# Small-scale multilingualism and language contact in rural Africa

## 1 Small-scale multilingualism in African settings

Areas of high linguistic diversity found on the African continent have generally been the focus of work seeking to describe specific languages and classify them in genealogical terms. In recent years, a new research focus has emerged to document and analyze traditional patterns of multilingual communication in these regions. There, due to the general absence of lingua francas before the colonial period, intergroup communication was often achieved through individual-level multilingualism. In particular, a person would have learned a number of languages associated with the areas that they lived and traveled in. We refer to this phenomenon here using the term *small-scale multilingualism*. Patterns of multilingualism of this kind are still observable in some rural environments that have only recently been exposed to modern state-based institutions and their associated ideologies.

Research on small-scale multilingualism has largely emerged out of efforts to document endangered languages. Such efforts have typically focused on individual languages (Woodbury 2011: 177–180). However, scholars focusing on different regions of the world have come to recognize that the multilingual ecologies of many endangered language communities require targeted investigation (Vaughan and Singer 2018). In this chapter, we summarize the major features of small-scale multilingualism with a focus on rural African contexts and consider the relationship between small-scale multilingualism, language contact, and language change (see also Kamwangamalu and Tovares, vol. 1). Because this is a relatively new area of investigation, the number of case studies that we are able to draw on is somewhat limited, and they are mostly found within West Africa.

## 2 What do we mean by small-scale multilingualism?

### 2.1 Brief terminological history

The emergence of the term small-scale multilingualism is relatively new (Lüpke 2016), and the study of African multilingualism has played a relatively large part in its development as evidenced, for instance, by work such as Lüpke & Storch (2013), which looked closely at the topic even before it had crystallized as a general area of research. This is, in no small part, connected to the observation that "multilingualism is the African lingua franca (Fardon and Furniss 1994:4)". Consideration of the different terms that have been used for this phenomenon is valuable both as a means of understanding its characteristics and to help readers locate additional work on this topic.

One set of terms references geographic or sociological features of the environments where such forms of multilingualism are commonly found. The term "rural multilingualism" (Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong Diba 2019) falls into this group, to which one can also add attributes like "pre-urban" or "pre-industrialized" for the societies where it is still practiced (Matras 2009). By contrast, terms such as "traditional multilingualism" (Aikhenvald 2003), "indigenous multilingualism" (Vaughan and Singer 2018), and "endogenous multilingualism" (Di Carlo 2018) focus on the historical dimension of this phenomenon, emphasizing that available evidence indicates that it represents pre-colonial practices.

The term small-scale multilingualism emphasizes both the fact that individuals have multilingual repertoires that are dominated by local, demographically small languages and, relatedly, the fact that they interact mostly with people from neighboring areas, typically people that they know. Viewing this phenomenon from the perspective of its scale also stresses that the

various language communities form a linguistically highly diverse environment and have interacted with each other quite intensely for long periods of time without relying on a lingua franca. The term "small-scale" here, therefore, references features of the environments in which the phenomenon is found rather than the nature of the multilingualism itself, which can be quite "large" in terms of the number of languages that an individual may know and are present in the local ecology.

The presence of small communities alone is not sufficient for small-scale multilingualism to arise. There must also be minimal to no asymmetries in the sociopolitical power or prestige of the communities in contact. This is the feature stressed by the term "egalitarian multilingualism" (Haudricourt 1961; see also François 2012) in the earliest attempt to name this phenomenon. The term "organic multilingualism" (Beyer and Schreiber 2017) has been similarly used to stress the pervasiveness of intercommunity relations in these settings, where communities may be socially and linguistically distinct from each other but nevertheless form an integrated sociocultural whole.

