

## **Motivations for language choice among Lower Fungom multilinguals**

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In literature, it is commonplace to see multilinguals' linguistic behaviours, especially their language choices in interaction interpreted in terms of polyglossia (Johnson, 1975). This approach does not account for observed language behaviours of multilinguals in Lower Fungom. Lower Fungom is a linguistically highly diverse region located at the northwestern edge of the Cameroonian Grassfields, where most of the 12,000 residents (Good et al. 2011), are speakers of multiple local languages, Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE) and English. Previous works (e.g. Di Carlo 2016) have stressed that the absence of powerful centralized socio-political institutions has made language choice constraint free as per generally agreed upon conditions. Local language ideologies seem not to be structured around the notions of prestige, social or economical status. In my work in the area (a three month period, between 2014 and 2016), I have observed that code-switching between local lects is extremely rare and usually bears a marked social meaning (see Di Carlo, Good and Ojong to appear: Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Linguistics). Moreover, multilingualism in Lower Fungom is handled not by polyglossia scales but by evaluating the markedness (Myers-Scotton, 1982) of their potential choices, determined by personal aspirations. Multilingualism in this area is interesting as making the marked choice is usually a very conscious effort on the part of the speaker.

In this talk, I will present qualitative data from 20 hours of recorded natural conversation of multilinguals and from prolonged observation of the community (three months), illustrating that multilinguals in lower Fungom do not adhere to polyglossia parameters. Rather, they have diverse and multiple reason aside 'prestige' and 'domain' for choosing to use one language over

another in their daily interactions. Understanding motivations for language choice in this rural setting would shine more light on the nuances of multilingualism in Africa.

#### References

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