A (micro-)accretion zone in a remnant zone?

Lower Fungom in areal-historical perspective[1]

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1. Introduction

Sandwiched between the ecological desert of the Sahara and "desert of linguistic homogeneity" (Childs 2003: 165) of the Bantu spread zone (Nichols 1992: 17), from the Atlantic coast in the west to the Ethiopian and East African highlands in the east, lies a region of marked diversity in terms of both language and language families that has come to be known as the Subsaharan Fragmentation Belt (Dalby 1970: 163). Within this belt, one finds representatives of the Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Congo, and—at its southeastern fringe—even Khoisan language groups, in the form of Hadza and Sandawe.[2] The vast majority of the region's languages remain underdescribed, and it has not been the subject of extensive areal investigation (though Güldemann (2008) is a noteworthy exception).

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[2] Of course, the status of groups like Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan as true genealogical units is far from clear (see, e.g., Bender (2000: 43) for a sympathetic but critical take on Nilo-Saharan and Güldemann & Vossen (2000: 99–103) for a less sympathetic critical assessment of Khoisan), as is the unity of all the languages subsumed under Niger-Congo (with Mande, in particular, considered problematic (see, e.g., Mukarovsky (1977: 4–6)).

Along the southern edge of this belt, at the point where the west coast of the continent bends southward in the Gulf of Guinea lies the region believed to be the Bantu cradleland. From this area, the Bantu languages spread in a complicated series of movements which would ultimately result in their being the primary languages of the inhabitants of the greater part of the southern half of the continent (see Nurse & Philippson 2003: 5 for an overview from a Bantuist perspective and Nichols 1997: 375–376 for an overview from a worldwide perspective). What are believed to be Bantu's closest relatives are found in this region as well, including most prominently the Grassfields Bantu group (Watters 2003) but also the Beboid group (first proposed by Hombert 1980), which will feature prominently in the discussion here. These two groups of languages (the latter of which should probably be viewed more as a grouping of convenience than a true genealogical unit) are spoken primarily in the northern part of western Cameroon, in what Stallcup (1980:44) has pointed out is the most fragmented part of the Fragmentation Belt in terms of language (though not lineage) distribution.

Within this region, lies a small zone, about half the size of the city of Chicago, known locally as Lower Fungom, where the fragmentation reaches what appears to be its greatest extent. The area's thirteen villages represent (on the lowest reasonable count) seven different languages, five of which are not known to have close relatives outside of the area, and even in the case where one finds multi-village "languages", dialect differences between villages separated by only a few kilometers can generally be detected upon cursory elicitation.

It will be argued here that superficially, at least, Lower Fungom resembles a *accretion zone*, in the sense of Nichols (1992: 21). (Nichols (1992) actually uses the term *residual* zone. The term *accretion zone* is used here following Nichols 1997.) However, there will be two major qualifications to this assessment: (i) The languages are uncontroversially related at some

genealogical level, most probably at the level of Bantoid, which comprises Narrow Bantu and its closest relatives and (ii) the region is quite tiny by world standards, occupying somewhat less than 250 square kilometers, making it, by way of contrast, less than the .1% the size of the Caucasus, an area Nichols (1992:13–14) treats as an exemplary accretion zone.

Nevertheless, it will be argued here that the notion of an accretion zone is valuable for understanding the linguistic situation of Lower Fungom, and the ways in which the region diverges from exemplary cases of accretion zones make its study worthwhile to coming to a better understanding of the external and internal dynamics of regions showing extreme patterns of diversity. As such, the goal of this paper is not to "prove" that Lower Fungom is (or is not) an accretion zone. Rather, it is to explore the multifaceted notion of the accretion zone in the context of this particular region to help us, on the one hand, refine the typology of linguistic areas developed by Nichols (1992) and, on the other hand, derive interesting research questions for further work as suggested by that typology.

Section 2 of this paper gives background information on Lower Fungom. Section 3 compares and contrasts the region with more prototypical accretion zones. Section 4 attempts to situate the region into a refined typology of linguistic areas. Section 5 concludes by drawing a general lesson from the discussion by suggesting how Nichols' work on linguistic diversity in a historical and areal perspective is valuable not simply for the broad study of linguistic typology but also suggests research agendas for language documentation which might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

