Documenting multilingualism in rural Africa
The case of Lower Fungom

Jeff Good
University at Buffalo
jcgood@buffalo.edu
Acknowledgments

• Much of the work discussed here results from funding from the
  • National Science Foundation; currently under Documenting Endangered Language Program Award No. BCS-1360763
  • National Endowment of the Humanities
  • The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology
  • The Endangered Languages Documentation Programme
  • The University at Buffalo, State University of New York

• Numerous collaborators have also played an important role in developing the content discussed here, especially Pierpaolo Di Carlo, Rachel Ojong, and Penghang Liu
KPAAM-CAM

- Key Pluridisciplinary Advances in African Multilingualism
- A collaboration between U. Buffalo, U. Yaoundé I, U. Buea and the Catholic University of Cameroon, Bamenda
- Fieldwork, training models, and computational tools
- Long-term goal: Longitudinal investigation of language change in a diverse region of the Cameroonian Grassfields
- Current focus: Documenting multilingualism
- Earlier work: More traditional linguistic description
- See http://buffalo.edu/~jcgood/lowerfungom.html
Lower fungom
At the northern edge of the Grassfields
Lower Fungom

- 13 villages
- 7–9 “languages”
- 5 local isolates
- 2 dialect clusters
- 12,000(?) people
- Rural economy
- Localist attitudes
- Multilingualism/multilectalism pervasive
Typologizing multilingualisms
*(Di Carlo, Good, and Ojong to appear)*

Documenting multilingualism in Lower Fungom

Applications to broader linguistic concerns
African multilingualism

- Multilingualism is “the African lingua franca” (Fardon & Furniss 1994:4) and “multilingualism has been a fact of social life in Africa for a very long time” (Whiteley 1971:1)
- Rural multilingualism is not well studied; emphasis has been on urban multilingualism (see, e.g., Mc Laughlin 2009)
- Urban spaces have been seen as sites of contact, while rural spaces modeled as dominated by discrete “tribes”
Polyglossic multilingualism

• “Whereas one set of behaviors, attitudes and values supported—and was expressed in—one language, another set of behaviors, attitudes and values supported and was expressed in the other (Fishman 1967:29).”

• This pattern is found in Africa, especially in urban environments, but it does not seem to be endogenous.

• It seems to require a degree of social stratification that is not typical in rural contexts (including Lower Fungom).
Africa is extremely diverse, hosting some 2,000 or more ethnolinguistic groups in just 54 states. The existence of and complex relationship between territorial, institutional, sociocultural and individual multilingualism in Africa makes it practically impossible to draw two-dimensional language maps for given territories in Africa. There is large-scale overlapping and constant changes in terms of which languages are used by whom and for what purposes in which communication spaces or communication domains. Further, the ubiquitous scenario in Africa of simultaneous plurality and diversity in terms of means of expression in human interaction dissolves the typical Western notion of the individual’s immediate and emotional attachment to his/her mother tongue as a primordial feature of identity that is transposed from the intimate social group to the nation-state—and as such fosters deeply grounded nationism. The African scenario is quite different. Here, it is the richness and resourcefulness that counts, rather than a purely and highly ideologised sentimental attachment to one particular language. This scenario is depicted, in a highly schematic way, in the above diagram (Fig. 6.1), which synthesises geographic and demographic distribution with the polyglossic cline of status, prestige and upward social mobility.

In such multi-tiered, complex communication landscapes, language serves several roles and functions in society, namely and obviously for purposeful vertical social mobility and prestige, official language(s), national language(s), i.e. lingua francas with national distribution, (several) regional lingua francas on provincial or state level, (hundreds of) local lingua francas, (UNESCO: community/area languages), (several hundreds of) local mother tongue-languages.
See Moore (2004)
Montagnards and Wandala in Jilve

