

Multilingualism, affiliation and spiritual insecurity. From phenomena to processes in language documentation

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Documentary linguists have often been urged to integrate language ideologies and other topics more closely to ethnography than to linguistics in their research, but these recommendations have seldom coincided, in literature, with practical directions for their implementation. This paper aims to contribute to filling this gap. After re-considering current documentary approaches, a case study from a documentation project in NW Cameroon is presented to show how an ethnographically-informed sociolinguistic survey on multilingualism can lead to progressively deeper insights into the local language ideology. The methodological implications that this research perspective brings to both documentary linguistics and language support and revitalization projects are discussed. A number of practical suggestions are finally proposed, illustrating the importance of language documentation projects being carried out by multidisciplinary teams.

1. INTRODUCTION. One of the first lessons anyone aspiring to do documentary linguistics according to contemporary standards is exposed to learning is that projects must be tailored to suit the specific environments, both social and linguistic, in which they are carried out. The inclusion of ethnographic data and, more generally, of field methods reminiscent of the ethnographic method also figure amongst the most often recalled best practices in language documentation (see on both points, amongst others, Haviland 2006, Hill 2006, Himmelmann 2006, Dobrin 2008, Dobrin et al. 2009: 46–7, Woodbury 2011: esp. 174ff.).

Although these methodological directions have been made explicit in a number of generally well-known publications, and do not seem to have been directly criticized, it would be deceptive to state that they have been accepted and are now practised by all documentary linguists. No doubt, the fact that these directions in many cases imply, for instance, that documentation projects be led by multidisciplinary teams, has been a practical obstacle (if only financially) for their actual implementation (see Austin & Grenoble (2007: 22) for a somewhat pessimistic opinion about their chances of being implemented in general). However, there are also other, deeper reasons for the somewhat common resistance to these best practices. For one thing, the structuralist tradition in linguistics might well be in conflict with them (see, e.g., Dobrin et al. 2009 and Woodbury 2011). However, it is also true that the relative abundance of general statements has not coincided with equally abundant illustrations as to how these methods can materialize in actual projects (see also Evans 2008: 343). The overarching goal of this paper is to offer one such illustration in the hope

that, by way of contributing to the creation of a wider repertoire of research possibilities, it will help documenters be more creative (and responsible) in designing their projects.

In order to do so, I will discuss one part of my ELDP-funded documentation project on Ngun and Ajumbu, two tiny villages of Northwest Cameroon where two Bantoid languages, respectively Mungbam [mij] and Ajumbu [muc], are spoken.¹ In fact, the part of the project I will summarize here (§3) does not concern these two languages in particular but, rather, it is focused on an essential aspect of the language ecology they share with the surrounding communities, i.e. individual multilingualism, which I have approached via an ethnographically-informed sociolinguistic survey. The presentation of data from this survey (§3.2) will be followed by progressively deeper explorations of its significance: first, in terms of the language ideology they help uncover and, hence, towards a ‘thicker’ (in the sense of Geertz’s (1973) notion of ‘thick description’) understanding of the sociocultural processes that still ensure its reproduction (§4).

The paper’s central aim is to extract suggestions of general methodological interest from a particular research experience. Therefore the case study is preceded by a brief methodological outline constructed on the basis of a contrastive view between the two opposite poles describing the ideal continuum of approaches to language documentation projects (§2). This is followed by a discussion about the possible implications that an emphasis on language ecologies, in its turn requiring the integration of ethnographic work into language documentation, may engender in language documentation as well as in language support and revitalization (§5). In fact, in §5 I will propose that the two extremes of the documentary continuum can be included in one and the same project to produce, via *integration* of ethnographic methods, what in fact is meant to be a new, comprehensive approach to language documentation.

2. TWO EXTREMES OF AN IDEAL CONTINUUM. Different proposals as to how one can approach language documentation can be found in a number of publications (e.g. Himmelmann 2006; Woodbury 2005, 2011; Lüpke 2010c).² Reviewing all of them here is not among the goals of this paper. Rather, inspired by Woodbury 2011, my intent is to gain some insights on the models informing documenters’ approaches to their work. I will try to do so via the contrastive analysis between two opposite documentary models, lying at the ideal extremes of an ‘abstraction vs. observation’ continuum: the top-down, ‘ancestral code’ model as opposed to the bottom-up, ‘phenomenological’ model.³

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² The majority of the methodological works seem to have focused especially on the kinds of community involvement, an aspect of language documentation projects’ design I will not be concerned with in this paper.

³ In the following I will use ‘model’ and ‘approach’ interchangeably.

These two models stem from different theoretical assumptions, focus upon different research objects, and are aimed at distinct goals. Here I will deal with them by limiting my attention to their actual documentary potential, that is, their ability to capture real-world linguistic facts, where ‘linguistic facts’ are intended to refer both to the broad range of people’s linguistic habitus (a set of dispositions acquired through learning to speak within particular contexts; see Bourdieu 1991: 21–22, 81ff.) and their materializations, i.e. linguistic practices. Since ethnography provides us with the most reliable tools to get as close as possible to documenting sociocultural (including linguistic) facts, both approaches will be looked at also in the light of ethnography’s basic assumptions (see, e.g., Blommaert & Jie 2010).

2.1 THE ANCESTRAL CODE EXTREME. This approach aims to ‘document’ what is left of an assumedly internally uniform language which used to be spoken by the entirety of a given community but whose current domains of usage or overall number of fluent speakers have shrunk in recent years.

For the fact of focusing on a ‘vanishing voice’, such an approach very often implies that the researcher selects the kinds of linguistic behaviors to be recorded and analyzed (and, in fact, drives the speakers themselves to select their linguistic behaviors, cf. Dobrin & Berson 2011: 194) so as to filter the targeted ancestral language out of the contemporary language ecology of the community. This purist view *per se* naturally leads to the so-called ‘Boasian triumvirate’ (i.e. grammar, dictionary and texts) as one of its quintessential outcomes. Also, due to the relative paucity of domains of actual use of the ‘pure’ ancestral code (assuming a pure ancestral code ever even existed) in a community speaking an endangered language, this very approach usually coincides with a strong reliance on elicitation as a data collection method: by documenting daily discourse or other spontaneous linguistic practices in a community undergoing processes of language attrition or shift—instantiated by pervasive bi- or multilingualism and code-switching—would expose the researcher to a complex array of data which in no way could lead to the systematic ‘documentation’ (in fact, selective reintegration) of the ancestral language. As a consequence, this approach usually coincides with an overall secondary role accorded to real-world linguistic phenomena. However, it often does have practical premises and consequences in the real world.

It is important to realize that this approach is very often linked with a sort of political agenda, however embryonic or subconscious, in the researcher or the target community or both (see, e.g., Dwyer 2006, Czaykowska-Higgins 2009, Harrison 2007, 2010). In some cases, the documentation takes place as a consequence of an explicit and autonomous plan of the community (as is often the case in North America and Australia). In others (the norm in Africa, for instance), it is the researcher who initially identifies a situation of endangerment and then, through his contacts with the community, contributes to the spread of a discourse over language that prizes maintenance of the ancestral code. Although this discourse, unavoidably political in nature, may be already present in the community, the presence of a foreign researcher—as a norm deeply unaware of the local micro-political situation—usually has the effect of reviving certain identity feelings or, in somewhat worse scenarios, of backing the political agenda of a local conservative faction at the expense of the modernist one. These risks often go unnoticed by the documenters as they do not pay attention to (or are just not trained to observe) social facts (see Crippen & Robinson 2013:

130–1 for exemplary cases).⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to limit our view of this model to the possible risks or fallacies it may engender. In fact, by operating a high-level selection and, therefore, a reduction of the variables at stake, it offers an effective environment for linguists to develop tools for a detailed linguistic analysis which, in its turn, is a prerequisite for any other kind of study one wants to conduct on the target community, on the languages that are part of its ecology, or on its culture. Moreover, linguistic descriptions made possible by adopting this approach are highly generative of innovative questions and perspectives within linguistics as a whole.

2.2 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXTREME. Under this rubric I collapse two elements of Woodbury's (2011) typology: the "documentation of contemporary communicative ecology" and the "documentation of an emergent code". He had already pointed out that the line between the two "may be blurred indeed" (2011: 180) so it is not surprising to see them merged. However, the kind of reasoning lying behind my choice of not keeping them separate does not surface in Woodbury's paper and I will make it explicit below.

One basic methodological feature of the ancestral code approach is that the object of research is predetermined and, in order to focus on it alone, the researcher applies more or less conscious selections of the data to be included in the documentation. Put roughly: the researcher identifies *a priori* their research object and then goes to the field looking for it.

At the logical opposite lies a method that does not focus on 'one language' but, rather, on the observable communicative practices of a given community: for lack of better terms, I call this the 'phenomenological approach', i.e. giving prominence to phenomena, which are "things as they are given to our consciousness, whether in perception or imagination or thought or volition" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The possibility that one of the codes used in the community may be in the process of being abandoned is not central here (if not for funding issues) as it is not ontologically connected with the method itself. In its essence, this model promotes the observation of the linguistic practices as they surface in naturally-occurring communicative events and proscribes any *a priori* assumptions, including the 'search for the pure code'.