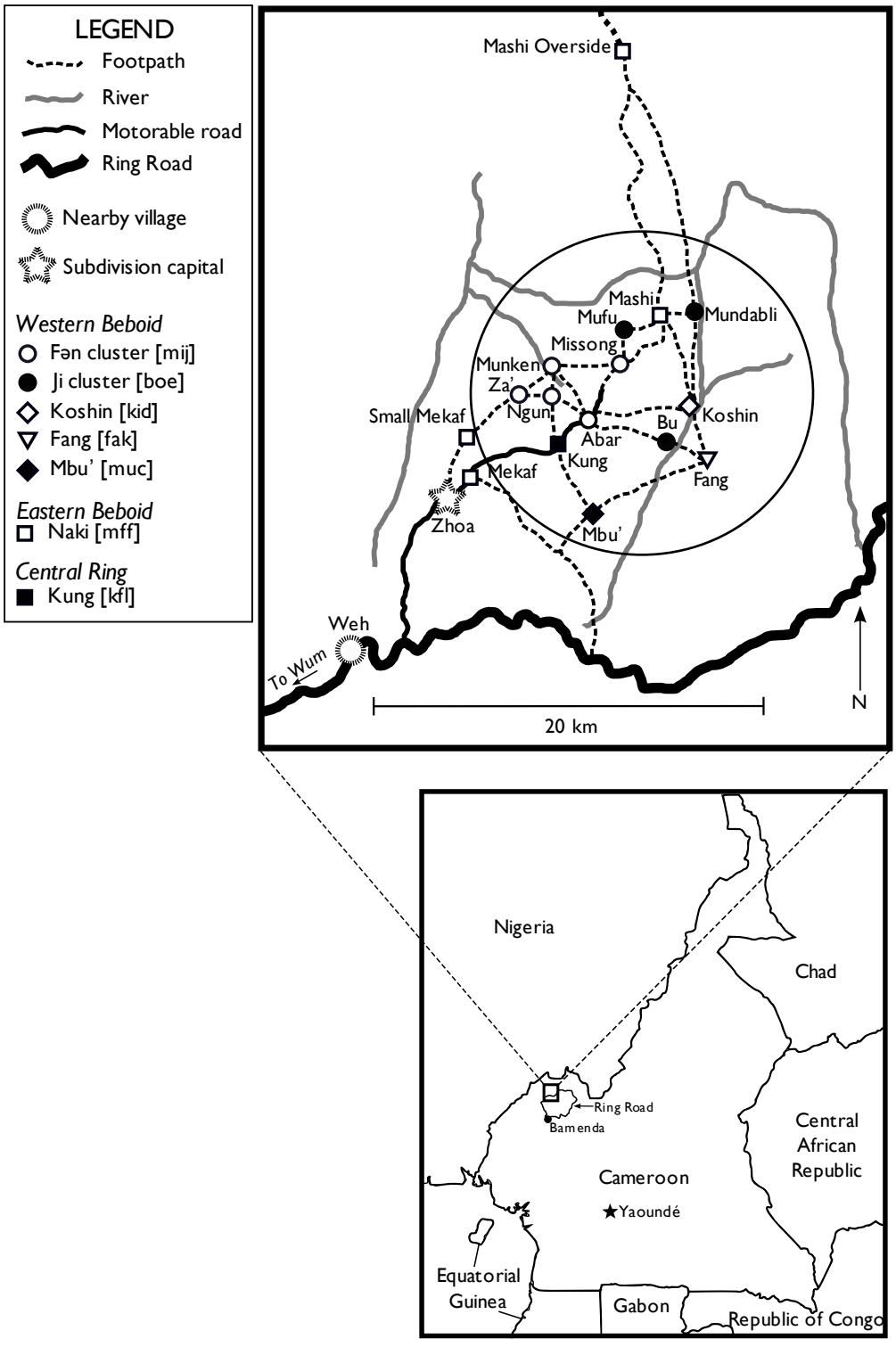

Figure 1: Map of the Lower Fungom region (based on Hombert 1980: 84)

2. Lower Fungom: A linguistic overview

Figure 1 gives an approximate map of Lower Fungom and the surrounding area, with the Lower Fungom villages indicated with a circle, situating it with respect to Cameroon in general.[3] The region is located in the country's Northwest Province to the north of the northern edge of Ring Road, which circles the province. Its name refers to the fact that it is located within the part of the Fungom Subdivision of the Menchum Division that is lower in altitude than "upper" Fungom (though it is not particularly low in altitude in more general terms ranging from approximately 600–900 meters in elevation). The overall area is hilly, being on the northern edge of the Cameroonian highlands and is generally described as containing thirteen villages, each of which is given on the map.[4] The region is relatively remote, with most of its villages accessible only by footpath and with only semi-regular vehicular transport from the centrally-located village of Abar to the closest major town of Wum, which is itself about two day's journey from the major Cameroonian cities of Douala and Yaoundé. The local economy is based on agriculture.

