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# Beyond the Ancestral Code: Towards a Model for Sociolinguistic Language Documentation

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Most language documentation efforts focus on capturing lexico-grammatical information on individual languages. Comparatively little effort has been devoted to considering a language's sociolinguistic contexts. In parts of the world characterized by high degrees of multilingualism, questions surrounding the factors involved in language choice and the relationship between 'communities' and 'languages' are clearly of interest to documentary linguistics, and this paper considers these issues by reporting on the results of a workshop held on sociolinguistic documentation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Over sixty participants from Africa and elsewhere discussed theoretical and methodological issues relating to the documentation of language in its social context. Relevant recommendations for projects wishing to broaden into the realm of sociolinguistic language documentation include: a greater emphasis on conversational data and the documentation of naturally occurring conversation; developing metadata conventions to allow for more nuanced descriptions of socio-cultural settings; encouraging teamwork and interdisciplinary collaboration in order to extend the scope of sociolinguistic documentation; collecting sociolinguistic data which can inform language planning and policy; and creating opportunities for training in sociolinguistic documentation. Consideration of sociolinguistic language documentation also raises significant questions regarding the ways in which Western language ideologies, which have been especially prominent in shaping documentary agendas, may be unduly influencing documentary practice in other parts of the world.

**1. INTRODUCTION.** The field of language documentation has successfully asserted itself as an important approach in the investigation of relatively understudied languages, particularly endangered languages (Himmelman 1998, 2006; Woodbury 2003, among many others). However, as Woodbury (2011:177) points out, most documentary efforts have limited themselves to documenting a single 'language,' and often even one particular variant within that language that can be identified as the 'ancestral code.'<sup>1</sup> In many contexts, such an emphasis may be appropriate (see, e.g., Woodbury 1993), but, in others, the idea that each 'community' should be linked to a particular ancestral code may be due to a misguided

<sup>1</sup> Even projects documenting more than one language tend to organize their efforts along the lines of multiple subprojects, each focusing on a single language rather than, say, documenting the contrasting use of multiple languages in a given community.

sense of nostalgia (see Lüpke 2013 for a critical perspective and Woodbury 2011:179–180 on the notion of contemporary linguistic ecology). On the one hand, a given community may, in some sense, actually have an ancestral code which is no longer used, but could still be using another underdocumented code just as worthy of investigation. The privileging of the ancestral code is not dissimilar to the criticisms of ‘the cult of authenticity’ in American sociolinguistics and elsewhere, where the most extreme and most casual speech is emphasized, e.g., Schilling-Estes 1998, Bucholtz 2003. On the other hand, among the members of a recently formed community, an ancestral code may never have existed, but this should not make their speech practices any less worthy of documentation. More importantly, approaches privileging one ‘language’ as ancestral are problematic, and potentially even pernicious, in highly multilingual and fluid linguistic contexts where language use is organized around multilingual repertoires rather than ‘native’ languages. This is the case in much of Sub-Saharan Africa (Vigouroux & Mufwene 2008; Mc Laughlin 2009; Lüpke & Chambers 2010; Lüpke & Storch 2013). Indeed, multilingualism itself, rather than any particular lexico-grammatical code, has been seen as “the African lingua franca” (Fardon & Furniss 1994:4).

Language documentation’s emphasis on fully capturing the world’s linguistic diversity will fall short of its potential if issues like these are not seriously considered. In particular, we believe that highly multilingual, fluid linguistic settings call for the development of new methods and recommendations in a domain we term *sociolinguistic documentation*, which would entail documenting not only lexico-grammatical codes but also the sociolinguistic contexts in which those codes are used, placing particular emphasis on the dynamics holding among multiple languages in a given environment. The purpose of this paper is to outline how a more sociolinguistically informed approach to language documentation would differ from currently dominant approaches. The discussion is based on the results of an NSF-funded workshop held on this topic in August 2012 in Buea, Cameroon, which focused on Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Further information about the workshop is included in the appendices to this paper.

As a result of the workshop’s focus, the discussion here is strongly skewed towards examples and problems from one part of the world. However, we expect that the discussion will be relevant to those interested in the linguistic situations of many parts of the world where multilingualism is common and where the linguistic lives of individuals are not defined by whether or not they choose to use one of the world’s major languages. We believe Sub-Saharan Africa serves as a particularly useful starting point for such a discussion since its multilingual societies not only confront us with immediate documentary challenges in and of themselves, but also because of the special fluidity of African linguistic situations, visible, in particular, as new media appear and old media expand, and also as languages have come and gone, whether recently or not.

In what follows, we report on what emerged from the workshop, adding further information in some cases to allow for a more coherent paper (e.g., relevant references), though this work should be read more as a record of discussion rather than as an original research article. We do not attribute the findings to any one person or group both because we feel the report represents a consensus and because, on the whole, it is not straightforward how to assign any of the ideas in this paper to a single individual. In many places, the discussion below is largely programmatic in nature, rather than offering concrete recommen-

dations for new documentary methods or detailed plans of action. When this is the case, it is not because we considered such concerns to be unimportant. Rather, it simply reflects the limitations of what could be accomplished over the course of a several-day workshop exploring the notion of sociolinguistic language documentation in detail for the first time.

A list of workshop participants is included at the end of this paper in Appendix 2 in order to acknowledge all contributors, and we also include further information on the structure of the workshop itself in Appendices 1 and 3 so that readers can better understand the context from which the discussion in this paper arose. We would like to emphasize, in particular, that much of the most significant workshop discussion took place in working groups where subgroups of conference participants focused on specific topics. Since it was impossible for the authors of this paper to attend all the sessions of all the working groups, much of what is said below relies on reports made by the working group chairs. We further divide the references between those which we believe provide useful background to the topic overall and which informed the design and discussions of the workshop, and those which are directly cited below.