Speaking of method, in a phenomenological approach the corpus will be theorized according to criteria of representativeness of the whole array of possible linguistic practices allowed to happen in a given community. Documenters, that is, are expected to select what is to be included in their documentations not on the basis of what language is recorded—like 'ancestralists' would do by carving the ancestral code out of a potentially heterogeneous database—but, rather, on the basis of the language ecology of the target speaker community or of the portions of this ecology that they have identified as particularly important. This orientation requires that documenters are acquainted with the communicative ecology they plan to target prior to the actual design of the project. To know a given 'communicative ecology' means having a clear view not only of the different languages or varieties present in the repertoire of the targeted speaker community, but also of the registers and the genres through which discourse is articulated, as well as of the language ideology

⁴ It must be acknowledged, however, that projects are generally funded to document endangered languages, and this sets the stage for a politically-oriented, ancestral focus to take prominence.

permeating the community's communicative behaviors (i.e. the ideas shared by the community members concerning language and its uses: see, e.g., Woolard 1998). These are aspects that a purely linguistic research cannot uncover as they lie closer to the objectives of an ethnographic inquiry. As a consequence, anyone adopting the phenomenological approach should accord ethnographic data a primary role.

Finally it must be remarked that, in principle, this approach brings more reliable information on a given real (i.e. not only linguistic) state of things than does the former, which is more idealistic. At the same time, it can cause one to get lost in the meanders of one group's cultural complexity.

2.3 THE PLACE OF ETHNOGRAPHY. I have mentioned ethnography several times so far but what do I mean precisely? Ethnography is a discipline commonly evoked in language documentation literature. However, different authors have looked at it from different angles. Focusing only on those who have dealt with it for methodological purposes, some, like Harrison (2005), have emphasized the field-based nature of ethnographic research, reminding that this enables one to (i) understand documented grammatical structures in their cultural significance and (ii) identify grammatical structures that might not be otherwise visible. Others, like Hill (2006), have concentrated on the 'ethnography of language', that is, on the fact that the very act of speaking or writing a language is per se a culture-specific practice loaded with particular values. In what appears to be one of the very few papers dedicated to the place of ethnography in language documentation, Franchetto (2006) offers a list of matters of interest to ethnographers and anthropologists and some advice on how to go about researching them, hoping to provide documenters with a to-do list for making their work better equipped for that kind of audience, which is seen as a form of 'Other' by the documenters themselves.

None of these angles, nor their cumulation, exhausts the multi-faceted nature of ethnography. However, it must be clear that ethnography is more than basic, easily-collectable cultural information about, say, a given group's ritual customs, economic strategies or history. For one thing, ethnography must include research on the social organization of a group, which can ultimately lead the ethnographer to answer in detail the question 'who is who for whom and why?' in the group.

The ancestral code model *per se* does not require the inclusion of ethnographic data but, rather, that of superficial cultural information (e.g. rituals, economic strategies) that are useful to characterize the group's identity *as a whole*. In fact, the ancestral code model entails that ethnographic information is given a limited role as this is likely to have a disruptive effect on the unit, both linguistic and cultural, which alone makes it possible for the purist perspective to come into being.

By contrast, in phenomenological works the kind of selection documenters are expected to apply (see 2.2 above) would force them to consider ethnographic data as an integral part, not an ancillary excursus, of the documentation. At a closer look, this integration is required not only in the corpus theorization phase of a project, as I said above, but also in its actual unfolding. For one thing, if language is to be captured mostly in culturally-situated natural performances, then the documenter must pay attention to (amongst other things) how the specific contexts, discourse genres and, importantly, participants are conceptualized by the speaker community (this is Hymes' (1986) ethnography of speaking *in nuce*) as

TABLE 1. Summary of contrasts between the ancestral code approach and the phenomenological approach to language documentation

	ANCESTRAL CODE MODEL	PHENOMENOLOGICAL MODEL
GOAL	Document one bounded language	Document communicative practices in a community
PRIMARY TARGET	“Pure” performances in one specific language, not necessarily the only one spoken in the target community	Discourse-in-context regardless of the language(s) used
DOCUMENTARY METHOD	Mainly elicitation or staged communicative event	Mainly recordings in natural settings
QUINTESSENTIAL OUTCOMES	Grammar, dictionary, texts and orthography	Documentation of language-in-use, discourse genres, pragmatics, language ecologies
	Teaching material	No teaching material but new cultural products portraying community's "realities" (e.g. maps, heterogeneous ethnohistories, etc.)
BEST IF	Community is committed to preservation and is in search for instruments to develop and implement language support or revitalization policies	Community is not expecting any easy-to-use material to further their language maintenance agenda
		Some linguistic description has been done already (the “ancestral code approach” may be instrumental in providing data for such descriptions and, hence, can be seen as a first documentary phase)
IMPLICITLY ASSUMES THAT	Speech communities are discrete social entities (monolingual)	Each situation is unique and documentary work must be singularly responsive
	Different languages mean different peoples	Relation between culture, language, and ethnicity can be fluid
RISKS	Strategic reduction of variability may become misleading oversimplification	Too much or too complex data (“too phenomenological”)
	Work fails to be documentary as it is led by purist views	Community feels exploited for ends that have little to do with its life (<i>pace</i> Austin & Sallabank 2011:18)
REQUISITES	Strong commitment to reproduce “traditional” linguistic scholarship (i.e. Chomskyan, typology, historical-comparative, etc.)	“Shut up and listen” research attitude. Or, the ability to resist immediate systematization of the unexpected.
	Curiosity	Curiosity ²
RESEARCH ACTORS	One linguist can be sufficient	Multidisciplinary teams are required (a linguist, an anthropologist and, ideally, also a geographer)

these conceptualizations are likely to condition the meanings produced by speakers during the communicative events recorded as part of the documentation (I will return to this point in §5.2).

Of course, this integration requires the “*rapprochement* between linguistics and a reinvented anthropology that has returned from its postmodern holiday ready to engage with falsifiable empirical data again” (Evans 2008: 342). This is the model that I tried to follow more closely in my documentation project, part of which I will present in the next section.

3. LANGUAGE ENDANGERMENT AND MULTILINGUALISM IN LOWER FUNGOM

3.1 AJUMBU, NGUN, AND MULTILINGUALISM. Ajumbu and Ngun are two tiny villages of about 200 inhabitants each, located at the northern fringes of the Cameroonian Grassfields, not far from the border with Nigeria, in an area known as Lower Fungom. This is a relatively small region (240 sq km in size, around the same size as the island of Guernsey) characterized by very hilly landscape, an ecology of forest-savanna mosaic type, and an astonishing degree of language density: here eight different Bantoid languages are spoken in thirteen villages, i.e. a ratio of one language per 30 sq km.⁵ With the exception of Fang and Koshin, all the region’s languages are spoken by less than 1000 people (see Table 2).

Ajumbu is currently described as a language of its own (ISO [muc], see Good et al. 2011), while Ngun is a variety of Mungbam [mij], whose other varieties are Abar, Biya, Missong and Munken (see Good et al. 2011 and Lovegren 2013). After Hombert’s (1980) initial overview of the languages of this area, nobody had focused on them until a SIL sociolinguistic survey (Hamm et al. 2002) and, more recently, Jeff Good’s postdoctoral research (based at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig). Good later received a DEL grant (2009–2013) to work in the region with a team which I was part of and, finally, I got a 1-year ELDP postdoctoral fellowship grant (all the publications issued from these projects can be found at <http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~jcgood/lowerfungom.html>).⁶

⁵In previous works (Di Carlo 2011, Good et al. 2011, Good 2012) the number of recognized languages was seven. Over the past two years, further research has suggested that Buu (not to be confused with Bu, where Laimbue [lɪmx] is spoken) be considered as a separate language. This recent insight still needs systematic verification and is not to be found in Ethnologue, where Buu still appears as an ‘alternate name’ for Mundabli [boe].

⁶Both Good’s DEL project and my ELDP postdoc fellowship have been designed from a ‘pure research’ standpoint and built upon the recognition that, for its linguistic and cultural specificities, the situation in Lower Fungom has much to offer to endangered languages research and linguistics as a whole. What I want to stress here is that none of the projects was in any way urged by the speaker communities we targeted, and the production of literacy material or any other kind of outcomes aimed at directly supporting local vernaculars has never been a priority (Good (2012) extensively deals with the reasons for these choices in both projects). It is then important to keep in mind that everything that follows comes from a research- rather than community-centered project. It is also relevant to note that the facts briefly sketched here may provide the reader with a reasonable account of why my ELDP project (entitled “Linguistic and ethnographic documentation aimed at identifying loci of linguistic and cultural reproduction in two communities speaking endangered Bantoid languages”) has been more concerned with understanding the dynamics of language maintenance of such ‘small’ languages in a highly multilingual region (not a unicum in sub-Saharan Africa) rather than with the documentation of one bounded lexicogrammatical code. Paraphrasing Good (2012: 35–36), if one recognizes the complexity of the area’s language ecology, one is bound to design a project “that takes the whole region as its research domain meaning that the community of research

