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Field notes from TC trip to Mblama–Kamasun (MbK), Th 8 May – Sun 11 May (“08 05 08–11 Blama Kamasun Lengbom TC field notes.doc”)

Preparation and plan

Two full days on site with possibly an afternoon after travel and a morning before travel

Goals

Record Bom speakers: Yema Kangayo (Kamasun), Mohammed Fofana (Kamasun), Matu Sherif (Kamasun); Tommy Kwemi (Lengbom)

Record Kim speakers: brother-sister pair, Alfa and Miata Bonda (Lengbom, she cannot travel); Abu Sese (Kamasun)

Record songs of Masa Tommy & co.: Sebatu Fama and Yema Kangayo

Photos: Matu Sherif (Kamasun) and all other speakers – she was gone attending to Bondo business

Identified speakers not yet interviewed: Tommy Vileh (Kamasun), Mohammed Senesie (Blama), Momo Kangayo (Kamasun)

Identify additional Kim and Bom speakers, especially women

Travel and consultant schedule

Th 8 May - Travel

Travel to Blama with Alie going to Mosenten, transport Fasia Kolia to Sembehun and accompany her to Mosenten

See if Solomon Khain available for travel to Blama

Find canoe to Kwako

On arrival in Blama confirm availability of Daniel Moiwo and Mohammed Daramy for translation, help with interviewing (both in Kamasun)

Possibility of trip to Lengbom to record Alfa and Miata Bonda

Fri 9 May – Blama / Kamasun

Translator:

Record singers Masa Tommy, Sebatu Fama, and Yema Kangayo (?, Bom speaker)

Interview Abu Sese, record?

Sat 10 May

Translator:

Kamasun

- Matu Sherif (Bom, Kamasun)
- Yema Kangayo (Bom, Kamasun)
- Mohammed Fofana (Bom, Kamasun)

Lengbom

- record brother–sister pair, Alfa and Miata Bonda (Kim speakers)
- record Tommy Kwemi (Bom)

Sun 11 May Return to Tei

Mblama-Kamasun interactions

Arrived in time to get some business done on Th 8 May and even did some transcription the day I left, Sun 11 May – this characterization, however, is a little deceiving since there was a fairly sizeable hole in the middle, when everyone seemed to be gone to the farm – in general, the planting season seems to be the busiest time of the year – people say they will help out but are gone to the *bati* at the scheduled time

Th 8 May

Arrived in Mblama during the afternoon and after settling my affairs

Alfa Sesay, son of Abu: +233 (0)76

Went immediately to Kamasun along with Solomon J. P. Khain (SK) to check in with my principals, Daniel Moiwo (DM) and Mohammed Daramy (MD), potential translators, and linguistic consultants, Yema Kangayo (YK, Bom), Mohammed Fofana (Bom, MF), Matu Sheriff (MS1, Bom), and her father Mohammed Sherriff (MS2, Bom), who turned out to be SK's "uncle". The last agreed to participate, but only if he were in a "good mood" (intended to be taken humorously, a charming and pleasant old man).

DM was at the farm but MD was there and agreed to help out – I saw DM in the evening and he said we should swing by the next morning, but he did so with great reluctance – I should have realized at the time that he would not show – I intended to use DM with Kamasun people outside of MF (his teacher) – MD would interview MF, with whom I spoke later in the evening

Mohammed Fofana (MF) returned later in the evening and was completely agreeable – gave my correct telephone number to MD and got his

Mohammed Daramy, Kamasun +233 (0)76 251-611

Another task was to arrange for the women singers: Masa Tommy & co.: Sebatu Fama and Yema Kangayo (MS1 turned up for the recording along with a bunch of men) – by the end of the day I had seen them all in one way or another

Fri 9 May

The three principal women singers eventually showed up on AS's front porch, become more and more reserved as a crowd gathered – MT kept her abrasive manner, however, and entertained the audience with what I could only assume was her wit – usually it was being rude to someone

The recording session started off very slow but gradually picked up a little steam as the women began to relax – a little difficult given the circumstances – children packed in everywhere, a number of men observing, and young men and women making fun of them (see recording notes) – eventually the men joined in and the singing was strong, Masa Tommy still leading but a much stronger chorus than before