Table 1 lists the thirteen Lower Fungom villages, indicating their current Ethnologue classification and estimated population.[5] The table deviates from the Ethnologue in referring to

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[3] The map is based on Hombert (1980:84). It appears to be largely accurate, having elicited no notable disagreement from a large number of consultants when shown to them. However, the precise positions of the villages have yet to be verified using modern mapping technologies, and the larger areas which are under the control of each village are not known.

[4] While the thirteen villages discussed here are the ones that have been generally recognized in the literature and by consultants as found in the region, they are not an exhaustive enumeration of settled areas. For example, between Mekaf and Kung there is a market area called Yemgeh which is either within or on the border of Lower Fungom and which some people consider a village but others characterize along the lines of a squatter settlement (see Troyer et al. 1995 for some discussion of Yemgeh). Furthermore, some villages are associated with secondary settled areas (e.g., there is a detached settled area associated with Mundabli known as Mundabli Overside) which have not been properly surveyed and whose precise relationships to the more central settlements is not fully understood. (For example, some of them may be occupied only seasonally.)

[5] Population figures are taken from Hamm et al. (2002: 6), except for Kung, which is taken from the Ethnologue and is based on a 2001 figure. Figures taken from the 1987 census are indicated. Other figures were self-reported during the survey reported on by Hamm et al. The population figures for Naki refer only to the population of the village of Mashi. The entire Naki language has 3,000 speakers according to the Ethnologue.

the languages with codes [mij] and [boe] as Fən and Ji respectively, in order to avoid possible confusion arising from the Ethnologue's partly arbitrary assignment of the name of one village from each of these dialect clusters (specifically, Abar for [mij] and Mundabli for [boe]) as the name for the language itself. The labels Fən and Ji reference lexical isoglosses which uniquely identify each of these clusters within the Western Beboid group (see Farrar & Good (2008)).

SUBGROUP	LANGUAGE	VILLAGE	POPULATION
Western Beboid	Fən [mij]	Abar	606 (1987)
		Missong	310 (1987)
		Munken	320 (1987)
		Ngun	76 (1987)
		Za'	92 (1987)
	Ji [boe]	Mundabli	313 (1987)
		Mufu	114 (1987)
		Bu	200
	Fang [fak]	Fang	1,592 (1987)
	Koshin [kid]	Koshin	932 (1987)
	Mbu' [muc]	Mbu'	623
Eastern Beboid	Naki [mff]	Mashi	173 (1987)
Central Ring	Kung [kfl]	Kung	1,750

Table 1: Lower Fungom villages following current Ethnologue classification

Existing work on the languages of the region is limited. Chilver & Kaberry (1974:37–40) contains the first documentation of any of the Lower Fungom languages I am aware of with Naki, Koshin, and Mbu' wordlists, Hombert (1980) is an important early comparative work, first

proposing the existence of the Beboid family comprising most of the region's languages, and Hamm et al. (2002) report on the results of a limited survey of the region's speech varieties. The Naki language has seen the most detailed study (see Kum (2002, 2007) and Good (2009+)) of the region's languages, though these studies were based on work with speakers from the village of Mekaf, whose location is given in figure 1 but which lies just outside of Lower Fungom itself. The results reported here going beyond the cited sources have arisen from several field trips since 2004 by the author and associates.

All of the languages of Lower Fungom are currently classified within the southern branch of Bantoid—a subfamily of Benue-Congo comprising the Bantu languages and their closest relatives, and this aspect of their classification seems comfortable based on the presence of noun class systems in all the region's languages with parallels to the reconstructed Proto-Bantu noun class system that seem impossible to attribute to chance but are distinct enough not to be obviously "Bantu" (see Farrar & Good (2008)), though it should be pointed out that the precise boundary between Bantu and Bantoid has yet to be delineated (see Schadeberg 2003: 154–155) as well as the boundary between Bantoid and Benue-Congo (see Williamson & Blench 2000:34).