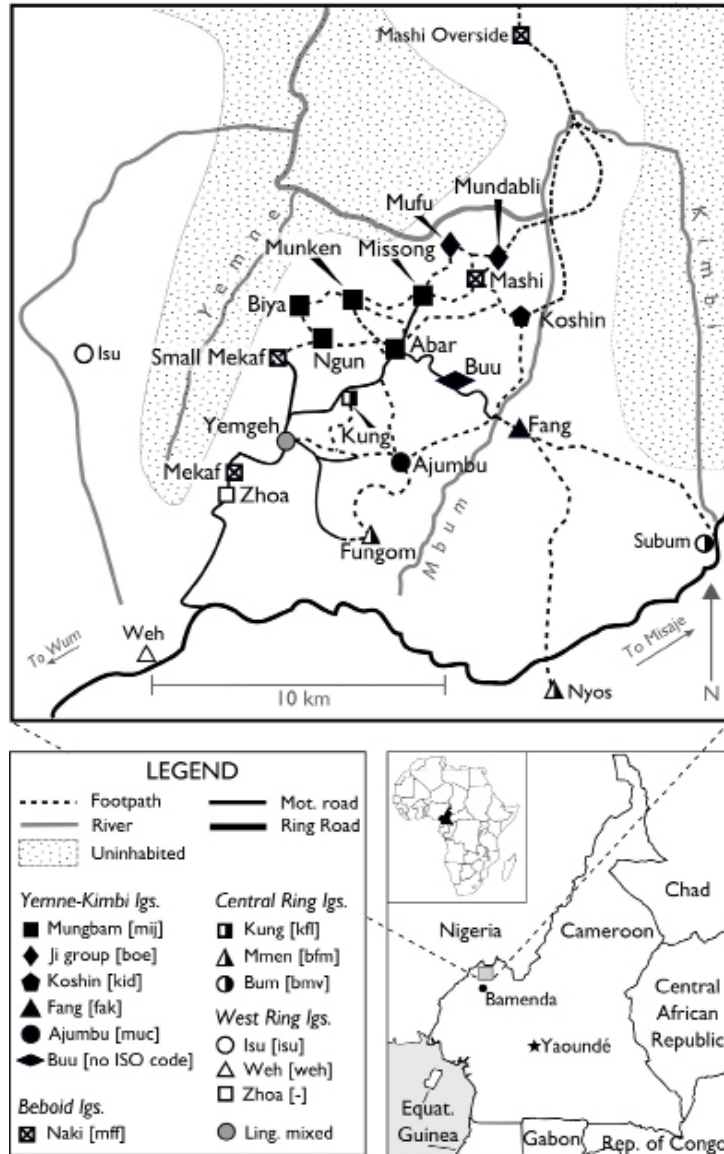


FIGURE 1. Map showing the distribution of languages and language varieties in Lower Fungom

does not overlap with a notion of speaker community but rather is something closer to a ‘microsprachbund’.” This is an implicit declaration of the inadequacy of the ancestral code model in the case of the Lower Fungom languages, although, as I will make clear in §5.1, both approaches have been followed in our projects.

As soon as fieldwork began, we realized that the main threats to the maintenance of local languages were, on the one hand, the ongoing process of depopulation of the area especially by younger generations (much in the same way as Lüpke (2009: 27) describes the Baïnouk situation in Senegal) and, on the other, the spread of the *lingua franca* Cameroonian Pidgin English (henceforth CPE). CPE was initially adopted in the Cameroonian Grassfields to facilitate communication between speakers of different languages (see Warnier 1979: 210–212; Menang 2004 on CPE more generally), but is now gaining momentum also in domains such as the home, where local vernaculars used to be exclusively used until few decades ago. This being said, the linguistic situation appeared to be one of relative vitality of vernaculars, even of those spoken by very small communities (i.e. below 200 people, such as Ngun and Ajumbu), as there are no known cases of people being monolingual in CPE, i.e. CPE has not creolized (Good (p.c.) points out that creolization seems to have taken place in some Cameroonian urban contexts like Limbe).

We progressively came to realize, however, that while intergenerational transmission seemed on the whole still rather effective at the level of individual languages, it was less so at the level of multilingual competence. Anecdotal observations made over the years by the different linguists who had visited the Lower Fungom area all pointed to the fact that, as a result of the spread of CPE from the 1960s onward, older generations seemed to show higher rates of competence in a number of local vernaculars than younger ones did.

TABLE 2. Languages and lects of Lower Fungom, with affiliations within the Bantoid, non-Bantu group of Niger-Congo, with approximate populations. Dotted line identifies possible language boundary not yet fully verified.

SUBGROUP	LANGUAGE	VILLAGE (LECT)	POPULATION
Yemne-Kimbi	Mungbam [mij]	Abar	650–850
		Biya	50–100
		Munken	around 600
		Ngun	around 170
		Missong	around 400
	Mundabli-Mufu [boe]	Mundabli	350–450
		Mufu	100–150
	Buu [no code]	Buu	100–200
Fang [fak]	Fang	4,000–6,000	
Koshin [kid]	Koshin	3,000–3,500	
Ajumbu [muc]	Ajumbu	150–200	
Beboid	Naki [mff]	Mashi	300–400
Central Ring	Kung [kfl]	Kung	600–800

To UNESCO as well as to the ‘ancestralist’ documenter this would be good news since multilingualism is often seen as being at odds with the vitality of endangered languages. By contrast, as many

scholars have stressed so far (e.g., Blommaert 2007, Lüpke 2009, Good 2012), African situations often do in fact escape models stemming from observations made elsewhere. Lüpke (2009), for instance, informs us that “[t]he majority of Bainouk speakers affirm that the long-established multilingualism in Joola languages and Mandinka is part of their identity, priding themselves on being able to communicate with all major linguistic groups of Casamance [i.e. the region where Bainouk varieties are spoken] and beyond”. To my knowledge, this is by no means the exception in Africa.⁷ In the case of Lower Fungom, multilingualism seemed not only a central feature of the local language ecology but also, and importantly, an endangered one. The fact that multilingualism is usually presented as ‘endangering’ rather than ‘endangered’ (see Blommaert et al. 2012) added to the scientific interest of this situation.

For all these reasons I thought it important to include in my documentary project also some research activities that could enable me to gain insights into the distribution of multilingual competence within the Lower Fungom population. The rationale of this choice was as follows: by providing clues for documenting the local language ecology (crucially including language ideology) in a more reliable way than anecdotal observations would, such documentary endeavor could shed light on some linguistic behaviors and specific practices I had been exposed to but whose motivations I was unable to understand and, hence, properly describe (on the importance of documenting language ecologies in endangered languages research see, e.g., Mülhäusler 2003 and Grenoble 2011; on the importance of documenting language ideologies see, e.g., Hill 2006 and Haviland 2006; on the paramount importance of addressing multilingualism in any kind of linguistic and anthropological research, including documentation, in African contexts see Lüpke & Storch 2013).

3.2 THE 2012 LOWER FUNGOM SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY

3.2.1 THE QUESTIONNAIRE AS A MNEMONIC. The data I briefly describe and comment on here come from a twenty-day survey I carried out in the Spring of 2012 with two Cameroonian postgraduate students (see fn. 1). Unlike ‘normal’ sociolinguistic surveys, we did not aim to produce a statistically relevant sample. In fact, as I have said in the previous section, our starting point was the well-rooted suspicion that, mostly on account of the increasing diffusion of CPE, multilingualism in the area is an endangered practice. As two additional concerns I might add here that (i) due to its centrality in the local language ecology, disappearance or decay of multilingual attitudes might also bear unpredictable consequences for the maintenance of local vernaculars and (ii) by being exposed to a high number of speakers of different languages and by interviewing them about how they deploy the lexicogrammatical codes present in their repertoires I could hope to gain insights into the local language ideology.

Thus, following an assumption close to that underpinning the Labovian notion of ‘apparent time’ (see Cukor-Avila & Bailey 2008), we favored the inclusion in our sample of elderly people, especially men, as these could be crucially instrumental in getting insights into the oldest level of language ideology reachable, i.e. the one we suspect used to support the devel-

⁷ What is exceptional, if anything, is to see it stated so clearly in a piece of scientific literature, an unsurprising deficiency according to Blommaert, who connects it to the rarity of “studies of actual language practices, with larger-scale sociolinguistic implications” (2007: 128).

opment of amazingly high rates of multilingual competence in the area prior to the diffusion of CPE (i.e. before ca. 1950s). We were able to interview a total of 97 individuals (54 men and 43 women; only 17 respondents aged 40 or less) from seven villages whose idiolects represented, to the linguist's eyes, four different languages (i.e. Buu, Koshin, Fang and Mungbam).

The tool we used during this survey was a questionnaire composed of three parts (see Appendix A). It must be stressed here that this questionnaire was not administered in written form (if only because many interviewees were illiterate) nor was it simply read aloud in its Pidgin translation. Rather, the questionnaire was used more as a mnemonic to guide what, in fact, were ethnographic interviews. This allowed the researchers considerable freedom in how to pose questions to different people and, importantly, in dealing at length with issues related with the reliability of the self-reported rates of multilingual competence (see below).

The first part of the questionnaire was aimed at obtaining as many details as possible about the respondents' biographical details that could be connected with their reported rates of multilingual competence. Therefore, we included a number of questions regarding (i) the various names the person had (see 4.2) and (ii) the provenance not only of the respondent's father, mother, and partner(s) but also of their parents and, if possible, also of some earlier ancestors. This was done on the basis of ethnographic data I had had the chance of collecting in 2010 concerning the importance of multilateral kin affiliations: as will become apparent in §4.2, the inclusion of this kind of biographical information has been fundamental to making the most of the questionnaire results.

