wandala [mfi, wand1278]	20,000
Pulka (see note 4)	?
Chikide [chik1255] (variety of Guduf-Gava [gdf, gudu1252])	20,000?
Cineni [cie, cine1238]	3,000
Dghwede [dgh, dghw1239]	40,000?
Zalidva (subvariety of North variety of Lamang [hia, lama1288])	4,000?
Kotoko subgroup (about sixteen dialects grouped in nine different languages)	40,000
Nilo-Saharan	
Kanuri (data do not distinguish between Manga Kanuri [kby, mang1399] and Yerwa Kanuri [knc, maid1261])	7,000,000
Srata (see note 4)	?
Niger-Congo	
Fulfulde	20,000?
Aguibo (see note 4)	?

Source: Table created by the author.

Note: For purposes of reference, ISO 639-3 language codes (<https://iso639-3.sil.org>) and Glottocodes (<https://glottolog.org>) are included with many of the language names.

Hausa varieties are found in many parts of West and Central Africa, covering Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Niger, Sudan, and Togo, as well as being widely used in Nigeria. There are also regional languages such as Kanuri—which has official language status in northern Nigeria—and Fulfulde—which is used as a lingua franca in northern Nigeria and even more so in northern Cameroon. Glavda, Mafa, Cineni, Dghwede, Wandala, Chikide, Srata, Zalidva, Kotoko, and Chadian Arabic, on the other hand, are more localized languages, which, due to historical accidents, are today cross-border languages in Cameroon and Nigeria. Finally, there are languages like Showo and Aguibo, whose distribution is entirely within Nigerian territory.

## 5. THE COMPLEXITY OF LANGUAGE RELATIONSHIPS

Once dispersed from their original ecosphere and transported to other environments—such as the Minawao camp—the traditional languages of the refugees continue to survive through what Calvet (1999) calls “acclimatization.” This represents the beginning of an even more complex linguistic situation since these languages, once in the camp, interact with each other: some (e.g., Kanuri) succeed in dominating others and eventually acquiring the status of a locale-specific vehicular language, while others (e.g., Glavda) are relegated to intragroup communication.

On the questionnaires—which were, remember, responded to by only 200 individuals, so less than 0.5 percent of the camp population—the question “Which language do you commonly speak in your group?” received a wide variety of answers, but one fact is clear: irrespective of their mother tongue, 86 percent of respondents said that they use Kanuri most of the time. Cineni, by contrast, is used by only 1 percent of the sample, although about 12 percent of respondents said that they can speak it as a first or second language.

Most of the multilingual repertoires I documented from the questionnaires pivot around three vehicular languages: Kanuri, Mafa, and Hausa. The majority of interviewees say they speak at least three languages including one or two of these vehicular ones. For those whose mother tongue is one of these vehicular languages, they see themselves as needing to speak at least one other vehicular language. For example, the fact that the Kanuri group is demographically superior to the others does not mean that they use only their own language for communication purposes: on the contrary, the majority of individuals in this camp, as is the case throughout much of Africa, were already multilingual while they were still living in their own communities.<sup>6</sup>

## 6. THE FUNCTION OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AND OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN ENGLISH

Apart from the languages discussed so far, which allow communication in informal interactions, there are other institutional languages that play a role in communication in formal environments. This is the case of English and, more marginally, French, which are used in schools. Nigerian Pidgin English is also used in playgrounds and during commercial exchanges.

English is the principal exoglossic language that serves for intergroup communication in the camp. It is the official language of Nigeria, the country of origin of the refugees. However, this language is subject to competition from the other languages of the camp, and is primarily present in school; it is, in the eyes of the majority of refugees, the language of the educated urban elite,

while the majority of these victims of war come from rural areas. English is taught at the camp in two nursery schools, three primary schools, and a secondary school, following the model in English-speaking Cameroon. However, the educational level of refugees is low, as is their literacy in English, as the majority of school-age children have been denied access to education in their home country for years due to Boko Haram's advocacy against non-Islamic education.

In the camp, French is the second language of instruction alongside English. However, it is rarely used in communication and is most commonly heard in cases where the interactants lived at some point along the Nigeria-Cameroon border: it must be recalled that the northern regions of Cameroon are historically francophone. French is a true second language for learners from Nigeria.

As for Nigerian Pidgin English, its status in the camp is not that of a vehicular language, as very few people actually speak it. There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is that Nigerian Pidgin English is used throughout northeastern Nigeria generally only for commercial exchanges between southerners (like Igbo and Yoruba traders) and northerners (like the Hausa and the Kanuri)—but commercial activity in the camp is not very developed and, importantly, involves mostly rural people who speak Hausa and Kanuri but not Nigerian Pidgin English. However, it is possible that this picture will change in the future. With life resuming its course, especially with the teaching of English in this area, Nigerian Pidgin English is likely to spread and may become vehicularized and standardized.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The ethnolinguistic melting pot of the Minawao International Refugee Camp is an illustration of cohabitation in an emergency situation in the context of war. The multilingualism that prevails there is a multilingualism of circumstance, where the strongest languages (Hausa, Kanuri, and Mafa) dominate the smaller ones. Certain languages, such as Wandala or Glavda, while they may nearly equal certain vehicular languages in terms of the number of speakers in the camp, do not enjoy the same status and are marginalized, being used only for intragroup communication. Still others, such as English, are common only in formal interactions and in schools, while Nigerian Pidgin English is much less used in the camp than it is in Nigeria as a whole.

From another perspective, one can argue that the smaller languages are of great use to their speakers, and that, like in multilingual Africa in general, multilingualism in the Minawao camp is of great help, especially against the backdrop of war, as it allows intercommunication, promotes tolerance

between the different ethnic groups that cohabit in such a demanding environment, and, above all, prevents group stigmatization. In short, multilingualism in this context calms conflict and brings peace and social cohesion within this area of tension and extreme distrust.

## NOTES

1. Editorial note: This chapter was originally submitted in French and was translated into English by Braden Brown, with additional revisions to the text made by the editors to enhance its readability. It is included in this volume as a research note; to the best of our knowledge, it is the first chapter to look closely at patterns of multilingualism in a refugee camp in a Central African context (and perhaps beyond).

2. It must be remembered that the environment of the camp is one of generalized distrust. This has often resulted in people refusing to become involved in research, a decision that I have always fully respected.

3. Men were either killed or forcibly recruited. Many of those who joined the sect had received threats against their families, which forced them to espouse the ideals of the sect. Since 2015 women have been targeted more and more often, and have also been used as unwitting suicide bombers.

4. Editorial note: Some of the lects named by the author do not find correspondences in available literature on the area; they are therefore not represented in figure 10.1. We are grateful to Ndokobai Dadak for providing additional information about some of these lects: (i) Srata is a name given to Kanuri people by outsiders, especially Peuls (i.e., speakers of Fulfulde); (ii) Showo is another name for Shuwa Arabic, here called Chadian Arabic, so it is not clear what makes the Showo different from the other speakers of Chadian Arabic in this list; (iii) Pulka is the name of a village where both Wandala and Lamang are spoken. We have not been able to associate the name Aguibo with either a language or a place. Naming lects in linguistically highly diverse areas that have not yet been thoroughly studied is a challenge well known to fieldworkers all over the world. Doing research in refugee camps like Minawao adds further complications due to both communicative difficulties with research participants, the use of multiple names by different groups for one and the same entity (be it a village or a language), and the fact that individuals within the camp have arrived from many different places.

5. The widespread use of Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulfulde throughout the northern stretch of the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland means that it is possible that some people, if not presented with a fine-grained questionnaire, may have chosen to identify with some of these larger labels (especially Kanuri) for any number of reasons. Because of this, labels like *Kanuri* (or *Hausa* or *Fulfulde*) as an ethnolinguistic group in this chapter should be treated with caution.

6. One interesting outcome of being multilingual has to do with Boko Haram's attacks. About 20 of the 200 people whose data was collected, primarily women and children, said that they escaped Boko Haram's attacks simply because they spoke the Kanuri language. By selecting this language, these people have created a kind



of link uniting them to the aggressors, who have then taken them as “their own.” In recent years, however, the violence has become more indiscriminate and such acts of solidarity would most likely no longer take place today.

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*Part III*

**METHODOLOGIES FOR THE STUDY  
OF RURAL MULTILINGUALISMS**



## *Chapter 11*

# **What an Ethnographically Informed Questionnaire Can Contribute to the Understanding of Traditional Multilingualism Research**

## *Lessons from Lower Fungom*

Angiachi D. Esene Agwara

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Cameroon is known as a highly diverse country socially, geographically, culturally, and linguistically and, as such, has attracted tremendous attention in sociolinguistic studies. However, the focus has been centered much more on urban environments (see, e.g., Ngefac 2010; Anchimbe 2007). The reasoning behind this is obvious considering that in a linguistically highly diverse and relatively young state like Cameroon (independent only since 1961), both administrative domains (such as government, schools, and churches) and private domains (including industry, the media, and small and medium trades) require that dimensions of multilingualism be studied to produce better language policies and planning.

That being said, one can argue that we fail to see the fuller picture when we overlook rural areas that also enjoy linguistic diversity and individual multilingualism. And indeed, while multilingualism has attracted considerable attention over the years (e.g., Adegbiya 2004; Cenoz 2013; Martin-Jones and Martin 2017), multilingualism from a typical rural viewpoint has scarcely been investigated (e.g., Connell 2009; Di Carlo 2018).

This has had the consequence that less emphasis has been placed on the development of more rural-focused research methods, especially on the adapting of questionnaires to locale-specific situations. Based on firsthand

data collected in the Lower Fungom area of the Cameroonian Grassfields in 2012 and 2017–2019, this chapter aims to fill this gap.<sup>1</sup>

Inspired by works such as Childs, Good, and Mitchell (2014), my doctoral research has focused on small-scale multilingualism (Lüpke 2016) in Lower Fungom, with a broad interest in how it patterns with local societies and their language ideologies. This is reflected in the multiple tools I have used in the field: not only questionnaires—the only tool discussed in the present chapter—but also matched-guise technique tests, documentation of linguistic practices, and participant observation (see Esene Agwara, in preparation). Data consisting of around 100 questionnaires and some initial ethnographic observations were collected in 2012 for my master’s thesis (Esene Agwara 2013); the other types of data have been added since 2017. While the earlier work was in fact a survey of the whole area, I have more recently focused primarily on Misong, a village in which a variety of Mungbam is spoken (Good et al. 2011; Lovegren 2013). It is important to keep in mind that, as a result, Misong is overrepresented in some of the samples discussed in this chapter (see section 5).

While my research is much more comprehensive than what is described in this chapter, nonetheless I believe it is useful to focus here only on the questionnaire component because, as I will try to illustrate in the following sections, prolonged periods of fieldwork (about eight months in total since 2017) and my ethnographic formation during the studies for my master’s degree have resulted in an increased awareness of the importance of capturing more ethnographic data than had hitherto been attempted by scholars.

The chapter is subdivided into six main sections. After section 2, in which I sketch the background knowledge that informed the first steps of my research, I introduce the research area of Lower Fungom in section 3 and then, in section 4, I discuss the adjustments that my ethnographic approach required in my questionnaire and the reasons behind this. In section 5, I present the findings, which are then summarized and further discussed in section 6.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS IN THE STUDY OF MULTILINGUALISM: EMPHASIS ON SELF-REPORTED DATA**

### **2.1 Two Main Approaches**

De Klerk and Bosch (1995, 27) state that “the types of questions researchers ask and the answers they find are liable to be influenced by the values and stereotypes that prevail.” Keeping these words in mind, my aim in this section as well as in its (critical) continuation in section 4 is to outline the main

differences between two methodological approaches in sociolinguistic studies on individual multilingualism for the collection of self-reported data from multilingual speakers. On the one hand, there is a set of methods and tools stemming from diglossia theory (see section 2.2), and, on the other, there are methods and tools that, while similar overall, include a more significant ethnographic component on the grounds that this is best suited to capture variables that are relevant in accounting for speakers' behaviors. The differences between these two approaches will be especially evident in section 4; in this section, my aim is to outline the main features of the former approach and then review some of the scholarship that has adopted this approach in African rural settings.

Before dealing with these different approaches, it is important to emphasize that, broadly speaking, both share a basic set of three tools for the collection of self-reported data from multilingual speakers: (semi-)structured interviews, written questionnaires, and broad surveys. The kinds of differences I will point out in this chapter concern specific ways to develop these tools, especially the questionnaire, rather than whether these tools are appropriate or not. From this perspective, one could argue that this work is motivated by the will to integrate with, not question, existing mainstream methods.

## **2.2 Diglossia Theory**

The notion of diglossia was first introduced in the late 1950s by Charles Ferguson (see Ferguson 1959), and later extended by Joshua Fishman, to describe multilingual contexts and the multilingual behaviors that emerge from such contexts. In a nutshell, extended diglossia theory (Fishman 1967) holds that in communities which have a linguistic repertoire that includes two or more languages, speakers' choices as to which language to use will be largely revealing of preexisting macro-sociological factors, the first of which is a hierarchy of languages according to their perceived prestige and suitability for communication in formal settings.

This hierarchy can materialize in endless concrete situations: while the topic of discourse and the role relations between interactants were mentioned in the foundational work in this regard (Fishman 1965), the most comprehensive notion that clearly characterizes this theory (and that has been applied more consistently in subsequent research) is that of social domains. Paraphrasing Fishman (1965, 75), one could say that social domains are abstracted social constructs that are assumed to largely determine individual linguistic behaviors. So, for example, "school" is a domain, in that it is conceptualized in the same way by the fellow members of a society, who likely associate it with a formal setting and all that flows from this. The domains that have most commonly been included in the study of multilingualism in Africa, as elsewhere,

include the school, the workplace, the family, the mass media, governmental institutions, religious institutions, and the neighborhood. A continuum with “formal” or “prestige” at one end and “informal” or “solidarity” at the other has usually been taken as the main, if not the only, key to analyze data.

It is thus evident that the theory of diglossia would fit environments where the different languages are clearly distinguished in the minds of speakers in terms of their potential for “standardness” and, consequently, prestige. Put otherwise, the theory posits the existence of a compartmentalized view on the part of speakers whereby “one set of behaviours, attitudes and values support[s] and [i]s expressed in one language,” while “another set of behaviours, attitudes and values support[s] and [i]s expressed in another” (Fishman (1967, 29)). Such a principle of internal compartmentalization of a society’s linguistic repertoire has deeply influenced the way multilingual questionnaires have been framed, both in urban and in rural studies (see, e.g., Connell 2009; Dyers 2008; Kennetz and Carroll 2018; and many of the studies discussed in section 2.3): it is very common, for instance, to find questionnaires pivoting on questions such as “What language do you use when you are at work / school / home?”

But what happens when speakers do not seem to have such a clear distinction between the languages they use in their daily lives? The egalitarian status that local languages enjoy in the language ideologies of Lower Fungom people (see section 3) requires us to change our point of view on the language behaviors of multilingual individuals. As we shall see in section 4, I moved completely away from probing into language behaviors from a diglossic or polyglossic perspective and, instead, attempted to collect individual- and culture-specific information that my ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to identify as potentially relevant in accounting for people’s multilingual behaviors.

### **2.3 Early Scholarship on African Multilingualism**

During the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, a number of articles were published that focused on individual multilingualism in rural areas of Africa (O’Barr 1971; Kashoki 1982; Myers-Scotton 1982). However, for the following quarter century, most sociolinguists concentrated their efforts on multilingualism in urban centers, especially in schools, with the twofold aim of testing the effectiveness of and improving on existing language policies (Anchimbe 2006; Mc Laughlin 2009; Swigart 1994). It is only recently that rural, small-scale multilingualism has once again provoked interest among scholars, and several new studies have been published (e.g., Cobbinah et al. 2016; Connell 2009; Di Carlo 2016, 2018; Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba, forthcoming; Kaji 2013; Lüpke 2016; Moore 2004). In this

section, I will briefly outline some general features and trends of these studies that my own research has questioned; these issues will be expanded upon in section 4.

Mainstream approaches to gathering self-reports have concentrated on the use of sociolinguistic questionnaires where, as we have just seen, each language is expected to have specific, distinctive functions within a society's linguistic repertoire. This is just as visible in studies focused on rural areas as those looking at urban environments. Limits of space do not allow a comprehensive review of such studies here (see Esene Agwara, in preparation), but a brief overview will be helpful.

Early works—such as O'Barr (1971), Myers-Scotton (1982), and Kashoki (1982)—were in fact surveys whose principal aim was to examine the role that exoglossic colonial languages, on the one hand, and local *lingua francas*, on the other, played in intra- and intergroup communication. A rather extreme example of the relative uninterest in how local languages were deployed by members of rural communities comes from O'Barr (1971, 290–3 in particular). In his inquiry about language use in a rural Tanzanian village, he was exposed to a number of what one would today define as local “named languages” (see section 4.2) but, nonetheless, did not feel it necessary to give more details about them. Instead, he lumped all of them in a single “other African vernaculars” category. In this way, the local sociolinguistic space was mutilated and, with it, any possibility was gone for the gathering of data about the “local language ideology”—a term that, admittedly, did not yet exist in sociolinguists' epistemological repertoires at the time (for more details, see Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019)).

While undoubtedly valuable for its groundbreaking role and much of the data it provided, even a more recent study like Connell's (2009) on the language choices of individuals in Somié (a village in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon) did not fully address issues around the development of context-specific questionnaires. Quite the opposite, in fact: except for some details presented somewhat anecdotally, Connell's study appears to rely largely on existing scholarship, with the focus on social domains as the main factor determining multilingual behaviors being largely left unquestioned, and a large part of Connell's questionnaire focusing on the principal network in which the respondents appear to be immersed, rather than leaving it open to respondents to give information about which are their networks (in the plural; for issues concerning multiple affiliations in traditional African societies, see, e.g., Kopytoff (1987)). This means that there is little detailed information about how and to what degree respondents have been exposed to the languages in which they claim to be competent or what kind of relationship they intend to activate when they use one or the other language present in their multilingual repertoire.