Beyond this, however, the picture becomes more complicated. Survey work has substantiated the classifications of Hamm et al. (2002) at the level of "language" as comprising either dialect clusters or small, shallow language families. However, the sociolinguistic dynamics of the region make arriving at even at an initial division between "languages" and "dialects" difficult. With the exception of the village of Mashi, which identifies itself as part of a larger cluster of Naki speaking villages, the rest of which lie outside of Lower Fungom, the general linguistic attitude of the region is one where each village views itself as speaking its own "talk", even if, in some cases, its variety is quite similar to those of another village (see also Hamm et al. (2002: 9)). This

attitude of linguistic fragmentation is paralleled by the region's political fragmentation wherein each village—again, except for Mashi—is independent in traditional political terms (see also Hamm et al. 2002: 15). Therefore, at the present level of understanding, speech varieties classed as "languages" in Lower Fungom are best understood conservatively to represent low-level genealogical units rather than actual languages in the conventional sense.

More problematic are the subgroupings in table 1, in particular the Western Beboid subgroup. Hombert (1980) first proposes the existence of the Beboid language family comprising a number of Bantoid languages to the north of the Grassfields Bantu group which did not appear to belong to Grassfields Bantu itself. He further subdivided the group into Eastern and Western branches, with Naki originally situated within the Western branch (and, in fact, occupying the western extreme of the range of the proposed family) but having been recently reclassified with the Eastern branch (Hamm et al. 2002: 22). However, despite the widespread adoption of Beboid as a classificatory label, no publication has ever presented evidence for the group in terms of shared innovations, or even lexicostatistics. Therefore, at present, the existence of a specific Beboid group can only be considered a geographically-motivated hypothesis of relationship, not a proper historical reconstruction. The same holds true for the proposed subgroups of Eastern and Western Beboid, though the existence of the Eastern Beboid group (as a unit unto itself) seems much more likely on the basis of available evidence. (A comparison, for example, of the lexicostatistical results of Brye & Brye (2002) for Eastern Beboid with those of Hamm et al. (2002: 9) for Western Beboid indicates much higher cognacy rates within the first set of languages than the second.) Thus, a conservative interpretation of the Western Beboid linguistic situation would posit five distinct Bantoid lineages within the Lower Fungom region: One for each of the language-level units in table 1. Furthermore, a conservative interpretation of the

Beboid situation more generally would posit that the one Eastern Beboid language present in Lower Fungom, Naki, constitutes an additional unique lineage in its own right in the context of the area, though one which is clearly intrusive given that the bulk of its speakers are otherwise distributed widely in villages directly to the north and east of the region.

The final Lower Fungom language, Kung, is presently classified within the Central group of the Ring languages, a subgroup of Grassfields Bantu. This places Kung within a lineage whose status is considered fairly secure (Watters 2003: 227). Roland Kießling (personal communication, July 2008), based on a superficial examination of data collected on Kung, believes its classification within Central Ring is plausible, if not yet proven (see also Troyer et al. 1995). Thus, Kung adds to the overall genealogical diversity of Lower Fungom but does not appear to represent a distinct lineage within Bantoid. Central Ring languages are otherwise spoken directly to the south of the Lower Fungom area, strongly suggesting that Kung is intrusive into the region.[6]

We can therefore summarize the linguistic situation of Lower Fungom as follows, keeping in mind the various caveats mentioned above. The region contains seven indigenous languages, six of which are not found outside of the region (the exception being Naki, spoken in Mashi). These languages represent at least "two and a half" distinct Bantoid lineages under the most liberal lumping hypothesis (presented in table 1) and possibly up to seven distinct Bantoid lineages under the most conservative splitting hypothesis. As the basis of the Western Beboid classification appears to be primarily one based on geographic and "wastebasket" criteria, in my own view, at present, the bias should be towards the splitting hypothesis over the lumping.

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[6] Just south of the Lower Fungom area is a village known as Fungom which also speaks a Ring language.

3. Lower Fungom as a (micro-)accretion zone

Nichols (1992: 21) gives the following characteristics of accretion zones: (i) high genealogical diversity, (ii) high structural diversity, (iii) deep language families, (iv) no appreciable spread of language families, (v) no clear center of innovation, (vi) language accretion, and (vii) lack of a lingua franca.