The next item on the agenda was a short walk to Kamasun and do the Bom interviews – we began with MS2, recorded in his house with as many people as possible packed into the small house and a few peering in through the windows – MS2 had a great deal of difficulty putting together a connected piece of discourse, but Yema Kangayo was there to help out

Summary of information on Bom speakers

(entered in db)

new speakers interviewed and/or recorded: Mohammed Sheriff, Joe Masari, Baige Twa

Njabama / Jabama, a short distance from Mblama (20 min by boat (?)): 1 speaker Baigeh Yami (m)

Talia, also fairly close to Mblama: 2 speakers, unknown

Ngeepahun, close to Mblama, a fairly big town, possible to get there by road, even by car straight from Freetown: 3 speakers, 2 female, one male, the male speaker even speaks some English

Sampo: as many as 5–6 speakers, including

In the environs of Torma Bom, especially the small towns on the road from Madina, should be a number of Bom speakers – before the war Torma Bom was a bustling commercial area, electrified even, but now pretty much back to square one after the rebel incursions

Madina is the chiefdom headquarters

Listing of photos

Pa Abu Sesay and his wife Sata Sesay

Singers Masa Tommy, Mata Sheriff, Yema Kangayo, and Sebatu Fama
many pictures of the group

Kamasun: Mohammed Sheriff, Yema Kangayo, Matu Sheriff

Palm trees, TC, and Solomon Khain during a break

Lingbom

back in Blama: Gasimun Musah with his fishing baskets and climbing belt

- several pictures taken

Wood on the beach at Lingbom

The Cadillac of dugouts

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Metadata for “08 05 08–11 Blama–Kamasun, Lengbom TC”

Many recordings were conducted during this visit, all in a relatively open context, including the transcription sessions. This of course had the disadvantage of ambient noise and other sorts of interference, but also had the advantage of showing people what we were doing and demystifying the process. People generally lost interest after a short period, although more stayed during the recordings than during the transcriptions.

Kim singers, original tracks 10-21, card 1 (F 9 May)

Front porch of Abu Sesay's house

Primary female singers: Masa Tommy (leader), Matu Sheriff, Sebatu Fama, Yema Kangayo

Accompanying females: Several unknown

Accompanying males (latter part): Mohammed Fofana, Abu Sesay, Tommy Lilei

Used solid state recorder, 2 high quality mics

Quality: High, recording levels set when women began by themselves and adjusted only much later on after the men had joined in and the loudness had increased considerably

Photos taken

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

The women started off very slowly (reluctance, unease, embarrassment), Masa singing almost entirely herself but gradually the others joined in – Masa was her usual irascible self

The songs are fairly simple in structure, consisting of two basic lines, the first of which often involves agent substitution, people join in on the

second line, part of which forms the chorus that everyone sings (very impressionistic)

“1010 Masa Tommy intro.WAV” Masa Tommy intro

11 Matu Sheriff intro

13 Yema Kangayo intro

14 Sebatu Fama intro

15 Apoma (Title = “Apoma tɛmɔdo ha cen wɔŋ mɔn” ‘?’)

16 Menta (‘If you flog me, I will not agree with you’)

17 Si nengo clip (“the fun song”) Not sure what happened here – recording starts in the middle of a verse and is followed by only one other

18 Si nengo w men (“Si nengo go goma nga” (the men join in here, much greater volume [and lots of distortion since recording levels not reset], Abu clapping softly, as did others eventually))

19 Menta w men. “Menta wɔ menta” (everyone started clapping here, even some syncopated clapping, highly animated, a pair of jerky boys in the background who made fun as they walked away; structured by different people contributing a line, probably just substituting a different agent) [Turned down the recording levels here about halfway through the song.]

20 Banjo. “Banjo yanjao” (softer clapping for this song, tempo quite a bit different and syncopated clapping)

21 Fire under drum. song led by Mohammed Fofana, something about a fire blazing under a drum, a woman saw it and hid – he was a little far from the microphones – others joined in right away. Partially Mende, partially Kim.

