

Multilingualism and the heteroglossia of ideologies in Lower Fungom (Cameroon): Use and attitudes

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Abstract

Located at the northwestern edge of the Cameroonian Grassfields, Lower Fungom is a rural, linguistically highly diverse region (pop. ca. 12,000) where individual multilingualism in three local languages plus Cameroonian Pidgin English (henceforth CPE) is the norm, with a minority also speaking Cameroonian English. This article focuses on the different types of identity that can be projected via the use of English, CPE, and the local languages. Data come from language documentation projects and include self-reports, ethnographic observations, and analysis of language use. Such a diverse dataset allows us to uncover and discuss a number of aspects of the local language ideologies. Key here is the recognition that only exoglossic languages allow the representation of different identities *qua* membership in stereotypical categories – such as the case of English, which calls up stereotypes connected with authority and prestige – whereas the use of local languages is associated with village affiliation and, hence, relational rather than categorical identities. This ideological layer is not regimented by any form of prestige- or domain-based compartmentalization and, therefore, can hardly be captured by classical theories such as Fishman's (1967) extended diglossia theory, whose limits in doing research on African rural settings are highlighted. Also, inspired by Jenks and Lee (2016), this article suggests

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the existence of a heteroglossia of ideologies of personal identity (relational vs. categorical) most likely determined by the relatively recent entry of English in the local language ecology.

KEYWORDS: small-scale multilingualism, multilingualism in rural Africa, non-diglossic ideologies, relational vs. categorical identities, Cameroon

1 Introduction

The Republic of Cameroon is a central African country of about 23 million that was formed in 1961 via the unification of a former French protectorate (Cameroun) and a former British protectorate (Southern Cameroons). According to the constitution, both French and English are the country's official languages but 'true linguistic equality has never been realized' (Wolf, 2001:182). Only about one quarter of the population currently resides in regions that were once under British control, which taken together amount to about one tenth of Cameroon's total area. In addition to this clear demographic imbalance, there are other factors that can be adduced to understand why French is *de facto* dominant in Cameroon. In this regard, Chumbow and Simo Bobda (1996) list also the politically dominant position of francophone élites ever since the country was created and the absence of a real commitment on the part of the government to fully implement a country-wide bilingual language policy.

From the perspective of the spread of English one might say that, while Cameroon as a country is no doubt part of Kachru's (1985) outer circle, it is internally much diversified as to the actual position of English in local language ecologies. For one thing, the phases of expansion and institutionalization of English (Moag, 1982) have taken place throughout most of the 20th century only in what today can be considered a minor part of the country: this means that any discussion about English that articulates at the level of the whole country would in fact misrepresent the actual situation encountered on the ground.

At a closer look, one realizes that the adoption of a regional or sub-regional focus instead of a country-wide focus is not yet sufficiently fine-grained in scope to capture sociolinguistic realities that may be representative of and significant to the local speech communities (for the need to refine Kachru's concentric circles model, see Bruthiaux, 2003). Most of the data about English in Cameroon, as well as about multilingualism in general, come from urban centres (see, e.g., Koenig, Emmanuel and Povey, 1983; Anchimbe, 2006). This has been, and still is, a widespread tendency among sociolinguists, who decide to concentrate on towns and cities instead of rural contexts because their aim is to give 'priority to more vital aspects of the social momentum which affects all Africa, as it moves towards an increasingly urban, cash economy' (Koenig, Emmanuel and Povey, 1983:8).

We do not criticize this focus and its rationale, but we also realize that the inclusion of rural speech communities is a key step towards the understanding of the dynamics of African multilingualism.

For one, it is commonly recognized that the distinction between urban and rural populations is problematic in many African countries because many people are in fact highly mobile and, even when they reside in cities, keep strong ties with their rural area of origin (see, e.g., Wolf, 2001:151). Furthermore, the few studies that have focused on multilingualism in rural communities have yielded interesting results that, on the one hand, contribute to deconstruct the (colonial) stereotype of rural communities as being subdivided into assumedly monolingual ‘tribes’ (in the same direction see, e.g., Dakubu, 2000; Lüpke, 2016; Di Carlo, Good and Ojong Diba, 2019) and, on the other, help identify traits of pre-colonial language ideologies that may be no longer readily discernible in urban ecologies (see, e.g., Di Carlo, 2018).

In this article we present data illustrating the pervasiveness of multilingualism and the diversity of language ideologies in Lower Fungom, a small rural area of Northwest Cameroon. Inspired by Jenks and Lee (2016), we define such diversity as a ‘heteroglossia of language ideologies’, and devote special attention to the radically different types of identities that can be constructed following the different ideologies. After introducing the study area in its general features, we present the data we collected via an ethnographically informed interview guide on multilingual repertoires and language ideologies. We then analyse excerpts from two natural discourse recordings in order to both assess the reliability of self-reports and get further insights into the local language ideologies. These are then discussed and ultimately lead us to address the heteroglossia of identity conceptions.

2 Area of study

2.1 General remarks

Lower Fungom is a rural area of about 240 km² in size located at the north-western fringes of the Menchum Division in the Northwest Region of Cameroon (see Figure 1). It is characterized by a very hilly landscape, an ecology of forest-savannah mosaic type, and an astonishing degree of language density. Here eight different Bantoid languages are spoken in thirteen villages, i.e. a ratio of about one language per 30 km². Ajumbu, Buu, Fang, Koshin, and Kung are one-village languages, whereas in five villages (i.e. Abar, Biya, Missong, Munken, and Ngun) more or less closely related varieties of Mungbam are spoken, and Mufu and Mundabli speak varieties of the same language.¹ With the exception of Fang and Koshin, all the region’s villages are inhabited by fewer than one thousand people (Good, Lovegren, Mve, Tchiemouo, Voll and Di Carlo, 2011) (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