Lower Fungom fails to meet several of these criteria, at least under strict interpretations. For example, it is not particularly diverse, containing languages which all appear to be from the Bantoid sub-branch of Benue-Congo. At the same time, however, one must acknowledge that, within Bantoid, the region is fairly diverse genealogically, under conservative interpretations (see section 2) containing possibly seven distinct Bantoid lineages. For similar reasons, Lower Fungom does not appear to have deep language families—at least not on the scale that Nichols (1992) considers deep in the context of the Caucasus, for example, with its old indigenous stocks of Northeast Caucasian and Kartvelian. The conventional date for the Bantu spread is around five thousand years ago (Nurse & Philippson 2003: 5), which means that the Lower Fungom lineages could be interpreted as being around that age, or a bit older, depending on whether or not their diversification is treated as part of the larger Bantu movements. This is an old date, but appears to be somewhat less ancient than state-of-the-art dates for Indo-European of around 6,000 years as its minimum age (Anthony 2007: 39–82), an informal "baseline" for an ancient lineage. More importantly, even if we put Bantoid itself on the borderline of being "ancient", there is no evidence that any of the particular lineages within Lower Fungom represent anything like a first branching out of Bantoid—meaning that their split is likely a good deal younger than Bantoid itself. Future work on reconstruction should clarify this picture, but for now, we should probably not assume that Lower Fungom harbors truly ancient lineages.

On Nichols' (1992) criterion of high structure diversity for Lower Fungom, the picture is more mixed. First and foremost, we must recognize that there is a problem regarding documentation: No language of the area has even a sketch grammar, and field work is in relatively early stages. Additionally, of course, given the relative genealogical homogeneity of the region, we would not expect the same level of structural diversity as a region like the Caucasus (and this is not to mention the much smaller size of the region), where, for example, head-marking Abkhaz can be set against dependent-marking Chechen (Nichols 1986: 59). However, we can still say a few things about how these languages pattern structurally.

In areal terms, it is helpful to view these languages as belonging to a typological buffer zone in the sense of Stilo (2004). To their north and west, one finds Kwa-type languages, which are characterizable in broad terms as isolating and dependent marking. To their south, one finds the Bantu type which is characterizable as agglutinating and head-marking (see Hyman 2004). This is a greatly simplified picture, but it is a useful high-level generalization and helps us situate Lower Fungom languages (and their neighbors) typologically as being intermediate between the Kwa and Bantu types. For example, they all exhibit noun class systems that can readily be related to those of Bantu but which have undergone patterns of morphological attrition and phonological change meaning that they show fewer total classes than Bantu languages and the exponence of those classes is not as cleanly agglutinative as the prefixes associated with Proto-Bantu (Katamba 2003: 103–105). For example, in Ji, Fang, Koshin, Mbu', and Naki, one finds singular/plural alternations marked on nouns—in a pairing that can be associated with the Proto-Bantu 9/10 class—solely via tone alternations (see Hombert 1980 and Farrar & Good 2008) where the singular is associated with a lower tone and the plural a higher tone. This pattern reconstructs to a situation where the class 9 prefix had a form like *ì- and the class 10 prefix a

form like *í- (a situation actually attested in Fən), with subsequent loss of the segmental material of the prefix and transfer of tone to the stem. Thus, the distinction between singular and plural is maintained, but its exponence shifts from agglutination to tonal ablaut. A comparable pattern is found for a noun class pair that can be associated with Proto-Bantu 3/4 and reconstructed as *u-/ *-i. In Ji, Fang, and Koshin, the prefixes have been replaced by initial consonant mutations where a labial or labialized initial consonant is associated with the singular and a palatal or palatalized consonant with the plural (see Kießling 2009+ for discussion of this pattern in Lower Fungom and nearby areas).

At the present stage of investigation, then, in terms of structural diversity, Lower Fungom at least superficially, appears to be a mix between structural homogeneity across features which are shared by the Kwa-type languages and Bantu-type languages (e.g., they are all SVO and tonal, following general Subsaharan and Benue-Congo patterns) and structural heterogeneity in cases where the typologies of the two regions clash. Thus, the noun class morphology ranges from conservative and more agglutinative in the case of Fən, to innovative in the case of Ji, to relatively reduced in the case of Mbu' (as discussed by Farrar & Good 2008), reflecting the tension between Kwa-type languages showing only remnants of noun classes systems and the famously elaborated Bantu noun class systems. Further descriptive work on these languages will give us a clearer picture of the specific contours of this typological clash has taken on within the Lower Fungom area. While it would be a stretch to say that the languages of the region demonstrate particular structural diversity on a global scale, it does not seem out of the question that one will eventually find that they are relatively structurally diverse, given their close genealogical relations.

While Lower Fungom may not be a prototypical accretion zone in terms of genealogical diversity, lineage time depth, or structural diversity, it comes much closer to the prototype when we examine the other properties of accretion zones proposed by Nichols. Setting aside the Bantu spread, which we will take up in more detail below, there is not evidence that the region has been subject to any further massive language spreads. The Fən group, and to a lesser extent the Ji group, appear to have spread within their immediate areas—but we see nothing even remotely resembling the kinds of language movements repeatedly witnessed on, for example, the Eurasian steppe.