### 3. LOWER FUNGOM

Now that the foundations have been laid out, it is time to introduce the area in which I did my research. This will then allow me to present the rationale for adopting an ethnographic approach and to illustrate some of the results of its application in the following section.

Lower Fungom is an area on the periphery of the Grassfields in the northwest of Cameroon, and has a population of about 10,000 (Good et al. 2011). It is located within Zhoa Subdivision, Menchum Division in the North-West Region of Cameroon. Over the years, certainly since Stallcup (1980, 44), if not earlier, the Grassfields, and Lower Fungom within it, has repeatedly been identified as a linguistically highly diverse zone: each language covers on average only an area of around thirty square kilometers. A minimum of eight languages have been identified in the thirteen Lower Fungom villages (see figure 11.1).

Although all these languages are found in the same small geographical area, five of them have no close relations in or outside the area (see Good et al. (2011) for details). While the locals agree that some linguistic codes, such as the Mungbam varieties, tend to rhyme (Lovegren 2013), they consider that every village speaks its own “talk” (see section 4.2; also Di Carlo (2016, 75)). Such a localistic way of viewing linguistic codes has an immediate effect on speakers’ multilingual repertoires (see, e.g., Esene Agwara 2013; Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba, forthcoming). I will come back to this key point in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

Culturally, twenty sociological distinctive features that have been used to compare Lower Fungom societies show that Lower Fungom villages share some commonalities despite their distinct histories and different ritual traditions (Di Carlo 2011). Socioeconomically, they are all agriculturalists. They undertake activities such as palm wine tapping, palm oil extraction, hunting, and weaving at the very least. Diverse occupations are lacking in the Lower Fungom area. There are a few schools in the region, with the first primary school, popularly called the Abar-Missong mother school, having been built in 1949. No more than four secondary schools are registered in the area, with only a few more primary schools. Early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and a lack of financial means are all causes for only insignificant numbers of students continuing on to middle secondary levels.

This sociocultural background provides the context of which one must be aware when studying the multilingualism of the region. By exposing, for example, how local languages are perceived in the area, we can already see possible implications for ways that multilingual studies at an individual level could be better understood. The following section analyses how one might integrate ethnographic information into the instruments used in uncovering multilingualism in urban and rural settings.

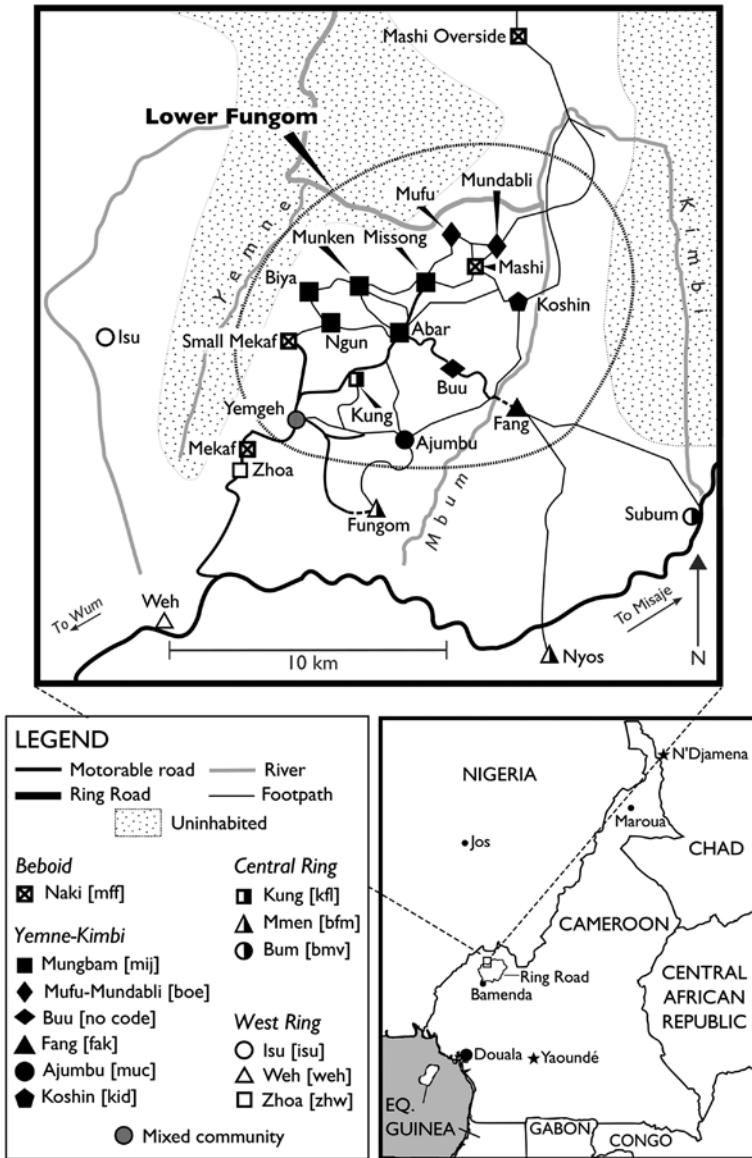


Figure 11.1 The villages and languages of lower Fungom and the surrounding regions. Note that small mekaf is politically part of the village of Mekaf (just outside of lower Fungom), rather than an independent village, and that the settlement of Yemgeh is also not considered an independent village, as it is a newly populated area found on land under the control of the chiefs of Kung, Ajumbu, and Mekaf. *Source:* Map created by Pierpaolo Di Carlo.

## 4. THE ETHNOGRAPHICALLY INFORMED QUESTIONNAIRE

### 4.1 Doing Ethnography

The main reason that I adopted a more prominent ethnographic perspective in my work on multilingualism is simply that, as one might guess from the presentation of the area in section 3, the sociolinguistic realities in Lower Fungom are largely different from the urban model implicitly posited by methods based in diglossia theory. To mention but two key aspects: social class—central in diglossia theory to account for prestige differences among the languages in a community’s repertoire—is a totally misplaced concept in Lower Fungom, where the locally relevant dimension of internal subdivision of societies is closer to kin relationships than to socioeconomic status; and so is the idea of social domains as a factor determining multilingual behavior. Of course, one can identify “social domains,” but their relevance in accounting for what people do linguistically is relatively negligible compared to other factors.

One key way of capturing these other variables—fundamentally, respondents’ social networks—is to enrich a questionnaire with questions and details that come from ethnographic studies, that is, studies aimed at “finding out things that are not often seen as important but belong to the implicit structure of people’s life” (Blommaert and Jie (2010, 1)). By spending long periods in the field doing such things as studying the population and their cultural habits, selecting consultants, understanding respondents’ genealogies, and gathering field notes, one is able to get closer to an insider perspective (see, e.g., Blommaert 2007; Van Zanten 2010). An ethnographic approach ensures plausibility in its accounts, as its reports and interpretations are centered on an understanding of context (Duranti 1997).

In my research, I have relied both on data collected by Di Carlo for his 2011 study and on my own firsthand experience. The latter included taking part in cultural activities such as *njangi* (savings groups), burials, attending the market, cooking and sharing meals at consultants’ homes, fetching firewood and water with a group of young women, and attending Christian church services. These activities took place over eight months in the research area, across three trips, for the most part during my PhD research. This meant that there was room for a friendly and sociable environment, which facilitated interactions between the consultants and me. Crucially, this continued exposure also let me see that language choice in interaction followed a logic that was not easily described using Fishman’s diglossia model: rather, the relationships between interactants were far more significant for a speaker’s language choices. Thus, it became possible to focus on speaker metadata as a means of gathering self-reported multilingual competencies.

## 4.2 Lects and Languages

As was indicated in section 3, the understanding that people in Lower Fungom have of what constitutes a language is completely different from the linguist's view. In linguistics, we consider that a language is a system of communication that entails a specific set of grammar rules and a lexicon that its speakers use to achieve communication with other speakers. From a socio-linguistic point of view, roughly speaking, a language may consist of a cluster of varieties (dialects or sociolects) whose speakers understand each other without the assistance of an interpreter. This means that, at least in traditions like those that have produced works such as the *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun* (Binam Bikoï et al. 2012), when a speaker of one variety finds that he or she can understand the speaker of another variety without too much difficulty, their "dialects" would generally be considered to form a language cluster.

In Lower Fungom, a different picture emerged from respondents: here each village is conceived of as forming a separate speaker community. This means that Lower Fungom, according to locals, is home to thirteen different "talks." A linguist would distinguish between dialects of the same language and languages "proper"; all of these varieties are in fact identified by locals as individual "named languages." Inspired by research on code-switching (e.g., Auer 1999), I realized that if the objective is to understand the local ecology, then we have no choice but to see the world "through the eyes" of respondents. Apart from anything else, where they recognize a unit there is a possibility for them to make a choice that is significant to them and their interlocutors.

In order to keep the distinction between "linguist's languages" and "Lower Fungom people's talks," I have followed Di Carlo (2015) in using the term *lects* for the latter. This term is intentionally neutral as to the genealogical relationship of a particular lexicogrammatical code to any other. From this perspective, English and French are two lects as much as Abar and Misong (both varieties of Mungbam, from a "linguist's" point of view).

## 4.3 Detailing the Ethnographic Questionnaire

The ethnographically informed questionnaire that I used was in part developed during my studies for a master's degree, thanks to the collaboration of Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Angela Nsen Tem (see Esene Agwara 2013), and was later refined during my PhD. It consists of three main parts.

In the first part of the questionnaire, I tried to gather as much detailed information as possible regarding biographies and geography, since this may pattern with reported multilingual competencies. Questions about the number of names that someone has and the history behind such names, for example,

were discovered to be of the utmost interest. Thanks to information previously collected in the area (see, e.g., Di Carlo and Good 2014), we knew that people's names followed a logic that might be relevant for the study of individual multilingual repertoires. A child may receive one, two, or more names, depending on the family and the environment into which the child is born.<sup>2</sup> The general trend of naming is that one name is given by the father, another name is given by the maternal grandfather, and then other names are given by the maternal or paternal grandmothers or even by other more distant relatives or friends. Each of these names is thus associated with a certain social network; and, on top of that whole set of names (which at times is not known by all of one's acquaintances), most of the respondents also bear a Christian name.

One's names thus come from a variety of social networks, and these can at times be rooted in different villages. In a linguistic ecology like that of Lower Fungom, where each village is conceptualized as speaking its own "talk," multiple affiliations may therefore also foster the addition of certain lects to one's multilingual repertoire. Apart from anything else, in order for a child to show that he or she is a member of certain social networks, he or she is expected to be multilingual in the lects that members of these shared affiliations speak.

In addition to questions about names, the questionnaire also asked about the respondents' provenance<sup>3</sup> and where they currently live. Queries about residency and provenance were also extended to the respondents' internal and external family lines: I asked not just about the respondents, but also about their paternal, maternal, and spouses' networks. In the most recent study (Esene Agwara, in preparation), the ethnographic questionnaire was revised so that residence and provenance questions extended even further, to the third generation of the respondents' maternal and paternal relations, and included information about in-laws as well.

There were also questions about respondents' friends and classmates—how many there were, where they were from, and what their affiliation was. The questionnaire additionally touched on (a) the respondents' levels of schooling, (b) the location of their schools, (c) any social activities of which they were members (such as dance groups), and (d) their past mobility.

In the second part of the questionnaire, I collected respondents' self-reports about their multilingual repertoires: they listed all the lects in which they reported passive and active competence. The study is not exempt from the well-known "weakness" of self-reported competences, that people may claim higher (or lower) competences for all kinds of reasons. However, many studies on multilingualism have been based on self-reports (see, e.g., Di Carlo 2016; Hildebrandt et al. 2015; O'Barr 1971; Kaji 2010) and have acknowledged this limitation—Mba and Nsen Tem (this volume) is the first attempt to

overcome this challenge in a complex setting such as Lower Fungom, where most languages have remained thus far underdescribed.

The third part of the questionnaire aimed at capturing aspects of the local language ideologies. So, information was collected on how exposed respondents' were to the lects they had listed, how they learned each lect, with whom they used each lect and in which situations, and the benefits of using each lect.

#### **4.4 Research Participants**

In order to get a detailed ethnographic representation, all thirteen villages of Lower Fungom, and a good number of quarters and compounds in each of these villages, have been sampled for the results presented in section 5. As noted in section 1, however, the more recent focus on Missong means that data from that village are overrepresented. Datasets coming from the Missong subsample only will be acknowledged below.

Among the 174 respondents, the gender distribution was relatively even, with 51 percent of respondents being female and 49 percent male. However, there was a bias toward older participants, with the majority (44 percent of the total sample population) consisting of people aged over sixty-five; people under the age of thirty-five amounted to only 14 percent of respondents.<sup>4</sup>

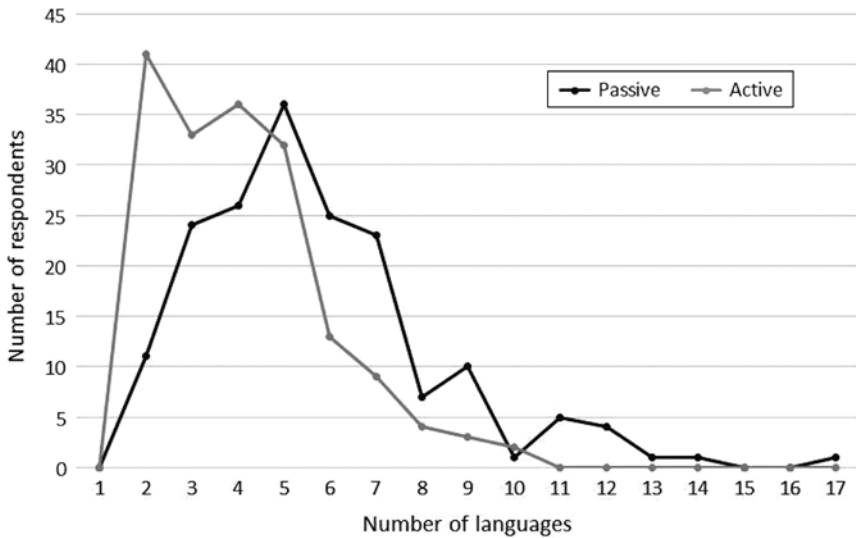
## **5. RESULTS**

In this section I present a few of the main findings that have been obtained through the semi-structured interviews held with multilingual speakers in Lower Fungom following the questionnaire discussed in section 4.3. Here the focus is particularly on those aspects of the study that reflect the importance of an ethnographic approach (in section 5.2); see Esene Agwara (in preparation) for further findings and more detail.

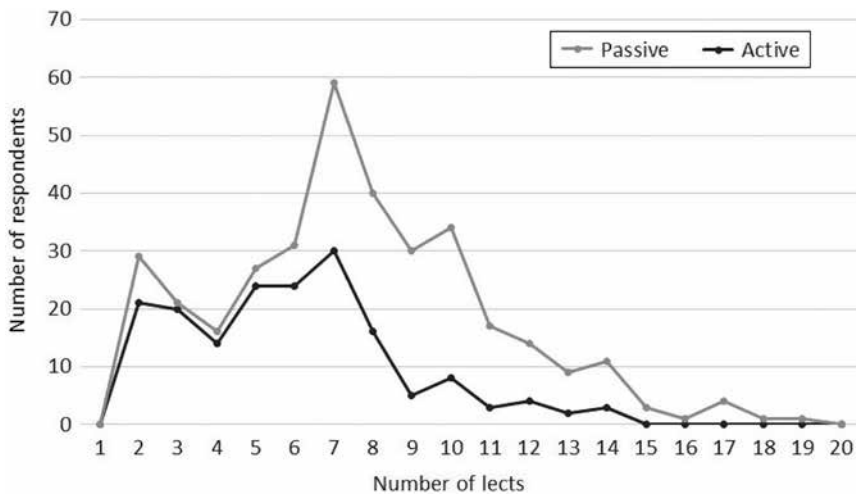
### **5.1 Macro-sociological Findings**

#### *5.1.1 Multilingualism and Multilectalism in Lower Fungom*

Figures 11.2 and 11.3 reveal high rates of self-reported multilingualism in Lower Fungom. There are no monolinguals in Lower Fungom. There are also relatively few bilingual speakers, less than one quarter of the respondents, and fewer still who can passively understand only two languages. While respondents know an average of 6.6 languages, on average they report being actively competent in 4.25 languages. At the levels of lects, the numbers rise



**Figure 11.2** The self-reported multilingual competence of speakers in lower Fungom ( $n = 174$ ), based on the traditional linguistic categorization of lects into languages. Responses are given separately for passive and active knowledge of the languages. *Source:* Figure created by the author.



**Figure 11.3** The self-reported multilectal competence of speakers in lower fungom ( $n = 174$ ), based on the lower Fungom view of distinct lects. Responses are given separately for passive and active knowledge of the lects. *Source:* Figure created by the author.

to an average of 9.25 lects for passive competence and 6.35 lects for active competence.

### 5.1.2 The Effect of Age on Multilingualism and Multilectalism

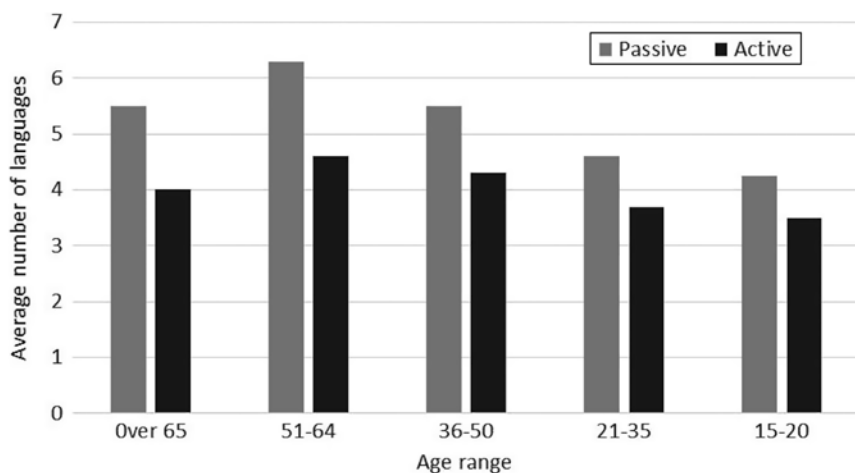
When one considers the average number of languages and lects used by respondents of different ages, a pattern emerges. Figures 11.4 and 11.5 illustrate how age affects multilingualism and multilectalism and show that there is an overall tendency for older respondents to speak more languages and lects than younger respondents.