## 2. WHAT IS SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION AND WHY IS IT NEEDED?

**2.1 OUR SENSE OF ‘SOCIOLINGUISTIC’.** Because sociolinguistic documentation is a poorly explored area within work on language documentation, we can give no definitive answer as to what is entailed in the sociolinguistic documentation of a language, and, indeed, one of the goals of the workshop was to begin to arrive at a definition of the concept. In particular, work on language documentation to this point has tended to focus on what sorts of records are required to facilitate the creation of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, rather than, for instance, considering what kinds of records are required to adequately document patterns of variation in a community or to provide sufficient context to inform community efforts at language standardization.<sup>2</sup> In the view we adopt here, a sociolinguistic approach entails work at both the micro- and macro- levels, as well as support for work in more applied areas, in addition to descriptive and theoretical ones.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the term *sociolinguistics* should be construed broadly as encompassing sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, and applied linguistics, especially as it relates to multilingual contexts of developing nations in Africa (see Djité 2008) and not limited to, for instance, variationist sociolinguistics (see Duranti 2009:5–8 for overview discussion). We should also emphasize that, although applied linguistics and other aspects of linguistics are often seen as relatively separate domains in many Western research contexts, this is much less the case in Sub-Saharan African countries where linguistic research is more often directed to questions of language policy and planning.

<sup>2</sup> Nagy’s (2009) examination of what the key components would be for a ‘sociogrammar’ anticipates some of our key points, but her focus is on grammars as an instance of language description, rather than sociolinguistically-oriented documentary products (though, obviously, there is some overlap in these concerns).

<sup>3</sup> The papers in Farfán and Ramallo 2010 bring a sociolinguistic perspective to bear on the tasks of language documentation and, specifically, language revitalization, and parallel the approach advocated here for Sub-Saharan Africa, though their focus, on the whole, is less strongly oriented towards how a sociolinguistic approach may change documentary practices than the one taken here.

**2.2 SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION PRACTICALLY DEFINED.** If language documentation, in general, is focused on the methods and products required to create transparent, potentially multipurpose records of a language, then sociolinguistic documentation can be understood as extending our conception of language documentation beyond its typical, nostalgic emphasis on specific ancestral codes (see Woodbury 2011) to the sociolinguistic context and patterns of language use in a given community. One way to understand what such an approach entails is to consider what kinds of documentary products would be required to support research into significant topics of sociolinguistics (e.g., variation, language ideology, multilingualism, language contact, etc.) and applied work where sociolinguistic information plays an important role (e.g., language planning and maintenance). Sociolinguistic documentation would, therefore, involve (at least):

- Collecting linguistic data (including use of multiple languages) in a carefully considered range of contexts reflecting important social features of a community
- Ensuring that the data is associated with a rich representation of the sociolinguistic configuration of the event which it documents
- Collecting ancillary resources (e.g., surveys of language use, metalinguistic interviews, ethnographic sketches) that will allow the data to be situated in the wider sociolinguistic context of a community

More broadly, sociolinguistic documentation can be understood as “ethnographically informed language documentation”, which advocates “the inclusion of ethnographic methods ... a restored balance between structuralist concerns and attention to cultural content of speech” (Harrison 2005:22). In fact, as will be discussed at various points below, effective sociolinguistic documentation almost certainly requires adoption of various ethnographic methods both for research and applied purposes. With respect to the latter, an ethnographic understanding of a given community is a prerequisite to culturally sensitive language planning and maintenance activities.

**2.3 MOTIVATION FOR SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION.** The primary reason for collecting sociolinguistic documentation is that it helps us get closer to the documentary promise of capturing a full record of the language practices of a community. In particular, it places more emphasis on situated language use than on specific, often idealized, ‘pure’ lexico-grammatical codes. In order to make the significance of this point clear, it bears repeating that, while language documentation has, from its inception, been strongly usage oriented, in practice, documentary work has often privileged the capture of communicative events that could serve to document ancestral codes. This means, for example, that it emphasizes recordings of speech dominated by a single code over speech with frequent code-switching into a socioeconomically dominant code even if such code-switching is an everyday fact of linguistic usage among members of a given community. Beyond this general aim, more specific reasons why sociolinguistic documentation is of value as an extension to existing models of language documentation include:

- Foregrounding the importance of context in shaping language use and language choice, thus producing a richer record of the social roles of different lexico-grammatical codes within a community
- Providing crucial input to a range of important research domains (e.g., language change, language contact, multilingualism, language variation, ethnography) that might become impossible to investigate in the future
- Collecting more reliable data by paying greater attention to contexts of usage and speaker identities
- Illustrating the range of speakers' linguistic competencies rather than documentation of only one lexico-grammatical code
- Creating more effective linguistic input for applied goals such as language planning

A final reason to engage in sociolinguistic documentation relates to the urgency of the task from the perspective of language endangerment in the face of globalization and other socioeconomic changes. Sociolinguistic contexts are more fragile than lexico-grammatical codes and, therefore, intrinsically more endangered. It is these contexts that will disappear first as smaller communities become transformed by contact with larger ones. Significant lexical data can be collected from even a single 'rememberer' (Campbell & Muntzel 1989), but documenting a language's sociolinguistic context requires an active speech community.

#### **2.4 SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AS A MOTIVATOR FOR A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH.**

In many Sub-Saharan African locations, multilingualism of varying kinds is the norm, both at the individual and societal level. Indeed, one reason for choosing Cameroon as the location of the workshop on which this paper is based is its status as one of the most linguistically diverse places on the earth, with around 280 languages in the *Ethnologue's* current count (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2013). The rest of Sub-Saharan Africa also exhibits a high degree of linguistic diversity.