### 2.2 Polyglossic and non-polyglossic language ideologies

The last term we would like to discuss here is "non-polyglossic multilingualism" (Lüpke 2016). It targets the language ideologies that underpin small-scale multilingualism—where language ideologies are understood as "ideas, or sets of beliefs, shared by the members of a community concerning language, its uses, and its role in their social world" (Pakendorf, Dobrushina, and Khanina 2021:837). Polyglossia is found in situations where language users have a shared understanding of which of the languages present in the local ecology is most appropriate for a given function (e.g., to increase or decrease the formality of an interaction), social domain (e.g., religious practice, public administration, or education), or with a specific type of interlocutor (see also Haberland 2019, i.e. Ch. 33 in vol. 1).

The idealized associations between specific lexicogrammatical codes and usage domains that characterize polyglossic situations are part of wider semiotic processes whereby a code is used to index a certain grouping of people that has become salient within a society for having features perceived as distinctive in some way (e.g., socioeconomic status, degree of education, lifestyle, etc.). These features, in turn, constrain perceptions about the domains in which the use of a code is seen as more or less appropriate. Language ideologies supporting this kind of "division of labor" among codes are also likely to result in the creation of a language hierarchy that reflects the existing social hierarchy—e.g., the language of the elite is likely to be the one used by state institutions and, as a result, conceptualized as being more prestigious than a language used primarily in commercial settings or on the street. The "public" nature of the latter language might, in turn, lead it to be seen as appropriate for a broader range of communicative purposes than the one used in the home, if they are different (see also Ehala 2019, i.e. Ch. 44 in vol. 1).

Polyglossic language ideologies can further result in a specific kind of association between languages and identities. A salient population may become linked to an abstract social category, and using its associated language may allow an individual to identify with its distinctive social features. In fact, most scholarship on the relationship between language and identity in multilingual settings focuses on polyglossic contexts and how identities are constructed and negotiated through the use of languages that are linked to specific social categories (see Newlin-Łukowicz 2019, i.e. Ch. 24 in vol. 1). By contrast, the language ideologies associated with well-described cases of small-scale multilingualism tend to lack these kinds of associations, and this suggests that the links between languages and identities that underpin these ideologies are of a different type. For instance, asymmetries in social prestige, when they exist in these relatively egalitarian contexts,

have not been observed to lead to the development of the kinds of language hierarchies associated with polyglossic ideologies.

An exemplary case of this difference is provided by the language ideologies observed in the Bafut chiefdom of the Cameroonian Grassfields. Its language ecology includes Cameroon Pidgin English (the local lingua franca spoken by nearly everyone), English (the official language most commonly used in this part of Cameroon, spoken by educated people), and no less than seven local languages. One, Bafut, is spoken in Upper Bafut and is the language of the politically dominant group (also referred to using the name Bafut), while the remaining six languages are spoken by politically marginalized groups in Lower Bafut (Chenemo and Neba 2020). Most Lower Bafut people can speak the Bafut language, and they are also more broadly multilingual in the ways that would be expected in societies characterized by small-scale multilingualism (Chenemo 2020:237–238). People identifying as Bafut are unlikely to learn any of the Lower Bafut languages. To the Lower Bafut people, the Bafut language is the code of the elite, a language of prestige spoken by people they "admire" (Chenemo and Neba 2020: 248). However, they seem to use it exclusively when interacting with Bafut people and not with each other. This reveals that, in Lower Bafut ideologies, the use of Bafut language is not associated with a domain or a social category, and it cannot be exploited to index higher social status or authority. Only English, which is learned in school and is used by the media and government, allows for this kind of social indexing. Bafut is simply the language of the Bafut people and is used to communicate with them.

This example allows us to stress three important and interrelated features of non-polyglossic ideologies and the small-scale societies where they are found. First, they co-occur with mechanisms of identity construction that pivot around concrete, interpersonal relationships rather than membership in abstract social categories. Second, individuals who interact in these societies will generally either know each other personally or be closely connected to each other through their social networks. Third, these societies are either unstratified or minimally stratified.

