Interdisciplinarity in areal documentation: Experiences from Lower Fungom, Cameroon

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Abstract

The Lower Fungom region of Northwest Cameroon is noteworthy for its exceptional linguistic diversity: Seven languages, or small language clusters, are spoken in its thirteen recognized villages. This situation prompts consideration of not only standard documentary concerns, such as how to collect sufficient information to grammatically describe each of the region's languages, but also raises the question: What factors have allowed Lower Fungom to develop and maintain its extreme linguistic diversity? Answering this question would not only be of relevance to linguistic scholarship but also has potential applications for addressing language endangerment in other parts of the world to the extent that the maintenance of linguistic diversity in Lower Fungom provides an obvious counterexample to dominant worldwide trends. This paper considers the ways in which the standard documentary toolkit has been augmented by an interdisciplinary approach to studying the region, allowing for the creation of a documentary record which covers both the synchronic features of the target languages and offers sufficient ethnographic and historical context to allow us to begin to understand what has allowed it to maintain its surprising level of diversity. In addition to outlining key results of this interdisciplinary research, concrete recommendations are provided for linguists interested in engaging in similar kinds of work.

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1 Documenting languages or language dynamics?

The rise of the documentary paradigm as an approach to the study of endangered languages has been, at least rhetorically, associated with an emphasis on the value of interdisciplinary collaboration as a means to come to a fuller understanding of the diverse linguistic practices of communities throughout the world.[1] Especially salient symbols of this can be found in edited collections, e.g., Gippert et al. (2006) and Thieberger (2012), which devote considerable space to how to collect linguistic data relevant to fields such as anthropology, botany, or geography—often to the point of backgrounding the traditional descriptive linguistic toolkit designed to elucidate structural patterns in grammars (see also Evans (2008: 342–343)).

Despite this, endangered language linguistics does not seem to have been overrun by projects with interdisciplinary focus, with most work in this area remaining more or less purely "linguistic" in nature (though often with an eye toward at least documenting culturally significant forms of language). There are clear reasons for this. On the one hand, in an academic world that is built upon disciplinary foundations, working across disciplines requires a high level of expense with comparatively little "overt" payoff, at least as measured in the usual terms such as publishing in high-profile outlets. Effective interdisciplinary research often require collaborators to gain fairly deep knowledge about how practitioners of other disciplines collect and theorize on their data, and may further result in academic outputs that are neither fish nor fowl, as it were, in terms of disciplinary evaluation. Is a culturally-informed collection of place names (see section 3.5) an

[1] I would like to acknowledge audience members at the Third International Conference on Language Documentation and Conservation for their comments on the original presented version of this paper. Various collaborators have also contributed to this work, most of whom are cited below, and Pierpaolo Di Carlo deserves special mention in this regard. Support for the development of this paper was provided by U.S. National Science Foundation Award BCS-1246525. The broader research on which this paper is based has been supported by funding from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology Department of Linguistics, the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (under NEH fellowship #500006 and NEH grant RZ-50817-07), the U.S. National Science Foundation (under NSF Grant BCS-0853981), the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme, and the University at Buffalo College of Arts and Sciences and Humanities Institute.

instance of linguistics, anthropology, or geography? On the other hand, time and resources for collaborative work are inevitably quite limited, and documentary linguists, in particular, are often pulled more strongly towards collaborative efforts with speaker communities (typically aimed at language maintenance activities) than collaboration with specialists of other disciplines. (See Good (2012a) for discussion relevant to the presence context.)

The purpose of the present paper is to highlight the results of interdisciplinary research on patterns of exceptional linguistic diversity in a region of the Cameroonian Grassfields known as Lower Fungom. The primary interdisciplinary collaboration in terms of individuals involved has been relatively limited, consisting of a pairing of the present author, identifying as a linguist, with a single collaborator, Pierpaolo Di Carlo, identifying as an anthropologist with a strong interest in the role of language in cultural reproduction. However, in terms of sources of data, the work has been quite a bit more interdisciplinary. In particular, data that is linguistic, anthropological, geographic, and historical in nature has been brought to bear on the question: *Why is Lower Fungom so linguistically diverse?* In discussing the interdisciplinary approach we have taken to this question, this paper hopes to serve both to highlight what is possible when linguists look at their research with an interdisciplinary frame of mind and to also lead to practical recommendations regarding how such work can be done effectively, even with relatively limited resources. The key lessons in this regard will be seen to be: (i) the utility of structuring interdisciplinary research around a particular research question that is sensible to scholars with different backgrounds and (ii) the importance of the specific skillsets and "temperaments" that different collaborators bring with them to a research project. It will also be seen that adopting an interdisciplinary approach can ultimately lead to a more informed view of the ideal linguistic foci for a documentary project, thereby having a significant long-term impact on documentary activities.

In section 2, general background information is given on the Lower Fungom region in order to provide context for later discussion. A description of the five types of interdisciplinary data that have been explored in current research on the languages of the region is given in section 3, with the relevance of the data to understanding the histories of Lower Fungom communities interspersed

throughout that section. General lessons that emerge from this specific case study are then offered in section 4.

2 Lower Fungom: Linguistic background

The Lower Fungom region is one of the most linguistically diverse parts of the Cameroonian Grassfields, itself an area whose linguistic diversity has been noted for some time (Stallcup 1980: 44). Located in the Grassfields' northwest periphery, the core inhabited area stretches roughly ten kilometers both north to south and east to west. In figure 1, a map of Lower Fungom and surrounding areas is given. Lower Fungom itself is found in the center of the map and is bounded roughly by the Yemne river to the west and the Kimbi river to the north and east, with its southern border running in a rough line between the market settlement of Yemgeh and the village of Mekaf and the villages of Ajumbu and Fungom.[2] Yemgeh and Ajumbu are both part of Lower Fungom, while Mekaf and Fungom are not.

Table 1 lists the linguistic affiliations of each of the Lower Fungom villages along with rough population estimates. Dashed lines indicate villages whose varieties are sufficiently distinctive from closely related varieties that they are probably best associated with their own "language" if only linguistic criteria (such as unacquired mutual intelligibility) are considered.

The languages of the referential Yemne-Kimbi subgroup (see table 1) are restricted to Lower Fungom. Of the other two languages, Naki is spoken in the Lower Fungom village Mashi and also in settlements outside of Lower Fungom, three of which, Mekaf, Small Mekaf, and Mashi Overside, appear in the map in figure 1. Kung is spoken only within the village of Kung but has been classified with the Central Ring languages found to the south, which include Mmen [bfm]. A dialect of Mmen is spoken in Fungom, a village to the south of the Lower Fungom village of Ajumbu. (For largely accidental historical reasons, Fungom lent its name to the wider region.) While Lower Fungom's languages can all be reasonably classified as Bantoid, the five Yemne-Kimbi languages

[2] The body of water we refer to as the "Yemne river" has no standard Western name. See Good et al. (2011: fn. 2) for discussion of the name used here.