Mohammed Sheriff (Bom, Kamasun, Fri 9 May)

Consultants: MS, Yema Kangayo, Matu Sheriff, his daughter, participated only briefly being overshadowed in her Krim-speaking ability by YK, Joe Masari

The recording context was more controlled than the other recordings during this trip, but was “open” to the extent it could be being held inside MS’s house. He lived in a small, round house with a small veranda filled

with the red wood the Chinese so prize and the trade of which the government has successfully terminated by a combination of taxation and excessive demands on the Chinese government. Despite being inside a number of faces pressed against the screen window and as many people as possible packed into the small house, one real stinker sitting right next to me. Two young girls were pressing their face to the screen so hard they left with cross-hatched faces

His Bom is not strong ("3+), probably through disuse, and he needed help throughout. A second problem was that he stutters quite a bit. He apologized and generally acted in a friendly and gracious manner.

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

22 Moh Sheriff Intro

24 Moh Sheriff youth. tales of his youth (speech very halting, admitted he was having trouble with Bom – YK, his daughter, and even Joe Masari helped out occasionally and even rehearsed with him before each track – breakdown at the end when he asked for the recorder to be turned off)

1025 Moh Sheriff et al biog. Biographical details, games at the end (Yema Kangayo offered to ask him questions – at times she carried much of the load throughout, completing sentences for him as well. MS was doing his best, gesturing quite a bit and even using some local props (his drinking cup) to illustrate some points. Joe Masari also there to help out. Slipped into Mende quite a lot)

26 Moh Sheriff et al Naming. naming procedures (asked for support from Yema in Mende – some echoing from audience members)

27 Moh Sheriff et al Marriage – occasional laughter as he slipped into Mende

28 Moh Sheriff advice to daughter Matu

29 Matu Sheriff repeats advice. Very short (later disappears to prepare food) – speech halting despite support from both her father and Yema Kangayo – not very comfortable

30 Moh Sheriff final words. (with a significant rehearsal period first – some (sometimes) helpful interruptions from Yema Kangayo – in many places both talking at the same time)

hà cén pè hò Bòm

Yema Kangayo (Bom, Kamasun, Fri 9 May)

YK is probably one of the best Bom speakers around – she speaks fluently and clearly, much more so than her predecessor. She grumbled a bit about being kept from the farm but was otherwise agreeable – passed by to greet her a number of times – confused her with her daughter, who has a striking resemblance

She eventually left rather abruptly saying she was late for prayers

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

“1032 Yema Kangayo intro.WAV”. 31 started off in Kim to general laughter. Track 32 bad start again, this time in Mende (with laughter, excised), but eventually introduced herself. 31 & 32 combined to make a single introduction.

“1033 Yema Kangayo land quarrel.WAV”. Bom land quarrel with neighboring village

“1034 Yema Kangayo 1991 civil war.WAV” – MS deferred to Yema in all cases, but helped prep her for the story – provided her with various (unwanted?) reminders as the story went on

Joe Masari (Bom, Kamasun, Fri 9 May)

Joe pretty much forced himself on us with some aggressive greetings as we first entered Kamasun, then intruded on the recording session with MS2, etc. – told him he would have his chance – bright green pants! – a fisherman and farmer – very busy – blew off our scheduled transcription session and then showed up in the evening when there was a great crowd in front of MD’s house

Born 1947 in Sawula, near Pujehun, his father Braima, spoke Mende, his mother born in Bole, Moyiatu, both deceased, she spoke Bom – at the time he grew up many people spoke Bom in Bole, stays in Kamasun, school up to Standard 2 in Nkpagbailiya, Kpangbatu, Bonthe District, wife and children know no Bom

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

“1035 Joe Masari intro.WAV” Edited from one practice run through and then the real thing (edit) – continued talking about when he grew up – asked him earlier if he were ever hungry growing up so probably talked about that – talked about how he was injured and even showed us the scar – used a fair number of gestures indicating deictic centers – broke into English a few times and used a lot of Mende – ended with him asking me my name (?? !!) – wind started to kick up a bit and flies buzzed around mics. English occasional. Sought some interaction from audience.

“1036 Joe Masari Bom disappearing.wav” How does he feel about Bom disappearing, young people laughing, etc.? Gestured a lot once again, including the held and squeezed breast indicating the mother’s milk – sought interaction from both me and Solomon ((This was the one we started to transcribe – Solomon indicated later that he tended to go off on tangents and include a lot of irrelevant material, also that he used a lot of Mende)

“1037 Joe Masari civil war.WAV” Civil war suffering. At one point at least he broke into Mende, then into Krio and started laughing.