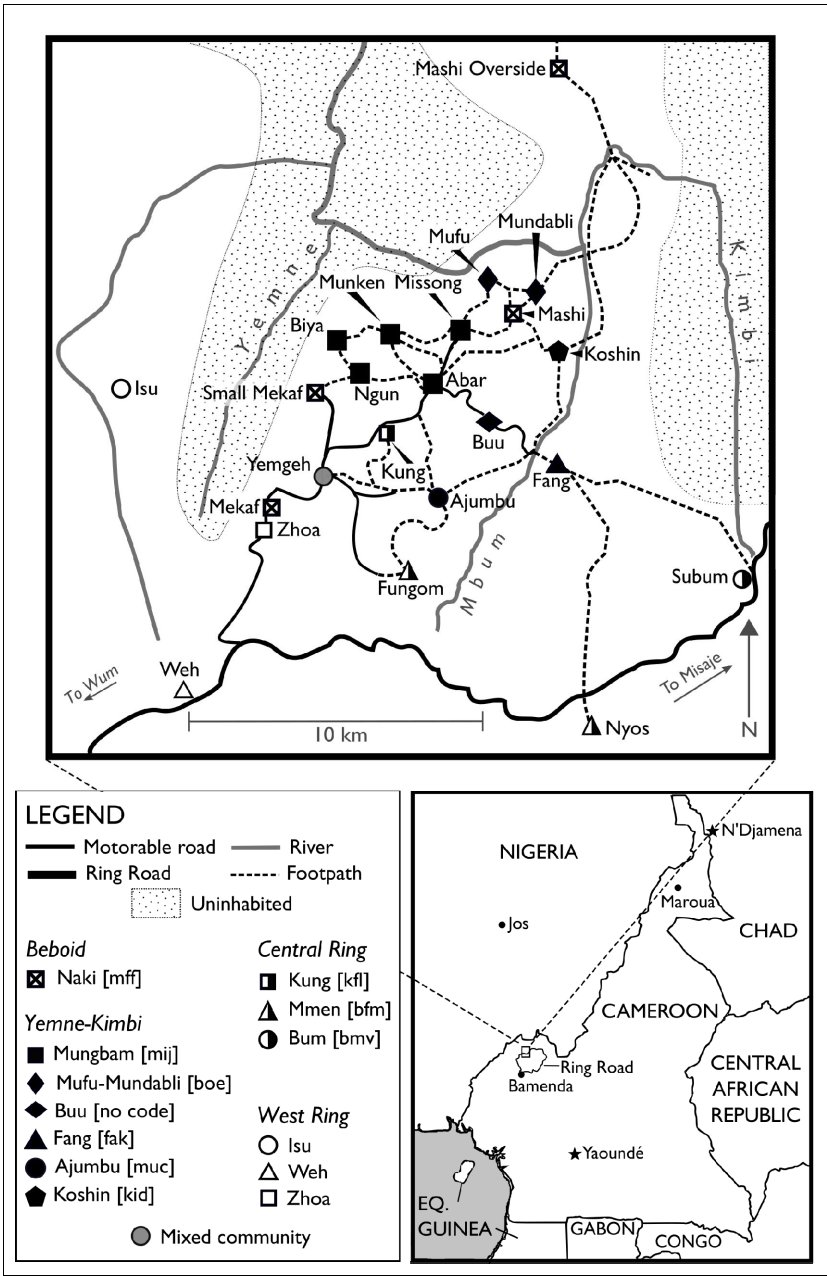


Figure 1. Lower Fungom and its languages in their regional context.

To the North, Lower Fungom is bordered by lower-elevation, thickly forested areas in which very few and tiny settlements and no motorable roads are found. So, while the Nigerian border is at about only 40km to the North as the crow flies, linguistic and cultural influences from Nigeria are marginal overall.² By contrast, Lower Fungom can be best considered as the north-western edge of the Cameroonian Grassfields, an area that has been described as a cultural unit (see, e.g., Warnier, 1985).

Table 1. Languages of Lower Fungom (Southern Bantoid, non-Bantu languages). The dotted line indicates that the status of Missong as a Mungbam variety is still unclear. Due to the pervasiveness of multilingualism and to a lack of reliable data for the region as a whole, it is presently impossible to say how many people speak one or the other language or lect (see 2.2. below for the use of this term). Population data (cf. Good, Lovegren, Mve, Nganguép, Voll and Di Carlo, 2011) are not retrieved from census data and must be considered tentative.

SUBGROUP	LANGUAGE	VILLAGE	POPULATION
Yemne-Kimbi	Mungbam [mij]	Abar	ca. 800
		Munken	ca. 600
		Ngun	ca. 150
		Biya	ca. 100
		
	Missong		ca. 500
	Mufu-Mundabli [boe]	Mufu Mundabli	ca. 100 ca. 400
	Buu [no ISO code]	Buu	ca. 100
	Fang [fak]	Fang	ca. 5,000
	Koshin [kid]	Koshin	ca. 4,000
	Ajumbu [muc]	Ajumbu	ca. 300
Beboid	Naki [mff]	Mashi	ca. 200
Central Ring	Kung [kfl]	Kung	ca. 700

The nearest town is Wum, which can be reached in one day on foot or about 3–6 hours by motorbike or 4-wheel car depending on the state of the motorable road. While it has undoubtedly been part of the Grassfields cultural complex for centuries, and still is, Lower Fungom shows signs of a certain isolation both culturally (Di Carlo, 2011) and linguistically (Good, Lovegren, Mve Nganguép, Voll and Di Carlo, 2011).

2.2 Multilingualism and language ideologies

The high degree of linguistic diversity found in Lower Fungom is just an extreme in a tendency towards ‘linguistic singularity’ (Fowler and Zeitlyn, 1996:1) that characterizes the whole of the Grassfields, where one finds ‘a multiplicity of fiercely independent and linguistically distinct groupings’ (see also Stallcup, 1980:44). Thus, while a linguist would recognize eight languages to be spoken in Lower Fungom, any local would instead recognize thirteen distinct ‘talks’, i.e. one per village-chieftdom,³ although resemblances between some of them (i.e. what a linguist would call ‘dialects’) would also be readily admitted. It is fundamental to keep this trait of the local language ideologies in sight: first, it is a key aspect to understand speakers’ motivations for developing multilingual repertoires in local languages; second, it is the only tool through which one can evaluate the social significance of choosing to speak one ‘language’ over another, independent of its analytically sanctioned status (see, e.g., Auer, 1999:312). Therefore, we decided to keep the two ideologies – i.e. the linguist’s and the locals’ – clearly distinct. In the following, the reader will find ‘languages’ as opposed to ‘lects’: the latter term is meant to refer to any named languages, i.e. any linguistic codes that locals consider distinctive – be it English, French, or a village-chieftdom specific ‘talk’.

