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MULTILINGUALISM AND INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPRAISAL OF LOWER FUNGOM COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

In the history of language and conflict, experience has shown that when there is multilingualism in very restricted communities like Lower Fungom, the issue of identity comes up as many people are asserting their identity and this has often resulted into conflict. Yet, there seem to be apparent calm in Lower Fungom and therefore the question is how these languages cohabit with the people such that there is relative calm. Hence, we study the households to see the kind of culture the people have and how they practice their multilingualism in such a way that it helps to blend them or separate them. This paper examines the interface on which multilingualism and inter-community relationship is expressed in Lower Fungom such that there is a peaceful cohabitation among the people.

A sociolinguistic survey was carried out in four of the thirteen villages of Lower Fungom with an ethnographic interview guide that handled both linguistic and ethnographic information.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews from ten households in each of the four chosen communities. The information collected through in-depth interviews was later verified through focus groups discussions where the participants refuted or confirmed what was provided as information during in-depth interviews. The analysis of the data collected is based on the information that was provided by participants during focus group discussions.

The data collection and analyses revealed that significant rates of multilingualism in the area are explained socially in terms of blood relations, marriage, in-laws, perceived proximity and similarity, religion, education, individual relations and movements.

Also, the data suggests that household multilingualism transmitted from one generation to another has become a culture and is responsible for the peaceful community and inter-community coexistence in the area. The ethnographic approach employed in data collection revealed that there is no identity crisis but there is a new way of negotiating identity which begins from the household where there is tolerance and consensus in the use of different languages. This tolerance and consensus is extended to the entire community and even beyond the community.

Furthermore, household and community multilingualism should be a national responsibility for reasons other than those of international politics. This is because language crisis often

tend to breed other crisis such as economic, political, and social crises which, in turn, create a dysfunction in the society.

KEY WORDS: Multilingualism, identity, diversity, households, power relations, inter-community relations, coexistence.

INTRODUCTION

It is fairly well-known that language is a tool for communication and social collaboration, a standard of education, and a vehicle for cultural expression. In any nation state, language is also often regarded as a symbol of national identity. This, in turn, is based on the equally wellknown function of language as a solidarity marker. Pardon and Furniss (2003) note that a speech community has its 'in-group' language that marks it off from other speech communities. This same speech community may have an 'out-group' language that it shares with a wider group. Alternatively, the solidarity function of a language may be restricted to special purposes, such as religion, power or economics. In all these cases, language marks a person as belonging to a group which may vary from a household in a village community or a religious sect, to an ethnic group or the entire nation. This in turn urges the person to identify with each of the groups through language use and hence the need for multilingualism. Multilingualism is the ability to speak more than one language. Today, multilingualism is a norm and monolingualism is the exception. It is a blessing rather than a biblical curse. Chumbou (2003), notes that Cameroon has over 260 languages, Nigeria has over 400, Papua New Guinea has over 800 languages and over 600 have been developed and are being used in schools.

On the one hand, the decision to speak more than one language especially in the elitist milieu is often seen as a mark of prestige. Here, English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Chinese or Arabic are used to express one's level of social sophistication or advancement. On the other hand, ethno-multilingualism is employed as a means for survival or for reasons of identity within a particular cultural milieu. Given that language is the vehicle of a culture, people will easily be accepted within some local cultural communities when they express themselves in the languages of such a culture.

Culture we know is a means of adapting to the environment and a people's cultural practice is necessarily linked to the pressures and opportunities of the environment in which they live. Thus the interpersonal relationship in any cultural grouping is first of all expressed through language. The methods of expressing these relationships can be cordial or hostile depending on the peer groups, gender or cultural norms of the group. Some cultures prescribe the protection of the younger generations and female gender while others protect the elder generations and give no room for the younger one or female gender to express themselves irrespective of family ties. Some cultures encourage strong family ties such that a family member feels secured and protected in a group or society where they have their members in charge. Other cultures give preference to the peer group members such that even a family member does not have any advantage before their family members. This becomes more complex in multilingual communities as we see in lower Fungom.