Although South Africa stands as a special case because of its complex recent history, it illustrates well how diverse the repertoires of an individual can be. The country has nearly thirty languages, eleven of which receive government sanction and support; two of the eleven are European languages.<sup>4</sup> A research assistant and student of the first author grew up in one of the Soweto squatter communities (Orlando) with two Zulu parents and thus grew up speaking Zulu in his home, albeit more of an urban, as opposed to a rural, variety.<sup>5</sup> Growing up in the townships, being involved with gangs, and spending time in jail caused him to learn the Zulu slang Isicamtho as well as Tsotsitaal, an older township variety of the Western Townships (formerly Sophiatown). He also spoke Tswana and Sotho, as well as their township counterparts, and because he attended school also learned English and Afrikaans. Due to other life circumstances, he was familiar with the workplace pidgin Fanagalo and Kaaps, the appropriated variant of Afrikaans. From a Western perspective, this is an exceptionally complex linguistic biography, but it would not be hard to find examples of individuals with comparable language repertoires all over the continent.

<sup>4</sup> Standard Afrikaans can be seen as a dialect, albeit somewhat restructured, of Dutch.

<sup>5</sup> His story is told in Ntshangase (1993), a thesis supervised by the first author.

Moreover, the multilingual diversity of the continent is not merely about how many languages an individual may have competence in. A single language may show a similarly complex diversity of functions, taking on variable significance depending on where it is used and with whom. Hausa is one of many varieties that could be used as an illustration. The following description of the variable significance of using the language is drawn from Fardon and Furniss (1994:22–23):

- In Nigeria, a mother tongue Hausa speaker using Hausa in Kano might subscribe to ideals of Hausa culture, Hausa centrality in the north, and Hausa nationalism, values widely shared in the community.
- A speaker using Hausa in Adamawa, Tabara, or Borno states in Nigeria might be using it as an expedient to allow communication between Shuwa and Kanuri, or between Kanuri and Fulani; speaking Hausa might also signify personal allegiance to a particular group within Maiduguri or the wider north.
- The use of Hausa among the Chamba of Northern Nigeria and Cameroon is a way to avoid the social implications embodied by the use of Fulfulde, which has also served as a lingua franca but is historically associated with a traditional state that occupied the area, the Adamawa Emirate.

As one could infer from these observations, the language-ethnicity link, in particular, can be weaker in Africa than Western language ideologies would assume. To pick some other examples, in the Forest Region of Guinea, what language one states one is speaking depends on whether one is rich or poor. The language is the same in both cases, Lele: speakers say they are Kuranko/Mandingo when they have money but say they are Kisi when they are poor. In a different vein, Lüpke & Storch (2013:24–28) describe an instance of language shift from the Baïnouk language Gujaher to the more socioeconomically prominent language Mandinka, not for the usual reasons relating to linguistic ‘prestige,’ but, rather, as part of a fertility ritual that involves alienation from a woman’s earlier identity.

Indeed, in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, complex multilingualism with various mappings between languages and social factors is the rule rather than the exception. Some indigenous languages are associated with comparatively small communities, while others serve as both primary languages and vehicular languages, e.g., Yoruba in Nigeria, Wolof in Senegal, or Jula in Burkina Faso. Colonial languages also play an important role, primarily French and English. Finally there is the issue of ‘official’ or ‘national’ languages, those languages that are sanctioned by political entities. This is much more complex than simply choosing one language over another as seen in, for instance, the case of the government of Sékou Touré in Guinea.<sup>6</sup> The precise social meaning entailed by using any one of these

<sup>6</sup> As part of the break with France, Touré launched a program to develop literacy in eight of the more than twenty indigenous languages of Guinea beginning in the early 1960s. The National Academy of Languages was created in 1972 to develop textbooks and methods for teaching in the indigenous languages, but the program fell into desuetude due to insufficient financing and was abandoned in 1984 with the passing of Touré. French once again became the only language used in the schools. Because of the program’s lack of support (and success), forced literacy in the indigenous languages was highly unpopular and their status was much reduced, contrary to the usual expectation where



kinds of languages cannot be stated in general terms but, rather, is highly particularized to the specific sociolinguistic context where they are employed.

Interdigitating with these complex code–society relationships are new kinds of language contexts associated with the rapid urbanization that the continent is undergoing. Indeed, most work on multilingualism on the continent has focused on urban environments (see, e.g., Childs 2003: 212–216; Kießling & Mous 2004; Mc Laughlin 2009: 5–13), although there is much that can be learned by studying practices in rural environments, and, given that urban environments have been strongly shaped by recent rural immigration, the sociolinguistic dynamics of rural environments are likely to shed light on contemporary urban patterns as well. It is further important to examine rural and urban environments in tandem because one routinely finds speaker communities dispersed across both contexts in this part of the world, and many individuals move between the two contexts over the course of their life.

Of course, one need only think of the varying social roles of English in the United Kingdom and the United States, as opposed to India, for another example of the different roles that a language can take on. We are not claiming that complex sociolinguistic configurations are unique to Africa. However, it is the case that these configurations characterize such a large part of the continent and are such an ingrained feature of daily life that it is hard to imagine an adequate documentary agenda for the continent not considering them in the first instance. We simply have not encountered extensive discussion of such issues in the documentary linguistics literature to this point, other than a few recent exceptions (see, e.g., Lüpke & Storch 2013). As is clear from recent collections, language documentation needs to be particularized and adapted to the area in which it takes place and to the focus of the research (Seifart et al. 2012); Africa presents no exception to this generalization, but its particularities suggest different agendas than those which have dominated language documentation to this point.

### 3. SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION

**3.1 UNDERTAKING SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION.** This section shifts from discussion of more conceptual issues and presents information on what the output of sociolinguistic documentation should be, how a project might be designed, what sort of training participants should undergo, and what ethical considerations should underlie the implementation of a research project, with a focus in each case on how a sociolinguistic documentation project would differ from a more traditional one.

### 3.2 THE OUTPUT OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION

**3.2.1 TYPES OF RECORDINGS.** In terms of audio and video recordings,<sup>7</sup> the most important target for sociolinguistic documentation would seem to be natural conversation. This would include, but not be limited to, recordings of locally salient forms of conversational exchange and conventional behaviors, such as greetings, politeness displays, and expressions of emotion. The reason for focusing on natural conversation is that this, by far, is the dominant way language is used. Moreover, having an extensive record of natural conversa-

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official support of a language should increase its social status.