It is obvious that, in such a small-scale ‘singularity area’, inter-village communication may be achieved either via a lingua franca or through the use of multiple languages. To the best of our knowledge, in Lower Fungom there has been no lingua franca prior to the diffusion of Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE), which took place in the area especially after the 1950s, when a number of locals moved to work in the plantations along the coast in today’s Southwest Region of Cameroon. What then sparked our initial interest was to find out how pervasive multilingualism was in Lower Fungom, especially among older generations.

3 Self-reported data

3.1 Our sample

The data we briefly describe in this section were collected during three field trips to the area, carried out in 2012 (Di Carlo, Esene Agwara and Nsen Tem), 2017, and 2018 (Esene Agwara). Previous stages of the research have been summarized in Esene Agwara (2013) and Di Carlo (2016, 2018). Our starting point was the well-rooted suspicion that, mostly on account of the increasing diffusion of CPE as an inter-village language of communication (see Warnier, 1979:410–412; Koenig, Emmanuel and Povey, 1983; Chumbow and Simo Bobda, 1996; Anchimbe, 2006), multilingualism in the area is an endangered practice. Therefore, following an assumption close to that underpinning the Labovian notion of ‘apparent time’ (see Cukor-Avila and Bailey, 2008), in our 2012 survey

we decided to bias our sample by including a higher proportion of elderly respondents, as these could be crucial in gaining an insight into the older ‘layers’ of language ideologies reachable, i.e. those we suspected would have promoted the development of high rates of multilingual competence in the area prior to the diffusion of CPE. To do this, we interviewed 174 individuals (89 females and 85 males, totalling about 1.5% of the Lower Fungom population) from all the villages of Lower Fungom using an ethnographically informed semi-structured interview guide (see Di Carlo, 2016). The distribution of respondents according to age ranges is represented in Figure 2, while their degrees of schooling are shown in Figure 3.

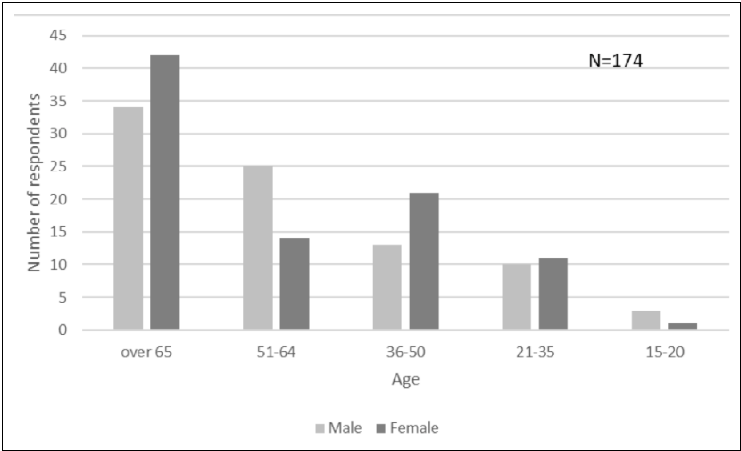


Figure 2. Respondents by age ranges.

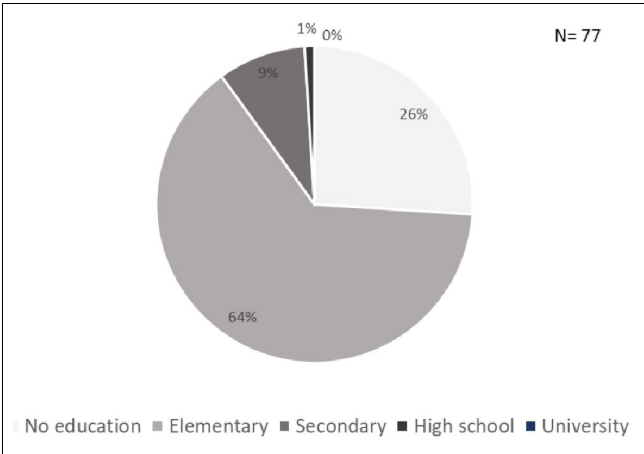


Figure 3. Degree of schooling of a representative portion of the respondents (only 2017 and 2018 data).

3.2 Multilingual repertoires

As we expected, self-reported rates of multilingualism were high: As an average, men and women reported to speak 6 lects or, from the linguist’s perspective, 4 languages (see Figures 4 to 7).⁴ Virtually nobody is monolingual in Lower Fungom; at the very least, everyone is competent in a local language plus CPE.

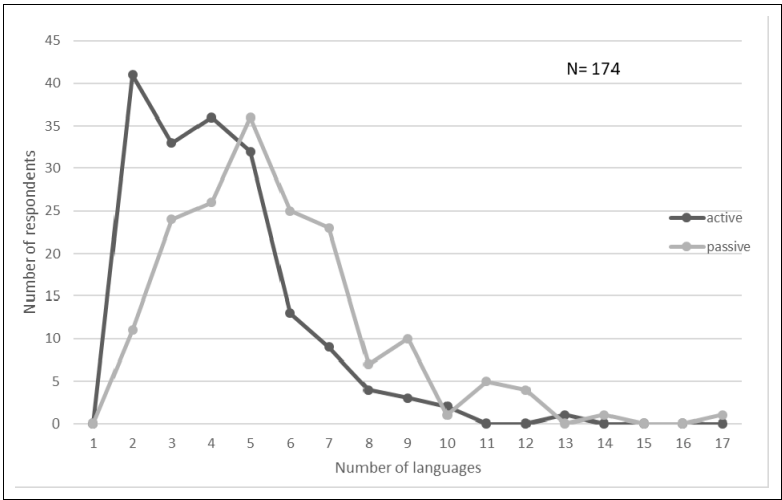


Figure 4. Self-reported multilingual competence, in languages, all respondents.