Lower Fungom is an area around 240 square kilometers in size which is located in the Grassfields' within the North West Region of Cameroon. The area is inhabited by about 10,000 people distributed in thirteen villages whose population ranges from less than 200

people (such as Biya, Buu, and Ngun) to about 3,000 (like Koshin and Fang). To Di Carlo (2012), Lower Fungom is a region of extreme interest as it is characterized by an amazing degree of linguistic diversity. The resulting language density averages one language per thirty square kilometers, making Lower Fungom one of the linguistically most diverse micro-areas of the Cameroonian Grassfields – itself a well-known area for its remarkable degree of linguistic diversity. While the languages are all reasonably classified as Bantoid, five of them do not have any established close relatives outside of the region, nor can they be straight forwardly shown to be closely related to each other. Di Carlo (2011: 54) notes that the astonishing degree of language density so far lacked historical and ethnographic contextualization and therefore any serious attempt to understand its etiology.

The locals hold that each ethnic group speaks a separate linguistic form, especially with the case of single villages. With this in mind, Di Carlo asserts that an individual speaking a different language can be accepted in that community and as such, receives protection from the invisible world by the chief. In other words, being multilingual can fetch a golden ticket of protection to invisible threats by a chief representing that ethnic community. Also, Di Carlo and Pizziolo (2012) in their study of Lower Fungom., showcase the importance of multi-disciplinarily approaches in probing linguistic issues. How then dose the household accept a member speaking a different language?

Angwara (2013) seeks to define the macro sociological factors that account for individual multilingualism in Lower Fungom and attempts an exposition of multilingualism in pre-colonial times in Lower Fungom while highlighting the importance of gathering data from an ethnographic perspective thus revealing possible language choices. The local language ideologies of the Lower Fungom people which consist of creating the maximum number of social networks for their own benefits (economic, political and social) underlie whatever sociological factors that account for high rates of multilingualism in Lower Fungom.

The scholarly linguistic classification of the speech varieties of this area suggests: that seven languages, or small language clusters, are spoken in its thirteen recognized villages (Good *et al.* 2011:102). However, this characterization is at odds with the local conception of linguistic distinctiveness which treats each of the region's thirteen villages as having its own "talk". These "talks" identify a community which needs to interact with another for cultural or economic purposes which we call intercommunity interaction. Ojong (2014) studied how people make use of their multilingual repertoires in lower Fungom while Nsen (2014) worked on the assessment of Individual Multilingualism. Dicarlo 2011 further stresses that Lower Fungom is a multilingual very restricted geographical area, to the extent that the network of multilingualism is so interwoven that you might not even know who the native speaker of which language is.

As stated earlier, this paper examines peaceful coexistence in a multilingual setting which would otherwise be characterized by conflict as it is the case in other multilingual areas. As such, we are going to detail into such domains as: Socio-cultural expression of intercommunity relationship in Lower Fungom, expression of inter-community relationship through death and burial in Lower Fungom, expression of inter-community relationship through economic activities, expression of inter-community interaction through power relations

Inter-community relationship is the interaction between two or more communities. Nfi (2014) refers to it as interactions between people who had formed separate entities with different languages and customs but who entertain various relations with each other. Yenshu (2001: 163-190) explains that apart from colonial arrangements that led to inter-community interaction in the Bamenda Grassfields, other factors such as, mutual exchange, identity, competition and use of a common language, are root causes of inter-community interaction.

The concept of inter-community relations is so vast and encompassing that it touches every aspect of life. Whatever we are doing involves human relations and interactions in one form or the other. Human relations are concerned with the ways of the people and their groups. It also means that which can be done to anticipate, prevent or resolve conflict among a given people. Lussier (2008) says that "human relations are about you and how you get along with your family, friends, co-workers, and everyone else you interact with." Lewin (1948) was interested in the scientific study of the processes that influence individuals in group situations and the centre initially focused on group productivity, communication, social perception, intergroup relations, group membership, leadership and improving the functioning of groups." Lewin coined the term group dynamics to describe how individuals and groups behave differently depending on their environmental context.

Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto (2006) developed the social dominance theory, which states that most social groups are organized into hierarchies within developed societies. According to the theory, these hierarchies are based on age, with older individuals having more power; sex, with men having more power than women, and arbitrary-set hierarchies which are culturally defined and can include race/ethnicity, religion, and nationality. The theory also predicts patterns of group conflict based on high-power hegemonic groups discriminating and oppressing low-power groups, with one mechanism of oppression involving myths that legitimize the hegemonic group's status. Sidanius developed the social dominance orientation scale to measure the desire for one's in-group to dominate and be superior to out-groups.