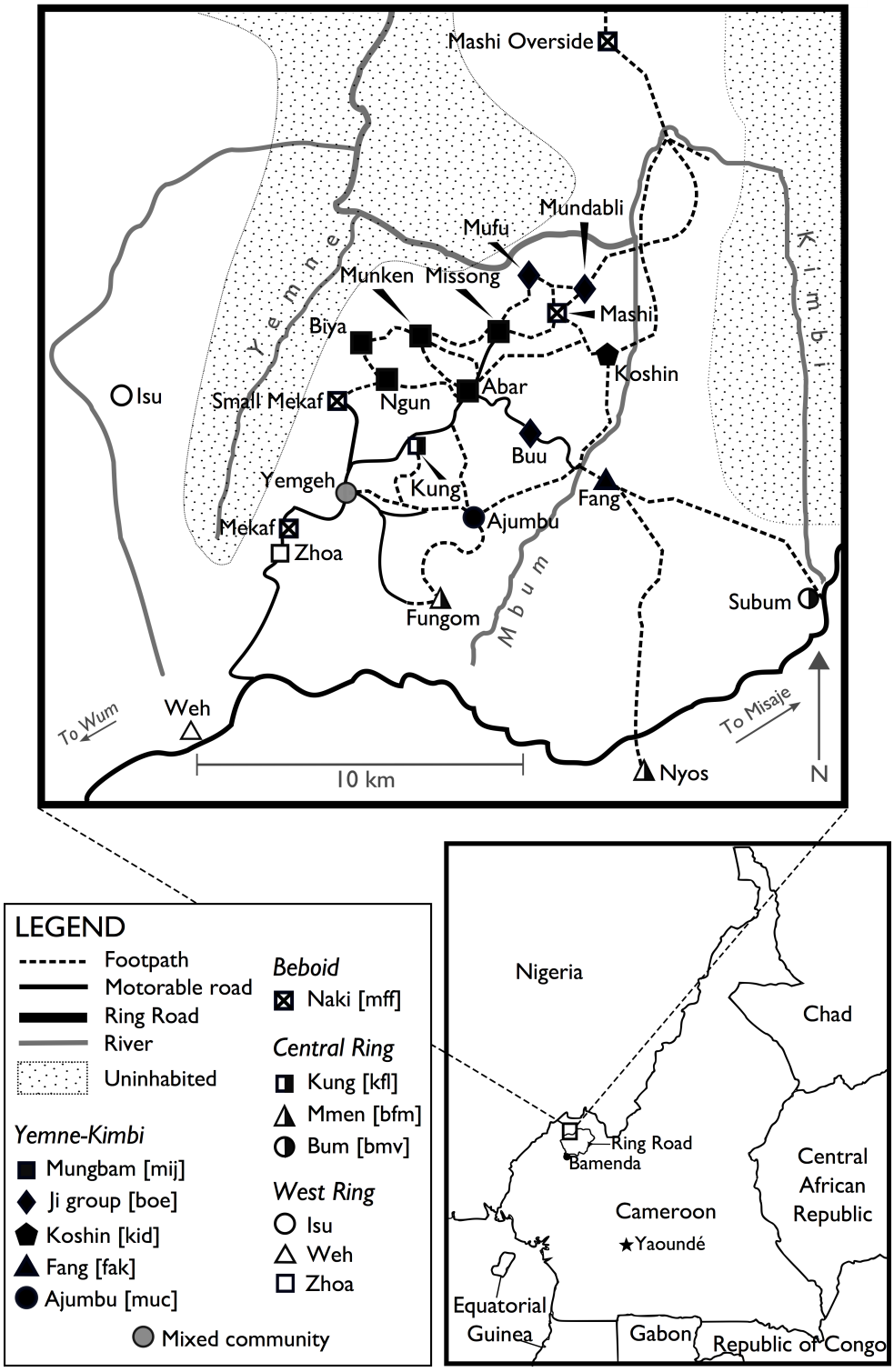

Figure 1: Lower Fungom and surrounding area

SUBGROUP	LANGUAGE	VILLAGE	POPULATION
Yemne-Kimbi	Mungbam [mij]	Abar	650–850
		Munken	around 600
		Ngun	150–200
		Biya	50–100
		Missong	around 400
	Ji [boe]	Mundabli	350–450
		Mufu	80–150
		Buu	100–200
	Fang [fak]	Fang	4,000–6,000
	Koshin [kid]	Koshin	3,000–3,500
	Ajumbu [muc]	Ajumbu	200–300
Beboid	Naki [mff]	Mashi	300–400
Central Ring	Kung [kfl]	Kung	600–800

Table 1: Lower Fungom villages

do not have any established close relatives outside of the region, nor can they be straightforwardly shown to be closely related to each other.[3] The linguistic picture is paralleled by an ethnographic one which shows considerable diversity in social organization across the region's villages as well. More detailed discussion of the region is provided in Good et al. (2011); Di Carlo (2011); Good (2013); Di Carlo & Good (2014+).

Current research on the languages of Lower Fungom involves the usual sorts of activities associated with language documentation and description, and has yielded traditional outputs such as the descriptive grammar of Mungbam of Lovegren (2013) as well as more targeted studies such as the phonological and morphological investigation of Buu of Ngako Yonga (2013). At the same time, the work is driven by a broader theoretical question associated with much work in contemporary linguistic typology, namely *What's where why?* (Bickel 2007: 239). In this case, the question has been more narrowly formulated to the Lower Fungom situation as, *Why is the region so linguistically diverse?* Consideration of the issues raised by such a question seems especially timely given that Lower Fungom is a clear counterexample to global trends of language endangerment and loss. Understanding what has allowed it to develop and maintain such a level of diversity, therefore, may

[3] See Watters (1989) for further background on the Bantoid subgroup of Niger-Congo. Roughly speaking, it can be characterized as comprising the (Narrow) Bantu languages and their closest relatives.

provide useful lessons for language maintenance activities in parts of the world where diversity is under greater immediate threat.

It is clear that a question of the kind just formulated cannot be answered with linguistic data alone. Typical documentary and descriptive linguistic activities provide the *what* of language diversity, but understanding the *why* requires something more. Our approach to this has been to examine ethnographic, geographic, historical, as well as other kinds of information, side-by-side with the results of more purely linguistic work to look for cases where the different strands of data converge on a coherent explanation for a given aspect of the region's diversity. The next section of this paper exemplifies the range of data that has been employed to this point.

3 Interdisciplinary data and Lower Fungom

3.1 Linguistic, ethnographic, archaeological, geographic, and historical data

As mentioned above, in seeking to understand why Lower Fungom is so linguistically diverse, we have attempted to combine data from interdisciplinary sources. Our hope is that these strands of evidence will converge in a way that allows for a unified explanation for at least some aspects of the region's diversity. On the whole, we believe we have been successful in using interdisciplinary data to develop historical models which provide context for understanding the region's diversity and are in the process of further exploring how regional language ideologies and patterns of multilingualism play a role in its maintenance. I do not fully explore these developments here—since the focus is on the value of interdisciplinarity for language documentation rather than specific research results—but allude to them at various points in this section and in section 4 for purposes of illustration.

One of the Lower Fungom villages in particular, Missong, will play an especially prominent role in the discussion since it represents an exemplary instance where different types of data come together to give us a coherent account of its linguistic exceptionality. It, therefore, is particular useful for illustrating the sorts of results one can achieve by combining data from different disciplines.

3.2 Comparative linguistic data

As a project built around understanding patterns of linguistic diversity, the collection of linguistic data is, of course, central to its activities. Significantly, however, there is a strong comparative element to the data collection. While most projects in language documentation operate in a mode where they are oriented primarily towards the "ancestral code" of a community (Woodbury 2011: 177) (see also Childs et al. (2014)), the work on Lower Fungom is more concerned with examining how the different lexicogrammatical codes of the region relate to each other (and to other codes spoken in the wider area as well). Gathering comparative data involves the usual methods associated with single-code documentation, with an additional emphasis in many cases on targeted elicitation in domains of grammar that are believed to be particularly valuable in understanding historical relationships among the languages in question.

To pick a concrete example, all of the languages of Lower Fungom show noun class systems that can be informally described as "reduced" variants of the well-known Bantu-type noun class system (though, in making this characterization, I do not mean to imply the relationship involves straightforward historical "decay"; see Good (2012b)). Examining their noun class systems in parallel provides a number of useful isoglosses, as can be seen in the noun class systems given in Good et al. (2011). Beginning with noun class data, I will focus in this section on the grammatical and lexical features of Mungbam, which consists of five closely related varieties, bringing in data from other languages where relevant for purposes of illustration. The discussion of Mungbam draws heavily on Lovegren (2013), which provides a "polylectal" grammar of the language drawing on data from all five varieties. Of all of the project outputs to date, this work most strongly exemplifies its comparative linguistic orientation.