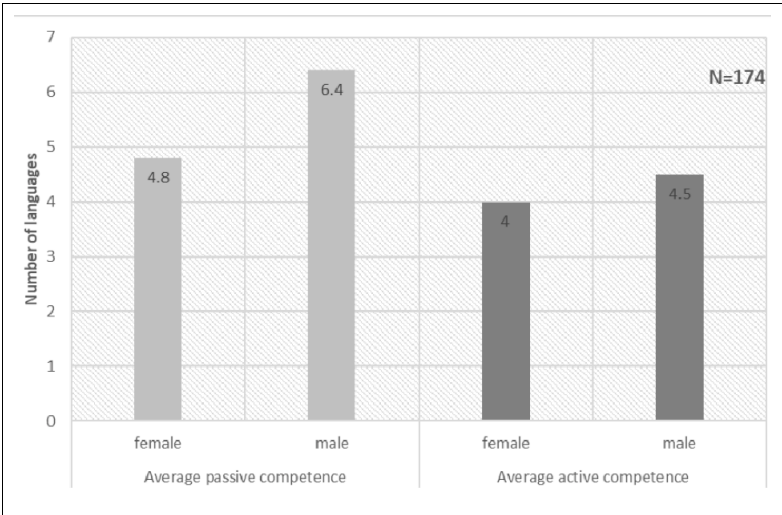


Figure 5. Self-reported average multilingual competence, in languages, by gender.

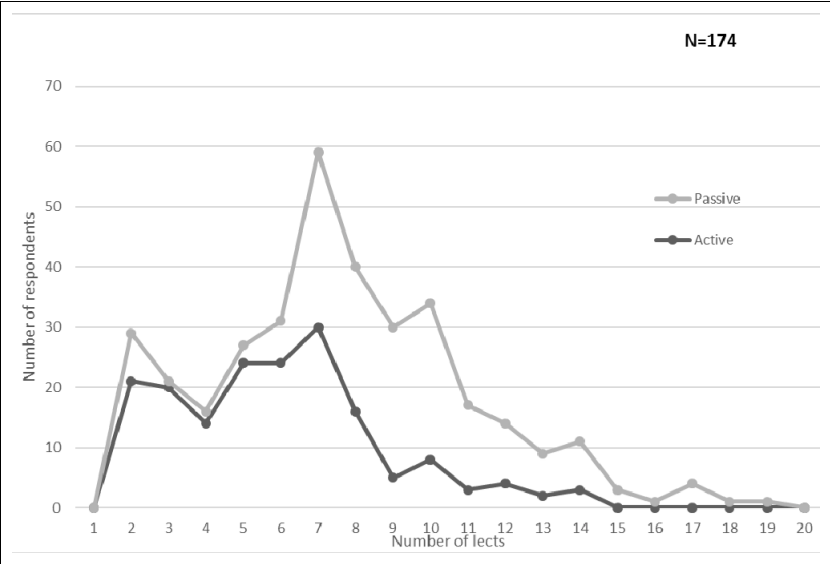


Figure 6. Self-reported multilingual competence, in lectors, all respondents.

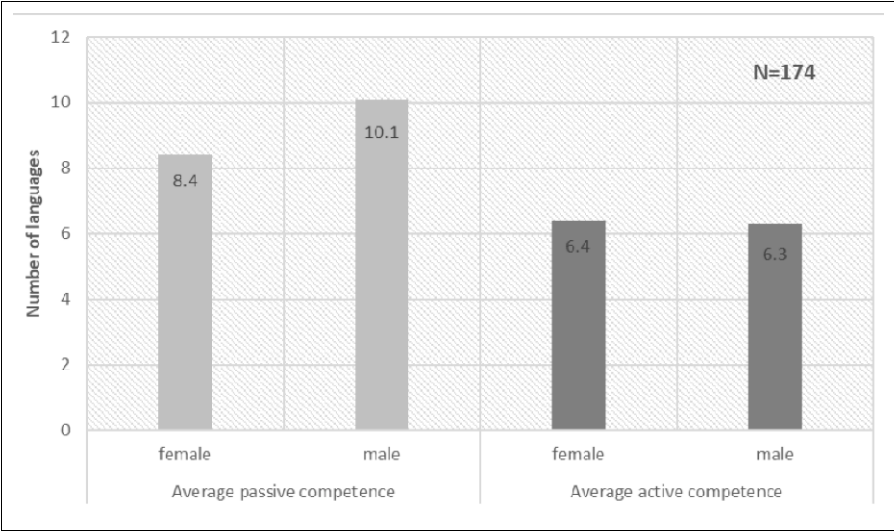


Figure 7. Self-reported average multilingual competence, in lectors, by gender.

3.3 Exoglossic languages and CPE in Lower Fungom

As is shown in Figures 8 to 10, self-reported rates of competence in exoglossic languages and CPE differ quite substantially. The main points that can be drawn from the data are given below:

1. About 90% of the respondents reported being able to communicate in CPE (see Figure 10).
2. The few people who reported no competence at all in CPE (19 in total, equal to about 10% of the total) were all over 51 years of age (see Figure 10).
3. Competence in English⁵ (see Figure 9) is higher among respondents aged 51 or under, with a peak of 100% of respondents aged 20 or under (though here our sample is very small).
4. French occupies a very marginal position within the lived language ecology of the area, with only 5 respondents (2.9%) reporting to have some competence in it (see Figure 8).

Though not shown in the charts, it is also to be noted that the few people who reported some competence in Munggaka ([mhk], used by the Basel mission, first, and then by the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon until about the 1960s) and German (a reminiscence of the pre-British colonial history of the area) were all aged 65 and over.