The case of Lower Fungom communities is especially peculiar; different groups migrated into the same region at different times and settled there because of the availability of arable land for agricultural practice, availability of streams and rivers, and relatively secured location from attacks. The closeness of these communities, perhaps a factor in their growth and expansion, resulted in the intermarriages, then the struggle for the ownership, control, and usage of land. It also resulted in a desire to seek or exercise dominance and separate community identities, with each having recourse to superior historical tradition. Despite the close location of these communities and the similarity in their customs and language, their relationship has not been completely cordial. There has been distrust and antagonism, resulting in the desire of the communities to seek ways of asserting themselves from the grip of domination. This community assertion is demonstrated in the mutual sharing and participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the communities that give them a sense of belonging. Briefly put, inter-community relationship in lower Fungom is expressed through the socio-cultural, economic and political domains of the area as we explain below. In this section, we explore how these factors enhance inter-community interaction and peaceful coexistence in Lower Fungom. Part one introduces the paper, while parts two and three explore the facets of inter-community relationship in Lower Fungom.

Socio-cultural Expression of Inter-community Relationship in Lower Fungom
Relationships between people from the same cultural area or norms are complex enough. When two people or a group of people form any type of relationship and they are from different cultural backgrounds, complexity and intricacy are taken to a whole different level. Culture typically consists of such social phenomena as beliefs, ideas, language, and customs. Mbonji (2005), notes that ... culture significantly influences the way in which we communicate with each other. When we interact with persons from different cultures, national stereotypes may affect our approach. Following the integrated threat theory, Redmond (2012), notes that when individuals or groups do not see any aspect of a situation as negative and do not react or act without threat, they are not motivated to protect their resources. Instead they are motivated to engage in cooperative behaviors like gaining judgments that are more accurate for their group and contributing more efficiently to decision-making abilities. Derks et al. (2009) described it as self-affirmation and group affirmation. Self-affirmation is when the individual focuses on themselves rather than the group. Group affirmation is when the focus is on the group as a whole. Inter-community relationships in Lower Fungom are both for self and group affirmation, and are expressed in such socio - cultural domains of life cycle (betrothal and marriage, birth and child care, childhood and education, death and burial) to verbal arts, music, and dance.

Betrothal and Marriage
Bethrodal and marriage are the basic formalities that lead to the founding of a family and hence the birth of communities. This is because the family is the nucleus of the society and family, providing game, firewood, labour and other services until the girl was ripe for marriage. This for long has been the case with Abar, Buu, Koshin and the Mashi communities where the data were collected. During a focus group discussion, a 59 years old male from Mashi participants in a focus group discussion in Mashi explained that.

> *"In those days, children could even be married when they were still in the hand. At times a person would just point a girl in any quarter or village to be his wife and the girl would grow up and be his wife. But it is no longer done today. For instance, my wife would still be like this one (points to a little girl in the hall) who was not even mature, this one is even big and I would know that my wife is growing. I would work chop and provide everything; carry firewood for the parents, hunting and providing meat and oil for the parents to maintain my wife. Nowadays, the average age of marriage for girls here is at 15 or 16 years."*

From the literature review, we noted that bethrodal and intermarriage among the Kikuyu of Kenya is strictly on lineage and tribe lines but this is not the case in the communities of Lower Fungom where a man is able to get his wife from any village or quarter. As long as the man is able to fulfill the marriage demands of the village or community, he is given the girl who grows up to be his wife. With this kind of attitude, there is no psychological division among the people when it comes to getting a wife and this is what enhances multilingualism and peaceful coexistence. This resonates with Yenshu (2001) who says mutual exchange is among the factors that lead to inter-community relationship.

Marriage and Intermarriage

Like in most African cultures, girls in Lower Fungom were betrothed at birth before being given out in marriage. Today, the girl will choose her husband and when they have stayed either for one month or one year, she presents him to her parents. The marriage arrangements and bride wealth are the same in most of Lower Fungom communities. The participants in a focus group discussion in Koshin agreed that:

> *"when she comes with the man, the man will bring something; a calabash of palm wine, they call it knock door. Then he can also bring ten or twenty thousand and the man will come with his family. They will come and meet the father, either, with two friends, or the family and when they come, the father welcomes them and the mother will give them food. After that when the man has brought the calabash of palm wine, he will say this is my friend, I want to marry your child. The father will then find out how long they have known each other and then enquire about the family of the man. This can take as up to three days or one week if the man is from a different village."*