In table 2 and table 3, the noun class systems of the Missong and Munken varieties of Mungbam are presented respectively. For each noun class, two forms are given, one associated with the class prefix found on nouns themselves and the other indicating the form of an agreement marker on elements which show agreement with the noun (e.g., determiners). Capital letters are used to reference different kinds of assimilating consonants. Grave and acute accents associated with

agreement markers should be interpreted as indicating that a given class or concord is coded with a lower or higher tone (respectively) than segmentally homophonous counterparts, but with the precise tonal realization dependent on the stem that the relevant marker appears with. Numbers for the noun classes attempt to follow conventions associated with Bantu noun classes (see, e.g, Maho (1999); Katamba (2003)), following standard practice, though these should not be associated with strict reconstructions. Paired noun classes are indicative of the most common singular/plural pairings in the varieties. These tables abstract away from various complications. Fuller description can be found in Lovegren (2013: 105–145).

SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	ù-/Ø-	w`-	2	ba-	bu´-
3	ú-	w´-	4	í-	y´-
5L	ì-	y`-	6	a-	w´-
5H	í-	y´-	13	ki-...(-Cə)	ky´-
7	ki-	k´-	8	bi-	by´-
9	ì-	y`-	10	í-	y´-
19	fi-	f´-	18a	mu-	mu´-
6a	aN-	mu´-			
14	bu-	bu`-			

Table 2: The noun class system of the Missong variety of Mungbam

SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	ù-/Ø-	w`-	2	bə-	b´-
3	ú-	w´-	4	í-	y´-
5L	ì-	y`-	6	a-	n´-
5H	í-	y´-	13	ki-...(-lə)	ky´-
12	a-	k´-	8	bi-	by´-
9	ì-	y`-	10	í-	y´-
19	ʃi-	ʃ´-	18a	mu-	mw´-
6a	N-	m´-			
14	bu-	bw`-			

Table 3: The noun class system of the Munken variety of Mungbam

A cursory comparison of the noun class systems in table 2 and table 3 reveals them to be quite similar. There are some clear differences, e.g., the singular associated with plural Class 8 in Munken has a strikingly different form of its nominal prefix (*a-*) than that of Missong (*ki-*)—to the

extent that it is not even clear whether they should be associated with a single etymological class (Lovegren 2013: 132–137), hence their different numerical assignment of Class 7 vs. Class 12 in the tables. However, for the most part, the differences can be seen as representing relatively minor phonological divergences. This basic pattern holds across all five Mungbam varieties, presenting strong linguistic evidence for their close relationship, which is important given that local language ideologies treat the varieties of each of the five villages as being distinct "languages" (Lovegren 2013: 2).

We can contrast Mungbam noun class systems with the system of Ajumbu, a one-village language of Lower Fungom, as given in table 4. While some similarities can be found among the Ajumbu and Mungbam noun class systems (e.g., in Classes 8 and 6a), the Ajumbu system is clearly much more distinctive from either Mungbam system than Missong and Munken are to each other. Thus, it is relatively straightforward to use comparative grammatical data to establish that Ajumbu and Mungbam should be grouped as separate languages. This data cannot resolve whether or not Missong and Munken should be considered separate "languages", but, from a research perspective, this is less important than simply knowing that Missong and Munken are much more closely related to each other than either is to Ajumbu.

SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	Ø-	w`-	2	a-	b´-
5	Ø-	y´-	6	a-	y´-
5	Ø-	k´-	7(a)	kə- (-lə)	k´-
7	kə-	k´-	8	bə-	b´-
9	`-	y`-	10	´-	y´-
19	fə-	f´	18a	m-	m´-
6a	m-	m´-			

Table 4: The noun class system of Ajumbu

The comparative data presented to this point is relatively straightforward in interpretation: It delineates a major genealogical boundary among the speech varieties of three Lower Fungom villages. Similar data can be presented to establish the distinctiveness of all of the region's "languages", where, here, a set of varieties is treated as a "language" if they share an ISO 639-3 code

as given in table 1 (Good et al. 2011)).[4] However, our comparative investigation has also yielded significant results when we look at the grammars and lexicons of varieties of the same "language". For instance, even though the five varieties comprising Mungbam are clearly much more similar to each than any of the other languages of Lower Fungom, the Missong variety is especially distinctive in its grammatical and lexical features.

Considering the lexicons of the five Mungbam varieties, for example, the Missong variety is the most divergent from the other four, as seen in table 5 where cognacy percentages are given for items in a 200-term wordlist (data provided by Jesse Lovegren, personal communication). As can be seen, while the four other Mungbam varieties tend to share around ninety-percent cognacy, for Missong, the percentage of shared items never reaches even eighty percent.

	Abar	Biya	Ngun	Munken	Missong
Abar	—				
Biya	90	—			
Ngun	89	93	—		
Munken	88	92	90	—	
Missong	77	74	73	77	—

Table 5: Lexicostatistical similarities across the five Mungbam varieties

More striking are the divergent patterns found in Missong with respect to a process of verbal ablaut that affects a subclass of verbs (not fully overlapping) in all Mungbam varieties as part of the coding of aspectual distinctions. (This pattern is roughly comparable to that associated with the tense marking found in so-called strong verbs in Germanic languages.) Examples are given in table 6 (see Good et al. (2011: 123) for earlier discussion of these forms and Lovegren (2013: 189–193) for a broader overview of this phenomenon in Mungbam). The two classes of stem forms are labelled as Perfective and Imperfective to reflect their approximate functions. In Munken, the general pattern is that, if a verb does undergo ablaut, the Perfective will show a front vowel and the Imperfective a back vowel, and this is the more typical pattern across the varieties. In Missong, however, a reverse relationship holds. Moreover, Missong, uniquely among

[4] See Cysouw & Good (2013: 336–339) for some of the problems associated with adopting such a simplistic approach to the language/dialect division.

the Mungbam varieties, shows Perfective/Imperfective forms where the Imperfective is coded with a nasal consonant not seen in the Perfective. These differences are not suggestive of mere gradual phonetic drift but indicative of a more abrupt process of change of some kind.

MISSONG		MUNKEN		
PFV	IPFV	PFV	IPFV	GLOSS
ji	*je*	*ja*	*ja*	'steal'
gbə	*gbe*	*gbi*	*gbo*	'fall'
ma	*mɔ*	*mɛ*	*mɔ*	'soak'
to	*ti*	*ti*	*to*	'come'
noa	*nɛŋ*	*ŋan*	*ŋan*	'slice'
wa	*waŋ*	*wan*	*wan*	'keep'
nyoa	*nyaŋ*	*nyɛ*	*nya*	'stay'

Table 6: Verbal ablaut in Missong and Munken

A final indicator of Missong's divergence from the other varieties comes from its pronominal system. As described in Lovegren (2013: 152), the personal pronoun systems of the Mungbam varieties are largely cognate with one clear exception. In the second person singular, Missong shows a pronoun with a form *bì*, while the rest of Mungbam shows the following forms in the same paradigmatic position: *wɛ̀* (Abar), ɔ̀ (Biya), *wɔ̀* (Munken), and *wɔ̀* (Ngun). The latter four can be easily seen as related to each other, while the Missong form cannot be.