<sup>7</sup> *Recordings* hereafter should be understood as including both video and audio formats.



tion is essential for the analysis of special uses of languages since it serves as a baseline for more rarified forms of speech. Natural conversation is also likely, by its very nature, to contain content that is revealing of speakers' social concerns and attitudes towards their communities. Obviously, natural conversation becomes more valuable in this way to the extent that what is recorded is representative of daily language use in a community. While more traditional documentation projects do, of course, often include records of conversation, they do not emphasize it as a key tool for further types of analysis, as sociolinguistic documentation would.

Another key advantage to recording natural conversation is the fact that its comparatively 'unfiltered' quality means that it is less likely to be impacted by the language ideologies that the researchers take with them to the field. A request for a traditional narrative or the process of looking for translational equivalents of word list items is likely to create a social space which causes speakers to try to produce their ancestral code, even if it is a code they hardly use in everyday speech. They may also, consciously or unconsciously, attempt to purify their speech by using only one lexico-grammatical code, even if in their usual interactions code-switching is an integral part of day-to-day communication. Even a research project focused on the ancestral code would clearly benefit from having access to recordings which allow comparison of the extent to which 'traditional' ways of speaking reflect actual ways of speaking.

In addition to conventional, everyday events, a sociolinguistic documentation project will, of course, also want to make recordings of other kinds of speech, with significant cultural events, such as masquerades and chieftaincy coronations, likely being especially prominent. One working group at the workshop devoted itself exclusively to forms of entertainment such as song and dance, another important recording target, especially to the extent that such events are crucial contexts for the expression of community identities.

Finally, even more so than with other kinds of documentary projects, the use of video is especially recommended for sociolinguistic documentation due to its much enhanced capability of capturing the overall context of an event, including subtleties of human interaction which would be irretrievable with an audio recording alone. For example, a project documenting the use of an avoidance register would fail to capture highly significant, non-oral aspects of avoidance behavior (such as lowered gaze, deferential posture, physical distance between individuals) if it were to rely only on audio recordings.

**3.2.2 METADATA AND OTHER ANCILLARY PRODUCTS.** As with any documentary project, the recordings produced as part of a sociolinguistic documentation project should ideally be annotated and associated with metadata, though information beyond what is usually considered necessary will also be required. For instance, while it is now standard to consider collecting metadata on basic speaker traits (e.g., sex, age, etc.) and about the events that are recorded (e.g., location, date, etc.), a sociolinguistic documentation project may also require information about local language attitudes at the community and individual level to be gathered via interviews and questionnaires, often with an emphasis on questions which may reveal local language ideologies. In addition, much more extensive biographical information about consultants is likely to be required, including assessments of multilingual competencies and contexts of acquisition, linguistic 'life histories,' information on exoteric and esoteric social ties (e.g., membership in a given village *quartier* 'neighborhood' or a

secret society), and family ties beyond those traditionally associated with kinship (e.g., fosterage, pawns, and slavery).

In the domain of the event metadata, extensive information on key non-linguistic aspects of context is likely to be needed, for instance, descriptions of the materials used to build a house in a recording of such an event, or detailed annotations of the behavior of participants in a traditional ceremony. Moreover, the relationships among the individuals at a given event are likely to be considered more significant than in more traditional documentation. Thus, one may need to go beyond recording the identity of the participants and explicitly indicate in the metadata if a conversation is between a junior and a senior sibling, between individuals in a joking relationship, or among members of different *quartiers*.

In addition, various kinds of ‘metadocumentary’ metadata are also likely to be crucial: How was a research project structured, what was the social makeup of the research team (e.g., age and sex of members), what were the roles of members of the research team (both internally and in terms of outward presentation), what were the methods for choosing consultants, what sorts of social problems were encountered, etc.? To pick just one issue, whether a research team was all-female, all-male, or mixed is likely to result in much different patterns of data collection in a sociolinguistic documentation project than one emphasizing a specific lexico-grammatical code. Finally, historical and governmental documents relevant to understanding the sociopolitical situation of speaker communities can comprise a kind of metadata as well for such research, placing a community more firmly in its contemporary and historical context.

Indeed, to the extent that there is one unifying theme to the additional kinds of information required for sociolinguistic documentation, it is ‘context,’ whether this is context regarding everyday language use, the life history of the individuals being recorded, or of the backgrounds of the researchers. In sum, the documentation of the sociolinguistics of languages requires us to consider capturing an extensive range of ‘social’ data that is not required for more traditional structural analysis (even its availability would improve such analysis). Fortunately, compared to many of the other recommendations made here, this call for expanded metadata is comparatively easy to implement given that documentary linguists are already accustomed to building in metadata collection into their workflows.

**3.3 STRUCTURING A FIELD PROJECT AND CHOOSING TOPICS OF FOCUS.** Engaging in sociolinguistic documentation requires rethinking of the ways in which a field project should be structured. Most crucially, an emphasis on community contexts makes conducting a pilot phase of research essential; outside researchers cannot be expected to know much about the sociolinguistic situation and what best to document until actually present at the research site. Even when a previous sociolinguistic survey is available, a difference of ten or twenty years can result in a very different community. Just determining the research site is also a decision requiring some consideration. Thus it will take more time and resources to design a sociolinguistically informed research project than traditional documentation. This is easier said than done, however, especially given that language documentation funding schemes are often biased towards funding established work over exploratory work.

Diversity of methods and team composition is also recommended. Interdisciplinary methods, especially ethnographic approaches, will help ensure that the collected data is not unduly biased by outside ideologies. Indeed, it was felt that an interdisciplinary team

involving at least a linguist and an anthropologist is a crucial starting point for such work. Ideally, one would also assemble a socially diverse research team, e.g., male and female, young and old, etc., since such diversity facilitates access to different social contexts. Of course, this raises additional issues of feasibility: A Ph.D. student normally will not be able to assemble a diverse team. Accordingly, it would be instructive, in the future, to explore what kinds of sociolinguistic documentation can be collected with relatively limited resources and how resources can be effectively pooled (see also section 3.4).