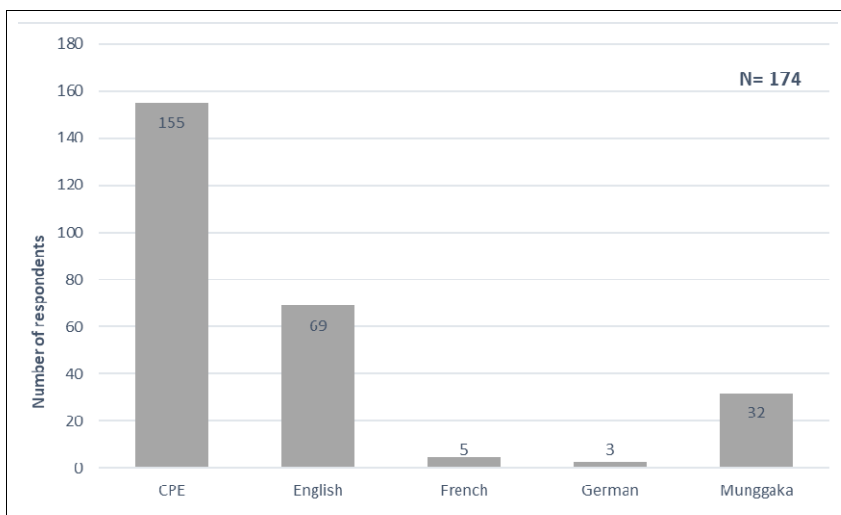


Figure 8. Self-reported rates of at least passive competence in exoglossic languages and CPE, all respondents.

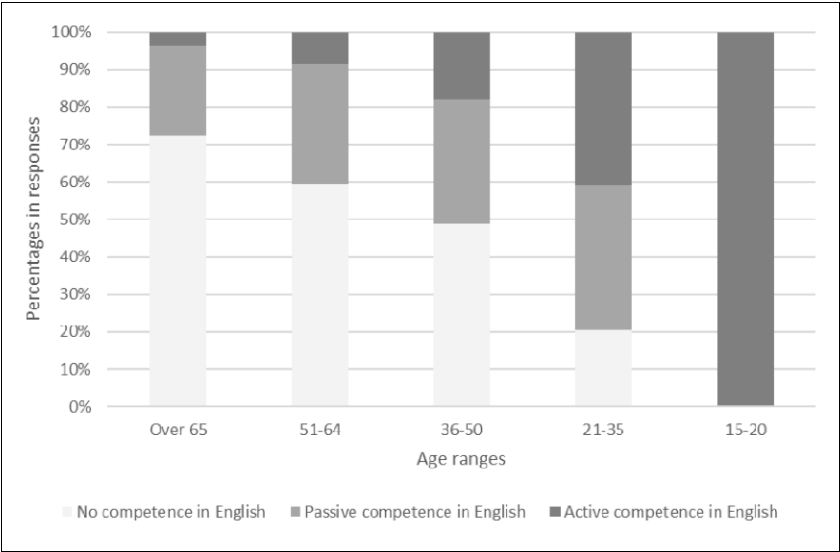


Figure 9. Self-reported degrees of competence in English.

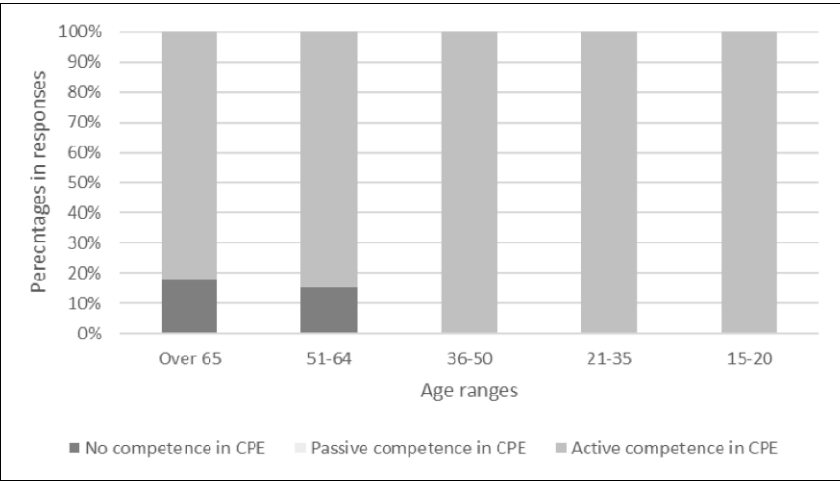


Figure 10. Self-reported degrees of competence in CPE, by age ranges.

The emerging picture is one of a situation in which CPE is increasingly being used, French is nearly absent, English is rather marginal except for the younger (e.g. schooled) generations, and local languages are still firmly established in the local language ecology.

3.4 Domains and motivations of use of the different languages

3.4.1 Passive competence

The main points can be summarized as follows:

1. The totality of respondents who had passive-only competence in some local lects reported that their main motivation is to be able to detect evil plans that others may be making against them.
2. No respondent reported to have a passive-only competence in CPE: CPE is either spoken or, for very few people, not known.
3. As for the other exoglossic languages, out of the 69 people who reported to have some competence in English, 50 reported to have passive-only competence. We did not make specific inquiries in this regard as our impression was that there was not an actual motivation for one to get a passive-only competence in English but, rather, these were cases of an early interruption in the learning (schooling) process.

3.4.2 Active competence

In an initial version of the interview guide that was used for this study, following established scholarly practices (all ultimately rooted in seminal works such as Fishman, 1965), we included questions focusing on the domains (e.g. the home, the church), categories of people (e.g. friends, family members, high-status individuals etc.), and topics that might be relevant for one to select one or the other lect. Di Carlo, Esene Agwara, and Nsen Tem noticed that respondents tended to answer, for a local lect, 'we speak [lect/village name] in [village name] and with those who can understand it' and, for an exoglossic language like English, 'we speak it with foreigners'. Faced with this 'misalignment', the team first assumed that they had not been able to adequately translate the notion of 'domain', 'topic', and 'different categories of interactants' into the locals' sociocultural realities. That is, at first they were not ready to doubt the universal applicability of the hierarchical compartmentalization of the linguistic space sanctioned by received scholarly wisdom (see, e.g., Fishman, 1967, 1972; on its assumed universality see, e.g., Graddol, 1997:12–13). Team members soon realized that this model was simply unable to capture the sociolinguistic reality they were being exposed to.

In fact, all the interviewees have stressed that, by using a given local vernacular with other speakers, their main goal is to induce in the latter a feeling of trust, unity, and friendship. The emerging picture is one where there are no actions, domains, or categories of interactants that require the use of a certain lect/language.⁶ This would mean that there are no stable, community-wide shared associations between a given local lect and any particular social meaning or

stereotype. Besides some interesting remarks to make at the level of indexical order (Silverstein, 2003; see also section 5 below), one of the expected outcomes of such a language ideology would be that metaphorical switches (Blom and Gumperz, 1972) are impossible to obtain via local lexis. As we will show later, calling this phenomenon ‘solidarity’ would mean oversimplifying the matter and leaving untapped its scientific value.