## 5.2 Ethnographically Informed Factors

### 5.2.1 The Effect of Names on Multilingualism

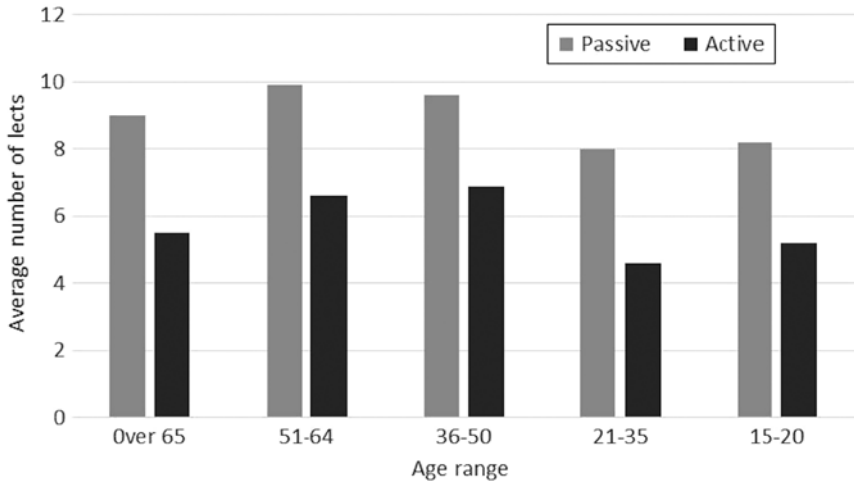
The targeting of people's onomastic data is one of the features of the questionnaire that most clearly attests to its ethnographic orientation (see section 4.3). Two charts are presented here that summarize my initial analysis of the relationship between the number of names that people have (excluding Christian names)<sup>5</sup> and their multilectal repertoires.

Figure 11.6 presents the differing number of names that 174 respondents of Lower Fungom have been given by their various social networks, together with the average number of spoken lects found in their repertoires. More than half of the respondents (53 percent) have three names or more, thus confirming that multiple affiliations are the norm in this part of the world.

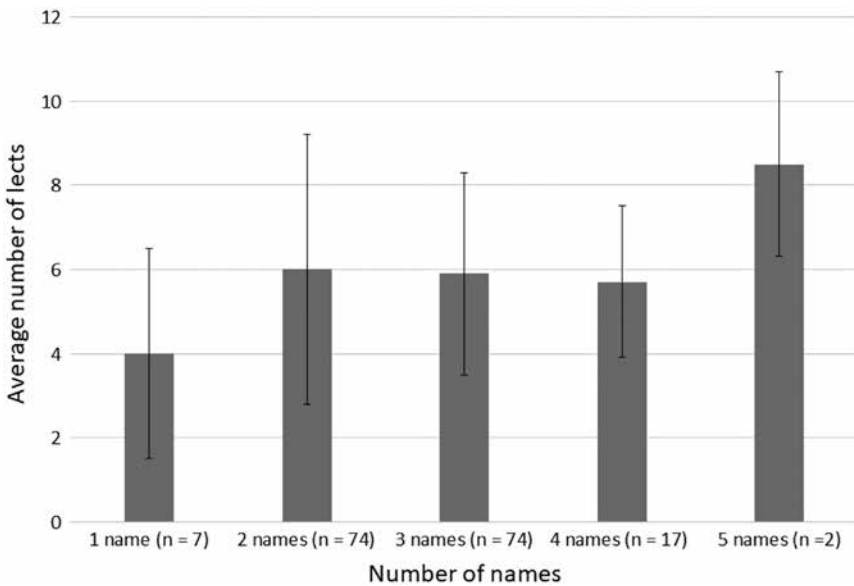


**Figure 11.4** Average self-reported rates of multilingual competence (passive and active), by age group ( $n = 174$ ). *Source:* Figure created by the author.





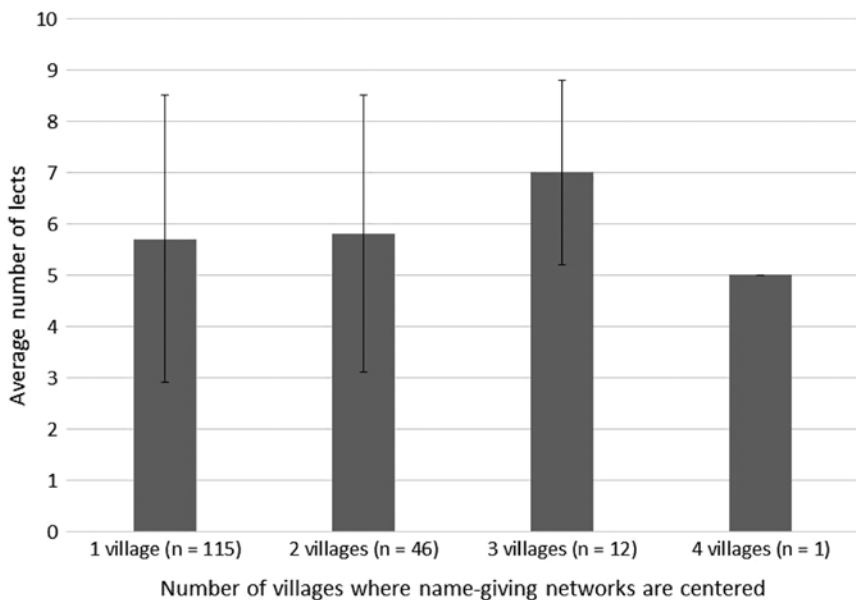
**Figure 11.5** Average self-reported rates of multilectal competence (passive and active), by age group ( $n = 174$ ). *Source:* Figure created by the author.



**Figure 11.6** The number of lects (average and standard deviation) actively known by respondents with differing numbers of names ( $n = 174$ ). *Source:* Figure created by the author.

It is interesting to see that the two extremes indicate opposite tendencies at the level of multilingual repertoires: the seven people with one name only have an average repertoire of 4.0 lects ( $sd = 2.5$ ), whereas the two people with five names have an average of 8.5 lects in their repertoires ( $sd = 2.2$ ). As for the intermediate groups, there are no clear relationships between the number of names one has and the number of lects present in one's multilingual repertoire: nonetheless, the groups are intermediate between the two extremes, suggesting that having more names does in fact have an impact on the formation of multilingual repertoires.

In order for different social networks involved in name-giving to foster individual multilingualism, though, the networks must be based in different villages, and this is what figure 11.7 focuses upon. Here respondents are categorized based on the number of villages in which their name-giving social networks are based, irrespective of their total number of names. Of the 174 respondents, 115 have been given names by social networks based in only a single village, 46 by networks based in two villages, 12 by networks based in three villages, and only a single person by networks based in four different villages. While a clear correlation between the average number of lects found in people's repertoires and the number of villages from which their names



**Figure 11.7** The number of lects (average and standard deviation) actively known by respondents whose name-giving social networks span differing numbers of villages ( $n = 174$ ). Source: Figure created by the author.

have stemmed is not apparent, it is nonetheless interesting to see that there is a slight gradient in figure 11.7, which seems to confirm the relevance of this sociocultural feature for the creation of individual multilingual repertoires. People associated in this way with three different villages do in fact have more lects in their repertoires (7.0 lects,  $sd = 1.8$ ) as compared to those connected with two villages (5.8 lects,  $sd = 2.7$ ) or one village only (5.7 lects,  $sd = 2.8$ ). These data cannot be held as conclusive, of course, but at the same time they do seem to confirm my expectations about the interconnections between sociocultural and sociolinguistic features.

### 5.2.2 *The Effect of Marriage Patterns on Multilingualism*

It is possible to consider the effect on the multilingual/multilectal competence of respondents of marrying someone outside their village. As shown in table 11.1, the majority of respondents claim competence in the lect of their spouse: 95 percent of men and 100 percent of women claim at least passive knowledge. However, women tend to claim active competence more than men, with 92 percent of women saying that they are actively competent in their husband's lect, while only 58 percent of men claim this about their wife's lect. In addition, while none of the women report having no knowledge of their husband's language, 5 percent of men lack competence in their wife's language. Note that the sample considered here is represented to a large degree by residents of the village of Missong.

### 5.2.3 *Degree of Friendship and Multilingual and Multilectal Competency*

The analysis of data from the subsample of 31 respondents that live in the village of Missong reveals that respondents have an average of 4.1 friends each, with an average of 2.5 being very close friends. Table 11.2 demonstrates how the friendship co-occurs with multilingualism and multilectalism at both passive and active levels. From the data, it is clear that respondents are more likely to report passive or active competence in the languages and lects

**Table 11.1** The percentage of men and women who have married outside their village and who claim passive competence, active competence, or no competence in the lect of their spouse ( $n = 66$ )

	<i>Males (%)</i>	<i>Females (%)</i>
Passive competence in spouse's language	95	100
Active competence in spouse's language	58	92
No competence in spouse's language	5	0

*Source:* Table created by the author.

**Table 11.2** The percentage of speakers from missong who report active or passive competence in the languages or lects of close friends versus other friends ( $n = 31$ )

	<i>Close Friend</i>		<i>Other Friend</i>	
	<i>Language (%)</i>	<i>Lect (%)</i>	<i>Language (%)</i>	<i>Lect (%)</i>
Passive competence in language or lect of close friend or other friend	90	87	80	71
Active competence in language or lect of close friend or other friend	86	76	67	58

Source: Table created by the author.

of close friends compared to those of other friends. For example, 90 percent of respondents have a passive knowledge of the language with which close friends identify, compared with only 80 percent having a passive knowledge of the language of friends who are less close; similarly, 76 percent report being able to speak the lects of their close friends, while only 58 percent report this for the lects of less close friends.

#### 5.2.4 *Influence of Schooling on Multilingual and Multilectal Repertoires*

English is used as a language of instruction in schools in Lower Fungom, and is also sometimes used in informal interactions, especially by the younger generations. Attending school is still a privilege in Lower Fungom as, sadly, over a quarter never make it to school: in my sample, only 64 percent went to primary school, and barely 9 percent have attended secondary school.

In the subsample from the village of Missong, the majority of those that speak English are, unsurprisingly, the younger respondents who have spent several years in school; for them, English is an additional language in their repertoires. From the ethnographic interviews with this subsample, we also know that many respondents attended schools where students from other villages were also present—this suggests a high degree of exposure to a variety of local languages and lects during interactions at school, once again supporting high rates of multilingualism and multilectalism in the area.

#### 5.2.5 *Motivations for Passive and Active Competence in Lects and Languages*

As I showed in a previous analysis (Esene Agwara 2013), by putting together self-reports and further analysis, it is possible to view questionnaire data along a number of dimensions pointing to different factors facilitating the development of individual multilingual repertoires: (a) (perceived)

geographical proximity, (b) social security, (c) marriage, (d) blood relations, (e) (perceived) linguistic proximity, and (g) personal mobility. When it comes to languages that do not fit these categories, nearly all speakers advanced as a reason for learning such languages passively (i.e., to understand but not to speak them) the need to intercept evil plans that others might be making against them. In contrast, for highly local languages and lects, the people of Lower Fungom actively speak them to gain respect as legitimate members of a group and to maintain and strengthen agnatic and cognatic relations (see Esene Agwara (in preparation) for more details).

## 6. DISCUSSION

One of the principal questions addressed in this work on individual multilingualism is: How can an ethnographically informed questionnaire assist in our understanding of multilingual dynamics in a rural setting like Lower Fungom? As seen in figures 11.6–11.7 and tables 11.1–11.2, aspects of the social networks of respondents—speakers' names, marriage patterns, and degrees of friendship—have a direct influence on their multilingual repertoires. All of these can only be investigated using ethnographic tools.

The findings reveal that patterns of individual multilingualism are heavily associated with social relationships rather than with some hierarchy of languages within local language ideologies. Being able to maintain and strengthen relationships and connections with others requires speaking their lect or language as a way of guaranteeing trust and protection, especially important in situations of general insecurity like the one in which subsistence farmers in this part of the world are immersed. On the flip side, being able to comprehend a specific lect or language is also needed as a protective social measure, in the sense that anything negative said about respondents can be intercepted if they speak the relevant lect, or sensitive information that is not meant for all can be concealed.

The findings in this chapter, and those presented in other research about the area, confirm that, in Lower Fungom, motivations for learning new languages (or, better, new lects) escape the compartmentalized and inherently hierarchical model proposed by diglossia theory. The ensuring of multiple affiliations in potentially supportive social networks is instead the lynchpin around which Lower Fungom's small-scale multilingualism revolves. This leads to a further notion, one of the most interesting arising from this research, that there is an apparent dichotomy between categorical and relational identity, with diglossia theory considering the former as the only kind of identity worth exploring; however, for reasons of space I cannot deal with this here (see Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba, forthcoming).

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have tried both to account for my choice to adopt an ethnographically informed perspective in the study of small-scale multilingualism in Lower Fungom and to illustrate the findings obtained through this choice, limiting myself to self-reported data collected from multilingual speakers through questionnaires (which were, in fact, semi-structured interviews). After outlining the main features of early scholarship on African rural multilingualism and the theoretical framework from which they stem (i.e., diglossia theory), I introduced the study area, emphasizing those sociolinguistic aspects that make Lower Fungom—like many other rural African contexts, especially those along the Nigeria-Cameroon border—too different from urban environments to be captured using the same tools. Without solid ethnographic knowledge of the area, the sorts of refinements to a sociolinguistic questionnaire that are detailed in section 4.3 would have been impossible, and many significant elements of the locals' language ideologies and language use would have remained unseen. Finally, I introduced the main findings that the use of this location-specific questionnaire has allowed me to observe.

While this study is only another single piece in a complex puzzle, there are some more general results that are particularly worth recalling: firstly, the relative unimportance of diglossic models in the language ideologies of the people of Lower Fungom (for a more complete view on this issue, see Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba (forthcoming)); and secondly, the prominence of social pressures for relational rather than categorical identities.

It is hoped that this work will contribute to sensitizing researchers to a consideration of ways of designing sociolinguistic questionnaires that allow one to capture the realities of an existing context as they are seen by the locals. In describing the complexities that shape individual multilingualism in Lower Fungom, this chapter invites others to undertake further research in other similar settings, to add to our knowledge of multilingualism.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Jeff Good for their constant support throughout my studies, and also my current supervisors in Bayreuth, Gabriele Sommer and Eric Anchimbe. Thanks go also to Angela Nsen Tem, the late Ngong George Bwei Kum, and, in particular, Njing Simon, who have contributed invaluable to the realization of this work. Research for this chapter was made possible thanks to generous funding from the US National Science Foundation (Award Nos. BCS-0853981 and BCS-1360763), the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (IPF0180).

2. A child receiving only a single name is rare, and generally limited to children born out of wedlock who have been rejected by their paternal kin.
3. By provenance, I mean the place of origin.
4. The choice behind this bias in the age category followed the notion of apparent time (Bailey 2007), as the initial goal of the main research was to gain access to the older levels of language ideologies still observable (Di Carlo (2018, 145)).
5. Christian names have been excluded from the counts because they have no immediate relevance to the village affiliations of respondents. These names are considered to be foreign and are thus not connected with the social affiliations that are cogent for the development of multilingual repertoires. It is important nonetheless to mention that 75 percent of participants bear Christian names.

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## *Chapter 12*

# **Ways to Assess Multilingual Competence in Small, Unwritten Languages**

## *The Case of Lower Fungom*

Gabriel Mba and Angela Nsen Tem

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Studies on multilingualism in Africa have focused mostly on urban centers and on situations of contact between European and well-described African languages. Relatively little work has been done on smaller African languages that are underdescribed and lack a written standard. This study considers the case of multilingualism in languages of this kind in a relatively small rural area of the North-West Region of Cameroon known as Lower Fungom. Its main contribution is the description of a number of tools that were designed to measure the competence of multilingual speakers in these languages. These tools are general enough in nature that they could be straightforwardly adapted to similar settings.

As amply discussed elsewhere in this volume (see Esene Agwara, this volume; Ojong Diba, this volume), Lower Fungom is characterized by high linguistic diversity. It is to be noted, however, that existing work describing individual multilingualism in Lower Fungom, such as Esene Agwara (2013) and Di Carlo (2015, 2018), has largely come from self-reports by locals collected via sociolinguistic questionnaires administered in the form of semi-structured interviews.

What remains to be investigated is how reported patterns of competence correspond to actual linguistic competence. Milroy and Gordon (2003) and Li Wei and Moyer (2008), among others, have made clear that, though self-reported degrees of linguistic proficiency can be used for analysis, this

should be combined with other methods for determining linguistic proficiency. We therefore developed tools to assess multilingual competence in settings such as Lower Fungom. Our overarching goals are ambitious: to develop tools and procedures to support this kind of assessment and to use those tools to assess the alignment between reported multilingual competence and actual competence in Lower Fungom. This chapter focuses on work relating to the first goal and, more tentatively, provides results connected to the second.

The chapter is organized as follows. After defining the main terms at the core of our research—that is, multilingualism, linguistic competence, and language assessment (section 2)—we illustrate the methodology we have adopted (section 3), devoting individual subsections to each of our four research tools: the sociolinguistic questionnaire (section 3.1), recorded text testing (RTT; section 3.2), the visual stimuli (section 3.3), and wordlists (section 3.4). We then briefly discuss our results in order to clarify the application of these tools (section 4), exemplifying our claims through the illustration of some individual cases. The concluding remarks offer an overview of the methods employed, of their admitted weaknesses, and of the areas where we see improvements are most needed (section 5).