In de-emphasizing the ancestral code, sociolinguistic documentation would also be likely to focus on areas not currently well-represented in documentation projects such as: code-switching and code-mixing; local slangs and 'secret' languages; the language of everyday activities (as opposed to traditional narratives); and the linguistic socialization of children and new wives, to name just a few. The linguistic 'habits' of entire communities, including their multilingual competences might also figure prominently, as would close observation of a set of speakers over a fixed period of time to see which languages speakers use with whom, when, and in what domains. In more general terms, sociolinguistic documentation would de-emphasize putting a language "through its paces" (Woodbury 2011:177) en route to filling out the chapters of a grammar or entries of a dictionary, instead focusing on more detailed examination of the intersection between language and social configurations determined to be of interest. The resulting product may not be sufficient to allow a future linguist to fill out a language's morphological paradigms, although it would be useful for other kinds of questions, such as the factors governing language choice among multilingual speakers or understanding how language ideologies impact patterns of language maintenance, topics which can scarcely be examined in work emphasizing a single lexico-grammatical code.

Finally, as with so many other aspects of documentary linguistics, the structure of any sociolinguistic documentation project will ideally align well with community needs. How to determine those needs, of course, can be problematic and often relies on negotiation and sensitivity and adaptability on the part of the researcher. However, the fact that engaging in sociolinguistic documentation forces one to consider the social structure of a community in ways that are not necessary for structural documentation means that its research results are more likely to facilitate culturally appropriate negotiation with the community than is the case for more traditional documentation.

**3.4 TRAINING.** A recurring theme of workshop discussion was how much-needed training opportunities could be developed to help researchers engage in sociolinguistic documentation. Large-scale workshops, like the one reported on here, were considered welcome, but a need for more individually oriented, hands-on training was also clear. In particular, those whose training is dominated by issues in structural linguistics require additional instruction in ethnographic approaches and methods from other key disciplines such as applied linguistics, anthropology, and sociology.

In many cases, better systems for partnering Africans with Westerners would make it possible for the skills of each to complement those of the other. Africans, in particular, have access to local knowledge and insights that Westerners lack, while Westerners have access to more resources that allow them to remain abreast of the latest theoretical and technological developments. However, even within a single African country, people living near each

other who could build on each other's expertise may fail to come into contact simply due to a lack of coordination. As one participant asked, how could an African student today find a local expert in interview methods or the use of ELAN in a world where research communication lines too often resemble the flight patterns and roads within countries? Direct flights from African cities may only go through Europe, and roads radiate out to the countryside from a single overcrowded metropolis. One promising suggestion was to encourage the creation of documentary 'clusters' of researchers with varying skill sets, e.g., structural linguistics, ethnography, language planning, etc., focusing on particular regions of Africa who would learn from each other over time and serve as points of contact for new researchers. Another possibility would be to develop research centers in Africa geared towards creating strong pan-African networks, though, obviously, the means required to fund such networks would not be easy to find.

In addition, in a domain like sociolinguistic documentation, the ideal training models would also take into account developing opportunities both for local scholars and non-scholarly community members even more so than for traditional documentation, since these groups have access to valuable sociolinguistic information about the community that outsiders might acquire only with difficulty (even in cases where there is nothing 'secret' about this information).

**3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.** Sociolinguistic documentation is likely to raise ethical concerns beyond those associated with more traditional types of documentation. For instance, some types of targeted data collection (e.g., biographical and social network information) and capturing of spontaneous data (e.g., conversation), as well as the likely increased use of video recordings, intensify ethical concerns already under discussion in more 'traditional' kinds of documentation. Being aware of local concerns, therefore, is of paramount importance for the documentation process. However, the community may not always express its concerns in ways that are recognized by an outside researcher, or its members may not clarify certain concerns due to a lack of understanding of the potential uses of documentation or a failure to realize the extent of an outsider's ignorance of community norms. Moreover, certain socially significant community practices that would make good targets for documentation may involve sensitive, secret, or controversial events or be performed by certain subdivisions of a society and be known only to specific people. Sociolinguistic documentation is, therefore, likely to require that issues of data access and dissemination be given especially careful consideration and involve ongoing discussion with participants and other community members, at both the individual and the corporate level. Properly addressing the complex set of ethical issues surrounding such materials almost certainly requires working with someone with a good understanding of the local culture, especially in the area of exchange (see Dobrin 2008).

Since significant, specialized, community-wide knowledge is likely to be collected, ideally the community, as a whole, needs to be fully aware of the nature of the research. Many problems in documentation and dissemination may be avoided by communication and full disclosure with the relevant community or communities. Inherent in this communication, however, is the challenge of determining who or what the relevant 'community' is. This issue does not appear to be well-explored in documentary contexts but is foregrounded in sociolinguistic documentation since this kind of research is likely to reveal webs of

relationships that complicate the simplistic notion of a ‘speaker community.’ For instance, if most adult women in a village joined it from the outside as the result of marriage, do we treat them as part of the speaker community of that village (assuming they speak its language) or of their village of origin? Similarly, when a rural area where documentation efforts are based is associated with an urban population elsewhere, does the urban population need to be consulted? As Crippen and Robinson (2013) argue, it is not always the case that communities will have sufficient interest in a linguist’s work to make collaboration viable or worthwhile. However, we feel that sociolinguistic documentation has far more potential to engage community members than, say, the writing of a grammar, and linguists should strive to communicate locally about their research and seek out community collaboration.

To the extent possible, community members should be involved as part of the research team for both practical and ethical reasons. Lines of communication, then, between the community and the researcher need to be developed and maintained, especially if sensitive practices are documented, since a community’s ideas regarding access to them may evolve over time. Ethical practices in sociolinguistic documentation are likely, therefore, to include a conscientious effort to develop infrastructure in order to attain sustainability required to keep the community involved in the research over time. This development should minimally include a way to guarantee contact with the community and communication beyond the time of the project itself.