With respect to this last point, it is important to bear in mind that, in much of the world today, non-polyglossic and polyglossic ideologies coexist within a given community due to the presence of languages of wider communication associated with highly stratified societies—like English as a high-prestige language in the Bafut ecology. This is because the communities where small-scale multilingualism can still be observed are now part of large-scale, state-based societies, and, as a result, their members are exposed to language ideologies built around prestige asymmetries. Below, we will focus on phenomena that are found at the "non-polyglossic side" of local sociolinguistic configurations that also include phenomena associated with polyglossic ideologies (Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Ojong Diba 2020).

The lack of strong prestige and power asymmetries among languages in an environment of small-scale multilingualism tends to produce a situation of pronounced diversity of individual language users' multilingual repertoires. In the absence of a clearly stratified society and of a unique regional "center of gravity" in socioeconomic or cultural terms, an individual's multilingual repertoire largely reflects their specific life trajectory. As a result, even members of a single household may have only partially overlapping repertoires (see, e.g., Cobbinah 2020: 78), and it might also be difficult to predict the degree of proficiency in the various languages that are reported to be used by individual members of any given community (see, e.g., Khachaturyan and Konoshenko 2021, Sagna and Hantgan 2021, Pan et al. under review).

We should acknowledge here that the term non-polyglossic is negative in nature, referencing the absence rather than presence of a particular kind of ideological configuration. At this point,

research on the topic is too limited to be able to say whether their non-polyglossic ideologies form a coherent class or not.

### 2.3 From ideologies to practices

One of the most interesting patterns to emerge in the study of small-scale multilingualism lies in how the non-polyglossic language ideologies associated with such settings are manifested in language use. Available data on spontaneous linguistic behavior in small-scale multilingual environments is still quite limited, but some basic discoveries from African languages can be outlined.

At one extreme, we find patterns like those recorded in Lower Fungom, a rural area in western Cameroon. The primary motivating factors in code choice between two interlocutors involve seniority—where the language choice of the senior member of the pair should be accommodated—and an understanding of how they are socially connected to each other. Once a specific lexicogrammatical code is chosen in an interaction between two people, its use should be maintained, barring a clear social or contextual motivation to change to another code—what Ojong Diba (2020) refers to as code regimentation. That is, interactions between multilingual speakers most often unfold in the form of monolingual speech. Codeswitching is not generally found in Lower Fungom discourse except when it involves the use of the local lingua franca, Cameroon Pidgin English. This is presumably due to the fact that Cameroon Pidgin English does not index local social relations in the way that local codes do, and this pattern underscores the role that language ideologies can play in the manifestation of language contact in language use.

At the opposite extreme we find cases like the one reported in Connell (2009). In an interaction recorded in the Somié market, in the Mambila region of Cameroon, Connell reports that the conversation between two multilingual men, one from Somié and the other a Tikar outsider, started in Ba Mambila (the language associated with Somié), then switched to Fulfulde (the local lingua franca), and then concluded in Vute (another Mambiloid language, spoken to the south of Somié). As Connell (2009: 139) remarks, "without knowing the content of the conversation, and more about its context, it is difficult to suggest a reason for this behavior". Interactions of such complexity do not appear to be rare in African communities practicing small-scale multilingualism. For example, in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal, which superficially resembles Lower Fungom in terms of linguistic diversity, code regimentation is not found. When speakers have overlapping repertoires, extreme degrees of codeswitching can be observed, even to the point where morphemes associated with distinct varieties can be found in the same word (Cobbinah et al. 2017: 89). Something similar is reported in Tabe (2020) in her study of multilingualism in the village of Ossing in Cameroon. Even though Ossing is relatively close to Lower Fungom, the observed codeswitching phenomena are much closer to what is found in Lower Casamance, making it clear that variation in this domain is not simply geographic in nature.

Understanding the motivations for the choice of a given language in interaction requires that researchers adopt a strongly ethnographic approach in the study of these societies, their speech behaviors, and the situational contexts of interaction, as further discussed in section 4.