## 2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The definition of multilingualism used by Edwards (1994, 1) centers on the practice of using more than one language, to varying degrees of proficiency, among individuals and societies (see also Kramsch and Whiteside 2007). That is, he considers multilingualism to be the use of two or more languages either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Li Wei (2008) defines a multilingual individual as “anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)” (Li Wei (2008, 4)). Though some scholars consider the ability to actively use a language as the main characteristic in assessing multilingual competence, this study is guided by Lüdi and Py (2009, 158), Grosjean (2010), and Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008), who say that a person does not need to have a perfect mastery of two or more languages in order to be considered multilingual.

In this study, then, both active and passive linguistic competence will be considered as relevant for multilingualism. Active competence refers to the ability of an individual to both speak and understand a language, while passive competence refers to an individual’s ability to understand a language, even if they cannot speak it effectively.

We can define language assessment as the study and practice of evaluating the competence of an individual in using a language efficiently. This is a complex process consisting of the ways in which a tester observes an individual's performance on a specific linguistic task and gives judgments on their ability to comprehend and use a given language, regardless of the contexts of use and the perceived statuses of such languages in the speech community as a whole. Smith, Teemant, and Pinnegar (2004) suggest that assessment is all about gathering information about students' learning. Sutherland (1996) further notes that assessment is a social activity and can only be understood by taking into account the cultural, social, political, and economic context of an individual. A sociocultural perspective of assessment is essential for measuring the competence of students coming from diverse linguistic backgrounds (Smith, Teemant, and Pinnegar 2004).

To the best of our knowledge, the assessment of multilingual competence in small, unwritten languages has thus far remained outside of scholarly work of this kind. For this reason, the main contribution of the work presented here is intended to be at the methodological level: we will try to show how existing tools for language description and analysis can be refined and adapted to a rural African situation in order to test the different competence levels of people who self-report as speakers of multiple unwritten languages of Lower Fungom.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This section discusses the four tools that were employed in this study: a sociolinguistic questionnaire, RTT, visual stimuli, and elicitation of wordlists from multilingual individuals. The first was designed to collect self-reports of multilingual competence and is discussed here in order to provide an understanding of the need for the three other tools.

#### **3.1 Sociolinguistic Questionnaire**

##### *3.1.1 General Overview*

A pilot study involving the second author was carried out in 2012.<sup>1</sup> Questionnaires were administered to around a hundred residents of Lower Fungom. These were presented in the form of semi-structured interviews because the informants were mostly illiterate. A number of questions were included that were intended to elicit ethnographic and biographical information, self-reported multilingual competence, and the motivations for learning local languages (for further details, see Esene Agwara (2013, this volume) and Di Carlo (2015, 2018)).

### 3.1.2 An Ethnographically Informed Questionnaire: Strengths and Weaknesses

The questionnaire is useful as a tool for a number of reasons. First, it helps gather ethnographic information about people's language ideologies as well as biographies of the interviewees, which include important data about their families and their degree of exposure to different languages, among other things. Second, from a more pragmatic perspective, in the current study questionnaire data allowed us to locate appropriate participants for the assessment tasks discussed in sections 3.2–3.4.

That being said, it remains clear that, since the questionnaire could only provide speakers' self-reported competence in any language and not their actual proficiency, a series of methods had to be employed to measure actual competence.

### 3.1.3 Scoring Multilingual Competence Based on Self-Reports

In the sociolinguistic questionnaire, the reported linguistic competence of respondents in each of the languages they claimed to speak or understand was converted to a numerical score, ranging from 1 to 5. A score of 1 was assigned when respondents reported that they could only understand a language to a small degree. A score of 2 was given when the respondent reported that they could understand a language well, but not speak it at all, whereas a score of 3 was used when the speaker reported being able to speak a language to a limited extent. Scores of 1 and 2 can be associated with passive competence, while a score of 3 corresponds with a competence between the active and passive categories. Scores of 4 and 5 were given for active competence: the difference between the two mainly depending on how the language had been acquired, with 5 being reserved for speakers whose competence was at the level typically described by the term *native speaker*.

## 3.2 Recorded Text Testing

As mentioned above, since questionnaires provided us only with self-reports of linguistic proficiency, we deemed it necessary to make use of other tools that would enable us to gather relevant data for assessing actual competence in multiple languages. The first of these tools is RTT, which we adapted to the goals of our research.

This tool was developed by Casad (1974). It provides a principled way to design and carry out sociolinguistic surveys focused on the assessment of intelligibility between dialects of the same language. The research procedure is quite simple, which makes this a good tool to use in a context such as Lower Fungom. First, two dialects are selected (the comparison is always

done across two dialects at a time), and then two speakers, each a native speaker of one of the dialects, are asked to present an episode of their life—or anything else that is not widely known—in their respective dialect. Following this, the recording in the first dialect is played to native speakers of the second dialect and vice versa. Each listener is asked a number of questions that are intended to test the degree to which they understood key content and grammatical features of the recording. Responses are then coded according to a survey-specific system (see Casad (1974, 52–88) in particular). Ring (1981, 1997), Boafo, Kehl, and Hatfield (2002), Kluge and Hatfield (2002), and Tompkins, Hatfield, and Kluge (2002) provide examples of linguists employing this tool for dialect intelligibility testing.

Since in the linguistic repertoire of most individuals from Lower Fungom we find that individuals are competent both in different languages and in different dialects of the same language, our research can make good use of the RTT method. However, our overarching goal is quite distinct from the original goal of RTT, which was to help determine the extent to which speakers of two dialects could use a single translation of a text into their language. That is, it was designed to determine whether two dialects were mutually intelligible. Our goal is, in some senses, the “opposite” of that of Casad (1974): we want to test the multilingual competence of an individual even in cases where we know that two varieties are not mutually intelligible in any way.

### *3.2.1 How the RTT Was Administered*

This study aimed to assess competence in the eight languages of Lower Fungom as recognized by linguistic studies, namely Ajumbu, Buu, Fang, Koshin, Kung, Mufu-Mundabli, Mungbam, and Naki. To carry out the RTT, we needed to select one native speaker for each of these languages and record the text that they produced. Stories on familiar topics were written in English by the second author and taken to Lower Fungom, where they were translated by native speakers of the languages in question and then recorded.<sup>2</sup> As a check, each of these recordings was then played to other L1 speakers of the relevant language, who identified the language and judged both the quality of the translation and the speaker’s overall performance.

After this, seven of the eight texts were played to each research participant participating in the comprehension tests—the text in their reported L1 was excluded. Thus, during the assessment process, non-native speakers of these languages listened to each narrative and then interpreted it into Cameroon Pidgin English based on what they understood from the recording. After interpreting each story, the participants also responded to questions based on the text.



To demonstrate the process, we provide a translation of one of the texts and the associated questions here. The English translation of the text used in the field for the language Naki is as follows:

Last week, Mr. Kulo got up very early in the morning before the sun rose. He heard his friend's voice and immediately jumped out of bed because he remembered they were to go hunting together. He picked up his bag, a cutlass, and a gun and jumped out calling for his friend. His friend, who had just passed by, pretended not to have heard him calling. Mr. Kulo immediately dived on the friend and beat him up badly. His friend shouted for help and was rescued by some young boys who were going to school. These boys seized Mr. Kulo's things and took him to the chief's palace. On reaching the chief's compound, the chief immediately came out and ordered Mr. Kulo to sit on the ground. Mr. Kulo immediately begged for forgiveness from his friend. His friend looked him in the eyes to see if he was really remorseful and then asked him to get up. (Naki RTT text; English translation)

The questions that were associated with this text, given here in an English translation rather than in the original Cameroon Pidgin English, were as follows:

At what time did Mr. Kulo get up?

Whose voice did he hear?

Where were they to go to?

What did he pick up?

What did Mr. Kulo's friend do when he was called?

What did Mr. Kulo do when his friend refused responding to his call?

Who rescued Mr. Kulo's friend?

What did the young boys do?

What did the chief do immediately when he came out?

What did Mr. Kulo do when he was asked to sit on the ground?

What did his friend ask him to do after looking into his eyes?

### *3.2.2 How the RTT Was Scored*

The scoring of the collected data was done across three parameters: the identification of the language of the recording, the translation of the content of the recording into Cameroon Pidgin English (used because of its status as a local lingua franca), and the answers to the questions based on the text. Correct identification of the language was assigned 2 points, the quality of the translation of the text earned up to 48 points, and the remaining 50 points were allocated on the basis of the answers to the questions. This resulted in a maximum total of 100 points. It should be noted here that this scoring was used as an initial way of developing and testing this method, and the system used was refined over the course of the study. Results presented in section 4

on the basis of this scoring should thus be considered preliminary in nature, and they are provided primarily to illustrate the utility of the method.

Using this scoring system, we then adopted a heuristic approach to associate the scores with different levels of proficiency as follows:

- 0–10: no competence (level 0)
- 11–20: understands a small amount (level 1)
- 21–40: understands at a basic level (level 2)
- 41–60: understands well (level 3)
- 61–80: understands very well (level 4)
- 81–100: has a full understanding of the language (level 5)

It should be noted that the rating system used for language production (see section 3.3) also makes use of six levels (including level 0), although it replaces this assessment of understanding with an assessment of speaking.

An important result of this study is that it revealed cases where reported patterns of competence could not be corroborated by this comprehension task. This was facilitated by the fact that the second author, who conducted this task, pretended not to understand any of the languages or the texts. On a few occasions, this revealed cases where participants pretended to understand a text that they did not really understand.

### **3.3 Visual Stimuli**

Visual stimuli were used to test consultants' active competence. The method is fairly simple. We used twelve pictures of locally salient day-to-day activities such as scenes depicting farming using techniques commonly employed in Cameroonian farms, the tapping of palm trees, nursing mothers, and so on, taken from a collection of drawings created in the 1990s by SIL Cameroon. Participants were asked to comment on the visual stimuli using the languages that they reported being able to speak. These recordings were then segmented into different topics of discussion so that they could be presented to native speakers of the relevant languages who would serve as judges of the speech produced by the participants.

In most cases, when an informant had a high score in the comprehension of a particular language based on the RTT study (see section 3.2), we found that they also had a relatively high degree of active competence in that language.<sup>3</sup>

#### *3.3.1 How the Visual Stimuli Were Administered*

The intent of this task was for participants to respond to the pictures by describing what they saw, though there were also other kinds of responses.

For instance, some participants posed questions to the pictures as if the characters depicted were alive. To pick one example, a Buu speaker responded to a picture where a man was going hunting with his dog, by asking, “Are you going hunting, friend?” Similarly, his response to the picture in which a young man is praying was, “Are you praying to God?” Since the aim of the study was to assess the ability of participants to speak the relevant languages, and not their ability to respond to the pictures in a particular way, participants were judged on their level of competence in speaking the languages and not with respect to the content of their responses. In the case of this Buu individual, for example, since the judge immediately understood his recorded speech and could interpret what was said, this confirmed that he was a good speaker and his competence was assessed as high.

### 3.3.2 *How the Visual Stimuli Were Scored*

With respect to scoring, a response that was deemed to use the relevant language well was assigned 5 points, giving a possible maximum total of 60 points across the twelve images. Each total was converted to a percentage and a competence level. However, this was done following a rough, “commonsense” scale, rather than a fixed set of rules, which necessarily affects the validity of the results and presents an area for future improvement. The raw numeric scores were simply converted into percentages (based on 60 as the highest possible score) and associated with six levels of competence as follows:

0–10%:	level 0
11–20%:	level 1
21–40%:	level 2
41–60%:	level 3
61–80%:	level 4
81–100%:	level 5

As further discussed in section 4, we found that the twenty-nine participants in this task generally did have the active competence that they reported as having for each language in the sociolinguistic questionnaire described in section 3.1.

## 3.4 Wordlists

To further test the abilities of individuals to speak particular languages, a wordlist task was used, where non-native speakers who claimed to have active competence in a language were asked to provide entries for words in

that language using a standardized 200-term wordlist. Wordlists provided a useful complement to the visual stimuli since they also involved language production but in a more controlled fashion than was possible with the visual stimulus task.

### *3.4.1 How Wordlists Were Administered*

The wordlist task was administered by presenting participants with a list of 200 terms in Cameroon Pidgin English. They were asked to produce the equivalent words in the languages that they claimed they could speak. The task was divided into two phases. In the first phase, elicitations were limited to whole words, without any attempt at internal segmentation. The second phase involved assessing participants on their knowledge of prefixes and suffixes in the relevant languages. This enabled us to assess the degree to which each participant was competent in the noun-class system of these languages.

### *3.4.2 How Wordlists Were Scored*

For each language tested for a given participant, scoring was based on how similar the words produced by the second-language speaker were to those produced by native speakers. Cases where there was a perfect match between the word produced by a participant and the one produced by a native speaker were assigned a score of 1, and the score decreased for any nonmatching elements, down to a score of -1 in cases where there were no matches. Both segments and tones were considered in the comparison.<sup>4</sup>

An example of the scoring process we used is as follows. The Misong word for “heads” that was collected from a native speaker is *àfi*. A non-native speaker gave the form *áfí*. Each of these forms has three elements in common (the segments *a*, *f*, and *i*) and two (the two tones) that do not match. For a partial match of this kind, we used a simple average calculation of distance as a first approximation, based on 1 for a match and -1 for a nonmatch; in this case, for example, our calculation was  $(1 + 1 + 1 - 1 - 1) / 5 = 0.20$ . Individual word scores could then be added to produce a single score for a participant’s overall production of the wordlist of a given language.

## **3.5 The Participant Sample**

It is worth noting here that the number of participants decreased across the tasks. The initial sample of ninety-seven participants for the sociolinguistic questionnaire, who were interviewed in 2012, was reduced to eighty respondents for the RTT sessions. Participants for the visual stimulus and wordlist tasks were chosen from among those who participated in the RTT task after they had scored highly for passive knowledge of a given language and further

claimed that they had active competence in it. In total, twenty-nine multilingual speakers were tested using both visual stimuli and wordlists. It seems likely that any project adopting this set of methods will see a similar decrease in the participant pool across tasks as the tasks become more difficult and the pool of appropriate participants becomes dependent on the results of earlier tasks.

## 4. RESULTS

Each of the tools discussed in section 3 provided results in accordance with the kind of data they were designed to collect. The sociolinguistic questionnaire allowed us to collect information about consultants' linguistic backgrounds, reported degrees of proficiency in the different languages, and social ties, as evidenced by, for instance, their affiliations with multiple villages as reflected in their names (see Esene Agwara, this volume). RTT was aimed at assessing listeners' passive competence in the languages they reported knowing. Finally, both the visual stimuli and wordlists were aimed at assessing speakers' active competence in the languages they claimed to be able to speak.

### 4.1 Results of the Sociolinguistic Questionnaire

With respect to the sociolinguistic questionnaire, one general point that emerged is that almost everyone in Lower Fungom is at least bilingual in one of the local languages and Cameroon Pidgin English, which was used as the language of communication between the second author and the participants. Men were found to claim knowledge of more languages than women. This appears connected to the fact that they were more mobile than women and came into contact with more language communities over the course of their lives. One interesting point that emerged from the interviews is that participants reported that an important motivation for them to have acquired at least passive competence in multiple languages is to help ensure that they would be aware of evil plans or gossip against them. Participants also expressed that learning multiple languages helped them maintain relationships. More detailed discussion of what was learned from the sociolinguistic questionnaires can be found in Esene Agwara (2013, this volume) and in Di Carlo (2015, 2018).

### 4.2 Passive Competence and Recorded Text Testing

Results of the RTT procedure by and large confirm what participants had said during the questionnaire sessions, with many of them scoring highly for passive competence in the languages that they reported knowing, as detailed in table 12.1 (see section 3.2 for the methodology used for this test and how

**Table 12.1** The scores that participants achieved on the RTT test for languages for which they self-reported a score of 3 or more in the sociolinguistic questionnaire

<i>Participant ID</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Self-Report</i>	<i>Score (Level)</i>
QAT25	Mufu	F	45	Mungbam	3	96 (5)
				Buu	5	80 (5)
				Fang	4	95 (5)
QAD25	Buu	F	65	Mungbam	3	70 (4)
				Mufu-Mundabli	3	78 (4)
				Fang	3	40 (2)
QAD28	Buu	M	61	Mungbam	3	70 (4)
				Fang	3	60 (3)
QAD23	Buu	M	60	Mungbam	3	90 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	3	70 (4)
				Fang	3	80 (5)
QAT27	Buu	M	68	Mungbam	4	85 (5)
				Koshin	3	90 (5)
				Fang	4	85 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	—	80 (5)
QAD24	Buu	F	56	Mungbam	3	98 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	3	90 (5)
				Fang	3	80 (5)
QAT22	Buu	M	55	Fang	4	60 (3)
				Mufu-Mundabli	4	80 (5)
				Kung	3	50 (3)
QPP22	Mufu	F	48	Buu	4	60 (3)
				Fang	3	75 (4)
QAT16	Missong	M	70	Mufu-Mundabli	3	60 (3)
QAT17	Missong	M	68	Buu	3	80 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	3	40 (2)

Source: Table created by the authors.

Note: The participant ID code, village of origin, sex, and age (in years) are presented for each participant; then for each language for which they claimed knowledge, their self-reported score, their score on the RTT test, and their calculated level of passive competence in that language are given.

scores and levels were calculated). Note that the table reports only those languages for which a participant self-reported a competence level of 3 or higher.<sup>5</sup> We must remind the reader that values in the “Self-report” column refer to the scale used in the questionnaire (see section 3.1.3), which runs from “understands a bit” (1), through “understands well” (2), “understands well and speaks only a bit” (3), and “understands all and speaks well” (4), to native proficiency (5). It will be apparent, then, that a self-report of 2 would be expected to be equivalent to 3 or 4 in the RTT level, since this marks only passive competence.