As may be evident, sociolinguistic documentation is not well suited to ‘parachute’ fieldwork, i.e., short blasts of concentrated research. It rather requires dedicated and prolonged interaction between the researcher and the researched. More than traditional documentation, sociolinguistic documentation demands long-term thinking and commitment. Planning also requires careful consideration of the many roles of research team members. A question that was raised (but not definitively answered) was how do students—who don’t lead teams or have much stability—fit into this picture?

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS OF A SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH IN AFRICA**

##### **4.1 BEYOND APPLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH TRADITIONAL DOCUMENTATION.**

Depending on the scope of a specific project, sociolinguistic documentation can help produce ‘traditional’ language resources and more. To the extent that sociolinguistic documentation results in the collection of significant stretches of annotated material, traditional language resources such as dictionaries and grammars can be constructed from it. Materials emerging from documentation efforts involving audio and audiovisual components can be developed as well, in addition to applications exploiting the increasing role of cell phones.

At the same time, sociolinguistic documentation can be used to produce resources that go beyond not only earlier traditions of grammar creation that were based on written materials in a standard variety, complete with paradigms and folk tales, but also what is possible in contemporary approaches to documentation that focus on a single lexico-grammatical code. It highlights the importance of gathering examples of colloquial, everyday language used in real-world contexts, even in projects focusing on more special kinds of language. This focus on conversational—and, more broadly, interactional—data allows the language to be documented as it is actually used, rather than in terms of an often artificially constructed, ‘pure’ form without borrowings or code-switching. Not only are such instances of language likely to be entertaining and engaging, but they are also more representative

of how people actually need to speak in day-to-day life, making them more useful for language revitalization efforts than simple narrative texts or other more specialized kinds of speech. As an approach that also promotes the use of video recordings, especially of culturally significant events, sociolinguistic documentation is also likely to result in records that can be put to a greater range of uses. Moreover, it is likely to often seek to document special cultural knowledge, as expressed in language practices identified by community members. This broad focus can lead to products of local significance, in particular to recordings of ritualized language, which play a role in facilitating maintenance of the everyday language. Different registers with varying levels of formality reveal the complexity of linguistic practices and provide the basis for more diverse applications.

Finally, knowledge of the sociolinguistic features of a community can more directly inform language policy and planning, as well as development work more generally, e.g., in health and education. One workshop participant discussed how a health campaign attempting to address a cholera outbreak in Cameroon was ineffective until the language of communication shifted from French and English to local languages. This suggests that access to even more nuanced information about language use in a community would further increase the effectiveness of such campaigns by helping health workers better understand what languages are most likely to be effective to attain a given goal (Henderson et al. 2014). On a more conceptual level, by showing the importance of the everyday and specialized uses of the language across the social spectrum of a society, sociolinguistic documentation can validate a language and valorize its speakers and their culture in contemporary terms rather than treating their language as an artifact of a 'lost and ancient' culture, likely to be perceived as irretrievable in its ideal form.

**4.2 LANGUAGE IDEOLOGY AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANGUAGE DOCUMENTATION.** Though it is rarely explicitly discussed, most documentary work has been embedded in essentialist ideologies equating language loss with culture loss and assuming an isomorphism between language and culture, a viewpoint originating in nineteenth century European nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Sub-Saharan African contexts do not map neatly onto this model; notions like 'mother tongue' or 'ethnic identity' do not immediately translate nor do they even apply in many cases. The differences between such European notions and African ideologies were demonstrated dramatically during the workshop using a questionnaire containing such terms, developed by Friederike Lüpke.<sup>9</sup> Africans asked to identify what was meant by a person's mother tongue gave widely varying definitions and raised questions of contexts and intents. For instance, a question about one's 'mother tongue' may be problematic in a multilingual household where patrilineality and exogamy dominate, e.g., the Nguni peoples of southern Africa. Subjects would feel that a question about one's 'father

<sup>8</sup> The discussion in Makoni and Pennycook (2012) advocates a more fluid conceptualization of language, relevant to the African context. This same ideological bias has been noted recently elsewhere as well (see, e.g., Lüpke & Storch (2013:47)). The lack of the presumed isomorphism has also been found in an Asian community. In a national award winning thesis, Peterson (1997) showed exhaustively that Vietnamese immigrants in Portland did not associate language with identity as strongly as they did other features.

<sup>9</sup> Lüpke was unable to attend the workshop. In her place we were happy to welcome Mandana Seyfeddinipur, Director, Endangered Languages Documentation Programme, and one of the world's leading experts on gesture, especially as part of language documentation, e.g., Seyfeddinipur (2012).



tongue' is more appropriate, and researchers would probably get the answer they wanted. Moreover, attitudes towards language are substantially different from Western ones. Nationalism, especially nationalism tied to language, does not play the powerful identity role in Sub-Saharan Africa that it often does in Europe. Language plays a more instrumental role, as suggested above.

Taking into account such differences with a sociolinguistic approach allows us to move past these ideologies and document a fuller range of speech practices in a community. This includes the multilingual competencies of its speakers, an assessment which gives us a more representative picture of African linguistic patterns. In abandoning the notion of a single code as the object of study, we can better document the full diversity of language and its many uses in a community. In so doing, we would likely also be moving towards a very different model of sociolinguistics that would have emerged had the subfield been born in the African linguistic experience rather than the Western one, as will be discussed below.

**4.3 ARE AFRICAN PRIORITIES DIFFERENT FROM WESTERN ONES?** The short answer to the question posed in the heading of this section is undoubtedly "yes," but the response must be informed by considerations of governing ideologies, as has been suggested in the preceding section. Typical Western ideologies relating languages to communities in essentialist fashion are found in Africa as well as in the West a colonial residue in part, although they are much less ingrained in Sub-Saharan Africa, where multilingualism widely obtains. Practical realities intrude as well. Resident African linguists feel many local constraints on their activities to which non-residents are impervious, indifferent, or even dismissive. Related to these pragmatic considerations is a difference in linguistic focus. Western linguists are more likely to focus on the theoretical and cultural components of interest in African languages, while African linguists may be more concerned with matters of national language policy, especially with respect to education (Childs 2003:13). Put more simply, African scholars are more likely to be interested than Western scholars in sociolinguistic documentation as a means towards what would be termed applied linguistics, and, in general it was true that African participants at the workshop, especially the junior scholars, were more focused on the social applications of sociolinguistic language documentation than were Westerners. While this focus is not necessarily surprising, it is something that needs to be considered when considering what forms sociolinguistic documentation projects should take on in the region.