If proper inquiries have been made and the man found worthy, the father will then put wine in a cup and give to his daughter, warning her that he will not drink again to give to a different man because he thinks the daughter has made the right partner for herself. After this drinking of the bond, the father will introduce his son in law to his family and they are asked to go to the girl's mother and drink the bond as well. When the bond is drank at the girl's mother, the mother also introduces his son in-law to her family and the family of the man is now asked to come and pay the bride price after two or three years of living together.The bridewealth depends on the level of education of the girl and the son in-law's relationship with the in-laws. In the communities where we collected data, bridewealth is usually very symbolic. Participants in a focus group discussion in Koshin agreed that: *"If you have cordial relationships with your in-laws you can pay a low bride price but if you are stubborn to your in-law, he can come in and ask you to pay five hundred thousand or six hundred thousand francs."*The exception is Ngun where bride wealth used to be very high (between twenty to thirty goats). This partly explains why the population of Ngun has remained low because other villages did not want to marry from Ngun**.**

It is apparent that the patterns have changed in the last 1 or 2 generations. Nowadays, the ratio of women marrying out of their villages has increased in Abar, Buu and Mashi except Koshin where women coming from outside seem to have decreased as a whole, and particularly those coming from Bum and Kom who reportedly were once numerous. It is however impossible to explain from such statements the ideological tendency that Koshin people have towards identifying themselves as more tightly related with Bum than the other communities of lower Fungom (Sawe in particular).

It is through marriage and **e**sp**e**cially intermarriage that intercommunity r**e**lations are expressed thus enhancing multilingual practices. A woman, who marries into a different language community, has to acquire the language of her new community thus rendering her multilingual. The children born of this union will equally be multilingual depending on their upbringing. In order to prove their love to their spouses and their people the husband or wife has to learn the languages of their people which is, in turn, transmitted to the children at home.

Childhood and Education

In Lower Fungom communities, intermarriage entails inter-community interaction both at the level of the household and the community at large. In this section, we describe what obtains at both levels.

Childhood and Education at the level of the household

At the level of the household, children born in one linguistic community can be able to acquire the language of another community without necessarily having lived in that community. This is the case of one informant in Abar whose grandmother and mother are from Munken, his father is Abar, he lives in Abar and his wife is from Fang. His elder brother is married from Kung and Ajumbo. He speaks Fang his wife's language, Munken; his mother's language, Abar his father's language as well as Ajumbo and Kung; the languages spoken by the two wives of his elder brother. He has lived with his mother's people in Munken, his step mother in Abar, his elder brother's two wives and his wife from Fang. During his stay in Munken as a child, he acquired the ways of life of his mother's people as he belongs to several social and sacred groups in Munken. In Abar, he has also acquired the way of life of his father's people where he is settled and is a member of almost all the sacred and social groups of the community. To keep up his relations with his in-laws from Fang, he learns the language of his in-laws from his wife as his wife also learns Abar language so as to be able to interact with her in-laws in Abar. He is a member of social groups in Munken and Abar some of which he attends with his wife. The wife is also a member of social groups in Abar and Koshin some of which she attends with her husband. The children speak Munken, Abar, and Fang and there are moments they have to go and spend some time with their maternal grandparents in Fang. During this time, they also acquire the ways of life of their mother's people. At home, they use Abar with the children to enable the children to interact in the host community but there are moments that the wife speaks to the children in Fang and the husband speaks munken.

Childhood and Education at the level of the Community at Large

For groups to subsist and continue to live, there is always this idea of consciousness and identity which comes with the idea of uniqueness, separateness and singularity, which are developed within the locus of culture. The development of multilingual education depends on the initial definition of multilingualism. We are multilingual when we understand and are understood in more than one language (Siray-Blatchford & Clarke, 2010). However, individuals have developed communication competences (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) in other ways in different languages. Furthermore, children enter multilingualism in different ways. Tabors (1997) writes about simultaneous and sequential learning within two languages. Simultaneous learning in two languages is characterized by a child learning two languages at the same time in a family situation where each parent speaks his or her own language to the child. Sequential learning in two languages describes situations where a child starts learning the second language after the first. In the latter case, the child already possesses some knowledge of the function of language; thus, when learning a second language, he or she does not learn the function of language but the ways in which the second language appears and how it is different from the first language. In the lower Fungom communities, childhood education begins from the household and emphasizes respect and conformity rather than uniqueness or singularity. At a tender age the