- Wandala: Socioeconomically dominant, Muslim, primary language is Wandala (Chadic)
- Montagnards: Linguistically heterogenous (various other Chadic languages), maintain traditional religion
- Groups have been in contact for centuries
- Wandala multilingualism reflects polyglossic hierarchy
- Montagnard multilingualism has a different character
Multilingual profile of a Wandala living in Jilve (Moore 2004:142)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wandala</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Fulfulde</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Intermediate receptive &amp; productive skills</td>
<td>Decoding skills with limited comprehension</td>
<td>Limited Receptive Skills Declined assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment by consultant or researcher</td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Intermediate receptive &amp; productive skills</td>
<td>Decoding skills with limited comprehension</td>
<td>Declined assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by father</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by mother</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by sibling(s)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in family</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in neighborhood</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker exposure</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in religious practice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in commerce</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally instructed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wuzlam</td>
<td>Pelasla</td>
<td>Wandala</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-assessment</strong></td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Can pass for native speaker</td>
<td>Highly proficient</td>
<td>Intermediate receptive &amp; productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment by consultant or researcher</strong></td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Native speaker</td>
<td>Highly proficient non-native</td>
<td>Intermediate receptive &amp; productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by father</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by mother</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken by sibling(s)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in family</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in neighborhood</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native speaker exposure</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in religious practice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses in commerce</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally instructed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads regularly</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes regularly</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multilingual profile of a Montagnard living in Jilve (Moore 2004:143)
Multilingual cultures

- Wandala grow up in monolingual households and learn second languages in school settings.
- Montagnards are often natively bilingual and are taught other languages from a young age.
- Montagnard culture is associated with dedicated language learning strategies; children are socialized as multilingual.
- The Montagnard pattern appears to be older in this part of the world, with similarities to Lower Fungom.
Lower Fungom

- 13 villages
- 7–9 “languages”
- 5 local isolates
- 2 dialect clusters
- 12,000(?) people
- Rural economy
- Localist attitudes
- Multilingualism/multilectalism pervasive
Language saves man from drowning!

...a foreigner was drowning in river Mbuk, since he knew that the Mbuks were around, he shouted in the Mbuk language and the Mbuks rushed out and fished him out. Because he identified himself through the canal of language to the Mbuk people he was rescued. It was after the rescue operation that they discovered that it was not a Mbuk, he just used the Mbuk language to call for their attention that one of their sons is drowning in the river.

—Nelson Tsong Tsonghongei
Village
Lexicogrammatical Code
Ritual Unit
Chief
Spiritual Security
Speaker
Language has primarily relational function, rather than expressing a cultural “essence”.
The Wandala seem closer to this type, but it is clearly an imperfect fit.
Parameters of multilingualism

- What kinds of social units are lexico-grammatical codes associated with, both observationally and ideologically?
- What kinds of identities are indexed through the choice of using a particular language?
- What motivates an individual to acquire a set of languages?
- How are multiple languages deployed in language use?
- How do different cultures of multilingualism affect patterns of metalinguistic awareness and language change?
- …
Documenting multilingualism in Lower Fungom
Components of the documentation

- Standard descriptive and documentary techniques aimed at uncovering properties of lexico-grammatical codes
- Comparative work across varieties
- Ethnographically informed sociolinguistic surveys
- Assessment of multilingual competences
- Tracking of language use across the day
- Spatial and social network analysis
- …
### Questionnaire excerpt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paternal name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternal affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse’s provenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse’s languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s provenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s provenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’s languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did you learn it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do you use it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages of knowing this language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there special occasions in which you use it (e.g. prayers, songs, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = hears a bit; 2 = hears but no talk; 3 = talks a bit, 4 = fluent; 5 = native
Reported number of languages spoken

30 languages of competence reported

- Number of individuals
- Number of languages

- Active
- Passive

Reported number of languages spoken: 30 languages of competence reported

Esene Agwara (2013)
Reported number of lects spoken

42 lects of competence reported

Number of individuals
Active
Passive

Number of lects

Esene Agwara (2013)
Factors given as promoting active competence

- Friendship
- Proximate
- Similar
- Movement
- Education
- Religion
- Blood
- Marriage
- In-Law

Esene Agwara (2013)
Factors given as promoting passive competence

Esene Agwara (2013)
Factors given as promoting passive competence

Pervasive factor
Desire to detect evil plans and gossip

Esene Agwara (2013)
Lower Fungom

- 13 villages
- 7–9 “languages”
- 5 local isolates
- 2 dialect clusters
- 12,000(?) people
- Rural economy
- Localist attitudes
- Multilingualism/multilectalism pervasive
Nto Cho Boniface’s linguistic day