Moreover, Africans do not feel the pressure of documenting highly endangered languages, at least to the extent to which the feeling exists in Western granting institutions. African scholars generally take on attitudes that, to Westerners at least, can be construed as more practical and less romantic (or 'nostalgic'). The language diversity that Western linguists celebrate may be viewed by local officials as a simple fact of life or even a hindrance to national unity and development. Furthermore, the Western focus on 'endangerment' may be somewhat problematic since it shifts focus away from the hundreds of 'medium'-sized languages which may not be endangered but are still in need of documentation and support, and, indeed, supporting these languages in the 'middle' may be key to maintaining an overall language ecology that allows small languages to flourish as well. It is also the case that even small, less widely spoken languages may be vital and do not need immediate documentation or resource development. Thus, using language documentation to support



areas like health and education rather than language maintenance per se may be the most effective way to ensure the languages remain used. In general, the scarce resources of many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa often force decisions of a more pragmatic vein.

During the workshop we were all struck by the provocative and somewhat rhetorical question raised by Felix Ameka, “What would sociolinguistics be like today if it had arisen in Africa?” Although no one provided an answer to the question, most would agree that the field would be quite different in its orientation and governing ideologies. Indeed, language documentation itself would probably be quite different if it had arisen in Africa.

**5. CONCLUSION.** The workshop on sociolinguistic documentation clearly indicated the need for an expansion of the documentarian’s task and for an orientation of the field’s methods to a more sociolinguistically informed and reflective perspective. One dominant theme was the pervasiveness of multilingualism in Sub-Saharan African contexts and how that fact complicated and enriched the linguist’s task. Multilingualism can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. At present there is no clear consensus on how to document or analyze multilingualism, nor is there agreement on how to operationalize a fair language policy (Martin-Jones, Blackledge & Creese 2012). It has been further suggested that we need a change in how we view the role of language, such as a shift to a “language-as-resource orientation” (Chimbutane 2012:169), as a way to escape the tyranny of colonial language policies. Abandoning an approach favoring a single, often mythical, ancestral code means documenting the variation and diversity in actual language use. Methodologies need to be adapted to specifically African contexts.

A related pervasive theme of the workshop was the relevance of understanding ‘latent’ ideologies—that is, ideologies that are so embedded in our way of acting that it is difficult to avoid them—that can prevent or minimize the application of sociolinguistic approaches to language documentation. Probably the most significant of these is the one built around the notion that for each ‘language’ there is a ‘speaker community.’ In Sub-Saharan Africa we often find instead that specific confluences of languages are a defining feature of communities.

New methods were proposed as well, drawing primarily on ethnography. The collection of detailed and individual data, particularly in the form of life histories, was advocated as a way to capture the full diversity of language use. Capturing natural conversation was favored over traditional elicitation, particularly by means of video recordings that could capture the full range of communicative modalities, including gestures and other nonverbal resources. From a Western academic perspective, a striking absence in the discussion was consideration of methodologies associated with the variationist sociolinguistic tradition. It is not that participants saw these methodologies as problematic. Rather, it seems that they were not considered to be especially useful in the contexts that were of interest to attendees.

Practical considerations included the expansion of training opportunities throughout Africa. By this was meant training opportunities in Africa with support for African trainees. Our experience and the comments of African workshop attendees suggests that young African scholars do not get the sort of training needed for sociolinguistic documentation, either at home or abroad. Those who study in the West, especially in North America, are often led to focus on theoretical issues in their own languages. Participants also observed that studying in Africa involves a great deal of personal and political pressure that often

distracts students from their studies. The advantage, however, is that African students have contacts, opportunities, and insights that are unavailable to outsiders.

A more specific call was for explicit methodological recommendations, especially for junior researchers. It was felt that such individuals often flounder just because they do not receive guidance and firm mentoring, especially in terms of setting research agendas and securing support. A further practical instruction was for partnering diversity, e.g., between senior and junior researchers, Western and African, male and female, something which was consciously done in the design of the workshop. This strategy benefits both parties and has already been fruitful at the workshop in encouraging and connecting disparate voices and perspectives. Many participants reported both formally and informally that the diversity of the groups contributed significantly to the productive outcomes.

Another important conclusion was the need for interdisciplinary cooperation. Two of the more obvious general fields are sociology and anthropology, but there can also be fruitful cooperation with social psychology, archaeology, history, and even genetics. Within linguistics there can be productive cross-fertilization with such subfields as cognitive linguistics and experimental phonology. The many subfields of sociolinguistics itself also clearly have a contribution to make, e.g., the quantitative methods of the variationists, even if these were not highlighted at the workshop itself.

With these findings in mind, work in the field of the sociolinguistic documentation of African languages has a promising future. A follow-up workshop is already being considered for the Eight World Congress of African Linguistics, which is planned for Kyoto in 2015. We hope that all of the participants in this workshop and many more will be able to come together and produce further explicit recommendations as to methodologies and practical outcomes for the sociolinguistic documentation of African languages. Since the conference is to be held outside Africa, there is the possibility that even more collaborations will be developed beyond the many engendered in Cameroon.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, we should conclude by making clear that we are aware that many of the points made here are likely to apply outside of Africa as well, and, while we believe the continent has much to offer in helping us expand our ideas about documentation to the sociolinguistic sphere, we think African sociolinguistic documentation can only be improved by insights from conversations about sociolinguistic documentation in other parts of the world, especially other areas where multilingualism is a normal way of life.