Additionally, there is no clear center of innovation within the region. As we have seen, the region is not immune to areal influences (presumably emanating from the Macro-Sudan Belt as described by Güldemann 2008). However, these are part of larger patterns holding across this part of Cameroon. The political and social fragmentation of the region is simply not conducive to there being any local center of innovation. Prestige relations, such as they are, operate in manner in which prestige centers appear to be located outside of the region (see, for example the discussion of Hamm et al. (2002:15) regarding community preferences for learning to read languages other than their own). We should recall that descriptive work on the languages of this region has only begun. So, isoglosses may emerge pinpointing some Lower Fungom villages as greater centers of innovation than others, though the real centers of innovation affecting the area will likely be found outside of the region.

While most of the prehistory of Lower Fungom is still to be determined, there are two transparent instances of language accretion in the region. These involve the presence of the Naki language at Mashi and a Ring language in Kung (see section 2). Therefore, on this criterion, Lower Fungom also shows characteristics of a accretion zone. When we look at the other

languages of the region, the three one-village languages of Fang, Koshin, and Mbu', are good candidates for also being intrusive, though showing this conclusively will require connecting these languages to outside Bantoid subgroups. The Fən and Ji clusters, of course, are good candidates for having been in situ for a longer period of time given their geographic spread and related dialect diversification.[7] In this context, it seems worth adding that, in the two cases where language intrusion seems clear, Naki and Kung, the intrusion apparently came from different directions: Naki distribution outside of Lower Fungom is to the north and west while the Ring languages with which Kung is affiliated are to the south, suggesting that we are looking at an area that can serve as a general refugium for the immediately surrounding region, not simply an area reflecting an archaic language distribution from a north-south spread as might be believed if one were to take the notion of the Bantu spread too literally without assuming any subsequent reshuffling in its wake (see Vansina 1995 for a general critique of the Bantu expansion).[8]

Nichols' final criterion for a accretion zone is lack of a lingua franca. At present, there is in fact a local lingua franca, a variety of Cameroonian Pidgin, though, as with the case of Russian in the prototypical accretion zone of the Caucasus (Nichols 1992: 15), this is a relatively recent phenomenon. Menang (2004: 903–904) gives a date around the mid nineteenth century for the first major influx of a pidgin English variety along the Cameroonian coast which was the precursor to contemporary Cameroonian Pidgin. It would have then taken some additional time for the pidgin to spread to a relatively remote inland region like Lower Fungom. In any event,

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[7] Oral histories of many of the region's villages explicitly suggest that its inhabitants arrived at their present locations via migrations (Hamm et al. 2002: 7), giving possible evidence for additional language accretion, though these are a problematic source of information and cannot be lightly taken at face value (see, e.g., and Fowler & Zeitlyn's 1996 discussion of the uses and reliability of Tikar origin stories among groups in the Cameroonian Grassfields).

[8] More recently, Troyer et al. (1995: 3) report that region has become home to refugees relocated after the 1986 disaster at Lake Nyos (Shanklin 1988).

while there are indications that, at present, Cameroonian Pidgin not only serves as a lingua franca but might also be in the process displacing the local languages (see, for example, Hamm et al. 2002:16), we are looking here at a relatively recent development, and there is no evidence that Cameroonian Pidgin displaced an earlier lingua franca. Rather, it has been spreading as a lingua franca in a large area in Cameroon (centering around the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest provinces), of which Lower Fungom is only a small part.

The picture of Lower Fungom that emerges from this examination is one where the region falls short of being a prototypical accretion zone, but, nevertheless shows several "accretion" characteristics. In the next section, I will explore the significance of Lower Fungom's similarities and dissimilarities to the prototype.

4. Lower Fungom and accretion zone dynamics

In interpreting Lower Fungom as a kind of accretion zone, it should be made clear that the goal here is not to simplistically determine where to place the region within a prescribed typology of linguistic areas. Rather, it is to use the multidimensional notion of a accretion zone to help us place the linguistic dynamics of the region in worldwide areal context. Therefore, I am relatively unconcerned here with rigid typologizing, as opposed to the uses of typology to address more general questions of correlation, following ideas expressed in Nichols (1992). Furthermore, by deemphasizing the importance of "gross types" (Bickel 2007: 245) in favor of the lower-level dimensions of variation comprising such types, I draw inspiration from autotypologizing methods (see, for example Bickel and Nichols 2002) which allow a set of types to emerge in bottom-up rather than top-down manner (see also Nichols 2007: 231). This leads to the relatively straightforward idea that notions like *spread zone* and *accretion zone* can be best understood as

laying foundation for a more fine-grained typology of areal dynamics, rather than as primitive, invariant categories. A key question here, becomes, then: Where would a region like Lower Fungom fit into such a refined typology?