The main point to emerge from table 12.1 is that for these participants, on the whole, a self-reported level of competence at level 3 or higher (which corresponds to being able to understand a language and speak it to at least

a limited extent) was generally associated with a relatively high RTT score, thus confirming the claims that participants made in their self-reports. From a methodological perspective, the results show how RTT can be an effective tool to verify self-reports of passive competence in a language.

### 4.3 Active Competence and Responses to Visual Stimuli

Table 12.2 presents results from the visual stimulus test (see section 3.3 for the methodology used for this test and how scores were calculated); the table reports only cases where a participant self-reported a competence level of 3 or higher in a particular language.

Looking at table 12.2, we can see that when participants reported having a competence level of 3 or higher in a language (which corresponds to being able to understand a language and speak it to a limited extent), their ability to actually produce that language was generally in line with their self-report or, in many cases, even higher than what they reported.

**Table 12.2 The scores that participants achieved on the visual stimulus test for languages for which they self-reported a score of 3 or more in the sociolinguistic questionnaire**

<i>Participant ID</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Self-report</i>	<i>Score (Level)</i>
QAT25	Mufu	F	45	Mungbam	3	77 (4)
				Buu	5	95 (5)
				Fang	4	55 (3)
QAD25	Buu	F	65	Mungbam	3	93 (5)
				Fang	3	63 (4)
QAD28	Buu	M	61	Mungbam	3	70 (4)
				Fang	3	68 (4)
QAD23	Buu	M	60	Mufu-Mundabli	3	80 (5)
QAT27	Buu	M	68	Mungbam	4	83 (5)
				Koshin	3	73 (4)
				Fang	4	57 (3)
				Mufu-Mundabli	—	80 (4)
QAD24	Buu	F	56	Mungbam	3	100 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	3	97 (5)
				Fang	3	80 (5)
QAT22	Buu	M	55	Mungbam	4	80 (5)
				Mufu-Mundabli	4	68 (4)
				Kung	3	52 (3)
				Fang	4	62 (4)

Source: Table created by the authors.

Note: The participant ID code, village of origin, sex, and age (in years) are presented for each participant; then for each language for which they claimed knowledge, their self-reported score, their score on the visual stimulus test, and their calculated level of active competence in that language are given.

### 4.4 Active Competence and Wordlists

In this section, results are presented on the lexical and morphological differences between words produced by native and non-native speakers of a language. There was considerable variation in the data. Some non-native speakers produced data that were indistinguishable from the forms produced by native speakers, while others produced completely different words. Here, we present a sample of our results. It should be acknowledged at the outset of this discussion that, due to the fact that a number of the languages of Lower Fungom are not well studied—and, in particular, none are well studied in terms of sociolinguistic variation—the transcriptions used in this section should be considered approximate, especially with respect to tone.

#### 4.4.1 Sample Words Produced by Non-Native Speakers

In our sample we had a number of cases in which forms uttered by non-native speakers matched perfectly those produced by native speakers, both at the segmental and suprasegmental level. We are not providing evidence of such cases here.

In table 12.3 are examples where non-native speakers of Fang were asked to produce words in this language, but the forms produced were either quite distant from the reference form or the speaker simply failed to produce a form. In some cases, the forms that were produced are close enough to the native speakers’ forms to suggest that the non-native speaker did indeed have some knowledge of the language, as in the production of Fang *tákú* for *tàkwú*

**Table 12.3** Examples of Fang words that were produced by participants who were not native speakers of Fang

<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Participant ID</i>	<i>Form produced</i>	<i>Native form</i>
head	QAD25	(no response)	<i>kwú</i>
heads	QAT139	<i>tákú</i>	<i>tàkwú</i>
heads	QAD25	(no response)	<i>tàkwú</i>
heads	QAT101	(no response)	<i>tàkwú</i>
heads	QAT135	<i>kútígbwím</i>	<i>tàkwú</i>
eye	QAT101	<i>yísâ</i>	<i>wúsâ</i>
eye	QAD23	<i>yí</i>	<i>wúsâ</i>
ear	QAT139	<i>kâtwú</i>	<i>twúŋ</i>
mouth	QAT135	<i>dzíkê</i>	<i>dzí</i>
mouth	QAD23	<i>kádzé</i>	<i>dzí</i>
hand	QAT101	<i>kârâ</i>	<i>tsìŋ</i>

Source: Table created by the authors.

Note: The forms they produced do not correspond well with the forms produced by native speakers; in some cases, the non-native speaker did not produce a form at all.



“head” (as there are differences in both segments and tones, this is not viewed as a close match). In other cases, such as the production of Fang *yí* rather than *wúsá* for “eye,” the forms are not recognizably connected.

4.4.2 Morphological Differences

In this section, we look at how wordlists can be used to assess the morpho-syntactic knowledge of speakers, with a focus on noun-class marking (for a summary discussion of noun classes in most of the languages of Lower Fungom, see Good et al. (2011)). Table 12.4 presents some patterns of noun affixation found in elicited Fang wordlists. Specifically, self-reported non-native speakers of Fang were assessed on how closely the noun-class affixes they used when asked to produce forms corresponded to the patterns produced by a native speaker. In the table, the speaker with identifier QAT108 is a native speaker of Fang, while the other participants reported that they spoke the language, but their primary linguistic identity was with another village, as indicated.

As can be seen in table 12.4, the non-native speakers of Fang frequently used different affixes from the native speaker, perhaps due to interference from other languages in their repertoires or because of patterns of hypercorrection discussed in section 4.4.3. In the word for “ear,” for example, the native speaker has a zero prefix (Ø-); by contrast, while the speaker from Ajumbu and a speaker from Kung employed *ká-*, three speakers from Buu gave forms *bè-*, *bá-*, and *-ká* (the first two prefixes, the last a suffix).

**Table 12.4 Examples of the noun-class marker patterns produced by non-native speakers of Fang, compared to the forms produced by a native speaker (QAT108)**

QAT139 <i>Ajumbu</i>	QAD25 <i>Buu</i>	QAT101 <i>Buu</i>	QAT135 <i>Kung</i>	QAD23 <i>Buu</i>	QAD28 <i>Buu</i>	QAT108 <i>Fang</i>	Example word
<i>ká-</i>	—	<i>bè-</i>	<i>ká-</i>	<i>bá-</i>	<i>-ká</i>	Ø-	ear
=	—	—	=	<i>kà-</i>	=	<i>bá-</i>	ears
<i>kè-</i>	<i>kà-</i>	=	=	=	<i>kà-</i>	Ø-	jaw
=	=	=	=	<i>tà-</i>	=	<i>bà-</i>	jaws
<i>kì-</i>	=	—	<i>kà-</i>	—	<i>kàN-</i>	<i>fì-</i>	frog
Ø-	<i>á-</i>	<i>fà-</i>	=	=	<i>fà-</i>	<i>ŋ-</i>	louse
<i>bà-</i>	<i>ká-</i>	<i>m-</i>	<i>ká-</i>	<i>bà-</i>	=	<i>mà-</i>	lice
Ø-	Ø-	=	Ø-	Ø-	Ø-	<i>ká-</i>	shoe
<i>tá-</i>	<i>tá-</i>	—	<i>tá-</i>	<i>tá-</i>	=	Ø-	firewood (pl.)
=	=	=	<i>bà-</i>	<i>kè-</i>	=	<i>fì-</i>	corn

Source: Table created by the authors.

Note: The village with which each participant identified is given. For each affix, an example is presented of a word that would use the relevant affix in Fang. The symbol “=” indicates that the form produced by the non-native speaker was the same as that of the reference native speaker; the symbol “—” indicates that no response was given. An N is used to transcribe an assimilating nasal consonant.

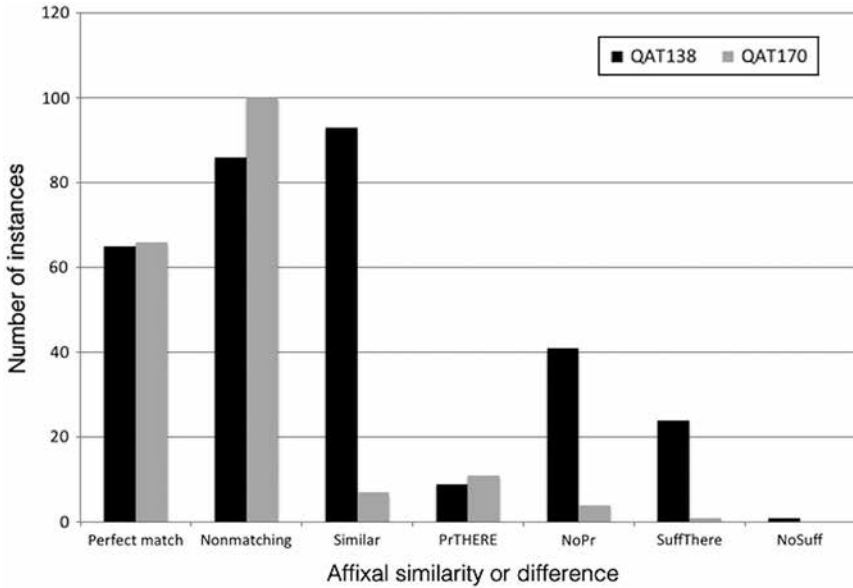
It is clear that it should be possible, at least in many cases, to account for the forms produced by a given speaker with reference to specific aspects of their linguistic repertoire. It would also be possible to develop metrics like those discussed in section 3.4.2 to permit the quantitative comparison of variation across speakers. However, both of these are outside the scope of the present chapter. In the next section, however, we discuss one specific comparison between two non-native speakers of Kung that we think reveals that at least some cases where a non-native speaker makes use of a different affix from a native speaker cannot be attributed to interference from another language but, rather, appear to be due to some other factor.

#### *4.4.3 Hypercorrection in the Production of Kung*

Participant QAT170 was a woman who identified with both Koshin and Mmen—her father was from the village of Koshin and her mother was from Fungom, a Mmen-speaking village located just outside of Lower Fungom. Mmen is closely related to Kung and shares many lexical and grammatical features with it that are otherwise not common in the languages of Lower Fungom. This participant lived in the market settlement of Yemgeh, where Kung is commonly spoken. Participant QAT138 was a man from Ajumbu, who still lived there when the data was collected. According to their responses in the sociolinguistic questionnaire, QAT170 knew Koshin (level 5; see section 3.1.3), Mmen (level 5), Kung (level 4), English (level 3), Cameroon Pidgin English (level 5), and Ajumbu (level 2); while QAT138 knew Ajumbu (level 5), Kung (level 4), English (level 3), and Mmen (level 3).

Figure 12.1 breaks down the affixal patterns of these two participants into seven categories: “perfect match” (when the non-native speaker’s affix is of the same form as the referential native speaker); “nonmatching” (when the affixes do not match very closely at all); “similar” (when the affixes are different but they are fairly close to each other in form); “prefix there” (PrTHERE, when the non-native speaker used a prefix but the native speaker did not); “no prefix” (NoPr, when the non-native speaker did not use a prefix but the native speaker did); “suffix there” (SuffThere, when the non-native speaker used a suffix but the native speaker did not); and “no suffix” (NoSuff, when the non-native speaker did not use a suffix but the native speaker did).

The most interesting patterns that can be seen in figure 12.1 concern the production of prefixes and suffixes. As can be seen by looking at the “no prefix” and “suffix there” categories, participant QAT138 failed to produce prefixes forty-one times when the native speaker did and used unexpected suffixes twenty-five times, in contrast to participant QAT170, who showed relatively few errors in these categories. In part, these differences seem understandable when set alongside the speakers’ sociolinguistic profiles:



**Figure 12.1** The similarity or difference between the noun-class markers produced by two non-native speakers of Kung, QAT138 and QAT170, and the noun-class markers produced by a Kung native speaker. (See the text for a full explanation of the categories of comparison.) *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

participant QAT170 speaks Mmen fluently, a language very closely related to Kung, whereas participant QAT138 does not.

An additional point of relevance in this context, however, is that Kung is the only language spoken in Lower Fungom where noun-class markers can regularly be suffixal. As Tatang (2016, 31) describes for Kung, “nouns from all the noun classes in the language can freely have the class marker prefixed to the root or suffixed to it without any semantic alterations.” This, she adds, is a phenomenon known also in other Central Ring languages, such as Bum, spoken to the southeast of Lower Fungom. In contrast, in all the other languages spoken in Lower Fungom, the only instance of a noun-class marker that is not purely prefixal is a circumfixal marker with a form like *kə- . . . -Cə* (where the final consonant varies by language and phonological context) found in Mungbam, Buu, and Ajumbu (Good et al. (2011, 112)).

What we appear to be seeing in the production data from speaker QAT138 is that, for him, the suffixal encoding of noun class has become a salient emblem of the Kung language, resulting in hypercorrection toward suffixal noun-class marking, well beyond what was produced by the referential native speaker. These hypercorrections aimed at increasing the impression of proficiency in Kung take two forms: either unexpected suffixes or the absence of expected prefixes.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research summarized in this chapter has a very ambitious goal: to develop research tools and analytical procedures allowing verifiable testing of competence in small, unwritten, and underdescribed languages. Moreover, residents in the specific research area tend to be highly multilingual, adding another dimension of complexity to the work. This has resulted in a comprehensive approach where the research tools have to be able to assess competence in each of the eight local languages of the area, and all the tools have to be developed in a way that is suitable for the local context (e.g., designed to be conducted orally rather than in writing). All these factors have dramatically increased the complexity of this study, both at the theoretical and the practical level and across all of its phases: research design, tool development, data collection, and data analysis.

It is clear that the present study has significant limits. For instance, we have not sufficiently considered some important aspects of the topics with which we have dealt. These include high-level concerns, such as what it means to be a “native” or “non-native” speaker in a context like Lower Fungom—especially with regard to alternative concepts of competence such as Hymes’s (1972) communicative competence—as well as more specific problems, such as how to establish proper referential data for languages that are not associated with any kind of standardization. Nevertheless, despite such gaps, we hope that this study provides a valuable contribution for the future development of tools for competence assessment in lesser-studied languages.

One crucial concern that permeates this study is the degree of control that the researcher has on the process of data collection. In a context like Lower Fungom, where many small and underdescribed languages are spoken, assessing passive competence could be done relatively directly thanks to the presence of Cameroon Pidgin English in the repertoires of both participants and researcher. However, the assessment of active competence was far more complicated. It required the selection of native speakers as judges for the visual stimuli phase (section 3.3); and it also prompted the addition of an extra assessment tool, based on wordlist data (section 3.4). The degree of control by the researcher was higher in the latter than the former—but properly analyzing the data requires the development of tools that rigorously compare the transcribed forms across many speakers, and the quality of the transcriptions themselves is reduced by the fact that no single researcher has a detailed knowledge of all of the languages under consideration.

Finally, we would like to come back to the original motivation for this study. This was the goal of determining the extent to which the impressive degrees of individual multilingualism reported by Lower Fungom residents

could be confirmed, by assessing their linguistic competence. The data we have presented here, relevant both at the level of passive and active competence, by and large confirm participants' self-reports. This comes as good news for all those who work on multilingualism via questionnaires that gather self-reported data, though it should be also emphasized that, while our findings seem to be valid for the Lower Fungom context, this does not mean that they will necessarily be replicated elsewhere.

## NOTES

1. This first field trip was carried out by the second author in collaboration with Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Angiachi D. Esene Agwara and was made possible thanks to the support of the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (IPF0180). The second author also wishes to acknowledge support from the US National Science Foundation (Award No. BCS-1360763).

2. The Mungbam variety used for this test was that of the village of Missong.

3. The only exception was a man from Buu who, when tested in the Ajumbu language using the RTT method, could not respond to anything from the text. When he was presented with pictures and asked to produce Ajumbu, however, he was able to do it and scored quite high. The reason for this discrepancy is not known.

4. Due to the preliminary nature of this study, the details of the string-matching algorithms are not further discussed here. Since the data collection itself does not assume any specific algorithm will be used for string comparison, the algorithm can be adjusted based on the needs of a given research project.

5. Note that data is not consistently available across all of the tests for all of the languages in which a speaker reported a competence of 3 or higher, as can be seen by a comparison of the data in table 12.1 and table 12.2. For instance, data for Mungbam is available for speaker QAT22 in table 12.2 but not in table 12.1.

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## Chapter 13

# Essentialism and Indexicality in a Multilingual Rural Community

## *The Case of Lower Bafut in North-West Cameroon*

Margaret Chenemo and Ayu'nwi N. Neba

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research on multilingualism has relied overwhelmingly on data from urban areas where speech communities seem to align with ideologies of hierarchy and prestige (Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019).<sup>1</sup> However, recent research suggests that rural speech communities show quite a different set of ideological traits: in a nutshell, “small” languages are used more often to obtain positional identities within local social networks rather than to construct prestige, which is not a central notion for the valorization of languages (see Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019). Given this preliminary finding, it is important to study multilingual rural settings to shed light on a variety of questions: Do people in rural areas want to learn many languages? What is the degree of competence that qualifies one to be called a native speaker? How do speakers in such contexts make use of their multilingual repertoires? And so on. Observations of the behavior and culture of people in rural settings will enable us to understand why they behave the way they do.

This chapter highlights the dichotomy between urban and rural configurations of multilingualism in Lower Bafut in the North-West Region of Cameroon, a multilingual rural setting mainly inhabited by minority groups who are, historically, immigrants to the area. Our objective is to evaluate the degree to which the essentialism versus indexicality dichotomy can help account for the findings from our fieldwork. To check this hypothesis, a sociolinguistic questionnaire and the matched-guise technique (MGT) adapted



from Lambert et al. (1960) were used to collect data on three languages: Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang.

In section 2, we situate the study in its geographical and social context, before section 3 reviews the relevant literature and gives operational definitions of important terms. This is followed in section 4 by a description of the methodology adopted. Section 5 presents the findings and discussion. Finally, section 6 briefly discusses the challenges encountered in using the MGT in our research, before the conclusion in section 7.