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<sup>10</sup> The authors would especially like to help new collaborations form. Please feel free to contact us to discuss the possibility.

**APPENDIX 1 BRIEF CHARACTERIZATION OF THE WORKSHOP**

*Official title:* Workshop on sociolinguistic language documentation in Sub-Saharan Africa held in conjunction with the Seventh World Congress of African Linguistics (WOCAL 7)

*Dates:* August 17–19, 2012

*Location:* Buea, Cameroon

*Organizers:* Tucker Childs and Jeff Good

*Funding:* National Science Foundation (OISE-1160649)

*Structure:* A mix of plenary sessions and working group discussions

*Participants:* Participants came from all over Africa, Europe, and the United States (see Appendix 2)

**APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANTS LISTED ALPHABETICALLY WITH AFFILIATIONS AT THE TIME OF THE WORKSHOP**

Adjei, Francisca; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Akinlabi, Akin; Rutgers University, USA  
Akumbu, Pius; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Ameke, Felix; University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
Asohsi, Melvice; University of Mainz, Germany  
Assine, Pascal; University Cheik Anta Diop, Senegal  
Assomo, Ghislaine; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Atindogbe, Gratien; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Baya, Joseph; University of Cocody, Côte d'Ivoire  
Belew, Anna; Eastern Michigan University, USA  
Bulane, Nthatsi; INALCO/LLACAN CNRS, France  
Caesar, Regina; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Chiattoh, Blasius; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Childs, Tucker; Portland State University, USA  
Chitwah, Muleng; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Dingemanse, Mark; MPI for Psycholinguistics, The Netherlands  
Efa, Delphine; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Ekpo, Golden; University of Uyo, Nigeria  
Esene Agwara, Angiachi Demetris; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Franich, Kathryn; University of Chicago, USA  
Fusi, Ayu'nwi Neba; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Garrett, Paul; Temple University, USA  
Good, Jeff; University at Buffalo, USA  
Hoymann, Gertie; MPI for Psycholinguistics, The Netherlands  
Kemmermann, Doris; University of Köln, Germany  
Kotey, Cecilia; University of Cape Coast, Ghana  
Krüger, Susanne; SIL Uganda-Tanzania Branch, Tanzania  
Lee, Seunghun; Central Connecticut State University, USA  
Lomotey, Charlotte Fofó; Texas A&M University, Commerce, USA  
Luc Musoro, Cheikai Mbah; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Majeu, Defo Felicite; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Mba, Gabriel; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Mekamgoum, Solange; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Mensah, Eyo; University of Calabar, Nigeria  
Mitchell, Alice; University at Buffalo, USA  
Moguo, Francine; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Mous, Maarten; Leiden University, The Netherlands  
Moussa, Loumpata Olivier; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Mugaddam, Abdelrahim Hamid; University of Khartoum, Sudan  
Mutaka, Philip; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Ndokobai, Dadak; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Nformi, Awasom Jude; University of Buea, Cameroon

Ngué Um, Emmanuel; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Ngumbu, Angela; SIL-Central Africa Group, Republic of Congo  
Njeck, Mathaus; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Nkamigbo, Linda; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria  
Nsen, Angela; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Ntube, Ngwana; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Nyindem, Nancy; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Orwenjo, Daniel Ochieng; Kenyatta University, Kenya  
Ousmanou; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Rosendal, Tove; University of Gothenburg, Sweden  
Rugemalira, Josephat; University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania  
Seyfeddinipur, Mandana; School of Oriental and African Studies, United Kingdom  
Strommer, Anissa; University of Vienna, Austria  
Tamanji, Pius; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Thornell, Christina; University of Gothenburg, Sweden  
Tschonghongi, Nelson; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Wainkem, Praside Nain; University of Buea, Cameroon  
Welaze, Jacquis; University of Yaoundé, Cameroon  
Woldemichael, Endashaw; Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia  
Wolff, Ekkehard; Adama University, Ethiopia

### APPENDIX 3: WORKING GROUPS WITH CO-CHAIRS AND BRIEF CHARACTERIZATIONS

#### General concerns/instructions to groups

- In what crucial ways do African sociolinguistic contexts differ from Western ones?
- What kinds of products (e.g., recordings, videos, transcriptions) are required to document the sociolinguistics of African languages? What kind of metadata needs to be collected?
- How should that information be structured? How and where should it be archived?
- How would one go about planning a field research project to gather the necessary kinds of documentation? What special challenges are there as set against more usual kinds of fieldwork, especially in terms of training and personnel?
- What special ethical considerations are there in working with communities to gather data relevant to sociolinguistic documentation?
- What kinds of training opportunities are needed for researchers to successfully undertake documentation in this area?
- How can a more sociolinguistically-informed approach to language documentation result in the creation of more effective community language resources?
- How can such an approach positively impact decisions regarding language planning and policy?

#### Working Group 1: Conversation and sociolinguistic language documentation

*The use of natural conversations for language documentation and sociolinguistic research, with a focus on social organization and social identity, special genres, and oratory*

Co-chairs: Mark Dingemans & Eyo Mensah

#### Working Group 2: The documentation of culturally significant events

*Documenting songs, dances, games, and related cultural events, as a way of documenting the sociolinguistic relations among people in a community and across communities*

Co-chairs: Akin Akinlabi & Daniel Ochieng Orwenjo

#### Working Group 3: How languages acquire 'value' in multilingual environments

*Which factors inform the 'market value' of an indigenous African language in a 'polyglossic' multilingual environment?*

Co-chairs: Pius Tamanji & Ekkehard Wolff

#### Working Group 4: Socially embedded multilingualism

*What are the social mechanisms that foster and nurture multilingualism?*

Co-chairs: Josephat Rugemalira & Mandana Seyfeddinipur

Working Group 5: The relationship between language and culture  
*Knowledge as coded in language and reflected in social and cultural practices*  
 Co-chairs: Doris Kemmermann & Abdelrahim Mugaddam

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