## 3 Language contact in small-scale multilingual societies

### 3.1 Complications for the study of language contact in small-scale multilingual settings

A central concern in the study of language contact is understanding the potential range of its outcomes and what sociolinguistic factors are associated with different kinds of contact effects. Some kinds of contact (e.g., lexical borrowing; see Matras 2019, i.e. Ch. 13 in vol. 1) are more

conceptually straightforward than others (e.g., contact-induced semantic change; see Epps and Law 2019, i.e. Ch. 4 in vol. 1). However, settings characterized by small-scale multilingualism complicate the investigation of language contact in ways that do not appear to be generally appreciated. The first of these is that the categorization of lexicogrammatical codes into "languages" in such environments is associated with nuances that make it difficult to clearly determine what kinds of phenomena constitute language contact in the first place (section 3.2). The second is that high degrees of individual-level multilingualism, paired with social structures that emphasize linguistic distinctiveness as a marker of social separation, may result in conscious or semi-conscious patterns of language change that impact language diversification and maintenance in these societies, resulting in contact-induced divergence (section 3.3).

### 3.2 What kind of contact?

By practical necessity, work on language contact presupposes the existence of language boundaries (see Nicolaï 2019, i.e. Ch. 23 in vol. 1). Communities characterized by small-scale multilingualism can be challenging for such assumptions for several reasons and, indeed, contact phenomena observed within them suggest that, in many respects, the meaning of "language contact" is underdeveloped within linguistics (see also Wilson 2019, i.e. Ch. 10 in vol. 1).

While it is not generally emphasized, there is an inherent ideological component to the study of language contact that emanates from the ways in which a given language community categorizes the salient codes of its social environment into distinct varieties. This is perhaps most evident with respect to mixed languages, whose lexicons and grammars derive from historically distinct sources (see Kamwangamalu and Tovares 2019, i.e. Ch. 27 in vol. 1). The existence of mixed languages presupposes the earlier presence of language contact. However, synchronically, these contact patterns are reclassified—whether by linguists and community members—as constituting a new code. Canonical instances of language contact, such as the Norman French influence on English (Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 306–315), involve cases where language boundaries are clear from both folk perspectives and scholarly linguistic ones. However, cases of small-scale multilingualism that have been carefully studied demonstrate that determining when "languages" are in "contact" can be a quite complex problem with no clear solution.

One initial distinction that needs to be made are differences between local and scholarly classifications of linguistic difference (Lüpke 2021). In Lower Fungom (see section 2.3), for example, local categorization of distinct languages (or "talks" as they are labeled in everyday speech) is centered on the varieties associated with villages enjoying traditional political autonomy as a chiefdom. However, while each village–chiefdom has a distinctive "talk", some of these varieties are close enough to each other in linguistic terms that they would be classified as dialects from a scholarly perspective (see Good et al. 2011).

More complicated cases arise when a community lumps together multiple, relatively distinct lexicogrammatical codes into a single language. In Bafut society (see section 2.2), for example, speech practices associated with the Bafut language are organized into lexically distinctive registers. The royal register, used for talking about the Fon of Bafut (the traditional political leader), for instance, makes use of the same grammar as the general register of the language but with a distinctive set of vocabulary items for objects and actions pertaining to the Fon, following a process of paralexification (Mous 2001). There are relationships among these parallel lexicons that are superficially similar to borrowing, for instance where a euphemism based on a word in the regular register is used as a mechanism to create a word for describing the Fon—e.g., the verb *bwɛ̂* is used for 'be missing' in the regular register and 'die' in the royal register (Di Carlo and Neba

2020: 39). We can, therefore, speak of a contact relationship among these registers. As discussed in Di Carlo and Neba (2020), the many special registers of Bafut (encompassing also registers for communicating with spirits, among members of secret societies, and within the royal court) result in a diversity of codes within a language community that parallels patterns of multilingualism seen in a nearby region like Lower Fungom or even the immediately bordering region of Lower Bafut. Relatedly, Storch (2011:60–66) showcases an instance of language change due to contact with a special register in Hone, a Jukunoid language spoken in the Gombe State of Nigeria. More research is needed to determine the extent to which these registers interact with each other in ways that are comparable to what has been described for straightforward cases of language contact.