The only partial exceptions to this non-diglossic (non-polyglossic) language ideology are CPE and English. CPE is universally recognized as a convenient lingua franca that allows anyone to communicate freely in the whole of the surrounding region at large. It is also associated with urban life and modernity, two values that are central to many Lower Fungom residents. English is conceptualized differently from both local vernaculars and CPE. During interviews, we encountered (male) respondents who said ‘I use English to rebuke my children’ or ‘I use English during discussions about politics [to try to get the upper hand]’. At the same time, we did not record any instances of people saying they use English to look modern or of higher social status. This prevalence of authority over other features commonly associated with English in this part of the world (see, e.g., Anchimbe, 2006, 2013; Ngefac and Sala, 2006; Ngefac, 2008, 2010) can be probably understood by recalling two facts: patterns of socialization into English and the history of English in this rural area.

As for the socialization aspect, schooling is the only means through which one can learn English (cf. also Wolf, 2001:198–203). On the whole, however, schooling has remained a mirage for the overwhelming majority of people in Lower Fungom until recently, a fact that explains why so few adults and elderly people can speak it (see Figure 9). Historically, one must keep in mind that English first entered the Lower Fungom language ecology at the establishment of the British sub-divisional office in Fungom in the 1920s and essentially remained a ‘white man’s language’ until the late 1950s, i.e. when the first school was built in Misong by the Basel mission. Out of the several Christian churches present in the area, only the Catholic mission (established in the 1970s) used English, whereas the Basel mission (since 1957 ‘Presbyterian Church in Cameroon’) first promoted the use of Mungbaka [mhk] as the language of readings and of mass services, and only later gradually shifted towards the use of CPE in most non-Mungbaka speaking areas (Lang Michael Kpughe, p.c.).

What we have presented so far seems to indicate that the Lower Fungom linguistic market (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1975) is essentially divided into two components: on the one hand, a system of valorization of local languages devoid of notions of prestige and stereotypes (for a similar example from a different rural area of Cameroon, see Connell, 2009). On the other hand, English is associated

with values such as ‘authority’ and ‘prestige’ and, therefore, can be used to call up social stereotypes including those features, while CPE remains an essential tool for general communication, with possible associations with modernity and urbanity. The two components can be considered as two different ideological layers, with the latter being of more recent development and the former reflecting more traditional (likely pre-colonial) ideological configurations.

What we have assessed so far comes from the analysis of self-reported data. Let us now see whether looking at language use in interaction confirms or further problematizes the issue.

4 Data from language use

4.1 The use of English

Out of the ca. 45 hours of natural discourse recordings collected over the past 3 years, we have observed very few cases of the use of English in interaction. Most of them were due to the presence of Di Carlo who, being a European, was clearly a foreigner to be addressed using English. In one case, English was used by two adolescents who wanted to communicate ‘secretly’ (the topic of the interaction had to do with dating) as surrounding people were deemed unable to understand English.

Below (Example 1) we report one of the clearer examples of the use of English according to the local language ideology.

Example (1)

Setting: Missong Presbyterian Church, a mud-brick room where about 40 people can sit.

Participants: lay preacher (LP) and Christians (C).

After closing with the liturgy, LP passes a series of announcements, one of which is to introduce the researcher (Esene Agwara) to the congregation as a visitor. The interaction is in CPE, **English**, and *Missong*.

- 01 LP: **Beloved Christians in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** we di talk for wuna say wuna welcome. We be don first talk say (...) we di greet all the people dem wey dem come. We don see some guest dey among we noh? (...) ↑ Hein ↑?
 ‘Beloved Christians in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we welcome you all. We have all said that we should welcome all the guests who have visited. We have seen there is a guest amongst us, don’t we?’
- 02 C: **Yes**

- 03 LP: We don first talk say wuna sing that we song make we
welcome yi
 'We have first of all asked you to sing a song to welcome her'
- 04 C1: **We welcome [you in the name] of the Lord (...)**
- 05 C2: [↓ Kádó wóka dé ki ye wá ↓]
 'She has not yet introduced herself' (to the other Christians)
- 06 C1: **[We welcome you in the name of the Lord]**
- 07 C3: [↓ Kádó wóka ↓ dé ki ye] [wá
 'She has not yet introduced herself'
- 08 C2: [Kádó [wóka ↑ dé ki ye wá ↑]
 'She has not yet introduced herself'
- 09 C4: [Kádó wóka dé ki] ↑ ye wá ↑
 'She has not yet introduced herself'
- [...]
- 10 LP: ↑↑ **What is that** ↑↑?
 [...]
- 11 C2: *yam tu nyí bobé*
 'Mother of Bobe tune the song' (looking at the LP while saying this.
 Bobe's mother is C1)
- 12 C2: ↓ *yam tu* ↓ (looking at Bobe's mother)
 'Tune the song'
- 13 C5: ↑ Give we the song ↑
 'Tune the song!'
- 14 LP: ↑↑ **Give us that song** ↑↑
- 15 C2: ↓ *weh fi í yam* ↓
 'Please tune the song'
- 16 C1: **We welcome you in the name of the Lord**
 (crowd follows in the singing)

[KPAAMCAM-MISSONG-AD-ZOOM07-P-2017-05-17: 00:05:11-00:06:11]⁷

In this excerpt, the LP asks the congregation to welcome the researcher (Esene Agwara, a young woman) with a song. In line 1, after an introductory formula in English, the LP switches to CPE and acknowledges Esene Agwara's presence and then, in line 3, asks the congregation to sing the welcome song, a customary practice in situations like this one. While one member starts singing (in English) straight away (C1 in lines 4 and 6), others are hesitant to follow on the ground that the researcher has not yet introduced herself: they whisper in Missong to voice this disappointment to each other (lines 5, 7, 8, 9). This stops C1, who was singing. After one second of silence, the LP angrily switches to English and loudly rebukes the members for interrupting the song (line 10). The first person to

speak, then, is C2, who is also the first who opposed the idea of singing. While looking at the LP, she uses Missong to ask the lead singer twice (lines 11 and 12) to introduce the song. The LP's request is then reinforced by C5 in CPE (line 13) and the LP himself in English (line 14). C2, probably feeling threatened by this escalation of requests, implores the choir leader in Missong to sing the song (line 15). The excerpt ends with the choir leader singing the welcome song and the rest of the congregation following her.