## 2. LOWER BAFUT

Lower Bafut (*mbù'nti*) is situated in Bafut Subdivision, in the North-West Region of Cameroon (see figure 13.1). According to Numfor (1978), the people of Lower Bafut are culturally different from those elsewhere in Bafut because the two groups do not have the same origin. It is widely believed that the peoples of Lower Bafut migrated to their present sites during the eighteenth-century waves of migration provoked by feudal wars and the quest for territorial domination.

As can be seen in table 13.1, six villages in Lower Bafut have Obang as native language, while each of the remaining languages of Lower Bafut is associated with one single village. Obang is therefore far and away the most widely spoken language in the area, particularly since three of the villages where Obang is spoken are quite large; after Obang, the next most widely spoken language is Mbakong.

The peoples of the various villages in Lower Bafut originated from different parts of the Widikum forest and the South-West Region of Cameroon, each group having their own language. When they arrived in Bafut, they could not establish themselves in those areas where the Bafut people were already settled, so they chose to inhabit the northern area of Bafut, which was apparently very fertile. The Fondom of Bafut (the name given to a traditional administrative unit ruled by a *fon* or traditional ruler), in which these minority groups are found, dominates them and imposes the Bafut language (*biffi*). The groups are expected to pay allegiance to the Fon of Bafut (a first-class paramount ruler), while each minority village is headed by a lower-level ruler.

With each minority village paying allegiance to Bafut, many Lower Bafut people speak Bafut, whereas the Bafut who can speak a language of Lower Bafut can be counted on the fingers of two hands. Indeed, if a Bafut man speaks a language of Lower Bafut, this is perceived in some ways as degrading.

Given their minority status in Bafut, the inhabitants of each of the Lower Bafut villages see Bafut people as superior, and for fear of being accused of insubordination will always show, in the presence of Bafut people, that they

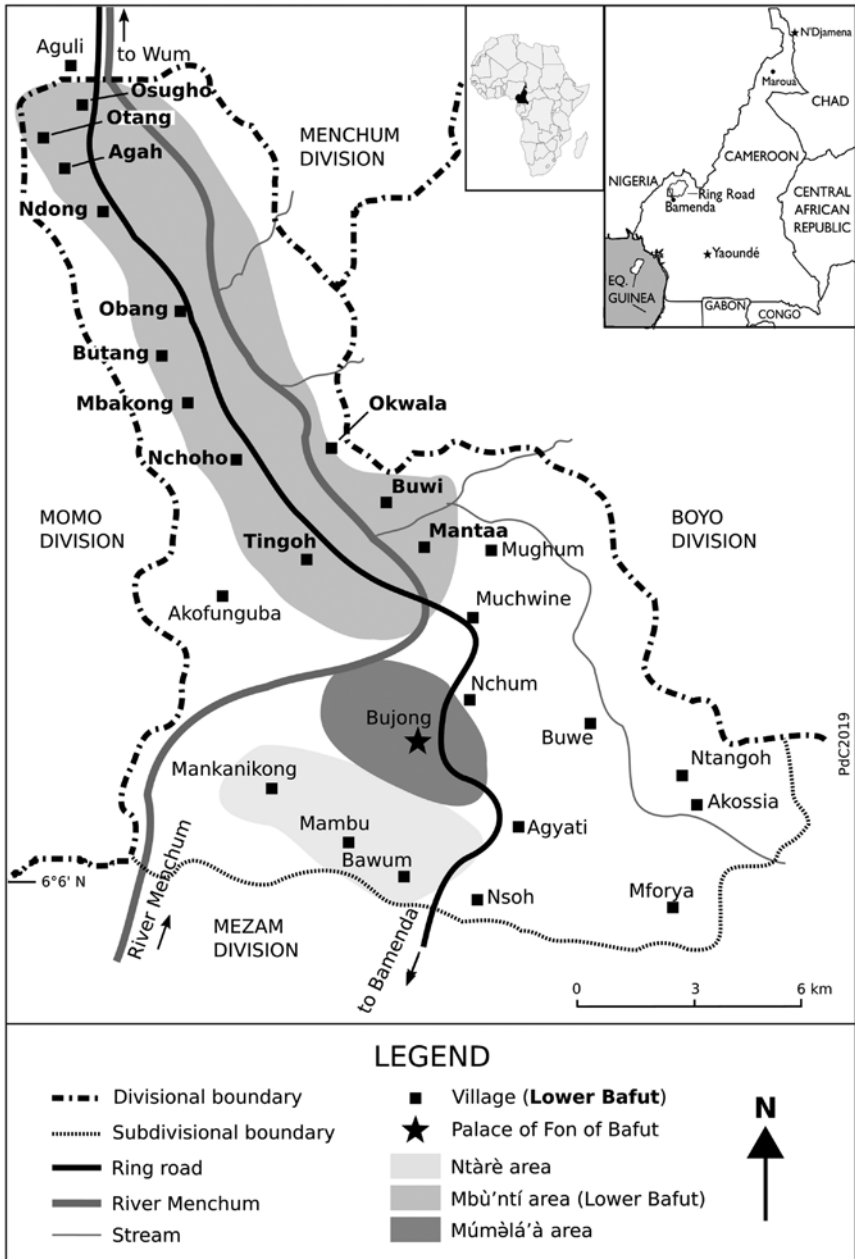


Figure 13.1 Map of Bafut subdivision, Mezam division, North-West region of Cameroon. The villages in Lower Bafut which are relevant for this study are given in boldface. Source: Map by Pierpaolo Di Carlo, base map from Ngwa 1981, modified.

**Table 13.1** The villages of Lower Bafut, together with the language of the village and the number of inhabitants

<i>Village</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Population</i>
Tingoh	Obang	6,000
Nchoho	Obang	600
Okwala	Obang	500
Ndong	Obang	3,000
Osugho	Obang	200
Obang	Obang	4,900
Otang	Otang	500
Butang	Butang	487
Buwi	Buwi	1,526
Mantaa	Mantaa	400
Mbakong	Mbakong	2,000
Agah	Beba	300
Total population		20,413

Source: Chenemo, forthcoming dissertation.

too are Bafut and respect Bafut culture, including speaking the Bafut language. In such a context, one might expect that the minority languages would die out. However, contrary to expectations, these languages are vibrant, and this is explained by the strong identity that each of the minority groups has.

Intercommunity conflicts have been reported among the minority Lower Bafut communities over fishing, farming, and settlement sites. In 2012, an open confrontation broke out between youths of the villages of Obang and Mbakong over a sand mine on the River Mezam, and another between Butang and Mbakong over land on which the Mbakong Health Centre is built, with each of the villages claiming ownership of the land. Thus, while all the small villages pay homage to the Bafut, strong rivalries exist among them, with each village striving to dominate the others. Identity sentiments are high and each community struggles to assert its uniqueness—and one of the ways that villages can show their uniqueness is through their language.

The above discussion of the social relations in Lower Bafut is what motivates our research to understand how the interactions between languages play out in this setting. The issues at stake here can be summarized as follows:

- How does a speaker of each of these communities feel when they hear Bafut, the dominant, popular, and administrative (somewhat colonial) language?
- How do members of each of these speech communities feel when they hear another language of Lower Bafut?

These questions can only be answered through observation of their behavior and cultural activities.

It should be underscored here that the scenario in Lower Bafut is different from that of urban settings in Cameroon, where European languages like English, French, German, and Portuguese have prestige and power. In Lower Bafut, these European languages and Cameroon Pidgin English hover in the air (especially English, since this area is located within Anglophone Cameroon); but it is Bafut that has a status more similar to that of the European languages in urban centers. In addition, there are the local social rivalries among the members of the minority communities. It is thus interesting to discover, amidst these various complexities of social life and identity, which language ideologies exist.

### **3. RELEVANT LITERATURE AND DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

A great deal has been written over the past few decades about multilingualism, and recently some attention is being paid to issues of language choice and linguistic ideologies. Among the concepts of concern in this literature are language ideologies, essentialism, and indexicality, with language attitudes often being (rightly) linked with these. Some of the most recent literature is also exploring the dichotomy between urban and rural contexts, which it believes are crucial variables to consider when researching multilingualism. This section defines these concepts, as used in this chapter, and serves to establish the conceptual framework within which the investigation is couched.

#### **3.1 Language Ideologies**

Language ideologies have been defined in various ways by different authors, with the common characteristic being the central role of culture, habits, and social relationships. Irvine (1989, 255), for example, defines language ideologies as “the cultural (or subcultural) systems of ideas about language and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” Woolard (1998, 1) buttresses this by defining language ideologies as “implicit or explicit representations that interpret intersections of language and human beings in a social world.” She underscores that

ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling, and law. (Woolard (1998, 3))

For these authors, then, language ideologies involve everything about what social relations have to do with languages and ideas. The present chapter presents and discusses language ideologies in Lower Bafut from the perspective of the definitions above.

### **3.2 Essentialism**

Essentialism is “the claim that objects have some of their properties essentially or necessarily” (Plantinga (1974, 14)). Walton and Banaji (2004, 206), referring to Gelman and Heyman (1999), note that “essentialism implies that a characteristic is inherent in the person (self or other) rather than the product of circumstance; that it is biological rather than social in origin; stable rather than unstable; and capable of great explanatory power rather than little.” Linguistic essentialism, therefore, as understood here, is the idea that people choose to speak one or the other language present in their repertoire because they think that by using that language they will automatically be perceived by hearers as possessing certain desirable personal and moral qualities. As Irvine and Gal (2000) note in their discussion of linguistic differentiation, the linguistic behavior of others is often simplified and seen as if deriving from those persons, essences of prestige, and hierarchy.

### **3.3 Indexicality**

According to Blommaert (2010, 38), “indexicality” refers to “registers,” which are “social categories, recognizable semiotic emblems for groups and individuals.” Blommaert goes further to highlight a specific aspect of indexicality, the “order of indexicality,” which is how these categories, symbols, and semiotic resources are ordered in hierarchies of value in different contexts. He notes that “orders of indexicalities operate within large stratified complexes in which some forms of semiosis are systematically perceived as valuable, others as less valuable, and some are not taken into account at all, while all are subject to rules of access and regulations as to circulation.” The internal composition of such stratified complexes and the valorization of the items found therein—languages—are two key factors that distinguish different language ideologies.

Based on this idea, a dichotomy between “essentialism” and “indexicality” was first introduced in the domain of small-scale multilingualism by Di Carlo and Good (2014) to capture a fundamental distinction. In their terminology, essentialist ideologies are found when the use of a particular language indexes speakers as possessing specific personal and moral qualities. Indexical ideologies, by contrast, are found when the use of a language

results only in speakers activating identities that are salient within local social networks and that, importantly, are most often devoid of any personal and moral implications. Put otherwise: in essentialist ideologies, speakers use languages to call up stereotypes; in indexical ideologies, speakers use languages to represent membership in concrete social networks not associated with any particular stereotype. This definition finds favor in the present chapter, as it will be demonstrated that preferences are made in language choices in Lower Bafut on the basis of certain ideologies.

### **3.4 Attitudes**

People's attitudes have been recognized as being of primary importance in modern society and having an impact on people's behavior (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams 2003). Although the definition of attitude, a cornerstone of traditional social psychology, has not been universally agreed upon, Sarnoff (1970, 279) has defined it as "a disposition to react favourably or unfavourably to a class of objects." This disposition is often taken to comprise three components: feelings (attractive elements), thoughts (cognitive elements), and—based upon the previous two—a predisposition to act in a certain way (behavioral elements); that is, one knows or believes something has some emotional reaction to it and, therefore, may be assumed to act on this basis (Edwards 2002). Individuals can shape their attitudes by accepting or refusing dominant ideologies, a process influenced by personal experiences (Dyers 1997). Being part of a society that shares particular ideologies influences one's attitudes, since ideologies represent "an overarching context within which attitudes are formed and played out" (Dyers and Abongdia (2010, 132)). The present study on essentialism and indexicality is therefore closely related to attitudes, and we will use the concept as it is defined by Sarnoff and Edwards.

### **3.5 Urban and Rural Contexts**

Since the distinction between urban and rural multilingualism is crucial in the discussion of language ideologies in this chapter, it is imperative to note the key distinctive characteristics of the two contexts. As Polomé (1982, 171) notes, it can be difficult to distinguish between rural and urban settings. Nevertheless, Kashoki (1982, 144) has identified four characteristics of urban settings—migration, urbanization, geographical mobility, and education—and in this chapter, following Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba (2019, 3), we consider rural environments to be characterized by a relative lack of demographic pressure and industrial development, and a context where most inhabitants are engaged in food production.

### **3.6 The Matched-Guise Technique**

This study makes use of the MGT to elicit and analyze data, and thus it is important that we briefly present this approach here. The MGT originated from the foundational work of Lambert et al. (1960) on the linguistic situation in bilingual Canada, and is an indirect way of evaluating people's attitudes toward languages. The drive toward the MGT was a suspicion about the inefficiency of direct techniques. Respondents' biases such as acquiescence and social-desirability bias (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003, 29); Tresch (2013, 5)) were some of the problems that resulted from direct methods for finding people's attitudes, and so, according to Lambert et al. (1960), these methods were unsuitable for accessing people's genuine private attitudes. Over time, the MGT has evolved, and these days there are many versions of it, including verbal-guise technique and open-guise technique (Tresch (2013, 5)).

In an MGT study, audio recordings are played to a group of judges (in our study referred to as listeners), who are subsequently asked to rate each speaker on a bipolar semantic differential scale on a number of personality traits (e.g., whether the speaker is intelligent or not). However, while the judges believe they are rating a series of different speakers, in fact a single speaker has read the same factually neutral text in different "guises." Using only a single speaker to read the same text in this way controls for extraneous variables (such as the pitch of the speaker's voice, their speech rate, the content, etc.) that could influence the results (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003, 52), cited in Tresch (2013, 6)).

While the MGT has been acclaimed in the literature for its "effective, rigorous and elegant way of investigating private attitudes which has allowed scholars to empirically determine the main dimensions of language evaluation thus providing insights into the sociolinguistic ecology of language variation" (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003, 57), in Tresch (2013, 6)), it has the flaw of being somewhat artificial and static (see Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003, 58–9); Zhang 2009). Nonetheless, the present study uses the MGT, as it remains a more acclaimed approach for investigating attitudes than its direct-approach counterparts.

## **4. METHOD**

To understand the language ideologies present in Lower Bafut, we adopted a documentary linguistic approach toward data collection. The approach is primarily ethnographic, allowing us to observe speakers and collect natural data from them in order to discover their beliefs about the language ideologies of essentialism and indexicality. In this section we provide the technical

information on how the investigation was conducted including the research approach and design, the language consultants, the instruments and procedure of data collection, and the way in which the data was analyzed.

The investigation was carried out in three phases: the first was a sociolinguistic pre-survey of the speech communities to identify multilingual individuals who spoke the three languages under study; the second was the administration of an ethnographically informed sociolinguistic questionnaire and interviews; and the last was the administration of an MGT test.

In what follows, we discuss the research procedure as though it was a carefully timed process, with each step occurring at a single point in time, following the completion of the previous step. In fact, this was far from the case. The various stages overlapped—for example, while we were establishing the choice of the speakers for the MGT, we were still conducting sociolinguistic questionnaires. Given that there would potentially be attrition and high withdrawal rates, we wished to ensure we had as many participants as possible. Equally, because we wished to have the participation of all competent multilingual consultants that were willing, we followed the time schedules of participants themselves where possible—so that, for example, when it came to doing the MGT, we made appointments to meet the participants individually, usually on market days or a cultural holiday. Since these details do not affect the research method or findings, we leave them aside in our discussion here, concentrating instead on the step-by-step nature of the process of data collection.

#### **4.1 Choice of Languages for the Study**

From the seven languages in table 13.1, we selected two for the MGT—Obang and Mbakong—and also included Bafut. The Bafut language was selected because, as was discussed in section 2, it is the dominant language of the area, having prestige and power, being the language of the administrator with whom the people of Lower Bafut are obliged to interact. The Fondom of Bafut, as a unit, is ruled by a first-class paramount leader, the Fon of Bafut. He is the only first-class ruler in the subdivision, and thus the language associated with him, Bafut, ranks highest in power, prestige, administration, and development. In urban settings in Cameroon, languages like English and French have this status, and this contributes to the ideologies and attitudes that people develop toward the languages, so it is interesting to discover how the people of Lower Bafut think and feel about Bafut.

Obang and Mbakong were chosen for a number of reasons. Unlike the Fondom of Bafut with its first-class fon, the villages of Mbakong and Obang are each ruled by second-class chiefs, and therefore come second in this hierarchy. On the other hand, the villages of Otang, Mantaa, Buwi, and Butang



are ruled by third-class chiefs, while Osugho, Ndong, Agah, Okwala, Tingoh, and Nchoho are ruled by *atanchos* (lower than chiefs). Thus, one could say that the hierarchical positions of Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang at the top of this administrative pyramid in a way gives all three of these languages some degree of authority, dominance, and recognition.

As well as their position in the hierarchy as second under Bafut, Obang and Mbakong are also the most widely spoken of the languages of Lower Bafut, as was seen in table 13.1; and Bafut is, of course, spoken by many in the area. Unsurprisingly, then, the sociolinguistic questionnaire (see section 4.2) revealed that these three languages are the most common in the repertoires of consultants that claimed to fluently speak more than one of the languages in this linguistic space.

For these reasons, this small-scale study is restricted to an examination of these three languages. In addition, the first author speaks two of these languages, and could therefore serve as a judge (see section 4.3.1).