- Son of the Fon of Missong, but not heir apparent; mother is from Buu
- Hunter and farmer, living in Missong; formerly worked on plantations outside of Lower Fungom
- Speaks Missong, Mashi, Buu, Munken, Mundabli, Mufu, and Cameroonian Pidgin as a “native speaker”; fluent in Menkaf and English; speaks Abar a bit, understands some French
- Mixes a lot of Cameroonian Pidgin with his Missong
Boniface’s language choice

Boniface kept using Missong until he met Frederick from Mashi. Both men started using Missong but Boniface switched to Mashi to discuss something he did not want others to understand. He was asking Frederick how hunting was in his village, then he (Boniface) switched back to Missong. He kept using Missong but switched again to Abar when Juma Richard from Abar spoke to him in Abar. Boniface responded in Abar but as he remembered that Richard could understand Missong, he switched back to Missong and kept using it with Richard…They were later joined by Ayaba…Ayaba even uses some CPE. Boniface says it is because they were discussing a general topic. He also explained that in LF using CPE can be taken badly as CPE is mostly used by people who have been out of LF; it has some kind of prestige. Using CPE could mean that you want to make the conversation heard by everybody.
B:  *Ndɛ...a ye ne...be de bɛ?*
Uncle...How are you? Isn’t there kola?

N:  *N fo question wa tumɛ.*
You had asked me before.

B:  *A fe ɣkwo mi tumɛ be?*
What is it about?

_A fe so hɛnɛ. N du we kwe fa mi ɛmu be..._
You remembered. I asked you to buy Kola for me...

[noise]

B:  *Ai ca n ɛɛ keke wu!*
Ah! Don’t flatter me!
N: *A ke ya le dzεŋ?*
Did you come up to Fang?

*Đ wu ye bu ka follow wa ton.*
I heard that you were chased there.

B: *Đ ka follow be mi?*
Chased away?

*Đge du ye a ka de mi. E bε kεhε Manto.*
It was not me, it was Manto

N: *A ke wou ye kem jo uwa de?*
Are you all listening to what I am saying?
B: *Ben wou gin ta?*
What should we listen to?

N: *A ɛkɛ kɛ ta?*
So, where did you go?

B: **Offlicense** wo ne mi wo me ma bahɛ ti ma.
I reached here and saw you in this off license.

N: *Bi kie lahɛ.*
You are still a child.

[After some grumbling, N stops speaking to B, who then leaves.]
Language as relational index

- Boniface’s mother is from Buu, as is the senior man.
- The senior man is married to Boniface’s older sister.
- In Buu, Boniface is clearly junior to the senior man.
- In Missong, Boniface is the son of the chief, and the senior man from Buu has no specific seniority relationship to him.
A linguistic gap: No code mixing

- This work has found individuals who can fluidly move between codes as social situations warrant.
- But, significant “mixing” has not been found—speakers report speaking one language at a time.
- The one exception: Cameroonian Pidgin, which is valued very differently from the local languages.
- There is, however, diachronic evidence for mixing.
- Mixing is reported in Senegal (Cobbinah et al. 2017) and among the Mandara montagnards (Moore 2004).
Explaining individual repertoires

• The model we are working with views linguistic knowledge as emanating from individual-specific constraints.

• Testing this requires exploring how different factors correlate with individual repertoires.

• We have begun to explore this by looking at social and spatial networks (Di Carlo et al. 2018).
Trilingual competence
Abar–Kung–Missong
Language competence of an individual from Mufu
Language competence of his mother
Analyzing network structure

- More representative sampling of individuals and more accurate geographic data would allow for:
  - Examination of how kinship networks affect multilingual competence
  - How significant spatial factors are
  - Which villages are more central and which more peripheral in local patterns of linguistic knowledge
Multilingualism in Lower Fungom

• What kind of social unit: The village
• What kind of identities: Membership in a social network
• What motivates multilingualism: Access to resources
• How are languages deployed: Discretely, without mixing
• Change: Abrupt code creation (Di Carlo & Good 2014)?
• Metalinguistic awareness: Not yet researched
Broader linguistic applications
Significance of multilingual research

• Development of documentary records that are more responsive to actual practices of speaker communities
• Models of change grounded in local language dynamics
• Understanding how individuals in cultures built around multilingualism show different kinds of linguistic knowledge
References

Project publications: http://buffalo.edu/~jcgood/lowerfungom.html