Issues like these, of course, are not intrinsically limited to contexts of small-scale multilingualism. For instance, distinctive registers are found in all societies and were central to the development of the now widespread notion of the linguistic repertoire (Gumperz 1964). The issue here is that detailed consideration regarding how lexicogrammatical codes are classified into "languages" in local terms is inescapable in societies characterized by small-scale multilingualism. Lüpke and Storch 2013 extensively discuss the general problem of considering repertoires and registers rather than discrete languages in the study of multilingualism in Africa. On the methodological side, this is due to the fact that language boundaries are generally not fully known in the absence of new linguistic research. On the historical side, this is because the salience of language choice as a means of encoding social relations leads to conditions where new and highly distinctive registers can develop within a "language" relatively quickly (see, e.g., Storch 2011 and also section 2.3).

On the basis of an investigation of data in the small-scale multilingual context of Lower Casamance in Senegal, Watson (2019) goes so far as to suggest that linguistic varieties in these settings should not be conceptualized as distinctive, bounded objects, as is implicit in many modes of linguistic analysis. Rather, she argues that they should be viewed as complex categories most readily definable through their prototypical features, as developed in the context of prototype theory (Rosch 1999). For instance, a high frequency phoneme in one variety may be seen as prototypical of that variety, and a low frequency phoneme as less prototypical. Two lexicogrammatically similar varieties which are treated as distinctive in the local context may share some prototypical features while differing in others. In a setting like Lower Casamance, this approach has served as an effective way to model relationships between socially distinct, but linguistically similar, varieties and can help identify when influence between them may be especially socially meaningful, for example, when linguistic material is brought into a variety that is not aligned with its prototypical features. Given how different settings of small-scale multilingualism are from what is found in large-scale societies, it is not surprising that the linguistic features of a region like Lower Casamance prompted Watson (2019) to propose a reconceptualization of the nature of the category of "language". Working out how language contact should be analyzed under such an approach is an open question.

### 3.3 Contact as a motivator for linguistic separation

Work on language contact has focused much more on how contact results in linguistic convergence than its role in shaping linguistic stability and divergence (Kühl and Braunmüller 2014:13). In large-scale societies where many language users are monolingual, contact-induced divergence, in particular, is an unlikely outcome across an entire community, barring coordinated state-level actions (see, e.g., Lewis 1999 on modern Turkish and also Maxwell 2019, i.e. Ch. 29 in vol. 1). There is also the possibility of contact creating distinctive varieties within a large-scale language

community, as has been proposed in the formation of ethnolects (Hoffman and Walker 2010:42), though the extent of the resulting divergence generally appears to be quite limited.

Contexts of small-scale multilingualism, by contrast, are more conducive to contact-induced linguistic stability and divergence for several reasons. First, linguistic diversity is not only a fact of social life in these settings but also serves as a key means through which social relations are mediated (see section 2.2). Therefore, the salience of linguistic diversity among the entire population is quite high. Second, the relatively small size of these communities allows for linguistic norms intended to maintain the distinctiveness of a language within the local space to be maintained or to develop in ways that would be much more difficult, if not impossible, in large-scale societies. Third, widespread individual multilingualism in the local languages means that there would be a relatively large pool of individuals who would be aware of the way that any two languages in the local space are similar to and different from each other, facilitating the maintenance and enhancement of their linguistic differentiation.