First and foremost, we must recognize that the single most important historical event for the known linguistic history of the region is the Bantu expansion (broadly construed to encompass Bantoid as well as Bantu). This language spread, whatever its internal dynamics, completely displaced whatever languages were earlier spoken in the area, thus giving a vast expanse of Subsaharan Africa a relatively homogenous genealogical profile. The factors underlying this spread are unclear, though work by Vansina (1995: 189–194) strongly suggests that, rather than giving a simplistic monocausal explanation (e.g., relating to food production or iron working technology), one must propose an explanation involving a mixture of multiple small-scale migrations of Bantu speakers accompanied by language shift (to Bantu languages) by earlier inhabitants of the present-day Bantu area. The key factors driving at least the early stages of the expansion in Vansina's view were cultural. On the one hand, the internal dynamics of Bantu societies fostered conditions favoring periodic migrations to new territories. On the other hand, the population densities of these Bantu societies, as compared to those they encountered during their migrations, would have given them a level of prestige which would have made shift to an arriving Bantu language desirable (Vansina 1995: 191–192).[9]

Such a scenario can help account for the greater part of the geographic expansion of the Bantu languages. However, Lower Fungom and its wider region appear to be subject to a different set of dynamics, as it lies within the apparent Bantu cradleland, the area where the bulk of Bantoid genealogical diversity lies, occupying a comparable position within Bantoid as, for

[9] Vansina (1995: 192–193) discusses a number of complications to this picture.

example, Taiwan does for Austronesian (see Pawley & Ross 1993 for an overview of issues in Austronesian historical linguistics). Since Greenberg's (1966: 37–38) reclassification of Bantu as a relatively deeply embedded sub-branch of Benue-Congo, at least part of the explanation for the genealogical diversity of the Bantu cradleland has simply been time depth: They have had a "head start" in differentiation compared to the relatively young Bantu offshoot. However, such an explanation still leaves open many questions, perhaps the most salient being why no subsequent spread, either from within or without, wiped out this diversity: After all, if one spread affected this region, why not another?

Answering this question for the larger Cameroon–Nigeria borderlands area lies beyond the score of this paper. However, at least for Lower Fungom, we do have the beginnings of an explanation—one that may even partially extend to the larger area (or other patches of the larger area) upon further investigation. As discussed, it appears to be a kind of accretion zone—or, rather, a *micro-accretion* zone. Taken at face value, this is of course merely a label, not an explanation. However, embedded within the larger historical framework of Nichols (1992), as well as her discovery of a number of clear-cut accretion zones, the label, like any good typological category, helps us situate that region with respect to other parts of the world showing similar patterns.

Within that category, the languages of Lower Fungom stand out for being not simply at the edge of a spread zone—after all the Caucasus are at the periphery of the Asian steppe—but at the edge of a spread zone containing their close relatives. If we label areas like the Bantu cradleland or Taiwan *remnant zones*, to indicate that they contain lineages "left behind" after language spreads originating from those regions, then an area like Lower Fungom would become a *remnant accretion zone*—that is, an accretion zone that has formed within a remnant zone. And,

this label, in turn, suggests a multitude of questions. What factors favor the maintenance of remnant zones, generally? Are long-lived remnant zones prone to developing pockets of accretion? What historical, geographic, and cultural circumstances simultaneously allow a region's languages to spread externally but accrete internally?

At this stage, at least in the context of Lower Fungom, I am only in a position to ask questions like those just posed, not answer them. Nevertheless, understanding that Lower Fungom presents us with an apparently interesting set of historical circumstances, one that may shed light on worldwide asymmetries in language distributions more generally, is an important first step towards obtaining more significant results, which I hope to be a topic of future research. Crucially, we must acknowledge that Nichols' (1992) work is a prerequisite for being able to devise questions like those above. In a field that has been dominated by a cognitive, rather than a cultural, approach to language, issues relating to the geographic distribution of languages saw little attention during the latter half of the twentieth century. As such, Nichols' work is important not simply for its methodological advancements (see, for example, Haspelmath (1993) for discussion). Just as important is the fact that it sensitized us to detect important linguistic patterns that might otherwise have escaped notice, in this particular case, the similarities and dissimilarities of Lower Fungom to other regions of the world showing noteworthy linguistic "fragmentation".