We have seen, then, that the comparative linguistic data provides us with the *what* of the *What's where why?* question that has informed much of the work on Lower Fungom. In this case, the "what" comprises the fact that one sees clearly distinct languages (e.g., Ajumbu vs. Mungbam), and, even within "languages", there are still interesting patterns of divergence among varieties. At the same time, the linguistic data alone cannot tell us why these particular languages and varieties happen to be the way they are. This is where data from other disciplines needs to be considered, and, in the following section, I will begin to do this by summarizing some significant results derived from ethnographic investigation. A recurrent topic in the discussion below will be the linguistic divergence of Missong, which will serve as a useful thread linking together the data derived from a variety of sources.

3.3 Ethnographic data

After comparative linguistic data, the next most extensive class of data that has been collected on the communities of Lower Fungom can be broadly classified as ethnographic. This includes types of ethnographic information that could be collected for almost any community, such as oral histories and information on patterns of intermarriage, to information more specific to Grassfields societies, such as the composition of village secret societies or lists of chiefs who are reported as having led a particular village. Collection of the latter kind of data was greatly facilitated by advanced consultation of existing ethnographic descriptions such as Chilver & Kaberry (1968). Fortunately, much ethnographic work of this sort (especially comparatively older work) is written in a style that is fairly accessible. Detailed discussion of the comparative ethnography of Lower Fungom can be found in Di Carlo (2011). Here, I will first highlight what I believe to be a useful general lessons for the linguist when making use of data of this kind and then discuss more specifically how ethnographic data has helped us better understand some linguistic features of Lower Fungom, again focusing on Missong.

It would, of course, be impossible for most linguists to collect ethnographic data with the same level of expertise as a cultural anthropologist. However, for a linguist with some familiarity of salient cultural characteristics of the communities whose languages they are studying, certain kinds of data can be collected with relative ease. For instance, I have personally found oral histories of Lower Fungom villages to be useful to collect merely as an example of a text that is easy to elicit from speakers, even without necessarily being specifically interested in their thematic content. In this case, the difficulty, for the documentary linguist is not in gathering oral histories but, rather, in understanding how to interpret them. In particular, for research purposes, it is not advisable to treat oral histories as "literal" histories in the academic sense. Vansina (1985) is an important work on this topic.

To pick a concrete case illustrating the difficulties involved in interpreting oral histories from the general Grassfields area of Cameroon, though not Lower Fungom specifically, claims of "Tikar" origins among various groups in the region are quite relevant here (Chilver & Kaberry 1971). Lin-

guistically, the term *Tikar* is used to refer to a specific language with ISO 639-3 code [tik] spoken around the eastern fringes of the Grassfields area. However, a number of communities speaking languages quite distinctive from Tikar (in the local context) are associated with oral claims of "Tikar" origin. Chilver & Kaberry (1971: 14) make clear, however, that such claims of Tikar origin should not be interpreted literally but, rather, as a means of legitimizing a certain style of kingship associated with the Tikar, just as, for instance, the mythical Trojan origins of Ancient Rome were used to legitimize its power. (The use of terms deriving from the name *Caesar* in European countries as a title for individuals with significant authority is also comparable in this regard.)

A somewhat different example of the problems involved in over-literal interpretation of ethnographic data can be found in chief lists. These are orally transmitted lists of the chiefs who have ruled over a particular village (or other relevant unit). They may be recounted as part of an oral history, but are a distinctive cultural object with their own special interpretive requirements. In literate societies, genealogies and succession lists will tend to be fixed in written form and, therefore, not readily alterable. In oral societies, by contrast, they can be actively changed to reflect new social realities, as in the example of the Gonja in Northern Ghana, as described by Goody & Watt (1963: 310). Their mythical founder shifted from having seven sons to five at some point in a span of sixty years, following a change in political organization of the group from comprising seven divisions to five.

In the case of chief lists, this means that we should not take them to be literal retellings of the names of those who held the position of chief, but, rather, should instead see them as expressions of the sort of history a given community's leadership associates with its claims of authority. In this regard, we see an interesting divergence in the chief lists of the Lower Fungom communities. As noted in Di Carlo (2011: 74), one straightforward way to compare chief lists across villages is to examine their "structural time depth" (Vansina 1985: 118). The typical chief list in the area consists of six to eight names. In Missong, however, the chief list is only four names in length (Di Carlo 2011: 84). This is consistent with aspects of its oral traditions that treat it as having

been founded in recent times by immigrant groups. Does this mean that Missong is, in fact, a recent formation? In fact, this has been our ultimate conclusion, but we cannot use ethnographic data such as this as our sole justification. All we can know from this is that Missong is *presented* as having less historical depth than most of the other Lower Fungom villages. However, if we encounter other evidence of Missong "recentness", then it will become possible to suggest with more reliability that Missong actually is a comparatively new village.

In fact, there is other ethnographic evidence that corroborates the idea that Missong is a recently formed village. In particular, there is a general lack of "cohesiveness" in the village's structure (Di Carlo 2011: 84). Its quarters—a unit of sociopolitical organization just below the level of the village—are more politically autonomous than what is found in other villages of the region, for instance having more distinctive ritual sites within them what is seen elsewhere, where ritual sites are more likely to be centralized in the quarter of the chief.[5] This lack of cohesiveness is clearly consonant with a history that treats it as a relatively recent federation of groups not formerly united.

Additionally, local cultural attitudes towards the Missong linguistic variety itself are relevant to the question of its relative age. Quite the contrary to popular associations of indigenous codes with "ancestral" varieties, one finds in Lower Fungom a quite intriguing characterization of the origins of the Missong variety of Mungbam as having been "stolen" from one of the other Mungbam villages. This history of theft is not simply an accusation that the other villages make about the Missong, since the Missong adopt this story as well.[6]

What we see, in this case, is a consistent ethnographic picture of Missong as a "recent" village, further understood to have formed from groups once speaking a different language or languages. This history is perhaps most effectively presented in the words of an individual who is from Missong, Buo Makpa Amos, as recorded by Pierpaolo Di Carlo. The place names referred to in the

[5] To understand this discussion, it is helpful to be clear on what is meant by the term *village* in this context. While villages will typically be associated with a certain degree of spatial clustering of settlement, as expected based on how the term is used in colloquial English, here, the conceptualization of the village as a political union of different kin groups is more significant than its actual physical manifestation. This alliance of kin groups is visible most saliently through the use of a common "language", making it a social unit of clear significance for documentary linguistic work.

[6] In the local context, this characterization of the Missong as language "thieves" does not appear to be particularly offensive, perhaps due to comparatively weak language–culture links when set against the norm for, for instance, in Western societies. See Di Carlo & Good (2014+) for detailed discussion.

quotation below can be found in the map in figure 1 (where the village of Subum is part of the general Bum area referred to below). Note, in particular, the characterization of Missong not as any kind of ancient unity but, rather, as a federation of independent groups and the explicit linking of a common language to an expression of a common political identity:

> As my father told me, we were from Fang side, even in Bum side there were many of us. When you people are cooperating you speak one language. If you speak one language, you cooperate. As a group of relatives moves, the brothers may decide to split, each choosing a different place to stay. This is what happened to us. We left the early place in Fang side as a whole and arrived in Abar. From here we scattered. Now, we Bambiam from Missong have relatives in Abar, in Buu, in Ngun. Each family attached itself to a village and therefore had to speak the general language used there. For example, we Bambiam attached ourselves to Bikwom and hence had to adopt their language; Bikwom people are attached to Bidjumbi and Biandzəm to form the village of Missong, and this is why they all had to use the same language, that is, Missong. This is why all the descendants of the family that moved from Fang side now speak different languages.

