

When stereotypes do not influence language attitudes: a study of multilingual individuals in  
Lower Fungom

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Research by most sociolinguists have suggested that stereotypes underpin most multilingual behaviors (Obiols, 2002; Hewstone and Giles, 1997; Mgbo-Elue, 1989). However, evidence from multilingual individuals of the Missong village (pop. About 600) in Lower Fungom (henceforth LF), Cameroon, indicate that there are understudied language ideologies that are not rooted in stereotypes and may account for multilingual behaviors. Field work data was collected over a duration of 5 months, and consulting a total of 76 consultants over a range of data types (interviews, matched-guise test, and language use). Semi-structured interviews were achieved thanks to an ethnographically-informed questionnaire that reveals insights to social affiliations and motivations for being multilingual. More, the matched-guise test sought to explore evaluational reactions of listeners towards some LF language varieties on status and relational qualities. Finally, language use data recorded the choice of languages by multilingual individuals, and its implications on language ideologies and language attitudes. Our interest in this talk is to show that language attitudes can be informed by an ideological transparency understood under the frame of Silverstein (2003) indexical order. The data suggests that language attitudes of Missong people mainly lies in their profound shared ideological beliefs that exists among them and not some 'tricky' social stereotypical categorizations and attributions. Reasons such as their egalitarian language ecology and existing multiple affiliations of the members makes group categorizations so difficult to frame, so that no one can really associate with one particular group. Therefore, attitude judgements are not necessarily rooted on stereotypes. The results add to the body of attitude research, while questioning the central discourse on stereotypes as influencers of language attitudes.

Keywords: language attitudes, indexical order, ethnographic questionnaire, matched-guise test, stereotypes, language use.

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