The second part was intended to produce a list of all the lects (see §3.2.2 below) the respondent claimed to be competent in, accompanied by self-evaluative remarks about the claimed competence in each lect. The third part was aimed at gaining insights into the ideas or practices the respondents associated with each of the lects they claimed to be able to hear or speak, so aiming to uncover portions of their language ideology in a more direct way.

Anyone would legitimately expect that a sociolinguistic survey on these topics, especially multilingual competence, should be based on scientific evidence rather than on respondents' self-reported information. In this regard, I would like to stress two aspects: (i) the results I will show below were obtained through interviews (lasting no less than thirty minutes, often about one hour) during which the respondents were also presented with real-life scenes that, by being described in great detail, would reasonably decrease the chance that the respondent would distort reality; (ii) as I already said and will become more apparent in §3.2.3, the main goal of these interviews was to uncover not just how many lects or languages people spoke but, rather, their motivations for learning and using the different codes in certain contexts. That is, the survey's primary goal was to reveal aspects of the local language ideology that would have been otherwise very difficult to observe given the time limit of my fieldwork.

3.2.2 LECTS AND LANGUAGES. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to clarify why I am talking about 'lects' and, in the following, I will also add 'languages'. As I said in §3.1, within Lower Fungom a linguist would identify eight different languages which can be either one-village languages (i.e. Ajumbu, Buu, Fang, Koshin and Kung) or clusters of varieties (i.e. Mungbam, Mundabli-Mufu and Naki). However, according to local conceptions of language boundaries, in each village a distinct 'talk' is spoken, though some of them are acknowledged to 'rhyme' one another (i.e. what we call 'varieties'). From the locals' perspective, that is, in Lower Fungom, there are thirteen 'talks', one for each village headed by a chief:

these are called here ‘lects’. It is no accident that each lect is named after a specific village.

Selecting one of these two ideologies (i.e. the linguist’s and the locals’) as our exclusive perspective would have been arbitrary and misleading. For instance: it would have made no sense to a Buu man had I asked him if he could speak Mungbam or Mundabli-Mufu as these are labels created by linguists for linguists and do not necessarily reflect the reality as it is seen by the speakers. For these reasons I decided to duplicate all analyses I or my collaborators would do on the questionnaire database so as to be able to move from one perspective to the other and vice versa, hence assessing which of the two gave the most reasonable accounts for different research questions.

3.2.3 BASIC RESULTS. For our present purposes, and for reasons of space, it will suffice here to recall the following figures concerning the rates of self-reported multilingual / multilectal competence:

1. There are no monolingual speakers: at the very least, people speak one local lect plus CPE;
2. As an average, men have passive competence in 6 distinct languages, and can speak about 5 distinct languages;
3. As an average, women have passive competence in 5 distinct languages, and can speak an average of 4 distinct languages;
4. As an average, men have passive competence in 10 distinct lects, and can speak about 6 distinct lects;
5. As an average, women have passive competence in 8 distinct lects, and can speak about 5 distinct lects.

It is interesting to note that *all* of the interviewees have reported that the main motivation for them to achieve (at least) passive competence in one or another lect is to be able to detect malicious plans or gossiping that others (i.e. speakers of the lect) may be making against them.

Coming to active competence, we can sum up the diverse results about motivations by saying that:

6. In general, all the interviewees have stressed the fact that, by using a given local vernacular fluently with other speakers, their main goal is to induce in the latter a feeling of trust, unity and friendship. This, of course, is hoped to have direct positive consequences on their personal relationships, such as in obtaining favors or protection, if needed (paraphrasing Myers-Scotton (1993), I would call this a beneficial rights-and-obligations set).
7. CPE is universally recognized as a very convenient lingua franca that allows anyone to communicate freely in the whole of the surrounding region at large.
8. English and, to a lesser extent, French, are conceptualized differently from both local vernaculars and CPE. Schooling, which in the Northwest Region of Cameroon is conducted mostly using English, is the only means through which one can learn these languages but, on the whole, schooling has remained a mirage for the overwhelming majority of people in Lower Fungom until recently. Therefore,

- except for purposes of communication with the very few European and American visitors to the area, these languages are typically used to accrete the perception of the speaker's high social status and, hence, authority. Interestingly, several people told us that English is the language they most often use for rebuking their children.
9. Only English and French are reported to be spoken in order to increase one's prestige.
 10. Respondents stated explicitly that fluency in a number of languages is highly prized on account of the fact that, by so doing, one is able to 'feel at home in different places'. Some men even pointed out that, should their social condition deteriorate in the village where they are currently residing, the chances that they could be well received if not fully incorporated in other villages would be significantly higher thanks to their ability to speak fluently the local vernacular (see Cohen & Middleton (1970) on the notion of incorporation in African traditional societies).

One of the most noticeable hints we get from this highly succinct and partial overview comes from points 6–9 above: language choice implying any of the local lects is made irrespective of notions of prestige that are, in fact, projected only onto the colonial languages. This indicates that the Lower Fungom 'linguistic market' (see Bourdieu 1991: 37–9, 44) is structured in a way that largely escapes the model of polyglossia scales, dominant in mainstream sociolinguistics, where each language or variety is found at a given 'rank' reflecting the degree of prestige attributed to its speakers. The fact that Connell (2009) found the notion of prestige to be absent also in the linguistic market of another rural area along the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland, namely Mambila, is probably a sign of a common ideological background in non-urban, more traditional social contexts of this part of the world, in opposition to urban ones.

But then, if this traditional system ignores prestige, what are the factors that lead people to select one or the other language in interaction?

4. INDEXES, IDEOLOGIES, AND MULTIPLE SOCIAL IDENTITIES

4.1 ESSENTIALIST VS. INDEXICAL LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES. The fact that prestige, except for the colonial languages—such as English and French—is not among the main symbolic assets negotiated in the local linguistic market, has tremendous consequences for our understanding of the local language ideology. Instead of the indexing of a social identity implying personal prestige, what we seem to be uncovering here is suggestive of a language ideology more oriented towards the indexing of affiliation with a given group, devoid of any behavioral or moral reflexes (see also point 10 in the above list of motivations for active multilingualism).

The available literature offers very few cases that can be compared to this situation (e.g. François 2012 and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Slotta 2012, both in Melanesian contexts). The reason for this, I believe, probably lies in the fact that scholars, even the closest to anthropology (such as, e.g., Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (1985) or Kroskrity (2000a)), have interpreted phenomena of language choice as consequential to what Irvine & Gal (2000) have called an 'iconization process'. Through this process "[l]inguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, *as if a linguistic*

feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence" (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37, emphasis added). It is this assumption, which informs the epistemological repertoires of most sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, that seems to be fundamentally questioned by the preliminary findings from Lower Fungom, as well as from other rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa researched so far, i.e. Mambila (Connell 2009) and the Casamance region of Senegal (Lüpke 2009, 2010a; Cobbinah 2010; Lüpke & Storch 2013: esp. 13–47). At the very least, then, our findings open an entirely new window on the social motivations of traditional, i.e. pre-colonial multilingualism in sub-Saharan Africa.

What I want to stress here is that the use of a given set of phonological variants of American English in a North American city, as well as the switch to the language of the former colonial powers in a sub-Saharan metropolis, are intended indexes of certain social identities only because they are underpinned by a whole system of widely shared, interconnected and mutually conditioning assumptions about certain social groups and their distinctive linguistic behaviors. Although the standard term to refer to these acts in literature is 'indexes', these are, in fact, not "nothing more than a semiotic pointer to something else" (McIntosh 2005: 1921) as an index is defined in Peircean terms, but rather, essentialist claims. That is, these acts are means through which one can produce symbolic projections of one's (imagined) inner essence to be 'seen' by others (see also Silverstein 2003 for some important conceptual clarifications).

By contrast, when a young man from Lower Fungom uses his father's language (lect X) with his paternal uncle and then switches to his mother's 'native' (i.e. mother's father's) language (lect Y) when he meets an important man from his mother's village, and then switches to his mother's mother's native language (lect Z) when he meets a man from the Z-speaking village—although everyone could speak Pidgin—he appears to be doing nothing relevant to the definition of his personal qualities. On the contrary, what he is doing is just representing himself, depending on the context, as a member of the groups known to speak respectively X, Y or Z.

It does not seem to be too much of an audacious claim to say that here multilingual competence would allow one to symbolize affiliation with multiple groups. There are a number of social facts that corroborate this view. Naming customs, for instance, move in the same direction.

Before proceeding further, I would like to warn the reader that the following sections will take a strongly ethnographic detour, in order to explore language ideologies in Lower Fungom and their cultural milieu at progressively 'thicker' levels of description (Geertz 1973), i.e. aiming to come progressively closer to what one might define as 'the natives' point of view'. In §4.3.4 we will see that what at first might appear to be primarily ethnographic concerns turn out to have deeper significance for understanding patterns of language use and, thereby, for how one might structure a documentation project (§5).

4.2 ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING MULTIPLE SOCIAL IDENTITIES. Throughout Lower Fungom (and beyond) it is customary that children receive at birth (at least) two names: one is given by their (social, i.e. not necessarily genetic) father, the other by their mother's father. Under normal circumstances, the former is more likely to become the most used, and ultimately the only name recognized by Cameroon's bureaucracy. The latter, which is not a nickname but rather a real personal name taken from the repertoire of names peculiar to the mother's agnatic kin group, is used only by the child's maternal

kin. If the child's parents come from two different villages and, hence, are speakers of two different lects (if not two different languages according to the linguist's standards), then the child is expected to learn both and to use them in the appropriate circumstances. Simplifying somewhat, the father's language is the exclusive code to be used for communication with the paternal kin, whereas the mother's language must be used with the maternal kin. In essence, both personal names and linguistic competence seem to require that the child acquires distinct identities with respect to each kin group (see also Di Carlo & Good 2014 and, for naming customs in other societies of the Cameroonian Grassfields, Mbunwe-Samba et al. 1993).