## 4.2 The Sociolinguistic Pre-survey and Questionnaire

Before beginning on the MGT, the first author, Chenemo, carried out two sociolinguistic surveys: a pre-survey and an ethnographically informed sociolinguistic survey. During the pre-survey, the researcher identified seventy-three potential participants based on self-reported multilingualism. These participants were drawn from across the seven language communities of Lower Bafut on the basis of their self-reported competence in the target languages. Each was a native speaker of at least one of the three target languages and also a speaker of at least two other languages (which might include English or Cameroon Pidgin English). We worked with all the villages of Lower Bafut, and also included some consultants from Upper Bafut, because we deemed it crucial to also know the attitudes of Bafut people toward the languages of Lower Bafut.

The ethnographic sociolinguistic questionnaire was administered to the seventy-three multilingual speakers (forty-three men and thirty women), to obtain detailed information about their self-reported multilingual repertoire, their membership in social networks, and their motivations for multilingualism (see appendix A for details; also Esene Agwara, this volume). While the questionnaire itself was in standard English, it was administered orally by the researcher in Cameroon Pidgin English. The participants were generally aged between twenty-five and sixty, although three were aged over seventy.

On the one hand, results from the questionnaire enabled the researcher to identify appropriate speakers for the MGT (see section 4.3.2). On the other, the answers contributed to adapting the MGT research procedure—developed in a Western context—to the local context.

### 4.3 MGT Participants

There were four distinct roles that were played by participants in the process of carrying out the MGT: judges, MGT speakers, filler speakers, and listeners (see table 13.2). The participants who filled these roles were all selected from among the seventy-three people who were consulted in the sociolinguistic survey.

#### 4.3.1 Judges of Language Competence

In the multilingual context of Lower Bafut, it is not always simple to determine who is a speaker of which language and to what level of competence. However, in order to carry out MGT research, it is necessary to have speakers who are highly competent in all of the languages that are being examined. For the present project, then, we required a way of rating the language competence of speakers.

Our judges were those who assessed the degree of similarity in linguistic performance between potential MGT speakers and a native speaker.<sup>2</sup> In other words, they listened to the people we were considering selecting as speakers for the MGT, and gave their opinion as to whether they were native speakers of a particular language or not, judging their competence and fluency.

The judges were selected on the basis of their own competence and fluency in the languages they had to judge, and were educated people who were not necessarily living in the same villages as the speakers and listeners.

We selected three primary judges, who judged only speakers of the language associated with their village of origin. In addition, though, we took into account judgments that other participants expressed more informally during the judging process. As mentioned earlier, the first author is competent in

**Table 13.2 The number of participants in the research, by role**

<i>Participant role</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Questionnaire respondents	73	Drawn from across the seven language communities of Lower Bafut
Judges	3	Each a native speaker of one of the target languages (other participants also helped to assess the language competence of participants)
MGT speakers	4	Fluent in the three target languages
Filler speakers	8	Fluent in at least one of the target languages
Listeners	29	Competent in the three target languages

*Source:* Table created by the authors.

Bafut and Mbakong and so she also judged potential speakers for these two languages.

#### 4.3.2 MGT Speakers and Filler Speakers

To carry out our MGT study, we required four speakers (two male and two female) who were able to speak all three languages of the study fluently, so that we could record them recounting a similar passage in each of the three languages, and then play those passages to other participants to elicit their responses. In addition, we needed a number of other speakers (“filler speakers”) to recount the same narrative, so that we could intersperse the recordings made by the MGT speakers with those of the filler speakers, thus minimizing the possibility that the listeners would realize that the recordings of the texts in different languages were being related by the same speakers.

Based on the results of the sociolinguistic questionnaire that we had distributed to the seventy-three consultants (see section 4.2), we identified thirty-five (fifteen males and twenty females) who claimed to speak many languages, including the three relevant languages. These people then provided us with as many speech samples as possible in the different languages; this always included the text on bushfire outbreaks that we would use in the MGT (see appendix B). The judges (section 4.3.1) then determined whether the participant had appropriate levels of competence in the languages or not.

The four most competent speakers of all three languages (two men and two women, ranging in age between thirty-four and seventy) became the MGT speakers, recording the same narrative in the three target languages: Bafut, Obang, and Mbakong. The other thirty-one multilingual speakers, usually not highly competent across all three languages, had also recorded the texts. Texts from eight of those speakers speaking their native language were used as fillers in the MGT.

#### 4.3.3 Listeners

The heart of MGT research is when a set of participants (here known as *listeners*, traditionally labeled *judges* in MGT studies) listen to recordings and evaluate the speakers. To be selected as a listener, a participant had to be a competent speaker of the three languages. Additionally, of course, it was important that they were not aware that the relevant speech samples were from a single speaker (which would affect their judgment), and should not know the MGT speakers.

For our study, we selected listeners from among those who participated in the sociolinguistic survey but were not selected as judges and were not among the thirty-five that had been in the running for becoming MGT speakers or filler speakers (section 4.3.2). Thirty listeners were selected (seventeen males

and thirteen females)—unfortunately, one was unable to participate in the end, and so we collected data from twenty-nine listeners.

#### 4.4 Matched-Guise Technique Procedure

Once the twenty-nine listeners had been selected, we worked with them one by one in an isolated environment where there was relatively little noise, wind, or human or animal interference. Each of them listened to the three-minute audio recording that contained the same short spoken text in the three languages (see appendix B). The text was recounted a total of twenty times: there were the three different language versions spoken by the four MGT speakers, plus eight versions of the text spoken by the filler speakers. The listeners did not know, of course, that the recording contained three different language versions of the text from each of the four MGT speakers.

After they listened to the audio recording twice, the listeners were interviewed; the interview lasted for a maximum of twenty minutes. They were asked to describe the personality traits of each of the speakers they had just listened to, in terms of fourteen categories such as looks, intelligence, trustworthiness, and so on (see appendix C for the set of categories). The researcher graded the responses of the listeners on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most negative answer and 5 the most positive answer (see table 13.3 for an indication of how verbal responses were converted to a rating score).

#### 4.5 Data Analysis

As we have already stated, the data in this investigation was analyzed based on an MGT adapted from Lambert et al. (1960), used to investigate the

**Table 13.3** How listener responses were converted into a rating score on the semantic differential scale, the corresponding attitude, and an indication of whether the response shows an essentialist or indexical orientation about the language (using either the binary or gradient analysis)

<i>Response</i>	<i>Rating</i>	<i>Attitude</i>	<i>Language Ideology</i>	
			<i>Binary Analysis</i>	<i>Gradient Analysis</i>
<i>never, least, worst</i>	1	Negative	Essentialist	Essentialist
<i>no, bad, worse, less</i>	2	Negative	Essentialist	Mixed essentialist-indexical
<i>okay, nice, normal, a bit, not really, somehow</i>	3	Neutral	Indexical	Indexical
<i>good, very good, very well</i>	4	Positive	Essentialist	Mixed essentialist-indexical
<i>great, excellent</i>	5	Positive	Essentialist	Essentialist

Source: Table created by the authors.

personality traits that project language ideologies. We found the MGT appropriate to address our main research concern: Do people choose to speak the languages present in Lower Bafut on a more essentialist basis—because the speakers of those languages are perceived to possess certain qualities—or for more indexical reasons—to affiliate with others through the act of speaking many languages?

It is important to point out here that the same text was rendered into the three target languages so as to avoid the chances of the listeners being influenced by the content of the story. This means that they listened to the same story on bushfire outbreaks, hearing the story from the same four speakers in each of the three different languages. Given that these speakers were the same individuals using different languages in the different repetitions of the text, the judgments about the personality traits that listeners made must be projections of the ideologies that listeners had about the populations who traditionally speak the target languages.

The MGT relied on a semantic differential scale containing two bipolar adjectives, where the listeners gave their opinions with respect to the character traits of speakers after listening to audio recordings. In fact, because of their level of education and unfamiliarity with this type of task, many respondents found it difficult to qualify speakers' personalities using comparative and superlative terms like *less* or *least* for negative adjectives and *more* or *most* for positive adjectives. Instead, they gave a wide variety of responses, which the researcher then converted to a rating on a five-point semantic differential scale as shown in table 13.3.

Listeners had given their responses in terms of their belief about the personality traits of the speaker—whether they were intelligent, confident, trustworthy, kind, and so on (see appendix C for the full list of fourteen categories). Because we were interested in whether listeners showed a more essentialist or a more indexical attitude to the language in question, we needed to convert the rating scores about the speaker into an equivalent on the essentialist-indexical scale. We did this in two different ways, using a binary analysis and using a gradient analysis: the final two columns of table 13.3 summarize these two alternative analyses.

In the initial binary analysis, scores of 1, 2, 4, and 5 were classed as essentialist, while a score of 3 was interpreted as being indexical. In the later gradient analysis, scores of 1 and 5 were considered to reflect an essentialist attitude, scores of 2 and 4 as showing a mixed essentialist-indexical attitude, and a score of 3 as being neutral (or showing indexicality). The two ways of analyzing the data reflect the difficulty posed by the absence of nonessentialist questions in the MGT. As a consequence, we attempted to extract signals of an indexical orientation either by using the neutral responses (i.e., those rated 3), in the binary analysis, or by using all non-extreme values (i.e., ratings of

**Table 13.4** Raw data giving the essentialist and indexical attitudes of the individual listeners to Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang, together with the total and means for all listeners (binary analysis)

Listener	Bafut	Bafut	Mbakong	Mbakong	Obang	Obang
	Essentialism	Indexicality	Essentialism	Indexicality	Essentialism	Indexicality
1	44	12	42	14	35	21
2	37	19	36	20	26	30
3	45	11	46	10	35	21
4	35	21	36	20	31	25
5	45	11	45	11	39	17
6	47	9	44	12	37	19
7	42	14	46	10	42	14
8	42	14	45	11	42	14
9	43	13	45	11	36	20
10	48	8	37	19	25	31
11	43	13	41	15	33	23
12	46	10	44	12	39	17
13	43	13	39	17	28	28
14	43	13	48	8	41	15
15	45	11	45	11	38	18
16	46	10	46	10	38	18
17	46	10	39	17	37	19
18	49	7	45	11	43	13
19	46	10	45	11	36	20
20	38	18	40	16	51	5
21	38	18	33	23	34	22
22	41	15	45	11	43	13
23	42	14	32	24	44	12
24	43	13	41	15	38	18
25	47	9	47	9	44	12
26	42	14	39	17	34	22
27	46	10	46	10	35	21
28	46	10	45	11	35	21
29	46	10	47	9	29	27
Total	1264	360	1229	395	1068	556
Mean	43.6	12.4	42.4	13.6	36.8	19.2

Source: Table created by the authors.

2, 3, and 4), in the gradient analysis, as the extreme values of 1 and 5 could be considered to be most clearly essentialist in nature.

Having converted the results to either essentialist versus indexical (binary analysis) or essentialist versus mixed essentialist-indexical versus neutral or indexical (gradient analysis), it was then possible to calculate the language ideologies for each individual listener. For example, in the binary analysis we calculated the essentialist attitudes of listener 1 to Bafut by adding up how many times he or she gave a rating of 1, 2, 4, or 5 in answer to the fourteen questions about personality traits, across the four different Bafut

texts. Having done this for each individual listener, it was then possible to calculate total values for each attitude to each language (in the two different analyses), as well as means. Data in table 13.4 (<13.6) and 13.5 (<13.7) provide these raw figures for each listener and the totals and means for the full set of twenty-nine listeners using both the binary analysis (table 13.4) and the gradient analysis (table 13.5).

It is important to keep in mind that all the results presented here are provided primarily to demonstrate the methodology, and should not be considered definitive. (More detailed discussion can be found in Chenemo

**Table 13.5 Raw data giving the essentialism (E), mixed essentialism-indexicality (M), and indexicality or neutral (I) attitudes of the individual listeners to Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang, together with the totals and means for all listeners (Gradient Analysis)**

Listener	Bafut			Mbakong			Obang		
	E	M	I	E	M	I	E	M	I
1	34	10	12	28	14	14	19	16	21
2	28	9	19	10	26	20	8	18	30
3	40	5	11	33	13	10	35	10	21
4	31	4	21	24	12	20	23	8	25
5	35	10	11	35	10	11	31	8	17
6	34	13	9	30	14	12	30	7	19
7	38	4	14	36	10	10	31	11	14
8	36	7	13	35	10	11	30	6	20
9	38	4	14	33	12	11	31	11	14
10	45	3	8	23	14	19	14	11	31
11	36	7	13	24	17	15	24	9	23
12	42	4	10	29	15	12	29	10	17
13	38	5	13	23	16	17	19	9	28
14	37	6	13	34	14	8	28	13	15
15	44	1	11	26	19	11	21	17	18
16	40	6	10	23	23	10	15	23	18
17	40	6	10	21	18	17	22	15	19
18	39	10	7	22	23	11	17	26	13
19	43	3	10	26	19	11	16	20	20
20	31	7	18	16	24	16	42	9	5
21	33	5	18	19	14	23	24	10	22
22	33	8	15	15	30	11	28	15	13
23	29	13	14	10	22	24	30	14	12
24	36	7	13	27	14	15	26	12	18
25	42	5	9	33	14	9	34	10	12
26	29	13	14	21	18	17	20	14	22
27	36	10	10	28	18	10	13	22	21
28	39	7	10	30	15	11	25	10	21
29	38	8	10	27	20	9	16	13	27
Total	1064	200	360	741	488	395	701	377	556
Mean	36.7	6.9	12.4	25.6	16.8	13.6	24.2	13.0	19.2

Source: Table created by the authors.

(forthcoming).) To the best of our knowledge, this study represents the first time that the MGT methodology has been applied in a rural African context.

## 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data have been analyzed in relation to the overarching research question posed in this investigation: when people choose to speak one or more languages present in Lower Bafut, is it because the native speakers of those languages are perceived by hearers to possess certain desirable and moral qualities, or it is because it is a cultural practice for people to affiliate through the act of speaking the languages of others? In other words, to what extent are the language ideologies of essentialism and indexicality present in Lower Bafut, a rural multilingual setting?

Inherent in this question is the assumption that urban settings are different from rural settings and thus that language ideologies may equally be different. The notion of “difference” recognizes that there is more than one valid way of representing human experience and through investigations of behaviors, activities, experiences, perspective, insights, and priorities, a better understanding of these differences can be achieved. This notion is explored in the subsidiary questions: What runs through people’s minds when a language is spoken? Are there essentialist traits on the part of the local language ideology concerned with local languages?

### 5.1 Language Attitudes in Lower Bafut

The MGT alone was not sufficient to provide adequate information to arrive a conclusion as to the kinds of language ideologies that exist in Lower Bafut. The realities of rural settings exposed limitations of the instrument—Tresch (2013) has discussed these in detail—and so necessitated adjustments. One of the ways in which we enriched our data to cover for this was to complement the MGT with the ethnographic questionnaire. From the responses to the ethnographic questionnaire, we give in this section those findings that are relevant to the topic of the present chapter.

Overall, Bafut is the dominant language in Lower Bafut, and it is regarded by the people of Lower Bafut as the language of the Fondom of Bafut. It is considered by them to be a prestigious language, and those that speak it admire the Bafut people and have a desire to be like them. This finding demonstrate that Bafut is a language of power and prestige and is considered in this linguistic ecology in a similar way to the views people have of English and French in urban contexts in Cameroon. On the other hand, no prestige labels were attached to the use of any of the languages of Lower Bafut.



Given the perception of the Bafut language as prestigious, it can be suggested that it would be used by the people of Lower Bafut in an essentialist manner. Looked at from a slightly different perspective, and considering Blommaert's (2010) "orders of indexicalities" (see section 3.3)—where some languages are perceived as valuable, others less so, and some not taken into account at all—Bafut can be viewed as indexing a certain kind of value. One can see this, at least, by contrasting between the use of the Bafut language—valuable—and the use of the languages of Lower Bafut, which comparatively have relatively little or no prestige at all.

Bafut people do not generally speak the Lower Bafut languages. Within the Fandom of Bafut, the chiefs of Lower Bafut live in total subservience to the Fon of Bafut, who is the paramount chief, while they are classified as either second-class or third-class chiefs. Unsurprisingly, then, the Bafut people consider that Bafut is the prestige language of the fondom and that everybody should speak it, while minimizing the importance or relevance of the languages of Lower Bafut.

Results from our interviews revealed that there is some political rivalry between the chiefs of Lower Bafut. The different peoples of Lower Bafut also have views of both themselves and the other peoples. Here we summarize these views about each group, and also the reasons that the various groups give for their relationship with the languages of the region.

The Mbakong people are the most multilingual people of the area, based on their self-reports, with Mbakong participants speaking Mbakong, Bafut, Obang, and Butang, and understanding many other languages. The reasons that they gave for this in the questionnaire are that they are very friendly to their neighbors and welcoming to strangers, and also that they create many relationships outside their village through intermarriages, trade, education, and jobs. For this group, languages are an important part of their livelihood.

The Mbakong are closely followed in terms of their multilingualism by the Buwi people. They have similar views on languages to those expressed by the Mbakong, and the Buwi participants indicated that they spoke Buwi, Obang, Mantaa, and Bafut.

In Plantinga's (1974) terms, languages are a necessity for the Mbakong and the Buwi, because they open up the possibilities for solidarity, not necessarily power. To the members of these two communities, speaking another language means access to education, employment, friendship, and peace. As Walton and Banaji (2004, 2006) note, essentialism is the belief that a characteristic is inherent in the person (self or other) rather than the product of circumstance, that it is biological rather than social in origin. For the Mbakong and the Buwi, language has become a biological object, stable as a way of life. The members of these communities are likely to choose one or the other language present in their repertoire because they think that by using that language they

will automatically be perceived by hearers as possessing certain desirable personal and moral qualities—friendship, solidarity, sociability, employment, warm-heartedness—that they see as essential for their livelihoods.

The Obang people are the least multilingual people in the area because, as the responses from the sociolinguistic questionnaire say, they are the rebellious people of the fondom, aggressive toward strangers, proud, and self-centered. The Obang participants mostly believed that they were monolingual when it comes to the local languages, claiming to speak only Obang and Cameroon Pidgin English (even if in practice they speak Bafut, by obligation).