The Lower Fungom region of Cameroon (see section 2.3) is probably the most well-studied area of Africa from the perspective of contact-induced stability and divergence (see Good to appear a). Historical, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence suggests that it has been a site of relatively rapid linguistic identity formation for at least one of its varieties, the Missong dialect of the Mungbam language (Di Carlo and Good 2014: 243–246). The village of Missong is a relatively new sociopolitical entity within the region and, while its lexicon and grammar clearly link it to the other Mungbam varieties, it is distinctive in a way that goes well beyond anything that can be accounted for in terms of mere linguistic "drift", especially given its relatively shallow history. Available evidence suggests that the formation of the Missong dialect involved a process through which a new shared lexicogrammatical norm was created by mixing elements of some non-Mungbam languages into a Mungbam "base", with these other languages presumably being the primary languages of some of the kin groups that were part of the initial formation of the Missong community. This process of language mixing would have served to differentiate Missong from other Mungbam varieties, representing an instance where both "internal" language contact (i.e., within the kin groups forming the community) and "external" contact (i.e., between the emerging Missong community and other Mungbam-speaking communities) resulted in linguistic divergence.

This is similar to other cases where mixed languages developed as a means of marking social divergence (see, e.g., Mous 2003), though involving much more closely related varieties. There is no reason to believe that such processes are especially rare in contexts of small-scale multilingualism in Africa given how little dedicated work on this topic has been undertaken. The Missong case also illustrates how, within small-scale societies, an approach to language contact that views it primarily in terms of independently established languages influencing each other is insufficient, since this cannot encompass the ways in which contact leads to the development of new languages in situations where communities are small and individuals are highly multilingual.

There are other regions of Africa whose overall patterns of linguistic diversity suggest that they may have followed similar historical paths. Dimmendaal (2009), for instance, discusses the case of two Kordofanian languages spoken in the Nuba Mountain region of Sudan, Tima and Katla. Tima speakers have an oral tradition that they deliberately changed their language so that they would not be understood by the Katla. He concludes that the best historical analysis for the observed patterns is due to transfer during a process of language shift, rather than deliberate change. However, the oral traditions suggest that the maintenance of these differences is, at least in part, attributable to contact-induced stability of a local linguistic boundary.

The dynamics that underlie the patterns of differentiation that we see in a case like that of Missong can be found in other contexts, suggesting that they are a specific manifestation of a general cultural trait that links the expression of social bonds to relatively high degrees of linguistic variation that go beyond what might be associated with "registers" in large-scale language communities. Storch (2011) documents the widespread use of special registers in Africa involving manipulated language (along the lines of what was described for Bafut in section 3.2) and how elements of these registers can enter the regular language, thereby serving as a mechanism for varieties to differentiate themselves from each other. From this perspective, the drive to create new varieties that is evident in the prevalence of urban youth languages on the continent—which are continuously recreated with each new generation (Kiessling and Mous 2004; Nicolaï 2019, i.e. Ch. 23 in vol. 1)—suggests that the processes involved in their formation are not innovative but, rather, manifestations of age-old language dynamics.

## 4 The need for a strongly ethnographic approach

In section 2.2, we saw that one central feature of small-scale multilingualism is that it is associated with non-polyglossic ideologies. As a result, understanding the motivations for language choice in interaction in such contexts may require collecting a significant amount of ethnographic and contextual detail. In addition, it is frequently the case that languages used in small-scale settings are not well described. Because of these complications, the most effective way to analyze small-scale multilingualism is to carry out team-based multidisciplinary research of the sort whose results are presented in Cobbinah et al. (2017) and Di Carlo, Ojong Diba, and Good (2021). In this section, we will provide an overview of the key methodological concerns that anyone working on small-scale multilingualism must consider (see also Good 2022).

The language ideologies that support local forms of multilingualism must necessarily be a crucial focus of such research. These can be both explicit—as in, for example, statements about one's attitude towards using a certain language—and implicit—e.g., covert beliefs about language regimentation (see section 2.3) observable from speech patterns in interaction. Research on multilingualism often addresses both, with interviews or questionnaires used to gather data about explicit ideologies and observation and analysis of speech patterns used to delineate implicit ideologies. What is significant in research on small-scale multilingualism is that one cannot draw on pre-existing models of the structure of the sociolinguistic space—such as those associated with polyglossic approaches—but, rather, a context-specific model needs to be developed that is sensitive to the nature of the local social relations that language choices are grounded in.