Kinship does not exhaust all the possibilities for multiple affiliation (cf. Lüpke & Storch 2013: 22–33). In the existing anthropological literature there exist a number of cases indicating that the tendency towards constructing multiple social identities and maintaining (often latent) multiple networks of solidarity was common in traditional sub-Saharan African societies and could go far beyond agnatic kinship *tout court*. Due to space restrictions I can only hope the reader will be content with the following quotations:

Almost all recent studies of nineteenth-century precolonial Africa have emphasized that far from there being a single 'tribal identity', most Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, defining themselves at one moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan, and at yet another moment as an initiate in that professional guild. These overlapping networks of association and exchange extended over wide areas. (Ranger 1983: 248)

[E]ach person was attached to several groups of solidarity. Depending on the context, one expected support from each and offered it to each of them. In times of conflict, one tried to mobilize the maximum contextually relevant group. Since traditional African societies were structured in terms of corporate groups, individual survival was possible only by being under the protective umbrella of one or another such group, and the larger and more powerful it was, the safer one was. (Kopytoff 1987b: 24)

To sum up, multiple affiliations constitute the individual's response to feelings of insecurity (cf. also Field 1960 on the pervasiveness of these feelings in rural Ghana).

The importance of speaking a given lexicogrammatical code to secure cooperation and affiliation with other groups is further made explicit in the following quote, which is an excerpt from an interview I held in 2010 with Buo Makpa Amos, a man from Missong (parts of the excerpt of particular interest to the present discussion have been emphasized):

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 Buo, 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.

It is difficult to understand why anthropologists seem to have rarely, if ever, considered the possibility that a macroscopic feature of Africa's sociolinguistic reality like multilingualism might be the main symbolic means through which these multiple identities could be enacted (but see Lüpke & Storch 2013: 19, 245ff. and *passim*). It is hard to dismiss the idea that there can be a strong link between this well-known cultural tendency and the diffusion of multilingual competence. The available evidence suggests that in Lower Fungom this link existed and, to some extent, is still functional.

4.3 GOING THICKER: MULTIPLE AFFILIATIONS AS A RESPONSE TO INVISIBLE THREATS. The degree of cultural depth we have now reached would probably be considered sufficient by most linguists and sociolinguists. However, as I will try to show in this and the following two sub-sections, by furthering our understanding of the sociocultural mechanisms connected with the response to feelings of insecurity, the role that language plays in this complex 'web of significance' (to cite Max Weber's famous definition of culture) will also become apparent. It is only by following this path that, in §5, the practical consequences for documentary linguists will emerge with due clarity.

4.3.1 MULTIPLE AFFILIATIONS AND PERSONAL INTERESTS. As the two quotations by Ranger and Kopytoff above suggest, a positive attitude towards constructing multiple social identities is to be generally connected with considerations of personal interests, of more or less immediate advantage on the part of the individual. Rather than attempting a typology of the possible advantages that such an attitude might secure, a pointless effort here, I would like to briefly outline some suggestions coming from anthropological literature on sub-Saharan African societies that allow us to imagine why such a need for security is so present in both traditional and postcolonial contexts.

Generally speaking, as secularized Westerners we are naturally inclined to interpret notions like 'advantage' and 'personal interest' mostly in material terms *tout court*. It would be a mistake to take it for granted that the same happens everywhere. For instance, in much of sub-Saharan Africa—no doubt including the Cameroonian Grassfields—local interpretations of the world seem not to admit the possibility that any given event may happen in the material world unless it is paralleled by some analog in the invisible world (see, e.g., Geschiere 1995: 22ff and, on Liberia, Ellis 1999: 13ff; Gausset 2010 (esp. 167ff.) and Baeke 2004 (esp. 147ff.) offer insights into this cultural feature as it is found in regions not far from Lower Fungom). Tensions towards the occult and, more in general, 'spiritual preoccupations' are pervasive in contemporary African societies to the degree that Adam Ashforth asserted "[n]o one can understand life in Africa without understanding witchcraft and the related aspects of spiritual insecurity" (Ashforth 2005: xiii, emphasis added). In other words, what these and a wealth of other studies indicate (such as, e.g., those in Moore & Sanders 2001) is that in no way can we isolate a material-only

economic sphere of social life in African societies, since everything material is generally perceived as being caused or shaped by occult forces and agents acting in the spiritual world. If so, it would be consequential to acknowledge ‘spiritual insecurity’ as having a very high (if not the top) position within the individual’s list of daily preoccupations.

How can one overcome such an all-embracing feeling of (spiritual) insecurity? This seems to be a matter of agency: since the supernatural powers enabling one to gain access into the invisible level of existence as an agent (as opposed to patient, which is believed to be the default condition of most people) can hardly be obtained individually by simply ‘purchasing’ them, the overwhelming majority of people have to rely on the services of specialists.

4.3.2 AGENCY IN THE VISIBLE AND IN THE INVISIBLE WORLDS. It goes without saying that this belief, central as it is in most sub-Saharan African societies, has a direct consequence in the conceptualization of political power and of those who hold it. For one thing, if the invisible determines the visible, then who is powerful in the visible world must also be powerful in the invisible one, either directly or indirectly. Geschiere (1995) offers many examples of such an assumption at work, mostly from Cameroonian contexts, and furthers the discussion so as to show that such beliefs may have been deeply intertwined with the development of certain sociopolitical models. Put roughly, Geschiere (1995: 164–71) suggests that in societies organized politically as ‘acephalous’ groups—i.e. whose internal hierarchy is headed by family heads, not chiefs, as there are no social units acting corporately beyond the level of kin-based groups—those individuals who had some degree of agency in the invisible were for the most part living outside of the society and their services, often as healers, could be requested in exchange for some sort of payment. In centralized societies, by contrast, where the top position in the social organization is occupied by the chief, possession and management of spiritual powers were the prerogative of the village chief, in addition to other figures of political and ritual influence, if present.

How do Lower Fungom societies pattern within this framework? At this point, it is necessary that I briefly deal with two key concepts in the ethnography of Lower Fungom societies: the local conception of the village and of the village chief. In §4.3.4 I will show how this ethnographic data can shed new light on the Lower Fungom language ideology.

4.3.3 VILLAGE AND CHIEF IN THE LOWER FUNGOM SOCIETIES. As I have shown in Di Carlo (2011), the basic ‘building block’ of the Lower Fungom societies is the kin-based ‘quarter’, not the village itself. Quarters are residential and exogamous units in a virilocal system, that is, a system in which all the male members of a given quarter as a rule (i) have to marry women coming from outside of their quarter and not consanguineous to their own mothers, and (ii) are the exclusive residents, together with their wives and children, of a spatially delimited area included in the village. Furthermore, quarters are corporate groups in terms of economy (i.e. members of the same quarter typically collaborate during farming and market activities) and, importantly, they enjoy a certain degree of political autonomy within the village context.

Ritual, on the contrary, seems to be the principal, if not the only, dimension of life in these societies in which the village acts corporately (i.e. as a social unit). Suffice it to recall

here⁸ that chiefs typically represent their power by saying that it is their exclusive duty to provide their fellow villagers with ‘chop, bush, pikin’—i.e. CPE for English ‘produce, game, offspring’—and that they are able to do so through ritual-magical means. Furthermore, as elsewhere in the Cameroonian Grassfields (cf. Fowler 1993, 2011; Warnier 2009), chiefs are conceptualized as sorts of ‘sacred kings’ whose spiritual powers must be given by village-based secret associations.⁹ Both aspects indicate that one of the main *raisons d’être* of the village, i.e. of a supra-kin group, is to be found in the localized management of ritual power (cf. Horton 1972).

So, turning back to the question in §4.3.2 that prompted this short digression, we can say that the Lower Fungom societies, due to their semi-centralized sociopolitical configuration pivoting around the chief’s supernatural agency and rooted in village-based secret associations, exemplify the second type in the framework proposed by Geschiere (see §4.3.2): the chief is the one who is credited with being able to secure prosperity for his subjects, thanks to his agency in the invisible world. Tautologically, one could also say that village members constitute the group of people who benefit from the village chief’s agency in the invisible world.

4.3.4 LANGUAGE X = VILLAGE X = SECURITY PROVIDED BY THE CHIEF OF VILLAGE X? At this point it must be recalled that the only other dimension where the village as a whole has a clear social significance besides ritual is *language*: as we have seen (§3.2.2) the local ideology prescribes the coincidence between ‘languages’ and chiefdoms, the latter nearly perfectly coinciding, in Lower Fungom, with single villages. As a result, in a context where social identity is fluid to a degree unknown to western societies, speaking in the language distinctive of a given chiefdom can legitimately be seen as the only symbolic means for representing, no matter how provisionally, one’s affiliation with that village community. Logically, this can be seen as the key way of representing (if subconsciously) oneself as being part of the group that can benefit from protection in the invisible world provided by its chief. In such a cultural universe, being multilingual could grant the potential of getting the spiritual protection from one or another chief, depending on the situation. Figure 2 offers a graphical summary of the chain of implications I have proposed in §4.