child learns to respect the bonds of Kinship, to perform economic activities, to watch out for his own interests and to make decisions for itself. The idea is for the child to be able to identify with a particular household within a given community and beyond that community. Education in this culture stresses economic and psychological independence but not social independence. From the beginning of initiative play (ndughunoaamto) both at home, in schools or in churches; there is a gradual transition to the adult activities which the child will perform throughout the rest of its life to participate to the extent that they are able in whatever work the parent of the same sex is doing. No pressure is necessary because for children, this is simply an extension of the games they have devised for themselves and it brings them close to the parents. The parents are more concerned with what the child can accomplish than in the possibility that the child may make mistakes or fail. Thus, children will acquire the skills and reasons for inter-community interaction from their parents or elders as they grow up. This is the case with this 44 years old male consultant in Abar whose mother is from Mundabli, his father from Buu and his mother's sister is married in Koshin. He has lived among his people in all these villages and he speaks all the languages and respects the bonds of kinship that arise from there. He now serves as the bridge for inter-community interactions for all the communities in the socio-cultural, economic and political domains.

In the socio-cultural domain, he is a member of the ***chop skin*** meeting group in Mashi which has members from Koshin, Mashi and Mundabli. This is because he has lived in Koshin with his mother's sister and the proximity of his mother's people (Mundabli) to Mashi. Apart from its monthly gatherings, the ***chop skin*** meeting group also rejoices and condoles with its members in times of fortune or misfortune. This could be in times of death affecting a meeting member or during the traditional wedding or church ceremony involving a member. At such occasions, members of the meeting will gather around the concerned member to support the member.

This therefore points to the fact that language in these communities is only a code for communication and every other thing that obtains here is geared at community interaction and peaceful coexistence. This is contrary to the situation that we see in other multilingual areas where language ideologies are at the bases of fatal conflicts. In the economic domain, our consultant is a liaison for any available business information within these communities. He can convey any information or bargain for commercial articles like fowls, goats, corn, groundnuts or other items which are for sale in any of the communities.

Politically, his father was a prince from Buu and chief of Abar while his mother is a princess from Mundabli palace. So he is a grand prince in Buu and Mundabli as well as a prince in Abar. His role in organizing or participating in traditional annual sequential rites in these communities cannot be belaboured as he has a right of access to most of the law houses in these villages and others especially when it concerns death and burial of a deceased member

Expression of Inter-community Relationship through Death and Burial in Lower Fungom
Death and burial is one of the cultural domains where inter-community interaction is most demonstrated in the Lower Fungom communities. Because of intermarriage in the communities, condoling with a bereaved in-law within one community or across the

communities is very common and this entails the acquisition of multilingual skills. Even though the funeral items and practices may be similar across the communities, the terminology differs from one community to another. For instance, while the people of Buu will demand *dji* (life animal) for the burial of an in-law, the people of Abar will call it *kiwong.* While the people of Koshin will refer to the grave as *fii*, the people of Mashi will call it *dzam.*

Also, a household in Abar going to attend the funeral of an in-law in Koshin or Mundabli will be accompanied by either their friends or neighbors and this means a cross section of the Abar community will have to interact with Koshin community because of the death of this in-law. Inter-community interaction is also displayed when a social group like a Njangi (thrift -and- loan scheme) or dance group has to accompany one of its members to go and condole with them for the death of a parent or in-law in a different village. This entails movement of people from one village to another and consequent interaction among them. During this time, the people express their verbal arts, music, and dance with no complex.

Expression of Inter-community Relationship through verbal arts, music, and dance
Verbal arts, music, and dance among the people of Lower Fungom are often expressed during occasions such as death, marriage or social gatherings. Some of the music or dance groups belong to some families or special category of persons while others are for the entire community. Dance groups such *as kebamo, Ndong, Mbolo, Kessem, Njong*or*munkpwem*are peer dance groups that cut across all the communities of lower Fungom with each community claiming to perform more than the other.   A member of the munkpwem juju peer dance group in Mashi whose in-law or relation has died in Mundabli will invite this group to accompany him to Mundabli for the burial ceremony. The people of Mundabli who are interested in the dance will pay a fee to become members of the dance group or they may pay for rights to form their branch of the dance. This entails that in future, the people from Mundabli will periodically invite their Mashi "master" in order to show him the quality of their performances. At any such occasions, the Mashi "master" will be given full hospitality but with no further payment. This amplifies inter-community interaction where there is both competition and cooperation. A*mbolo*or *kessem* dance group from Buu going to perform in Abar or Koshin will do the singing in Buu language and the people of Koshin who fine the songs good will have to learn to sing the same songs first in Buu language and vice versa. This creates avenues for the acquisition of multilingual competences which are further used across other socio-cultural domains especially in the economy and politics.