On the surface, the tools that are needed are similar to those used in research on multilingualism in general—i.e., interview guides, questionnaires, field notes, and analysis of language practices. However, there are key differences. To begin with, the collection of data from language users must proceed in a way that allows it to capture information that might be salient in a system that is not based on polyglossia or categorical models of identity. For example, person metadata should not be limited to "standard" demographic categories such as age, sex, "ethnicity", schooling, and residence history, etc., as is common in surveys of multilingualism (Codó 2007, Khachaturyan and Konoshenko 2021). Rather, it should also include as much information as possible on the kinship networks and the communities of practice in which the language user is—or desires to be—a member (Di Carlo 2022). Such relational information is necessary to establish potential affiliations that an individual may activate through language choice with other interactants. This information might potentially shed light on even highly complex interactions such as the one from Connell

(2009) mentioned in section 2.3. (McConvell 1985 provides an exemplary application of this method in an Australian setting.)

The analysis of speech data requires similar adaptations. As discussed in section 3.2, ideologies supporting small-scale multilingualism may reify languages based on locally-salient sociocultural and political traits, and these categorizations can be at odds with a linguist's perspective. For example, dialects of the same language in scholarly terms may be vested with social indexical meaning otherwise expected for varieties considered to be separate languages. This makes it crucial for researchers to carefully consider local understandings of what counts as a separate "language" even if this contrasts with their own conceptualizations. Seemingly minor phonological or morphological differences may be socially salient ways of differentiating two "languages" within a setting characterized by small-scale multilingualism, as suggested by the work of Watson (2019), based on work in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal, discussed in section 2.3.

It may require a long time for subtleties of this kind to become clear to a researcher. One possible way to overcome this problem is to structure the initial phases of work by mostly relying on the insights of individuals from the communities being investigated. The resulting "relinquished control" on the research output is "one of the most difficult constraints for academics to accept" (Grinevald 2001: 301) because of the risk of not being able to ensure the validity of the collected data. However, as discussed in Di Carlo, Ojong Diba, and Good (2021), there are ways to design such collaborations, as well as the broader projects which they are part of, to minimize this risk. This involves developing processes that allow for a productive interplay between obtaining knowledge about language users and their language ideologies—i.e., the ethnographic component—on the one hand, and of the grammatical features of the languages that they use, on the other. Such work should ideally start with a focus on the ethnographic component because this provides the information needed to understand the cultural features that could be involved in the social meanings produced by language users through their linguistic choices. This can then be followed by an initial analysis of speech data relying on the observations of community members, which, in turn, can form the basis of more traditional structural linguistic analysis that will lead to new ethnographic research questions. This ethnographic–linguistic analysis cycle can be repeated over time, even by different researchers, with each step improving on the following one.

## 5 Conclusion

Even though a significant amount has been learned about small-scale multilingualism in recent years, it remains an area in need of much more investigation both within Africa and other parts of the world. Nevertheless, for the investigation of the study of language contact, it is already clear that the fact that the social contexts of small-scale multilingualism are grounded in the dynamics of personal relationships, rather than categorical identities, leads to different kinds of outcomes than are found in large-scale societies. At this stage, what seems most crucial for future work is to simply have more detailed case studies of multilingualism in small-scale societies so that we can have a clearer idea of the range of possible variation in their language ideologies and patterns of language use. Based on the existing literature, sub-Saharan Africa is a region with particularly striking diversity in its patterns of multilingualism. Further detailed studies of small-scale multilingualism on the continent would be especially welcome especially given that, as languages of wider communication, and, especially colonial languages, gain ground theres, contexts of small-scale multilingualism are becoming increasingly endangered, making this work time sensitive.

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