⁸ A detailed treatment of this topic would require more space than is possible here: see Di Carlo (2011: 70ff.) for an overview of some sociopolitical features in the area and Horton (1972) for a general view on the importance of mainly ritual institutions in the emergence of so-called ‘stateless societies’.

⁹ This is an essential aspect of social life throughout (at least) Central and West Africa, on which see Horton (1972) and, for the Grassfields, Kaberry (1962), Chilver and Kaberry (1968), and Fowler (1993, 2011). Di Carlo (2011: 65ff.) is the only source for Lower Fungom in this regard beyond some 1920–30s British colonial reports (cited therein).

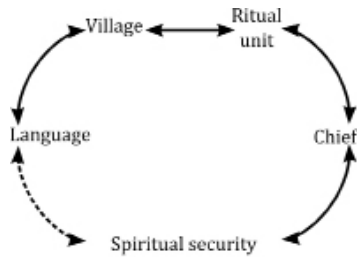


Figure 2. **a)**: the chain of implications, clockwise: Lower Fungom language ideology conceptualizes that each village speaks its own “language” (which, from the linguist’s standpoint may be a variety, not a separate language); the village behaves corporately (i.e. as a social unit) only in ritual matters; within the ritual sphere the village chief is the most prominent actor; since the chief is credited with powers that grant him agency in the spiritual world, he provides the community of his subjects with protection in the spiritual world—that is, spiritual security, a prerequisite for material well-being.

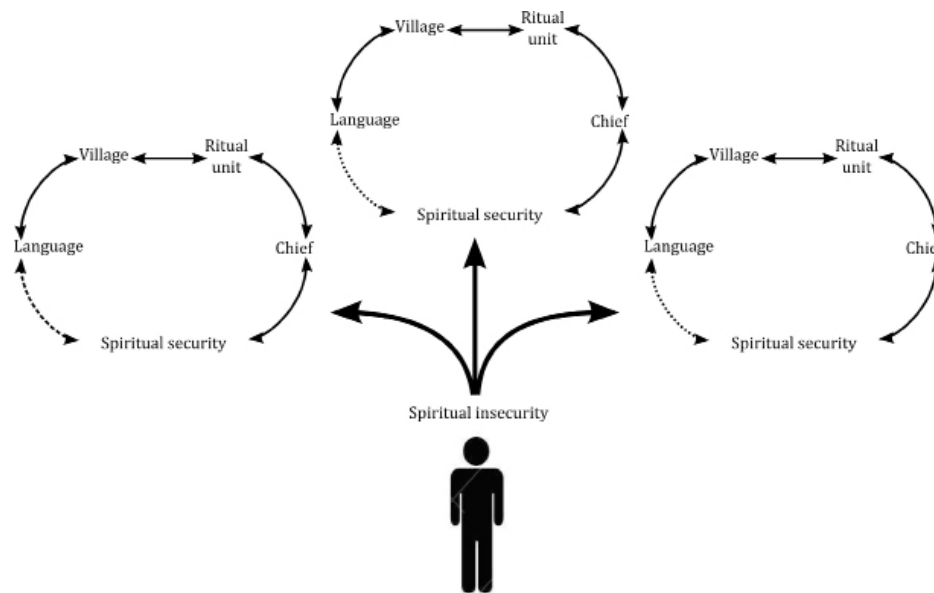


Figure 2. **b)**: through active competence in multiple languages an individual represents affiliation in multiple village communities. By joining different communities enjoying protection from different chiefs, he maximizes the chances to obtain spiritual protection and, hence, material well-being. It will become apparent that this logic is parallel to what in finance is usually called “diversification of investments”.

4.4 SUMMARY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CASE STUDY. To sum up what I have presented so far:¹⁰

1. upon assessing the vitality of Lower Fungom languages, we realized that these are immersed in a language ecology where (i) there is an extremely localist sociolinguistic stance (Hill 1996) (i.e. in local conceptions each village speaks a separate language) and (ii) individual multilingualism is very common;
2. thanks to anecdotal observations, we realized that intergenerational transmission of local languages is, on the whole, still relatively functional as opposed to the transmission of multilingual competence: multilingualism appears as an endangered practice;
3. multilingualism is a key element in the local language ecology and, in addressing issues of language maintenance (i.e. how come small languages are still spoken in a linguistically highly diverse area where multilingualism is so common?), we realized that it was necessary to gain more insights into the actual distribution of multilingual competence among the local population;
4. in order to do so, we interviewed 97 individuals using an ethnographically-informed questionnaire as a mnemonic and we found out that (i) high degrees of multilingualism are common, (ii) multilingualism in local vernaculars (i.e. traditional multilingualism) is not essentialist but indexical in nature as it is not prestige but, rather, affiliation and, thereby, social identities devoid of moral reflexes that are represented through language choice. Since the local language ideology associates each village with one separate ‘language’, we wondered what ‘being a villager of village X or Y’ means in local culture.
5. the village is a meaningful social unit only in its being a ritual unit, and ritual is headed by the village chief;
6. the chief is credited with supernatural powers that grant him agency in the invisible world of spirits: hence, the chief is the major person responsible for the material well-being of the village as, traditionally, it is believed that everything in the visible world is determined in the invisible;
7. being a member of village X means being under the spiritual protection of its chief;

¹⁰ However intriguing, it must be kept in mind that, at the present stage of the research, what I have proposed so far needs additional research before it can be legitimately presented as a fact. My impression, however, is that there are too many clues going in the same direction for one to state that this is totally wrong. For one thing, the actual level of multilingual competence needs to be properly assessed although, one must add, it will be important not only to assess people’s multilingual competence through linguistic means (i.e. comparing performances with those by ‘native’ speakers) but also *in which way ‘native’ speakers assess his competence* (‘native’ is in scare quotes due to the fact that individuals’ linguistic repertoires are so complex that usual categories lose their meaning, cf. Lüpke 2010b: 1). A number of anecdotal observations, for instance, seem to point to a high degree of ‘tolerance’ in this regard: in my experience, even if the person who claims to be speaking language X is evidently not as fluent as he thinks he is, speakers of language X tend to have a ‘mild’ attitude towards him. It is highly likely that what they are more concerned about is not judging abstract ‘grammaticality’, as it is in our cultures, but showing respect for the person’s will to be recognized as a would-be member of group X.

8. by symbolizing affiliation to different villages through speaking their ‘languages’ one obtains potential sources of protection from their chiefs, to be activated when the need arises.

This chain of implications leads us to a ‘thicker’ understanding of both the single components of the Lower Fungom language ecology (i.e. indexical multilingualism, localist sociolinguistic stance, the different local lects, etc.) and, importantly, *how they are connected to each other and what the possible motivations could be for people to make choices within this web of correlations*. Documenting language ecology, that is, enables one to discern the possible motivations people have in choosing, e.g., one given language, one given genre, one given construction, or one given phonological variant in a particular context. I will come back to this point in §5.2 to further show how this can be of essential importance to the documentary as well as to the descriptive linguist.

One last aspect that I would like to stress here is that a better understanding of the Lower Fungom language ecology might even lead us to consider that the maintenance of local vernaculars is in some way also connected with the maintenance of individual multilingualism, which in its turn is rooted in the traditional *Weltanschauung* I have briefly outlined in the previous sections (I will return to this point in §5.3).

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION

5.1 RECONCILING ANCESTRALIST AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL POSITIONS. We all know that the nostalgic¹¹ ancestral code model has characterized the early phases of endangered languages research and still plays a major role in shaping the work of many documenters. The essentialist ELDP motto “Because every lost word is another lost world” is a perfect example in this sense: it assumes, in a neo-Whorfian fashion, that every language embodies a distinct conception of the tangible world, an assumption that Di Carlo & Good (2014) try to complement with at least one possible alternative based on documentary evidence.

The point I want to raise here is: can we really think we are documenting a world if we limit ourselves to documenting an arbitrary selection of what people say in their daily life? In the literature, like I did above (§2), the different approaches have been dealt with contrastively, as if the adoption of one would not admit the adoption of the other method. Of course, in the concrete unfolding of research activities, it is impossible for one and the same person to use the ‘ancestralist’ and the ‘phenomenological’ research perspective at the same time. However, I would like to stress here that it remains fully possible that the two models (i) are applied at different stages of one and the same documentation project, also recursively¹² or (ii) inform the research plans of different members of a team.

¹¹ I take this term from Woodbury (2011): “[...] documentation of the ancestral code, like the endangerment construct itself, can be termed, without any intention to disparage [...], as NOSTALGIC, in the sense that it selects as important from among all the speech in a community that speech which gives evidence of a feature of the past which may not persist long into the future, namely the ancestral code” (Woodbury 2011: 178).