Expression of Inter-community Relationship through Economic activities
As mentioned earlier, the economic activities of lower Fungom are based on subsistent hoe farming of food crops mostly for household consumption while surplus is sold in the local markets (Abar and Yemngeh). Warnier (1979) attested to this by stating that palm oil among others was a regular commodity for trade. It further fostered willingness in the learning of local languages. Farming is done on pieces of lands owned by households or general land provided every year by the chief and one can move from one village to go and beg for land in another village for farming. This is the case with women from Abar who have farms in Munken and Fang people who have farms on Buu lands.

The markets in lower Fungom are not only a space for selling and buying of goods but they are also an avenue for the exchange of socio-cultural information and services. The Abar market which we visited holds weekly on alternating days. The market day is more of a festive day when people gather from all the thirteen villages. Here, foodstuff, drinks animals, fowls and charms of all categories are displayed for sale from all the thirteen villages of Lower Fungom. While some people are selling, others are dancing, drinking or eating. People with multilingual skills can make brisk business either by selling fast or buying at lower prices because of their ability to bargain in the other local languages or because of the blood or social relations that they have with the buyers or seller. Even the traders who sell nonperishable goods and are mostly not from lower Fungom will struggle to use some of the languages of Lower Fungom so as to be able to convince the buyers.

Apart from being a place for buying and selling, the market also serves as a place where information is relayed from one community to the other on market days. The newly wed will have to appear in the market, a new born baby especially twins will have to be presented in the market, the health or death of a person in any of the villages is widely known on the market day, the availability of foodstuff in any community that could not be brought to the market is made known to those who will be able to send people to these communities to buy on non-market days, a newly enthroned chief in any of the communities has to be presented to the other villages in the market on a market day. Information about community labour or any inter-community activity is announced on the market day. This especially demonstrates the power relations among the communities as we see below.

Expression of Inter-community interaction through Power Relations
In their work "The Bases of Social Power" John French and Bertram Raven (1959) identify coercive and collaborative power among the five types of social power. Lower Fungom is made up of thirteen villages with each of them having its political institutions. Such institutions as the chief and law houses like the *kwifon, nkoh, ntoo,* or *bikan* for men as well as thena'atum and *shaamte* for th**e** women, ar**e** present in all the villages. Apart from the chieftaincy and the shaamte or na'tum which have a hereditary status, adherence to the other institutions is by a fee even though the details vary slightly from one village to the other.
Dicarlo (2014), notes that secret societies are essential for the formation of the village itself as a political unit. In Lower Fungom, the paramount social institution is the (extended) agnatic family or lineage. The presence of quarter heads, the distribution of law houses among the different quarters, the existence of sub-chiefs born in a family different from that of the chief, are all features indicating that Lower Fungom societies are of segmentary nature. The segments, the patrilineages, typically constitute exogamous, residential, and ritual units. Such a social fabric is kept together by the secret societies. These act as a social glue along at least two different dimensions:
• they provide the village with an effective organizational tool that encompasses all the segments;
• they provide the villagers with a pervasive ideology that both justifies the existing power relations andrepresents the village's moral world, thus everyone's life goals. We can hypothesize that village communities exist only inasmuch as they have secret

societies. These alone can effectively overcome the centrifugal forces inherent in segmentary structures. This is donemainly through putting at the centre of everyone's life a shared moral world made of values, practices, and beliefs…. Fang, Koshin and Mundabli claim a common historical origin. Buu, Abar, Ngun and Munken claim to share common cultural ties while Mashi have cultural ties with communities out of Lower Fungom but have closer interaction with Mumfu as their neighbour.