As just discussed, we cannot uncritically jump from ethnographic data such as this to concrete historical reconstruction. However, the evidence seems sufficient enough at this point to at least seriously consider that the Missong *ideology* of recentness is, in fact, connected to an actual recentness of formation, at least when set against other villages in the area. This naturally leads to a further suspicion: That Missong's linguistic distinctiveness (see section 3.2) may result from its being a historically shallow formation from groups which formerly spoke diverse languages, only recently shifting to a Mungbam variety, presumably incorporating the influences of other languages into it as part of the process of kin group federation. In other words, a "mixed" Missong history may have led to a "mixed" linguistic variety. The challenge that remains is to see the extent to which we can corroborate this story with data from other sources.

As mentioned above, it is clearly not the case that a linguist would be able to collect ethnographic data with the same level of skill as a trained anthropologist. Moreover, they would not be

able to, on their own, develop appropriate models for interpreting such data. At the same time, if these models have already been developed, gathering some useful data need not be particularly difficult. The Missong case just discussed involved, for example, collecting oral histories, independently useful as analyzed texts; chief lists, which, if significant to the local societies, can be easily collected even using a language of wider communication; and statements of local language attitudes, which can also be easily collected even in a language of wider communication. Of course, the specific kinds of information of this type one can collect will depend on cultural context—chief lists will not be found across the world (though, of course, genealogies, more generally, can be found anywhere). However, to the extent that one can find a reasonably broad ethnographic literature on societies in the same general cultural area as those whose language is being investigated, it seems likely that other easily "collectible" sorts of ethnographic points of interest can be easily gathered.[7] In other words, useful ethnographic data may be in reach even in the absence of a dedicated ethnographer.

3.4 Archaeological data

The data the project has collected (exclusively by Pierpaolo Di Carlo) in the archeological domain is less extensive than in other areas, but it has, nevertheless, helped us paint a more complete picture of the forces that have shaped linguistic distributions in Lower Fungom. Of course, extensive archaeological surveying is clearly outside the scope of a linguistic project. However, at least in our context, a shallow sort of exploration has been relatively straightforward because we are targeting historical time depths that are not too distant from living memory and collecting the location of sites of settlement where traces of former occupation are visible on the surface (e.g., in the form of foundations that remain from former houses).

[7] The project's investigations into the ethnographic characteristics of Lower Fungom societies has, in fact, involved collection of data which requires deeper knowledge and care in the use of ethnographic methods. Di Carlo (2011) presents a fuller picture, and this is hinted at in the discussion of village "cohesiveness" above. I highlight these "easy" cases here to emphasize that even a lone linguist could engage in some kinds of interdisciplinary data collection without taking them too far afield from their core documentary efforts.

The archaeological data we have access to for the settlements once associated with the village of Mufu is especially revealing. The present-day village is located at the top of an inaccessible hill, following a pattern found for a number of villages in Lower Fungom. This settlement pattern is associated with a need for defense from neighboring groups, since it is otherwise remarkably inconvenient: Farming areas will frequently be quite distant from settlements and require arduous hiking up and down narrow paths (along which water and other necessities will also need to be transported). Across Lower Fungom, there is no reason to believe this settlement pattern is particularly "ancient". Rather, it appears, in large part, to represent a response to a period of instability in the broader region in the nineteenth century (see Di Carlo & Good (2014+)). Previous to this, settlements would have been located closer to farming areas (and, in fact, the trend in recent decades of relative peace has been for people to move to more accessible settlements, such as the low-altitude Yemgeh market area seen in figure 1).

In the case of Mufu, evidence for the shift of the village population to its present location can be found not only in oral histories (see section 3.3) but also in archaeological sites found near the village. In particular, one finds remains of five small settlements found in less easily-defended locations near the village, corroborating accounts that treat Mufu as resulting from a movement of formerly more distributed kin groups into a compact, more defensible physical space. As with all of Lower Fungom's villages, Mufu is divided into distinctive quarters—both residential and social units—some of which presumably were historically associated with these small settlements. The proximate cause for the change in settlement patterns in the Mufu case appears to be the arrival of Naki-speakers associated with the present-day village Mashi (Di Carlo 2011: 90).

Returning to the case of the village of Missong, discussed in more detail in preceding sections, our only archaeological evidence is negative: It is not a village readily associated with older habitation sites. This is, of course, perfectly consistent with the ethnographic characterization of Missong as a "recent" village (see section 3.3), though, at the same time, in this case we must be quite conscious of the limited scope of the archaeological investigations to this point, meaning that absence of evidence can only be weakly construed as evidence of absence.

As with the ethnographic data points mentioned above, it is important to stress here that the collection of the sort of archaeological information just discussed for Mufu does not require specialized training. The inhabitants of Lower Fungom are quite aware of these archaeological sites—indeed, they are not all that different from so-called "ghost towns" found in the western United States—and can easily lead an outsider to them. Beyond (sometimes arduous) hiking, a GPS device was also required so that the locations of the sites could later be mapped alongside the collection of oral accounts of their significance. Such data collection can be somewhat time intensive, but, in the scope of a long field trip, is not clearly unmanageable, and GPS devices have become quite standard pieces of field equipment these days.

3.5 Geographic data

By "geographic data", one can mean various things. In the simplest case, this could be data on locations of sites of significance to a community being investigated, and in the age of cheap GPS devices, it is quite straightforward to collect highly accurate information in this regard which can, among other things, allow for the creation of maps of the areas being investigated. Indeed, the map in figure 1 was created using data gathered from a GPS device in the context of this project, and is a significant improvement over previously available maps. While such use of geographic data is enormously valuable as a means for visualizing linguistic distributions, in the context of a project such as the one described here, where the motivating question is *What's where why?*, it is best understood as a "geography-weak" approach (Di Carlo & Pizziolo 2012: 152) to the use of locational data in the exploration of linguistic questions.

By contrast, we can also consider a "geography-strong approach" such as the one adopted in the analysis of Lower Fungom population distributions in Di Carlo & Pizziolo (2012), which I rely on in the discussion here. Such an approach expands on the usual model of examining language distributions primarily as abstract distributions over a two-dimensional space (usually merely as "dots", but also, in some cases as polygons) by: (i) using modern geographic methods, in particular Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to examine correspondences between linguistic

features and other geographic features (e.g. hills, rivers, etc.) (see Di Carlo & Pizziolo (2012: 183) for summary discussion and review of the use of GIS in linguistic work) and (ii) mapping the geolinguistic knowledge of communities in addition to the locations of languages and language features.

As with much of the data discussed above, there has been nothing specifically innovative about our use of geographic information in and of itself. The innovation involves using a geography-strong approach to lend further insight into the *What's where why?* problem for Lower Fungom. In particular, the compactness of the region allows us to explore language–geography interaction at a much more fine-grained level than is possible for global-scale surveys, such as Nichols (1992). (This is not to criticize such work since, as discussed by Good (2013), work of this kind actually serves as much of the inspiration for our investigation into the micro-area of Lower Fungom.)

To pick one example of the value in taking a geography-strong approach to language documentation, we can consider Di Carlo & Pizziolo's (2012) presentation of information on *sites of memory*, adapting a notion developed by the historian Pierre Nora (see, e.g., Nora (1989)).[8] This involves collecting data on locations that form part of the collective memory of villages based on their ethnohistorical traditions and, to the extent possible, attaching approximate relative chronologies to these sites using available evidence (including archival records—see section 3.6). These locations can then be mapped for purposes of presentation and analysis.