“1038 Joe Masari land fight.wav”. Fighting among Bom over land – someone wounded and he showed me where – showed us also how the prisoners were bound, their hands behind their back – Was he bound?

Abu Sesay (Krim, Kamasun, Fri 9 May)

Abu himself and Joe Peku characterize Abu as being a weak speaker but he delivered a solid description of the history of Mblama

Recorded right after Joe Masari in the old schoolhouse just outside Kamasun – nice picture of his recumbent form on one of the benches used by the schoolchildren

The wind picked up a bit as he spoke and there is probably some distortion – moved the microphones a bit

He kept his head down throughout and was not terribly animated in his speech, but that's pretty much the way he is all the time – pleasant and extremely considerate but not terribly fiery

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

“1039 Abu Sesay intro.WAV” Intro. Speaks quite softly with a bit of hoarseness. Halting.

“1040 Abu Sesay Mblama history.WAV” (former 41 thought he was finished and so had shut the recorder off – turned out he was finished even though he said a few words – pasted on to 40)

Tom Braima (Kwemi) (Bom, Lengbom, Fri 9 May)

A handsome and entirely agreeable man, Pa Tom seems entirely comfortable speaking Bom. He smiled throughout, except when I was taking his picture – tried to capture him gesturing but my timing always seemed a bit off – because he was so agreeable he was often looking around the audience for some kind of approval and was easily interrupted

Oddly he seemed very much in a hurry – not sure why – don't think he was going to prayers – he jammed several of his topics into a single track

Unfortunately I was not carefully monitoring the space on the memory card and we ran out of space on the first – not sure what the transition will be like – he was talking about naming procedures

Spoke in a fairly soft voice

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

42 Practice and setting levels (deleted from current directory)

“1043 Tom Braima intro.WAV” Intro – lots of pauses and prompts deleted during initial editing

“1044 Tom Braima youth.WAV” how things were when he was small (distracted by onlookers – Tom was the first of three subjects, so there was a fairly big crowd)

“1045 Tom Braima naming marriage.WAV” Because of interruption by a full memory card, two tracks combined into present file: 45 Naming procedures and Card 2, 1 Tom continues talking about naming and marriage, not sure in which order nor where he was

“1046 Tom Braima final words.WAV” former 2 final words

Alfa and Bonda Yema Kema (K, Lengbom, F 9 May)

“Miata” is the name I had written down for Yema, but that is her Moslem name and not one that the people use very often. I didn’t quite get the significance of the “Kema” – usually (old) people have just two names. (“Yema” is her Bondo name.)

Part of the reason we had travelled to Lengbom was to record Yema Bonda (YB). I had interviewed both Alfa and Tom Braima in Mblama some weeks before, and Alfa had told me at the time that she spoke Krim even better than he – although it was difficult to tell which is better, Alfa may be correct in his assessment.

Yema is considerably older than Alfa, at least looks a lot older. Most of her still-present teeth are decayed and because she is missing so many her mouth is sort of caving in. Ma Yema has trouble walking and is slightly bent over all the time. Alfa, on the other hand, is the picture of preserved good health, regal and even statuesque with his stiff goatee (which a child tried to touch during the recordings).

Both are definitely fluent speakers – little signs of hesitation or thinking about words – there was even some badinage when I asked Yema what her little brother was like as a child

At the end of the interview Yema said she knew some stories but was just too tired to go on – make sure she has some supporting singers when she sings

Alfa said he, too, knew some songs and would record them when he came back

Rained in the middle of the recording but not so hard as to greatly affect the recording

Tracks listed and briefly characterized, Memory card 2

“1003 Yema Kema Bonda Lengbom intro.WAV” Originally two files: 3 Yema intro and “4 Yema intro” combined into this one 19 May 08 – basically the same material is repeated with a few small differences, needs further editing when transcribed – a very clear but reedy voice