¹² This is reminiscent of Grinevald’s proposal to see an “eternal spiralling upwards through the elements of the classic Boasian trilogy—grammar, texts (now = documentary corpus), and dictionary—

In the case of the documentary projects on Lower Fungom, for instance, focusing on one of the codes present in a given community's repertoire or on an assumedly uniform ethnohistorical tradition have been a priority until the team as a whole obtained a clearer understanding of the local language ecologies and ideologies, which meant that some of us became progressively more focused on multilingualism and on issues of language maintenance. The adoption of such a selective approach, closer to the ancestral code approach rather than to the phenomenological extreme, has allowed the production of both monolectal (like Voll's (in prep.) descriptive grammar of Mundabli) and polylectal grammars (like Lovegren 2013). Far from being obstacles, these outcomes have provided irreplaceable tools for deepening research in other domains and identifying other research targets that could contribute to making our work closer to a holistic documentation. Without those more or less 'ancestralist', reductionist works it would have been too difficult to deal with complex issues such as the loci of reproduction of local languages and cultures (which, to date, have been identified and partially explored (see, e.g., Di Carlo & Good 2014 and Di Carlo in progress)). It must be kept in mind, moreover, that several of the Lower Fungom languages still lack a comprehensive description like those of Mungbam and Mundabli: the description of these languages, as opposed to their documentation, will be facilitated by the adoption, however temporary and self-conscious, of an ancestral code approach.

5.2 FROM PHENOMENA TO PROCESSES. If the previous proposal suggests that a holistic documentation can be achieved only by adopting both models, though at different stages, the one I present here wants to draw a firm boundary between the two and propose a further step in the methodology (let alone the epistemology) of documentary linguistics. As we have seen, at its core the ancestral code model is reductionist: it implies that the researcher makes arbitrary selections into the corpus to be included in the documentation so that it is 'purified' of everything that is not the target language. This facilitates description but warrants that the project outcome is not a 'real' documentation but, rather, the product of a process of co-creation of a language where both speakers (providers of data) and researcher (selector of data) play crucial roles in shaping the final outcome (see, e.g., Dobrin & Berson 2011: 194).

By contrast, taking a phenomenological approach means devoting more substantial attention to recording and analyzing the communicative practices observed in a given community. This increases the chances that one includes in the corpus also data that pertains to other languages, or to some forms of the target language that would be otherwise difficult to record unless they are captured in interaction. So, this is a step towards the inclusion of complexity in documentation.

Nonetheless, it is important to realize that, however different from each other in many respects, the two models both share one feature: their outcomes resemble what one could compare to a still image. The language being documented is captured at some point in time: it can be the selected, reintegrated 'pure' code in the 'ancestralist' approach or the multifaceted present in the phenomenological one (at its roots, the logic of this dichotomy parallels the innatist UG vs. coevolutionary model dichotomy discussed by Evans and Levinson

with each step forward producing advances and refinements in how the other steps proceed" (quote from Evans 2008: 348).

2009). In both cases we would be able to know what people are *saying*, but we would be still missing what people *mean* when they use a code in a given way or choose one among the codes present in their repertoires, since we crucially have no idea as to *why*, to which ends, they are making those choices.

The documentation (as opposed to the record) of the immanent communicative practices of a certain community aiming at being as faithful as possible cannot leave these questions unanswered. The point I wanted to exemplify with the case study I have offered here is that what I see as a promising way to achieve a holistic (i.e. real) documentation is to (i) take both approaches at different times (or by different team members) and for different purposes within one and the same documentary project and (ii) include ethnographic insights and tools in the documentation not as ancillary, complementary, interesting-but-too-complicated-to-include ‘things’ but, rather, as an integral and profoundly meaningful part of a language documentation project. This kind of research path naturally leads to a level of understanding that lies on an ontologically new ground, very similar to what Bourdieu (1977: 3, *passim*) proposes for the theory of practice as a way to integrate and at the same time overcome the dualism between objectivism (our ancestralist model) and phenomenology.

By getting closer to the real motivations for people to behave (if only linguistically) in a certain way, we are uncovering the social semiotic *processes*, that is, the cultural matrices underpinning local ways of speaking. This is likely to change how we see things in the field and, later, in our analysis. An example from my documentation can be helpful here.

During the recordings of a several-day-long welcome ritual in Ngun, I also had the opportunity to videotape some performances of *ishaama*, the highest women’s secret association in the village. What I knew already was that membership in this association grants a woman the highest level of social esteem possible—credited by the rest of the village as well as by all the surrounding villages and beyond thanks to a system of ‘cross-chiefdom equivalence’ of these titles (see Di Carlo 2011: 69, 76ff.)—which materializes, on the one hand, in access to especially sizable shares of food and drinks on certain occasions and, on the other, in the possibility of directly influencing the life of the village as well as of the whole area, thanks to collaboration with analogous women’s associations throughout the area. In the past I had witnessed the performances of some equivalent women’s associations in other villages of Lower Fungom: the chiefs were members and had always participated in the performance. This had left with me the impression that chiefs in some way ‘ruled’ these associations, thus confirming what men usually said during interviews about these associations. In Ngun I was exposed to a totally different situation: first of all, the chief participated in the initial, preparatory phases of the ritual dance but then chose to remain seated on his chair throughout the actual performance; secondly, during the performance of the several songs and dances, each lady sang in her father’s language, i.e. most often in a lect or language that was not Ngun.¹³

I first thought that this was a way for the women to sanction their autonomy in the vil-

¹³ As a consequence of the exogamy rules recalled in §4.3.3, it is common to find in every Lower Fungom village a number of women who were born in other villages and have moved in after marriage with a local man. In Ngun, for instance, out of the 23 wives I have counted in a detailed village census, 16 came from other nearby villages.

lage: most Ngun villagers always hear them speaking Ngun, which is their way of representing themselves as ‘Ngun women’. Although this is surely achieved via this language choice, it might not be the whole story. Following what I have proposed in §4.3.4. an important addition can be made: they could be representing their autonomy by reminding the chief that they will always be ‘daughters of another village’, that is, members of another community of speakers and beneficiaries of the spiritual skills of another chief. From this perspective, the women’s choice to switch to their father’s language during a culturally highly salient event would appear more as a way of publicly downsizing and relativizing the Ngun chief’s actual power rather than as a symbol of the women’s autonomy *tout court* (relevant discussion of this and related aspects in Jukun areas, in a border region of Nigeria not far from Lower Fungom, can be found in Lüpke & Storch 2013: esp. 157ff.). To put it differently: some women, thanks to the degree of agency they have obtained in the society, materialize the popular view that the powers of the chief are limited, that he is potentially faulty like any other villager, that he can be wrong. These are reminiscent of the numerous little events in daily life during which villagers manifest their mocking and vaguely dissident-like attitude towards ‘big men’ through gossiping or secretly ridiculing their deeds. I would like to stress that these emergences of a political anti-hegemonic, profoundly egalitarian discourse, though permeating the Lower Fungom societies (and many others as illustrated, e.g., by Geschiere 1995: 93–120), are usually very difficult to document.

Why is this important? First, this alternative reading of the language choices during the *ishaama* performance would allow a re-appraisal of the event’s key (in the sense of Hymes’ (1986) SPEAKING mnemonic) from ‘exhibited self-determinism’ to ‘mocking iconoclasm’ or to a mixture of the two. This possible difference might prove to be of relevance to the linguist as the availability of alternative keys providing “the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done” (Hymes 1986: 62) may offer handholds for a better translation and overall linguistic annotation of verbal art performances. Those who have worked on these kinds of texts know how crucial such a possibility can be as it is common that verbal art genres are characterized by elliptical or otherwise ‘complicated’ constructions that are usually little understood in detail.

Second, it is a matter of doing ‘thick’ documentation: for one thing, local ‘distributions’ of agency, too, should be documented as they determine what can be said or done and in which way (e.g. using which discourse genres) by different people occupying different social positions.

Third, it can serve to avoid the risk of hypostatizing fluid or otherwise multifaceted institutions, a risk well-known to anthropologists (see, e.g., Bourdieu’s (1977) critiques to objectivism). That is, it mitigates the risk that an outsider, by way of recording practices ignoring the fact that they are carried out by *certain* individuals, in *given* moments, within *culturally-situated* contexts and for *specific* ends, “unduly magnifies the claim of a statement to general validity” (Fabian 1983: 80). This is clearly a less than ideal outcome in any documentary context. In Lower Fungom languages, chiefs are referred to by the non-specific term *ɲkuɲ* ‘head of a group of people (e.g. farmers, builders, dancers)’, while in the fully centralized chiefdoms of the Cameroonian Grassfields the chief is called *fon*. *Fons* are at the center of a much more elaborated etiquette and are socially more distant from the rest of the society than Lower Fungom *ɲkuɲ* (see, e.g., Warnier 1975 on Mankon, Chilver & Kaberry 1962 and Neba 2013 on Bafut; for the differences between Lower Fungom and

Grassfields chiefs see Di Carlo 2011: 65–89). Failing to grasp this difference could lead the documentary linguist to reify, unknowingly, a rigidly hierarchical institution (especially in recordings made in ritual contexts) whereas, in fact, it is not. It would not only be an ethnographic mistake but also a crucial misunderstanding that, once archived and published (also through publicly available videos), could be diffused back to the village so potentially becoming (i) a cause for the group being documented to become more conformant to a set of practices sanctioned in the (locally highly-prized) documenter’s misinformed work and (ii) a potential source of legitimation for a chief’s power hunger.