What we see here essentially confirms what we had collected through interviews. By using English, the lay preacher re-asserts his position of authority within the congregation, a position that had been threatened by some of the church members when they voiced their disappointment in Missong. In other words, English allows the LP to call up a social stereotype associated with authority – not modernity or wealth or high education level – due to the fact that in Lower Fungom the main association of English has more to do with its locale-specific institutionalization rather than with how it is currently perceived in urban centres. Therefore, it is essentially associated with administrative power (colonial and then state institutions) and school and church hierarchies.

4.2 Cameroonian Pidgin English

CPE is by far the language we heard most often throughout our fieldwork. For one thing, both Esene Agwara and Ojong Diba are Anglophone Cameroonians who speak CPE; so locals always selected CPE when interacting with them. Moreover, it was common for two or more interactants using one of the local languages to switch to CPE whenever someone else approached who they knew could not understand the language they were using. When asked why they did so, all our consultants invariably said that they wanted to reassure the person they were not talking about him/her or about sensitive issues.

Clearly telling of the use of CPE among Lower Fungom locals is the following case of code-switching. An elderly man (N, from Buu) was talking with his friends, a mixed crowd from Lower Fungom, while they were sitting in a drinking place. At some point they engaged in a heated political argument. They started arguing using the two lects all of them were competent in (i.e. Missong and Abar) but, as the argument became more and more heated, one of the participants (E, from Abar) began to use English and N followed him. E and N used English for a few turns but then switched to CPE. We asked N why they would choose to move to CPE to discuss further and he told us that they did that to allow others to share their opinions about the topic. This example is also a confirmation of what we had collected through interviews about English being used during (heated) political discussions.

4.3 Local languages

Interactions in local languages were recorded in different settings: we targeted some public places, like the Abar market, Missong Presbyterian Church (Esene Agwara), or the drinking spots around the Abar market (Esene Agwara and Ojong Diba). As for the participants, we selected some of the many multilingual individuals we have profiled over the years (see section 3.1) according to their availability and had them record their interactions with a microphone they wore visibly around the neck for a number of hours (Ojong Diba).

In general, we observed that if individuals start using a given local lect in an interaction with another person, they tend to keep using it unless the interaction is perturbed by contextual changes requiring a change of code, such as when a new interactant joins them or a new person appears within hearing distance. Other types of code-switching are generally stigmatized, with the exception of isolated CPE words, which are used somewhat freely and are at times handy when speakers do not remember the right word in the lect they are using.

The following Example (2) attests to the degree of social salience of code-switching. It comes from a recording made by one of our main consultants in a drinking place using a microphone visibly hanging from his neck.

Example (2)

Setting: a drinking place at the Abar market. About 30 people are sitting drinking and chatting in small groups; the room is quite noisy.

Participants:

B, ca. 45-year old man, son to the chief of Missong; can speak Buu, Missong, Mashi, Munken, Mundabli, Mufu and CPE;

N, ca. 60-year old man from Buu; can speak Buu, Missong, Fang, and CPE; is married to B's older sister.

Languages used: Buu, **Missong**, *CPE*.

- 01 B: Nde (...) a ye ne (...) be de be
'Uncle... How are you? Isn't there kola?'
- 02 N: nfo *question* wa tume
'You had asked me before'
- 03 B: a fe ŋkwo mi tume be? a fe so hene. n du we kwe fa mi
emu be.
'What is it about? You remembered. I asked you to buy Kola for me.'
[noise 3 seconds]
- 04 B: ai ca n se keke wu!
'Ah! Don't flatter me!'

- 05 N: a ke ya le dzeng? ɲ wu ye bu ka *follow* wa ton
 ‘Did you come up to Fang? I heard that you were chased there’
- 06 B: ɲ ka *follow* be mi? ɲge du ye a ka de mi. e be kehe
 manto.
 ‘Chased away? It was not me, it was Manto’
- 07 N: a ke wou ye kem jo uwa de?
 [addressing other people sitting nearby] ‘Are you all listening to what I
 am saying?’
- 08 B: ben wou gin ta?
 ‘What should we listen to?’
- 09 N: a ge ke ke ta?
 ‘So, where did you go?’
- 10 B: *offlicense* wo ne mi wo me ma bahe ti ma
 ‘I reached here and saw you in this off license’
- 11 N: bi kie lahe
 ‘You are still a child’
 [After some grumbling, N stops speaking to B who then leaves.]

[KPAAM_CAM_RO_MULTILINGUALISM_NTO_ABARMARKETDAY-2015:
 00:28:02 - 00:29:31]

N comes from Buu while B does not but, from the perspective of the local etiquette, there are a number of reasons why one would expect B to speak to N in Buu:

- i) B is younger than N,
- ii) B’s mother is from Buu, and
- iii) B’s sister is married to N.

B (junior) initially does respect the etiquette by choosing to use Buu (lines 1–4). Then, N begins to reprimand B (line 5) and the latter does his best to argue against N’s insinuation in Buu (lines 6 and 8). Finally, probably feeling threatened by N’s inclusion of others in the discussion (line 7), B shifts to Missong (line 10). This has the effect of upsetting N (line 11) and, therefore, putting a sudden end to the interaction.

In theory, B and N could also talk in Missong because both can speak it. However, in this case, the switch caused a strong reaction on the part of N. Can we understand it simply as a reaction to B’s social distancing? We could, probably, but that would neutralize thicker, and possibly more fruitful readings of this interaction.