The people of Abar, Buu and Ngun (and Kung out of Lower Fungom) share the same traditional political institutions while Koshin and Fang share the same institutions. Among the people of Abar, Buu, Ngun and Kung, inter-community interaction is expressed through the *bikan* festival which holds in Ngun annually. Even though the seat of the b*ikan* is in Ngun, the guardian of the shrine is from Abar and the *bikan* festival can only begin after he has been consulted and he moves from Abar to Ngun to clean the shrine. During the festival, people from these three villages converge at Ngun for one night to communion and ask for blessings from the ancestors.

Fang and Koshin share one type of dance (*neemngah*), and they hold that a festival is devoted to its performance in different days so as to allow mutual participation. The festival is first held in Mbuk, then in Fang, and finally in Koshin. This shows a resemblance with Bikang/Ndji of Abar, Buu and Ngun. The institution of the chief, cuts across all the villages with the chief of Ngun having overall spiritual and sacred dominance over all the villages. The chief of Ngun has to preside the enthroning of the Chiefs of Abar, Buu, Munken, Missong and Mumfu in which case his absence or refusal to participate will make the enthronement incomplete and consequent problems to the chief on the throne. While on the field, we attended a burial and noticed someone who danced more than everyone and even the jujus. We later inquired and found out that the said person was the chief of Mufu and his apparent madness had come from the fact that his enthronement rites had not been completed because the chief of Ngun had not been invited to his enthronement and until the chief of Ngun will be consulted, his mental situation will not change. Again, during the enthronement of the chief of Buu in July 2018, the chief of Ngun was the first chief to visit him in the shrine before any other chief would come.

Another institution is the *nkoh* which is present in all the villages. In Mashi and Koshin, the dog is one of the most important items in the fees for membership in the *nkoh*. But it is not required in the other villages. But a member of the *nkoh* in Buu can be considered a member in Mashi or any other village in Lower Fungom as long as they have paid the membership fee in one village. During the enthronement of the Chief of Buu, we noticed that the incantations for the *nkoh* were done in the Missong language by a Man from Missong who had especially been called in for this occasion.

The *na'atum* (queen mother) is a female institution present in all the villages and it is usually the wife of the chief and are assisted by the eldest woman in the village or any other woman of moral rectitude. They are also the leaders of the *shaamte* sacred society whose membership is obtained through payment of a very high fee (pigs, goat, honey palmwine, fowls and tins of oil among others). The fee differs from one village to the other but a member of the *shaamte* in Koshin can participate in the *Shaamte* of Mumfu. During the death of the queen mother of Abar in 2017 while we on the field, the *shaamte* of Ngun came

to Abar to condole with one of the wives of the Chief of Ngun because she was from the Abar Palace. All the *shaamte* women from Ngun, Abar, Munken, Mundabli and the other villages, participated in the dancing and eating of whatever food was given to the *shaamte* from Ngun.

The *nto'o* is another institution that is present in most of the villages with members drawn from among the notables of the community. Its appellation varies among the villages but it has the same function as the national law house where highest decisions concerning the village are taken and where the powers of the chief are checked. A person from one village who has lived for long in a village can be copted as a member of the *nto'o* in his host village. This is the case of one of our informants who originates from Mumfu where he is also a prince but because he has lived for long in Abar, he is a member of the *nto'o* of Abar as well as that of Mumfu.

Spiritual power is also shared across the villages especially when it comes to healing or protection from evil forces. The protection of households an lands is a specialty of the people of Mashi and Koshin who are noted for spiritual protection. A son or grandson in Abar can be handed spiritual power or the knowledge of herbs for healing by his grandfather in Mundabli. This is the case with one of some of other informants whose mother's father showed him the herbs to treat infertility in women for one and another one whose mother's father in Mundabli showed him the herbs to treat side pain and pile. When preparing the medicine for infertility, our consultant makes incantations in Munken language even though he is in Abar. This is the same thing with the other informant who speaks to the herbs in Mundabli even though he is in Abar. These competences are later transmitted from one generation to another.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we explored the practice of Multilingualism in Lower Fungom households and communities. Multilingualism in Lower Fungom is expressed through socio-cultural domains such as: marriage and intermarriage, economy, and power relation amongst others. These practices are imbedded in the culture and are responsible for the peaceful community and inter-community coexistence in the area. Without being exhaustive, this study was but a microscopic view on how multilingual practices can contribute to peaceful co-existence where there is tolerance and consensus.

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