“1005 Alfa Bonda intro.WAV” 5 Alfa intro ... name, parents, birthplace

“1006 Yema Kema Bonda youth.WAV” 6 Yema growing up – slightly edited

“1007 Alfa Bonda youth.WAV” 7 Alfa gives his name again and talks about his youth, mentions some games they used to play

“1008 Yema Kema Bonda Alfa as a boy.WAV” During editing Sound Forge hung several times, rebooted – allowed me to recover. 8 Yema talks about Alfa when he was small (even got the normally stern one to smile and hide his face) – children laughing in background (some excised, as well as stuttering and false starts, but crashing may have preserved them)

“1009 Alfa Bonda accident.WAV” 9 Alfa, did anything really bad happen to you? quite animated as he talked about a rather severe knock on the head – laughter from Yema – extremely fluent

“1010 Yema Kema Bonda town founding.WAV” kind of breaks down towards the end 10 Yema on founding of town and history (being bent over was something of an advantage but she also moved back and forth as she spoke)

“1011 Alfa Bonda talks about Yema.WAV” 11 Alfa given the chance to talk about Yema when she was small, slight smile as he talked

“1012 Alfa Bonda land quarrel.WAV” 12 Alfa: land quarrel with people of Tupain

“1013 Yeman Jema Bonda final words.WAV” Horrible high frequency hiss!! ?? 13 Yema final words

“1014 Alfa Bonda final words.WAV” Horrible hiss again!! ?? 14 Alfa final words (started in Mende)

Mohammed Fofana (Bom, Kamasun, Sat 10 May 08)

Translator: Mohammed Daramy, also present at the controls: Solomon Khain

Venue: Town barrie, paved but smelling of goat urine

The self-acknowledged “professor” of Bom – he has provided instruction to Councilor Daramy in Kamasun – MF is an assured and confident speaker eager to participate. I delivered to him this trip both a National Geographic cap and a picture of himself – MF had no trouble talking on any topic

MF was recorded in the Kamasun barrie with a number of onlookers and small children, one of whom had to be unceremoniously ushered out because of the disturbance he caused. In one corner of the barrie was a mysterious man in a hammock who chimed in with occasional contributions but did not make himself known to me and who disappeared before I had a chance to talk to him.

More important a personage was Baige Twa, MF’s acknowledged teacher, who consented to a recording, which is characterized below.

The topics touched on were: the history of the town, the land wars, the quarrel with Talia, the rebel incursions, danger of death, naming and marriage, and then a, Is there anything you want to talk about?

Baige Twa (Bom, Kamasun, Sat 10 May 08)

A rather frail old man with halting speech – not a great speaker but MF’s “teacher” – wanted to be recorded but his performance was far from stellar – he had trouble following the questions from Daramy, so I suggested letting MF ask him questions – this worked a little better but we didn’t get a whole lot of language Pa Baige speaks both Kim and Bom and sometimes gets a little confused

MF excellent at asking questions and getting what he could out of the old man – old man much more relaxed when MF talking to him

Tracks listed and briefly characterized

“1026 Baige Twa intro.WAV” Two files combined – 26 placed first – needs editing when transcribed. Horrible wind noise at the beginning – Original track 25 Intro; 26 Re-try of intro (very halting speech) but still useful
“1027 Baige Twa Momoh Fofana posing questions.WAV” 27 First file inserted at 0:46. Original 1027 begins there. (MF begins posing questions)
Contains the same info present in 1026.

“1029 Baige Twa personal history.WAV” 28 history (chicken interruption) inserted at the front of 29 history resumed – broke into Mende at one point – the way he grew up, the way they lived (MF very serious in asking questions) – all sorts of fly noise, a little wind, a woman taking away a baby, a rooster

“1030 Baige Twa w Momoh Fofana past vs present.WAV” 30 more comparisons (cut off by Solomon, thought he had finished)

“1031 Baige Twa authority.WAV” 31 comparisons cont’d (cut off at 2:31) short track 32 appended 32 ? (Solomon Khain a little quick on the stop button); 33 present vs. past (cont’d), children listening to their parents, wives to their husbands

“1034 Baige Twa w Momoh Fofana Why lg disappear.WAV” 34 Why language disappearing?

“1035 Baige Twa consultant's topic.WAV” 35 What does he want to talk about?

"1036 Baige Twa final words.WAV" 36 final words