In figure 2 and figure 3 sites of memory are plotted for the various Lower Fungom villages (as well as one additional site, Nsom, a settlement formerly reported to be present in the region as discussed in (Di Carlo 2011: 92–93)). These maps are drawn from the online supplementary materials published as part of Di Carlo & Pizziolo (2012). Sites of memory that can be associated with a period around 1860 are found in figure 2, and sites that can be associated with a period around 1900 are found in figure 3. The association of a site of memory for a village's community with a particular place may have been made by the members of the village itself or by members of

[8] Di Carlo & Pizziolo (2012) translate Nora's original term, *lieux de mémoire*, as *memory-places*, following Flores (1998: 429). I use *sites of memory* here because it appears to be a more standardly employed translation (see, e.g., Nora (1989: 15)).

an outside village. The survey of sites of memory was preliminary in various respects. However, the relative differences in site density and locations should be reasonably reliable across the maps as an index of certain features of local historical memories.

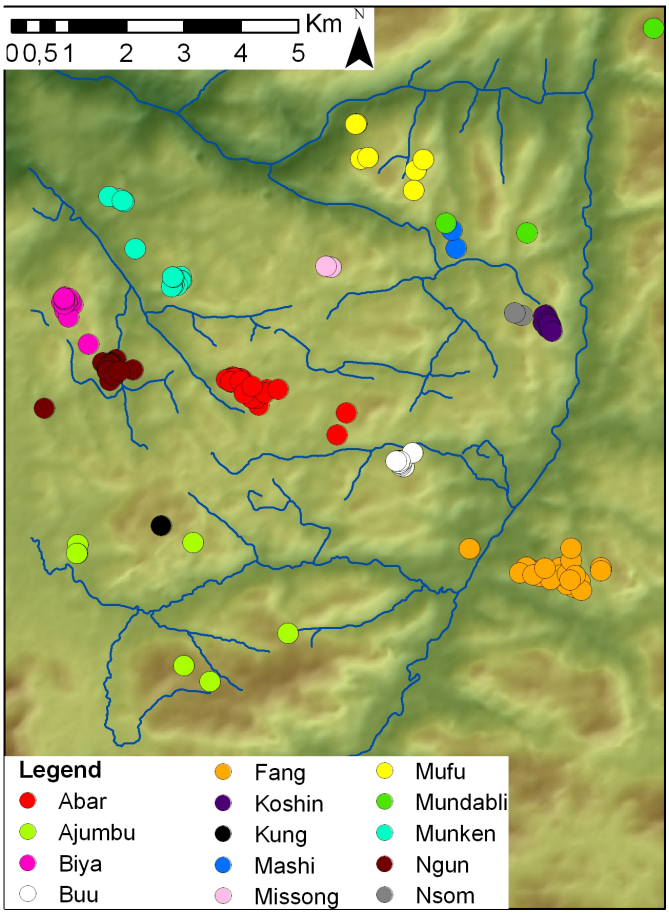

Figure 2: Sites of memory circa 1860

For each village, the maps in figure 2 and figure 3 reveal both the relative quantity of sites of memory and their spatial concentration. For instance, towards the bottom of the 1860 map in figure 2, one can contrast the numerous, relatively concentrated sites associated with the village of Fang (in orange), against the less numerous and quite scattered sites associated with Ajumbu (in light green). Around 1900, as seen in figure 3, the configuration of sites for Fang is relatively similar to what was found in 1860. The Ajumbu sites, however, still remain comparatively few but have become more concentrated around the present-day location of the village of Ajumbu (see figure 1).

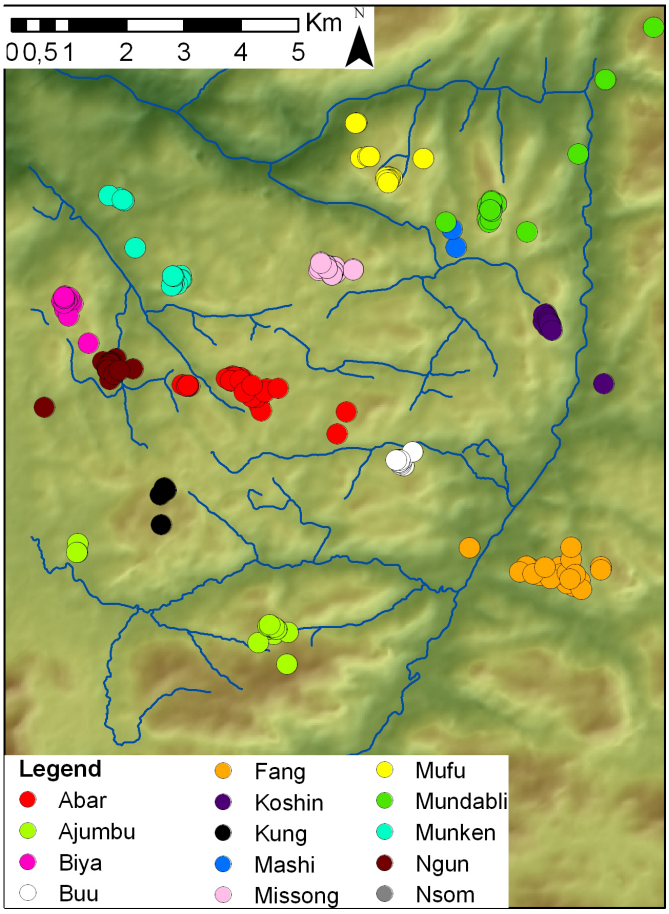

Figure 3: Sites of memory circa 1900

These patterns straightforwardly correspond to ways in which Fang and Ajumbu differ from each other, in both contemporary and historical terms. On the one hand, as seen in figure 1, there is a remarkable disparity in the populations of the two villages. Fang is, by far, the most populous village in Lower Fungom, perhaps even more than twenty times the size of Ajumbu. That there are more sites of memory associated with Fang than Ajumbu is, therefore, hardly surprising.

To understand the difference in the concentration of the sites of memory, where those of Fang strongly cluster around the present-day location of the village of Fang in both 1860 and 1900, while those of Ajumbu only show strong clustering in the 1900 map, it is necessary to appeal to history. As discussed in section 3.4 (see also Di Carlo & Good (2014+)), the nineteenth century was a period of political instability in Lower Fungom. The most direct cause for this was the

movement of refugee groups from outside of Lower Fungom into the region. (These movements were themselves caused by a larger-scale pattern of regional instability.) A community associated with present-day Fang would have been one of these refugee groups, moving into Lower Fungom via a compact migration event (see also section 3.6 for further comments on Fang's history). Those associated with the present-day Ajumbu, on the other hand, appear to have been present in Lower Fungom since before this period of instability and originally had a more dispersed settlement pattern, much like what was once found for Mufu, as discussed in section 3.4. The concentration of settlement for Ajumbu groups would only have come over the course of the nineteenth century as political instability affected them to the point where, like the Mufu (and others), they would have decided to move to their present location on a relatively inaccessible hilltop. In this case, the proximate cause for this shift of settlement pattern would have most likely been the arrival of the Kung into Lower Fungom, who compete for space with the Ajumbu relatively directly.[9]

Returning to the case of the village of Missong, the maps in figure 2 and figure 3 reveal a village without a particular high number of sites of memory in either period, as well as a village where these sites are quite spatially concentrated. Missong is a comparatively small village in terms of population. So, we should not expect the multitude of sites seen for higher-population villages such as Fang. However, even accounting for this, the sites of memory in the 1860 map are still quite small in number. Missong's population is roughly in the same order of magnitude as that of Ajumbu, Biya, Buu, Mufu, and Ngun, for example, which show many more sites of memory in that period. This, along with the concentration of sites in the present-day location of the village rather than in more outlying areas, can be understood as a further index of its "recentness".