5 Identity *qua* categorical identification vs. identity *qua* relational identification

Extending Ferguson's (1959) insights on diglossia to include bilingualism, Fishman (1967) proposed to view language choice in interaction to be dependent on the fact that 'whereas one set of behaviours, attitudes and values [support and are] expressed in one language, another set of behaviours, attitudes and values [support and are] expressed in the other' (Fishman, 1967:29). The separation between the two sets / languages is 'most often along the lines of a High (H) language, on the one hand, utilized in conjunction with religion, education and other aspects of high culture, and a Low (L) language, on the other hand, utilized in conjunction with everyday pursuits of hearth, home and work' (Fishman, 1967:30). In a nutshell, Fishman's basic tenet is that language ideologies regimenting multilingual language use are 'most often' structured around notions of prestige and degrees of formality: at a closer look, however, it becomes clear that these features leak into languages as a consequence of their being distinctive of the speakers of these languages. By using a certain language, speakers are able to call up the features of its stereotypical speaker population and, therefore, be seen as members of that population (see, e.g. Eckert, 2012:94 and the 'iconisation process' proposed by Irvine and Gal, 2000).

Sociologists Brubaker and Cooper (2000) call this type of identity '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.)' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:15). This can account for the LP's choice of English in Example (1), but can hardly justify B's switch to Missong in Example (2).

In Example (1), by using English the LP indexes his membership in a *category* of people – i.e. British colonial officers, state administrators, church hierarchy, and school teachers – who have been until very recently the only ones that could be possibly associated with this language in the area: It comes as no surprise that the indexical effect obtained is one of second order, where a given sign (in this case a language) indexes a category which, in its turn, indexes a set of essential features (in this case, authority).

In Example (2), by contrast, the identities of both interactants changed based on the language of interaction: when Buu is used, B is junior and subordinated to N; when Missong is used, B is the chief's son and N loses his senior status. There are no stereotypes associated with either of the languages used. It is just a matter of indexing belonging to one or the other village community.

What we want to stress here is that the availability of village-specific linguistic codes allows the multilingual speaker to occupy different, village-specific *positions* in different webs of relations via the selection of one or the other code. In the terminology proposed by Brubaker and Cooper (2000), this is not an instance of ‘categorical identification’ but, rather, of ‘relational identification’, which entails that one’s perceived identity depends on one’s position within a specific web of relations. Thus, if we compare Example (1) and (2) we realize that the most essential difference between them lies in their being outcomes of two different conceptions of identity.

This makes Lower Fungom exemplary of a linguistic ecology in which two ideologies of identity coexist: one, probably of pre-colonial origin, is rooted in a relational conception of identity and targets local languages; the other, clearly connected with the exposure to English that locals have had, pivots around a conception of identity that links people to categorical, essentialist features and targets exoglossic languages like English and CPE. We are not aware of similar results in the study of multilingualism in countries of the outer circle. Moreover, we want to stress that this result leads us to a better appreciation of the role that English may play in Lower Fungom’s linguistic ecology: it not only occupies the top position of the local language hierarchy (cf., e.g., Graddol, 1997:12–13) but could in fact be more fruitfully viewed as a fundamentally alien entity that is bringing about radical cultural changes at deeper levels than are normally observed in the field of World Englishes. The questions arising from a situation such as the one we observe in Lower Fungom are of a completely different nature if compared to those characterizing World English studies in Cameroon (Chumbow and Simo Bobda, 1996; Ngefac, 2008; Anchimbe, 2013) and elsewhere focused on the countries of the outer circle.

6 Conclusion

Multilingualism in Lower Fungom is pervasive to the point of no speaker being monolingual. The language use patterns of these multilinguals evidence that their language ideologies include but are not limited to values and factors that mainstream theories typically associate with bi/multilingualism. Exoglossic languages, i.e. those endowed with prestige due to their local history, have been observed to be rather marginally used except for the younger generations while they are at school, by seniors to reprimand others, or in more formal gatherings like in church. CPE has been assessed as being a language of inclusiveness. Local languages, on their part, are used to index several relational rather than categorical identities. All this is telling of a linguistic ecology that is only partly compartmentalized and of language ideologies that allow the establishment of a

‘heteroglossia of identity conceptions’. Echoing Jenks and Lee (2016), here we adapt the Bakhtinian notion of heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981:esp. 290ff.) to consider the simultaneous co-presence and availability of different ideologies of identity: English (and, to a lesser extent, possibly also CPE) allows the projection of categorical identities; local languages, by contrast, can only allow speakers to project relational identities.

Thanks to works done by other scholars in different rural areas of Africa (Moore, 2004; Connell, 2009; Kaji, 2013; Lüpke, 2016; Cobbinah, Hantgan, Lüpke and Watson, 2017), we are also aware that this ‘heteroglossia of identity conceptions’ in one and the same speech community might be found elsewhere in Africa and beyond (see, e.g., François, 2012 focused on a Melanesian context). This, in its turn, might also contribute to a better understanding of many identity-related processes in urban contexts where the omnipresence of identity *qua* categorical identification might be seen as an epistemological limit to overcome in future research.

Notes

1. The linguistic scenario depicted in the Ethnologue was updated in 2011, but data discussed here is slightly different as it includes research that was carried out more recently. So, we consider Buu to be a separate language [no ISO code] and not, as it is found in the Ethnologue, part of the Ji cluster [boe] with Mufu and Mundabli.
2. For instance, across the Nigerian border, Jukunoid languages are found that have no close resemblances with the Yemne-Kimbi languages spoken in Lower Fungom.
3. One of the anonymous reviewers suggested that this is evidence of essentialism in the local language ideologies. In a nutshell, essentialism is characterized by the association of a population *and* an imagined ‘essence’, i.e. behavioural or existential features distinguishing (in fact, stereotyping) the given population from the others. In Lower Fungom, lects do distinguish the individual villages, but this distinction has no associated stereotypes of any sort (cf. also Di Carlo, 2018; Esene Agwara, in preparation; Ojong Diba, 2019).
4. Independent research run by Angela Nsen Tem and aimed at assessing multilingual competence in the area has by and large confirmed these figures (Nsen Tem, submitted).
5. Whenever we refer to ‘English’ we are necessarily referring to Cameroonian English (see Wolf, 2001:187).
6. Ongoing research on people’s attitudes towards local languages and varieties through adapted MGT (Esene Agwara, in preparation) indicates that there are no established social stereotypes associated with specific villages.
7. Excerpts from recordings are provided with metadata indicating file name and timing within the file.

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