The Butang people are conservative and quite a closed society, despite their small population. The Butang participants were bilingual in terms of the languages of Lower Bafut, speaking Butang and also Obang.

Like the Butang, the Mantaa people are very few in number, and they have adopted a strong self-defensive policy, having a reputation for fortifying themselves with masquerades that can destroy vegetation and kill massively within enemy territory. However, they are the third most multilingual people in the area, with almost all Butang participants speaking Mantaa, Buwi, and Obang, as well as Bafut and Butang.

The Otang people are calm, reserved, and rarely encountered in the fondom outside their village. The Otang participants spoke Otang, Beba, and Obang, and many languages of the Menchum Division to the north of Bafut.

The Agah participants often became agitated when talking about their origins, because their history is one of betrayal and bloodshed. They were formerly part of the Beba, who live in Menchum Division, before breaking away to resettle in Agah in Mezam Division. They came as refugees, but have now settled and gained recognition as part of the fondom. The Agah participants spoke their own language of Beba, Otang, and Obang, Bafut, and also Mundum (spoken in the Fondom of Bafut, but not a language of Lower Bafut), Mankon (spoken outside the fondom, but in Mezam Division), and some languages of Menchum Division.

These results from the ethnographic questionnaire allow us to understand a little about the characteristics of the people with whom we are dealing. The findings from the questionnaire provide a background against which to interpret the MGT results.

## **5.2 Essential and Indexical Use of Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang**

In section 4.5, we explained how we converted the responses that listeners gave about the personality traits of speakers of Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang into an indication of the essentialist or indexical attitudes that the listeners had toward those languages. Table 13.4 summarizes the results of this initial binary analysis.

As table 13.4 shows, Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang are seen more in an essentialist manner than indexically, with greater means in each case for the essentialist responses. In the binary analysis, then, in which responses were analyzed as either essentialist or indexical, it emerges that Lower Bafut people are likely to use all three languages we have examined from that linguistic ecosystem in a primarily essentialist way.

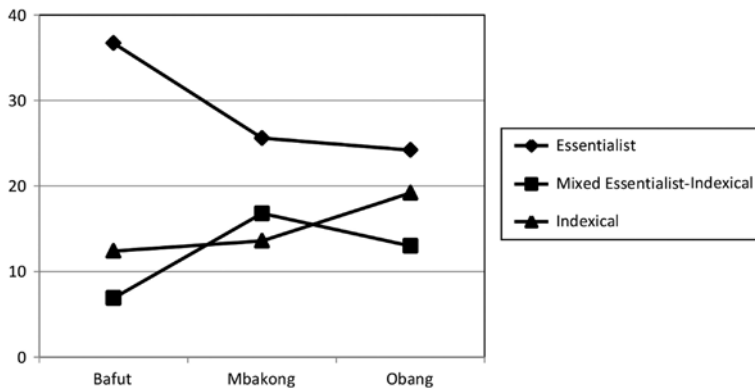
While all three languages are thus more likely to be used in an essentialist way, we can also see from table 13.4 that there are differences between the three languages in terms of the distribution of essentialist versus indexical views—Bafut essentialism has a mean of 43.6, Mbakong essentialism a mean of 42.4, and Obang essentialism a mean of 36.8. Comparing the essential use of the three languages, it is evident that Obang is the least of the three. While the difference between Bafut and Mbakong is not significant ( $p = 0.1$  on a  $t$ -test), the difference between Bafut and Obang and the difference between Mbakong and Obang are both significant ( $p < .001$ ). This means that Obang is more likely than the other languages to be used more indexically, while Bafut and Mbakong are more likely to be used in a more essentialist manner.

The above statistics are based on an analysis of the results in terms of a binary contrast between essentialism and indexicality. However, as explained in section 4.5, we can alternatively analyze the data in a gradient manner (see table 13.3) by considering that responses with scores of 2 and 4 lie midway between indexicality and essentialism.

Table 13.5 presents the mean responses from listeners, and indicates whether each language is seen in an essentialist manner, in a mixed essentialist-indexical manner, or indexically, on the basis of the gradient analysis of the responses.

The figures in table 13.5 are more revealing than those in table 13.4. While Bafut use remains largely essentialist in orientation compared with mixed or indexical ideologies, Mbakong is no longer perceived in an essentialist fashion—the mean number of essentialist responses (25.6) is less than the combined mean responses viewing it as indexical or as having mixed perceptions (30.4). Obang, for its part, is still viewed in the least essentialist manner of these three languages. Figure 13.2 gives a graphical representation of the mean values (last row) in table 13.5, clearly showing the much more essentialist view of Bafut than the other two languages.

From the data presented in this section, it is evident that both essentialism and indexicality are present in the language ideologies of Lower Bafut to various degrees. Because Bafut had more essentialist responses, we can see that it is viewed in a highly essentialist manner, while Mbakong and Obang are used less essentially. Mbakong had more mixed responses in the gradient analysis, suggesting that it is viewed both essentially and indexically. The



**Figure 13.2** The mean number of essentialist, mixed essentialist-indexical, and indexical responses that the listeners gave for Bafut, Mbakong, and Obang. These figures represent the data in table 13.5. *Source:* Figure created by the authors.

MGT results reveal that the languages of the region are conceptualized in different ways, with different language ideologies in each case.

The reality underlying the findings of this investigation is that this rural context—the Lower Bafut area of Cameroon—accommodates people of different statuses, different levels of education and literacy, different professions, different religions, and so on. Consequently, it would be illusory to expect it to have a uniformity of culture characterized by all inhabitants sharing one and the same language ideology; the existence of multiple, fluid ideologies in this community is unsurprising.

## 6. PERSPECTIVES ON USING THE MATCHED-GUISE TECHNIQUE

The MGT has become one of the core methods for assessing people's evaluations of different languages and language varieties. Its use continues to grow with the revelation that people's attitudes have an impact on their lives (Tresch 2013). As more investigations are conducted, challenges of using the approach are being identified and solutions being sought to handle these challenges and make the method more appropriate for a range of contexts (Garrett, Coupland, and Williams (2003, 57–61); Zhang (2009, 153); Solís Obiols 2002, cited in Tresch (2013, 6–8)), which has led to the emergence of a number of variants, such as verbal-guise technique and open-guise technique. Tresch (2013) devotes a whole section of her paper to sharing her

experiences with using MGT in her study of Cajun English, with one of the challenges she identifies being the rating scale.

Given this ongoing discussion, we deem it worthwhile to contribute our own experiences in using MGT in a rural multilingual setting. This is especially important because research on multilingualism in rural areas is still in its infancy and a great deal remains to be determined about the use of appropriate research techniques in this area.

The first challenge we came up against was the difficulty in eliciting accurate answers from the respondents. Most of the respondents were not literate, and were not accustomed to the idea of a semantic differential scale. As noted in section 4.5, they found it difficult to qualify speakers' personalities using comparative and superlative forms such as *less* and *least* for negative adjectives and *more* and *most* for positive adjectives. Generally, they tended to use only three grades: not good, normal, and good. This made it difficult for us to translate their responses into the adopted rating scale of 1 to 5. As a result, we used the strategy indicated in table 13.3, which allowed us to interpret the responses on the wider scale. Future research in rural multilingual settings will need to consider this challenge a priori so as to identify solutions before embarking on the fieldwork.

Even when the consultants were literate, the meanings they gave to words like *good*, *very good*, *very bad*, *fair*, and so on were not standard. For some, *very good* meant excellent, and for others, *fair* meant *good*. In fact, we used Cameroon Pidgin English to educate participants on the meanings of the words until they mastered them, before commencing the data elicitation. As an additional remedy, we were able to associate the ethnographic questionnaires with the tests. The responses from the structured interviews based on the ethnographically informed questionnaire facilitated our data analysis immensely.

An additional challenge that we came up against, in some ways related to the previous, was in teasing out the differences between the attitudes toward the different languages. Using a binary scale—essentialist versus indexical—to capture these fine-grained differences was a huge challenge. This is why we adopted the two different analytical strategies presented in section 4.5 to assist in interpreting the data.

## 7. CONCLUSION

We have analyzed in this chapter the language ideologies of essentialism and indexicality as projected by the people of Lower Bafut, in terms of the languages spoken in the area. From the results of the sociolinguistic questionnaire and the MGT, we have seen that Bafut is considered a more prestigious

language, while Mbakong and Obang are considered less prestigious; and that Bafut is used in a more essentialist fashion, Mbakong is intermediate, while Obang is used more indexically than the other two languages.

Our findings demonstrate that these three languages spoken in Lower Bafut can be placed on a cline: at one end, there is Bafut, with higher figures for essentialist values and very low figures for indexical values; at the opposite end is Obang with more indexical values and lower essentialist values. Overall, despite the varied ideological characteristics of language users in Lower Bafut, it is evident from this study that languages in this linguistic space are used more essentially than indexically. Essentialism can be observed in the relationship between the Bafut people and the people of Lower Bafut. Due to the imperialist attitudes of the Bafut, the people of Lower Bafut shy away from speaking their own languages in public gatherings where the Bafut are involved. In those contexts, they tend to speak Bafut, English, or Cameroon Pidgin English so as to identify with the Bafut people whose language they need to connect to the outside world (essentialism). Meanwhile, the Bafut people do not need or want to speak Lower Bafut languages at all. This situation of language dominance in Lower Bafut would appear to explain why the languages of Lower Bafut—in contrast to Bafut—have much stronger indexical values.

Each inhabitant of Lower Bafut will likely have in mind both essentialist and indexical ideologies, as our data and interpretations suggest. It would be illusory to look for 100 percent essentialist versus 100 percent indexical ideologies in a community like Lower Bafut. Interestingly, though, the situation cannot have come about through exposure to highly essentialist ideologies like those of the British colonial administration, which prioritized English; the influence of the colonialist past cannot be taken for granted.

We realize that the results presented here cannot be considered final. We hope that, at the very least, this chapter will contribute ideas toward an answer to the question: How can we adapt the MGT to linguistic and ideological contexts that are very different from those found in Western cities and other similar environments?

## NOTES

1. This chapter is based primarily on data collected by the first author during fieldwork for her PhD thesis (Chenemo, forthcoming). We are extremely grateful to an anonymous reviewer of the present volume for making suggestions that have significantly improved the quality of the chapter.

2. Note that using the term *judges* for these participants is not the usual practice in MGT research, where *judges* is used for those participants that we refer to as *listeners*.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: SOCIOLINGUISTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

This appendix contains the content of the various questions asked during the sociolinguistic questionnaire. The questionnaires were filled in by the researcher, during interviews with participants. To save space, the format of the original questionnaire is not followed here.

#### A.1 Information about the Interview

The questionnaire recorded: researcher name; date of interview; audio files; and village and quarter where interview undertaken.

#### A.2 Personal Details of Participant

The participant was asked about: paternal name; maternal name; other names; gender; date of birth; occupation; paternal affiliation (quarter); maternal affiliation (quarter); spouse's provenance (quarter); spouse's languages; father's provenance; father's languages; mother's provenance; mother's languages; and children's languages.



### **A.3 Participant's Knowledge of Languages**

Participants were asked what languages they knew. For each language, they were asked to rate their knowledge on a scale of 1–5 (1 = understands a bit, 2 = understands everything but cannot speak, 3 = speaks a bit, 4 = fluent, 5 = native), and indicate: where they learnt it; where they used it; what advantages there were to knowing this language; and whether there were any special occasions on which they used it (e.g., prayers, songs, invocations).

### **A.4 Participant's Views on Languages**

Participants were asked: why they spoke so many languages when people in other villages understand their language; whether they liked Bafut people; whether they liked speaking Bafut; why they liked speaking Bafut (in particular, for prestige, for solidarity, for family, for profit, because they were forced to speak it, or because it was normal to speak it). Participants were asked to rank the languages of the Fondom of Bafut. They were asked: if they were proud of their village and their language; whether they spoke their language to Bafut people, and why (not); if they believed that Bafut people were more enlightened than the people of Lower Bafut, and why (not); and if the Bafut language was superior to their own language, and why (not).

### **A.5 Participant's Opinions on Social Issues**

Participants were asked: why they made friends from many villages; why they belonged to many groups; why there is so much intermarriage in Lower Bafut; whether Bafut men marry women from Lower Bafut, or men from Lower Bafut marry Bafut women, and why or why not; how many names are given to a child and why; whether they gave their children meaningful names; who names a child and why; whether they wanted their children to identify with their family or their wife's family; their social rank; and any groups or cults to which they belonged.

### **A.6 History and Geography**

Participants were asked about: the name of their village and its meaning; its population; where it was located; what the neighboring villages were; the age of the oldest person in their village; who were the first people to arrive in the area and who came later; the story of where their people came from and how they arrived in the village; whether people still spoke their language where they came from; who founded their village; who the kings of their tribe were, from the first to the present; how the village was traditionally governed; what the quarters in the village are; why there are different settlements

(specifically, for reasons of farming, fishing, development, witchcraft, family compounds, protection, rice irrigation, conflict, friendship); how their tribe is different from other tribes of Lower Bafut (e.g., language, traditions, food, clothing); how their people earn a livelihood; what impact the construction of the Ring Road had on them and their village, and whether they gain or lose from the road being built.

## **APPENDIX B: THE MGT TEXTS (BUSHFIRE OUTBREAKS)**

This is the text that was used for the MGT, given here in the three languages (Bafut, Obang, and Mbakong), together with a fairly literal English translation. Because the languages (except for Bafut) have not been previously described, we have provided the text in a phonemic transcription.

### **B.1 MGT Text in Bafut**

Ò ki mbiinà títugə mbôŋ ki fu afò ò làa miji nlə̀ mbò bə̀ bô. Bɛ̀ è ò ɲiti mɔ'ɔ, ò lo'ɔsə̀ ɲgwàrə̀ ya a tətà̀rə̀ a digi yí mə̀ mbə̀ bə̀ɔ wa'a ghu kə'ɔ ɲkú'ù. Bɛ̀ è ò mɔ̀si mbôŋ ki fɛ'è ò bwetə̀ mɔ'ɔ wá, nloŋ mə̀ tsitsə̀ŋ a bə̀a nòò lòò, ìdigi aloò si'i. Bə̀ bia mə̀ bo tə̀ò ɲgè̀ è a mum nsòò à, ta bo kentə̀ nloŋ mə̀ kwi'ifə̀ bə̀ tswa waa boŋ à ká jì'i nsoò waa.

### **B.2 MGT Text in Mbakong**

à lò kə' mié mié ta diə̀ à læ̀ jini bu ya bóó. À lééti ví à líŋ ɲgbwàlè kɪ̀ kà'lè. à læ̀ ɲmè̀ti à limi ví loŋni tətə̀sə̀ŋ ná ɲyòò lòŋ, idí' zi lòò ɲkiə̀ŋ. À diə̀ ɲgbwéŋ, káni tə̀ò ví bə̀ kwi'fə̀ waa dzig ya sóŋ.

### **B.3 MGT Text in Obang**

sí wə̀ náidü bisə̀ bisə̀ mə̀ kə̀ fə̀ kú sóm, ɲyám súbə̀ ɲyɪŋə̀ kú bóónə̀. Sí wə̀ kásé gús wə̀ nálé ɲgbəl ká sái kə̀ lé' gu bóónə̀ dáa fə̀ kwénə̀ gi. Sí wə̀ ɲyám lás wə̀ ním gús sí lás dùl kə̀ ndə̀p, bə' ɲy'ə̀ á mú ɲyüm, ùlé' é gú mə̀ təm tswə̀.bə̀ bú bə̀ kwi sóm, á bəmá kiə̀n kɪ̀ dáá kwisə̀ bə' ɲyə̀ kwi'fə̀n kii lə̀ŋə̀ bəmá.

### **B.4 English Translation of the MGT Text**

When you get up in the morning, before going to the farm, you should cook food for your children. After lighting the fire, hide the match in the ceiling so that children will not reach it. When you finish cooking the food, quench the fire before leaving your house, because we are in the dry season and the heat is very

oppressive. Even those of you who burn grass in the farms are not allowed to do so. Anyone caught in the act of burning grass will be sanctioned very heavily by the Kwi'fo [a secret society].

## APPENDIX C: MGT PROTOCOLS

### C.1 Instructions Given Verbally to Listeners

Listen to the tape carefully once, and if you have anything to say, say it. Then listen to it a second time, and answer the questions that I will pose to you. Each text will take three minutes, and there will be a five-minute interval before the next reading. You will only give the answers after the second reading.

### C.2 MGT Questions

The listeners were asked a series of questions about the speaker of each text that they heard. The first three questions had textual answers. The fourth question consisted of fourteen subquestions; the researcher converted the listener's answers to a rating of 1–5, where 1 was the most negative, and 5 was the most positive (see table 13.3 for details).

1. Which language was used?
2. Is the speaker a native speaker or a non-native speaker?
3. What is your impression of the speaker?
4. Personality traits of the speaker:
  - a. Body height: How tall is the speaker?
  - b. Good looks: Is the speaker physically appealing?
  - c. Leadership: Is the speaker apt to be a leader?
  - d. Joviality: Is the speaker jovial?
  - e. Intelligence: Is the speaker intelligent?
  - f. Devotedness: Is the speaker a devout Christian?
  - g. Self-confidence: Is the speaker confident?
  - h. Trustworthiness: Is the speaker trustworthy?
  - i. Kindness: Is the speaker kind?
  - j. Ambition: Is the speaker ambitious?
  - k. Sociable: Is the speaker sociable?
  - l. Traditionalness: Is the speaker attached to local traditions?
  - m. Respectfulness: Does the speaker respect traditional rulers?
  - n. General likeability: Is the speaker generally nice?

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- Western Ejagham (dialect of Ejagham) [etu; west2482], 124
- Wolof [wol; nucl1347], 20, 75, 78–80, 139–41, 143–52
- Youtou (variety of Joola) [no ISO 639-3 code; jola1264], 75, 78, 88
- Zalidva [hia, lama1288], 172, 173, 174
- Zhoa [zhw; zhoa1238], 16

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