Of course, historical memory of this sort is subject to revision. Therefore, we should not take this as "proof" that Missong is somehow "younger" than, say, Buu. However, this is another piece of evidence for this historical interpretation. Ethnography, archaeology, and geography are all converging on the same reconstruction of the village's history. The final type of data to consider

[9] The two outlier sites associated with Ajumbu in figure 3 are more precisely not associated with Ajumbu, per se, but, rather, a settlement most frequently referred to as Lung in the scant literature that mentions it. Investigation by the author with rememberers of Lung clearly show it to have been a variety very closely related to Ajumbu, though it is now more or less lost, its speakers having scattered among other groups due to the political instability just mentioned.

here is historical data in the usual Western sense of *history*: Written records written by first-hand observers, in this case those working as part of the British colonial enterprise. These will be discussed in section 3.6.

Before moving on, it is worth emphasizing a point made above in the context of other kinds of data. While linguists, of course, cannot be expert geographers, this does not prevent them from collecting certain kinds of geographic information. In the present case, for instance, the collection of locations of sites of memory requires a GPS device and asking people about sites in their area and their association with specific villages—activities which do not presuppose advanced training. Interpreting the significance of the locations of these sites does require some additional knowledge, but by emphasizing the comparative differences in site quantity and concentration among villages, as was done here, rather than, say, the significance of a specific site, the potential for over-interpretation of data which may be, in its details, not fully reliable is mitigated.

3.6 Archival data

To the best of my knowledge, language survey and documentation projects rarely consult archival records as a means to provide historical context to the communities they are studying. In the case of Lower Fungom, for instance, the first published survey of its languages (Hombert 1980), implicitly treats the region as largely "ahistorical". Specifically, the surveyed varieties are reconstructed in a way which suggests that their grammatical diversity is due to ancient patterns of diversification after an initial settlement event, with little in the way of intervening "history" considered side-by-side with this. I do not mean to be especially critical of individual instances of such work, as they seem to represent the norm in the field of linguistics, and, for Africa especially, merely continue a popular tradition viewing it (without justification beyond a kind of colonial romanticism) as a "continent mired in timeless immobility" (Kopytoff 1987: 7).

However, in the Cameroonian case, at least, there is a significant amount of documentation in the form of survey reports from the colonial period that can push our window of Grassfields history back decades or more before the first proper linguistic surveys took place. The present

project, again in work primarily undertaken by Pierpaolo Di Carlo, has examined, in particular, the national archives in Buea, Cameroon (see Maderspacher (2009) for discussion of Cameroon's national archives). During the colonial period, Lower Fungom was, just as today, not an area of special political or economic importance. Therefore, one will not find especially detailed colonial reports regarding it. Nevertheless, one can still discover within the archives additional data of relevance for understanding Lower Fungom linguistic history.

In some cases, colonial sources cannot be said to offer new "facts" but they can, at least, establish that aspects of contemporary oral tradition were also in place decades ago. For instance, the oral history of the village of Fang claims that its inhabitants originated much further south than their present location in Bafang, a town in the West Region of Cameroon. They then are said to have migrated to their present northern location after stopping for a period in Befang, a village not especially far from Fang, close to the town of Wum on the road between Wum and Bamenda (see figure 1 for the location of Bamenda). Colonial records cannot verify this specific migration story. However, as discussed by Di Carlo (2011: 79–80), during a visit to Fang by a colonial officer who was assisted by Befang carriers, the Fang asserted a strong friendship with the Befang people. We, therefore, know that the claim of a connection between the Fang and the Befang is at least nearly a century old. This cannot "prove" the Fang did actually spend time in Befang, but, as part of a larger set of evidence, can help us put together a more detailed story for this village's history.

Similarly, the Koshin have a clear tradition of having migrated, as a village, from points to the southeast of Lower Fungom. As discussed in Di Carlo (2011: 81), a map from the 1930's specifically includes a site labeled "Old Koshin" in an area consistent with the migratory path told in Koshin oral history. Of course, we do not know the exact process through which this map was created. So, we cannot see this as a definitive statement of Koshin's earlier location. However, it minimally verifies a decades-long persistence of this aspect of Koshin oral history, and, if the site of Old Koshin could be specifically surveyed, perhaps will one day yield quite strong evidence for this story.

Returning to Missong, similar to the archaeological data (see section 3.4), where there were no old sites associated with the village, the most salient aspect of Missong's presence in the colonial record is its comparatively minor role. Colonial documents rarely mention the village and, when they do, they represent it as a break-off from the village of Munken (Di Carlo 2011: 84). This is not strong positive evidence for Missong's recentness, but it is perfectly consistent with this idea. And, it further verifies that the perception of Missong as a historically shallow village goes back at least to the first part of the twentieth century.

In some ways, the archival records are comparatively poor source of evidence: They simply lack the level of detail that we would like to have on the region from decades ago. Of course, the needs of colonial administration were quite distinctive from the needs a linguistic research project of this kind. So, this is to be expected. In other ways, however, they are very valuable since, by virtue of being written, they are not subject to the distortions intrinsic to oral histories. (This is not to say they are not subject other distortions, of course, the most prominent being the colonial lens through which they were collected.) Moreover, their written content is readily accessible to a linguist, not being embedded in theoretical concerns specific to some academic discipline.

3.7 *Why is what where?*

We have now considered five different kinds of data: linguistic, ethnographic, archaeological, geographic, and historical/archival. In the context of work on Lower Fungom, this interdisciplinary approach has been intended to help us answer the *What's where why?* problem for the languages of the region, and we can begin to sketch out parts of an answer to this question. Why are there so many languages in such a small space? We can see part of the answer lies in the fact that region has served, in the last 150 years or so, as a refugium, making immigration a source of linguistic diversity. Why are language communities typically associated with compact settlements, often on hilltops? This is not an ancient pattern of habitation but, rather, a comparatively recent one triggered by political instability.

And, to return to Missong, why is it, on the one hand, clearly a Mungbam variety, while, on the other hand, being the most distinctive variety of the language? As discussed in more detail in Di Carlo & Good (2014+), the most likely explanation is not the one that might seem most obvious to the linguist at first: That it is the result of "ancient" drift. One might conclude this without an interdisciplinary perspective. After all, our default stance as linguists is to view linguistic divergence as the result of divergence of speaker communities.

The interdisciplinary data, by contrast, quite consistently points to Missong being a *recent* formation, not an ancient one. If we accept this, then its linguistic divergence must also be recent. The most likely account for this divergence would seem to be that the village represents a relatively new confederation of linguistically distinct groups who devised a common language, using a Mungbam base, to signal the construction of new, Missong political identity. Into this Mungbam base, elements of the other founder languages were likely added in order to create not merely a common language but also a locally distinctive one. Missong unity would, therefore, be signalled by a common village way of speaking that was simultaneously not found outside of Missong. The *what* of the Missong language is, therefore, associated with the *where* of the village of Missong precisely because Missong is a new village located in a part of the world where the most salient external emblem of sociopolitical independence is the possession of a distinctive "language".

Of course, this is just the beginning of an answer to the *What's where why?* question, and many points remain open for Missong specifically and Lower Fungom more generally. For instance, the lexical and grammatical divergence of Missong from the other varieties of Mungbam alongside the evidence of its recent formation points to some sort of intense language contact as the source for much of its linguistic differentiation, as just indicated. However, we have not located a specific language from which these grammatical differences could have been imported. Even if such a source language is no longer spoken, we might still be able to find a close relative to it, which would help us add crucial details to the Missong story. In a broader Lower Fungom perspective, the open questions multiply: Can we find linguistic evidence to verify Fang and Koshin oral traditions of their having recently immigrated from outside the region (see section 3.6)? How do we rectify

the fact that some Mungbam-speaking villages have traditions of outside origin and others claim to be longstanding inhabitants of Lower Fungom (see Di Carlo & Good (2014+)? What are the sources of the apparent linguistic distinctiveness of the Buu variety of the Ji cluster of languages against the closely related varieties of Mundabli and Mufu?