At this point it is important to recall that I arrived at this point *only because I paid attention to multilingualism*: a project led only through the lens of the ancestral code model could not possibly discover this since it would de-select multilingual evidence. I do not know whether the reader has realized that, since I started my discussion of Lower Fungom language ideology, we have passed a threshold, that which lies between phenomena on the one side and processes on the other. I have tried to talk about multilingualism not as a sociolinguistic phenomenon to be studied quantitatively or qualitatively or both. By directing my efforts to understanding the motivations for people to become multilingual, I have tried not to abstract multilingualism from its embeddedness in society and interaction. As we have not seen, this can mean quite long a journey in another culture, the goal being parallel to Fredrik Barth’s in Bali, i.e. “to build progressively a *more workable facsimile* of the realities [the Balinese] variously construct and inhabit” (1993: 93, emphasis mine). I find “progressively more workable facsimile” to be a very nice definition of the objective of language documentation as I intend it, surely one that cannot be achieved unless we manage, in some way, to integrate documentation of phenomena with documentation of the processes that give rise to them.

The importance of all this becomes even more evident if we recall that the development of language policies promoting revitalization or support should be drawn from the outcomes of a documentation project.

5.3 LANGUAGE SUPPORT AND REVITALIZATION POLICIES. Nobody would object to the claim that a radical change in the environment or the culture of a given community might threaten the maintenance of its lexico-grammatical code. To give but an example, ethnobotany, ethnozoology, and any other culture- and environment-specific components of ethnoscientific knowledge can be documented only in the field because it is here that the environment provides the referents that are encoded. However, if we agree on the fact that lexico-grammatical codes convey social as much as referential meanings, then it follows that maintenance of a given code is tied with the maintenance not only of environmental and broadly ‘cultural’ (i.e. ‘folkloristic’ in the understanding of many) realities, but also of social ones.

For this reason, most publications on language revitalization are careful to emphasize the importance of knowing local language ideologies in designing language policies. However, as I said above, when we talk about language ideologies we are talking about the processes, the matrices determining certain linguistic behaviors, something ontologically different from, say, the phonology or the lexicon of a given language, which are to be considered as the ultimate products, i.e. the emergent phenomena, of a complex web of cognitive, historical and cultural factors. To make this difference clear I would like to recall that there are cases, such as that in Kulick (1992), showing that maintenance of a tradi-

tional language ideology can coincide with the death of a language. The documentation of language ideologies and ecologies can lead to what a documentary linguist would define as counterintuitive results.

Equally telling as to how ideology and language lie on two different planes, is to note that maintenance of a given code can coincide with the permanence of a condition of social injustice. Should we discover that maintenance of a given language is instrumental in the continuation of social inequalities in a given community, would we struggle for its support or revitalization? Its death would disappoint the nostalgic westerners. These very people, I guess, would be equally disappointed to learn that corrupt and careless ‘politicians’ keep their power since the key institutions sanctioning their power have been preserved thanks to the outcomes of a nostalgic discourse over the maintenance of the local ancestral language.

In sum, my claim is: before embarking on a language support initiative (especially in Africa), one should first know what kind of sociocultural implications the use of a certain lexico-grammatical code has had in the past of a speaker community so as to be able to assess the consequences its maintenance would engender in the future. In the specific case of Lower Fungom, the essential role that multilingualism plays in the local language ecology that I have illustrated in this paper might ‘counterintuitively’ suggest that support of individual languages could be best pursued by fostering the development, in young people, of individual multilingual competence in the local vernaculars. This is a possibility I am exploring in the NSF-funded project I am currently involved in (PI Jeff Good).

6. CONCLUSIONS. In its essence this paper claims that doing language documentation means documenting not only the codes but also their ecologies and that this, in its turn, means also documenting the practices and the beliefs ensuring the reproduction of the phenomena we are exposed to in the field: phenomena such as sets of phonological variants, discourse genres, registers and language choices (to name but few) are all immersed in the open-ended universe of a group’s language ideology, in its turn contained within its language ecology. It is at this level that linguistic behaviors get their significance, at least in the mind of the speakers. My claim is that a documentation project should at least try and explore these topics.

But, as Evans (2008) has rightly pointed out and Jeff Good (p.c.) has emphasized, here lies the risk that claims such as mine are taken as further ‘need to be’s’ or ‘need to do’s’ by the documentary linguist who, feeling overtaxed, would get lost in translating general recommendations into practical suggestions. Therefore, in these conclusions I will try to list what I hope the documentary linguist would consider doing after reading this paper (already an ambitious task *per se*).

1. Focus upon language ideology. In the available literature it is not made clear how one should target language ideology in the field and deal with it as an archivable documentary outcome. Points 2 and 3 below, respectively, tackle these aspects.
2. Carry out sociolinguistic surveys. If designed to this end (see 3.2.1 and Appendix A), a survey can be a shortcut in uncovering features of the local language ideology. At the very least, this will help you get acquainted with more people than you would do for the purposes of writing a grammar or a dictionary. By so doing, you

- will (i) have the opportunity to show the community at large that you are not totally ‘*encliqué*’¹⁴ with the families you most often work with (including that you will distribute some of your money to people who would not otherwise receive it) and (ii) be exposed to a diverse array of statements or suggestions about the local language ideology especially from people who have not been too influenced through prolonged contact with you. In general, it is good to be reminded that exposure to diversity means exposure to potentially new discoveries in any domains.
3. Include introductory texts and ethnographic reference tools in your archived documentation. In my case, for instance, how can I make sure that anyone accessing my documentary materials stored in ELAR be informed about the language ideology and its cultural context as I have discussed in this paper? I think that an introductory sketch stored in the same file bundle would probably be of help. Moreover, it would be important to also prepare, as standalone documentary outcomes, (i) a census of the community members (if these are not too many) and (ii) a reference tool to map the existing relations between the people recorded in your audiovisual primary data: this can be generated after proper ethnographic data are collected and then organized using an application such as KinOath (URL <http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/kinoath/>).
 4. Form a multidisciplinary team. Dobrin (2008: 317) recommends that “[l]inguists preparing for fieldwork should read the contemporary ethnographic literature on the broader region in which they plan to work”. This will surely be of help but, I am afraid, will not be sufficient for a language documentation project of the kind I am advocating here to be successful. Ethnographic literature is commonly felt to be easier reading than linguistics works filled with field-specific (and, at times, also author-specific) technical terminology. Of course, the more superficially one can read something and have a sense of following the argument, the more likely this person will indulge in as superficial a reading as possible. And, it should not be overlooked that in order for one to make sense of the description of, say, a ritual performance, one should have a number of expectations in mind concerning, e.g., the role of participants (e.g. who can sing what songs? where does the singer live?) or the objects being used (e.g. where are the ritual objects usually stored?) as these could all provide interpretive cues. These kinds of questions are more likely to rise after one either has some previous fieldwork experience or has also studied a number of general anthropological or philosophical works or both. Let us reverse this: paraphrasing Dobrin (2008), would you recommend that “Ethnographers preparing for fieldwork should read the contemporary linguistic literature on the languages spoken in the broader region in which they plan to work”? Sure you would. But if in the target languages there are, say, tones, wouldn’t you also recommend reading some general works on tones? In order for you to be sure that the ethnographer will be able to do a proper transcription, then,

¹⁴ The notion I am referring to here is Olivier de Sardan’s (1995) *enclique*: “The researcher enters a society through some of its particular groups, not with the participation of the whole community. He enters some networks and not others. This bias is as daunting as it is unavoidable. The researcher can always be assimilated, often unwillingly but at times with his complicity, to a ‘clique’ or a local ‘faction’.” (Olivier de Sardan 1995: §81, my translation).

you should also check that he is familiar with the basics of the IPA. But, can you expect the ethnographer also to become a linguist? Imagine one has access to unlimited funding, wouldn't it be far better to have the ethnographer be accompanied by a linguist (ideally after training them in the art of listening and cooperating)? Sure it would. *The fact that, as we all know, funding is very limited (if there is any), should not make us forget what the best practice we should aim at is.* As the reader will realize, the last point is the most important as it is likely to transform all the imperatives of the previous points from 'do this' or 'be this' to 'have an ethnographer do this'. I am hoping that, with these practical directions, this paper has contributed to having the overtaxed linguist not only better grasp what I meant in my paper, but also make novel plans for future research.

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APPENDIX
MULTILINGUALISM PROJECT – QUESTIONNAIRE

Researcher		
Date		
Audio files		
Village		
Quarter		
Personal details	Paternal name	
	Maternal name	
	Other names	
	Gender	
	Date of birth	
	Occupation	
	Paternal affiliation(s)	<i>Quarter of birth, mother's quarter, grandmothers' affiliations, other affiliations (e.g. child fostering)</i>
	Maternal affiliation(s)	<i>See above</i>
	Spouse(s)' provenance	
	Spouse(s)' languages	
	Parents' provenance	<i>Quarter of birth. At times focus on this detail gives information which complements that in "paternal affiliation"</i>
	Parents' languages	<i>Languages spoken by the respondent's parents. Here it is the local ideology to be applied (i.e. lects, not languages)</i>

Known languages

Date..... Village.....

Consultant's paternal name.....

Language name	Degree of competence 1= hears a bit; 2= hears but no talk; 3= talks a bit; 4= fluent ; 5= native

Language sheet /Village..... Consultant's paternal name.....

Language name	
How did you learn it and where?	
When do you use it?	
Are there any special occasions in which you use it? (e.g. prayers, songs, invocations, formulas)	

Language name	
How did you learn it and where?	
When do you use it?	
Are there any special occasions in which you use it? (e.g. prayers, songs, invocations, formulas)	

Language name	
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Are there any special occasions in which you use it? (e.g. prayers, songs, invocations, formulas)	

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