We can conclude this discussion by noting that Lower Fungom offers an interesting opportunity. By virtue of being a relatively historically "shallow" accretion zone in terms of time depth and lineages, it should be possible to arrive at a clearer picture of the prehistory which resulted in the region's language accretion than for older accretion zones, making it an interesting case for studying accretion zone dynamics. The region's compact size is helpful in

this regard as well, allowing a single research group to grasp its linguistic dynamics in a way that would be difficult, if not impossible, for a vast region like the Caucasus. Furthermore, limitations on genealogical diversity, number of languages, and ecological zones within Lower Fungom, will be able to serve as controls through which the importance of other factors can be explored more rigorously.

In the next section, I will try to generalize some of the lessons from this examination of Lower Fungom, by examining what impact work on areal typology may have in the domain of language documentation.

5. Linguistic diversity in space and time and language documentation

Typology and descriptive linguistics have enjoyed a healthily symbiotic relationship over the last decades, largely on account of the fact that both value rigorously applicable framework-neutral definitions of linguistic phenomena, allowing each subdiscipline to make use of and, in turn, enhance the work of the other (see Nichols 2007: 235–236).

Less obvious is the role of typology in a relatively recently codified domain of inquiry known as *documentary linguistics* (Himmelmann 1988, Woodbury 2003). The leading idea behind the development of documentary linguistics is that there is a crucial distinction to be made between the processes through which one collects primary data in the course of making a record of a given language and the processes through which one derives descriptive statements from that primary data—each makes use of different methodologies and requires a different set of skills. Himmelmann (1998:168) further suggests that, "[t]he core of a language documentation, then, is constituted by a comprehensive and representative sample of communicative events as natural as possible.".

But what else may be required beyond this? Franchetto (2006) discusses the possibility of including ethnographic information with more traditional language documentation—including, for example, recording sessions showing how speakers in a community interact linguistically with outsiders (2006: 189–190), which would be of interest not only to the ethnographer but also, of course, researchers on language contact, giving a nice example of how considering possible uses of documentation outside of linguistics can also reinforce its impact within linguistics.

The ethnographic example underscores the straightforward, if often implicit, point that what one chooses to document in a language is guided by the questions one hopes to answer with the documentation. The idea that the core component to a documentary corpus is a sample of communicative events is clearly embedded in a general view that the primary goal of language documentation is to produce traditional linguistic outputs like grammars (whether academic or pedagogical). By contrast, if one hopes a documentary corpus can support ethnography, for example, one's collection plan will need to be altered.

So, where does a micro-accretion zone fit into this picture? When we look at Lower Fungom, we take as a given that each of its languages are independently worthy of study in their own right. This would be just as true if they were spoken in North America as opposed to Africa. But, collectively and in areal context, they become even more interesting, possibly providing us with important information on issues ranging from the maintenance of incredibly small languages in an intensely multilingual setting to the processes underlying the Bantu expansion to the development of accretion zones across the world generally. Thus, in addition to documenting the individual Lower Fungom languages, it clearly makes sense to also attempt to document Lower Fungom as a linguistic area, covering, for example, patterns of multilingualism, the extent of linguistic exogamy, and speakers attitudes towards their own languages and the languages of

their neighbors, among other things—and, when it presents itself, whatever information one might encounter giving clues as to the linguistic prehistory of the region, including collection of vocabulary of particular value for comparative work.[10] Thus, a region like Lower Fungom points the way to a more comprehensive notion of documentation, than the view of documentation which sees its "core" as simply collection of communicative events.

In my own work on Lower Fungom, this point became clear only because I had been generally sensitized to the importance of the question, "What's where why?" (Bickel 2007: 239) in linguistic research. A corpus of speech events can tell you *what's where* but answering *why* requires one to look outside the confines of a particular grammar. The reason I had been sensitized to this question, of course, was because of Nichols (1992) typology of linguistic areas. Thus, like all good typology, Nichols (1992) has important consequences not only for typologists but also for how the field worker approaches the problem of collecting data on under-researched languages, in this case expanding my own horizons beyond documenting a given language simply the way it happens to be now but also towards gathering data that can shed light on the dynamics that produced that particular language—and its linguistic ecology—in the first place.

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[10] Here one should note that the SIL-sponsored survey of Western Beboid of Hamm et al. (2002) addresses some issues like these, at least preliminarily. While the academic literature on language documentation has not focused on sociolinguistic documentation, the long-term language development goals of SIL have led them in this direction.

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