Nevertheless, even at this stage, by setting the linguistic data alongside data traditionally associated with other disciplines, a much more nuanced and informative picture of Lower Fungom diversity has begun to emerge, and our understanding of what makes it linguistically "special" has become deeper. In the next section, I will conclude the paper by trying to generalize on these results and also briefly discuss how this interdisciplinary approach is leading to a more informed ongoing documentary agenda for the region.

4 Extending interdisciplinarity

4.1 A research question driving interdisciplinarity

Most typically, the term "interdisciplinarity" conjures up a vision of an interdisciplinary team of researchers. However, while the project discussed here has involved a medium-sized documentary team (see, e.g., the author list of Good et al. (2011) to get a sense of its composition), the team itself is comprised mostly of linguists, with only one member (Pierpaolo Di Carlo) primarily identifying as a practitioner of a different discipline (anthropology). This has not prevented the research from making use of interdisciplinary *data*, however. As can be seen, for a part of the world that has seen very little research of any kind, there is quite a bit of such data that can be collected even by a non-expert. Even a "lone-wolf" linguist (Crippen & Robinson 2013) could engage in some of the interdisciplinary data collection described without a major alteration of their fieldwork plans, assuming they were able to develop some familiarity with relevant kinds of data to collect beforehand.

It is also important to bear in mind that one reason why this kind of interdisciplinary analysis has yielded useful results is that it has not been guided by some vague sense that "interdisciplinarity" will automatically result in better documentation, or that pairing a linguist with an anthro-

pologist will somehow create a better grammar and a better ethnography without a dedicated set of research plans to that end. Rather, the work began with a particular research question, *Why is Lower Fungom so linguistically diverse?* This question expanded data collection outside of the usual bounds of language documentation, on the one hand, while, on the other, narrowing down precisely what kinds of interdisciplinary data would be collected. A full ethnographic account was not necessary, for instance. Rather, the initial focus was on ethnographic features of relevance for reconstructing historical origins and local language ideologies. No attempt was made to do an archaeological "dig", and only sites which could be identified with basic surface inspection were considered, in order to provide a window into settlement patterns in the last century or so. Geographic investigation did not extend, for instance, to the local taxonomy of landscape elements, privileging instead geographic data of relevance to historical memory.

The focused manner of this data collection allowed for an integration of sources which would have been more difficult had a more general ethnographic, archaeological, or geographic survey been conducted. The downside of this is a degree of thematic narrowness. If the primary concern is understanding the linguistic situation of Lower Fungom, such narrowness is not a problem in and of itself, since it is tailored towards issues of interest to linguists. At the same time, the obvious drawback is that the data collected may be of less value to scholars outside of linguistics than more general studies would have been. This simply reflects inherent tensions in doing "interdisciplinary" work of any kind.

4.2 Collaborative personalities

The nature of most scholarly communities reinforces disciplinarity in numerous ways, via publication cultures, university hierarchies, professional societies, etc. It is not surprising, therefore, that interdisciplinarity will typically require special effort. Moreover, given the numerous institutional structures that build on disciplinary boundaries, it is not surprising that many scholars are not naturally interdisciplinary in their orientation. What this means, in practice, is that successful interdisciplinary research is not merely a function of gathering the right data or having an inter-

disciplinary question but also requires scholars who have what could be called, for lack of a better term, an "interdisciplinary temperament" and who enhance such a temperament by becoming informed of disciplines allied to theirs.[10]

In my own case, I was heavily influenced by work like Nichols (1992), which revealed the significance of historical and spatial factors in understanding patterns of linguistic diversity. From this arose my interests in exploring linguistic diversity using interdisciplinary data. While Nichols' work examined these issues on a global scale, as discussed in Good (2013), the same basic approach could be applied (suitably modified) to much smaller regions, and the concentration of languages in Lower Fungom made it a useful region to consider in this way. To prepare for such research, I was then able to make use of traditional ethnographic research on the Grassfields region of Cameroon, such as what is found Chilver & Kaberry (1968), to gain a better sense of the region's overall culture and history. Work of this sort then prepared me to bring in useful insights from more theoretically organized work such as Warnier (1985), Kopytoff (1987), and Zeitlyn & Connell (2003), among others. Historical investigations of Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Vansina (1990), also helped expand my understanding of issues outside of linguistics. This then allowed me to more productively interact with Pierpaolo Di Carlo whose earlier work had focused on the intersection of language and the maintenance of culture (Di Carlo 2010), a central concern to any understanding of *What's where why?* in a linguistic context.

Of course, acquiring such interdisciplinary knowledge and honing one's interdisciplinary temperament takes effort—though, in my own case, I found this to be significantly less effort than acquiring the complex set of skills required to do grammatical analysis of the languages of Lower Fungom in the first place. Perhaps it was roughly on the order of mastering the technical aspects of language documentation (e.g., archival formats, metadata creation, annotation, etc.)—not insignificant, but not insurmountable either.

[10] In discussing "interdisciplinary temperaments", I in no way mean to disparage scholars who are more strictly "disciplinary" in their temperaments. I take it as a given that discipline exists primarily because of their effectiveness in achieving important scholarly ends.

4.3 Interdisciplinary extensions

I have focused in this paper on the results of interdisciplinary data collection in terms of how they help us understand the linguistic situation of different parts of Lower Fungom. This has resulted in a retrospective orientation. That is, the focus is on what we have already learned. But, we could also take a prospective orientation. How can work of this kind actually alter our research agendas in positive ways, especially in the realm of language documentation?

In our case, an interdisciplinary focus has identified a significant new domain of documentary investigation that has been largely neglected to this point (though the picture has changed in recent years): The documentation of multilingual practices in highly multilingual rural environments (see, e.g., Esene Agwara (2013); Di Carlo (2014+)). As discussed in Di Carlo & Good (2014+) (see also Lüpke & Storch (2013) for broader contextualization), there has been a tendency in the language documentation literature to focus on the nostalgic documentation of "ancestral codes" (Woodbury 2011: 177) rather than to try to capture, as closely as possible, the range of lexicogrammatical codes employed by a given individual or group of individuals in a multilingual context. The nostalgic orientation in documentation may be quite sensible in regions like North America or Australia where a dominant colonial language is encroaching on indigenous languages. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, where multilingualism is the norm and the dynamic deployment of different languages plays a significant and active role in identity construction, this orientation obscures the social reality of language use (Childs et al. 2014: 168–169).

The idea of prioritizing the documentation of multilingual practices in Lower Fungom emerged directly from an insight of our interdisciplinary research regarding local language ideologies. Ethnographic investigations closely considered the relationship between language and identity, and it became apparent that language in Lower Fungom, rather than being viewed as a marker of immutable ethnicity, as is typical of language ideologies built on the "Herderian equation" of language, culture, and nation (see, e.g., Hymes (1968; 1972); Foley (2005)), were locally construed as markers of more ephemeral sociopolitical configurations. This is seen fairly clearly in the quotation from Buo Makpa Amos given in section 3.3 where the use of the Missong variety is

linked to “cooperation” among diverse kin groups rather than expressing “Missongness” or some related notion. This understanding implied that multilingualism in Lower Fungom is not merely a means to a communicative end but is a significant cultural feature in its own right, allowing people to maintain multiple sociopolitical identities to help gain access to the resources of different groups. As such, any documentation of language use among Lower Fungom communities—and, indeed, the entire Grassfields region where Lower Fungom is found (Warnier 1980)—would be incomplete as a reflection of the local linguistic culture if multilingual practices were not adequately documented.

Interdisciplinarity, therefore, turned out to not merely be a tool to answer questions that we were independently considering but also allowed us to identify an important new way to enhance our documentary work that is more responsive to Lower Fungom’s sociolinguistic context. It certainly required extra work, but the payoff has fortunately been quite extensive as well.

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