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Peer reviewed

*African Multilingualisms: Rural Linguistic and Cultural Diversity*, by Pierpaolo Di Carlo and Jeff Good (Eds.). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020, 310 pp.

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This review of Di Carlo and Good's *African Multilingualisms: Rural Linguistic and Cultural Diversity* is a brief synopsis of the collection's thirteen case studies, as well as a reflection on ways this collection could benefit not only future scholarship of the selected topic, but sociolinguistics as a whole.

In the introduction by Di Carlo and Good, a brief background on sub-Saharan culture, politics, and language is provided for context of the following works. Chief among the many important points made in the introduction is the note that while African multilingualism has been studied in urban spaces, there is a gap in the literature regarding rural environments. This point is reintroduced many times throughout the volume, with several of the contributors acknowledging the differences between rural and urban centers as well as the value of studying the melting pot of cultures which inhabit the rural space. Such research, according to the authors, may affect court proceedings, education, medical practice, and other societal structures which intersect in the daily lives of those who utilize multilingual competences.

The communities researched in this collection are all from sub-Saharan Africa, with participants residing in Cameroon and Senegal (with some attention drawn to neighboring nations). The communities of this collection are unique, each holding their own linguistically intriguing features. For this reason, the collection is divided into three sections which highlight three features of linguistic study: the diversity of multilingualisms, multilingualisms in environments of contact, and suggestions for methods to study multilingualisms in Africa.

### **The Diversity of Multilingualisms in Rural Spaces**

The first six chapters of the collection primarily focus on rural Cameroon, with some attention brought to Senegal. The first chapter introduces the multilingual situation presented in further chapters. This chapter focuses on the Mbororo people in Northwest Cameroon. Learning Babanki, a neighboring language, is essential for most Mbororo. Additionally, many also learn to speak Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE), which is treated as a lingua franca for the rest of the country. As a result, most Mbororo learn to speak at least three languages by age eight and more at the onset of primary school. The authors of this study note that while many believe rural areas

to be monolingual, the data from this case study demonstrates the vast array of languages which may be spoken by rural communities.

The authors of Chapter two provide readers with another unique perspective of language use in Africa. According to the authors, the traditional understanding of code switching needs to be reassessed in light of their research. For residents of Cameroon's Lower Fungom, a conversation's language of choice is that of the primary language of the person of superior position (based upon family relationship or social status). Indeed, code switching with individuals is seen as a violation of social norms and is considered a marked act; an example being one participant changing their language choice mid conversation based on a developed frustration. As individuals may hold different statuses with different people, a conversation between three or more people may utilize over three different languages depending on who they are and where they are from. In other words, language is an act of identifying oneself with a community while at the same time marking who is and who is not a part of that community.

Chapter three explores the special linguistic features used in Cameroonian royal society. The authors of this chapter delve into the kinships and secret societies which utilize and are distinguished by special codes and language registers used specifically for these groups. Some of these features utilize metaphors, metonymy, semantic reassignments, and other linguistic features to denote the special privilege and language use of certain community members.

Chapter four describes an intriguing trend of multilingualism in the Kelleng region of Cameroon. The researchers found that language in Kelleng is a series of choices based on performativity in public life and an expression of identity in private life. The choice of which language to use in a given circumstance is both a reflection of the speaker's past experiences and a decision based on the speaker's emotional state. For this reason, the authors propose that more studies be performed regarding the emotional state of research participants.

While the previous studies focused on multilingualisms in Cameroon, language use in Senegalese Lower Casamance is described in Chapter five as egalitarian, with positive associations concerning the learning of multiple languages. Here, it is difficult to say if a single language is a part of a bigger linguistic group or is more independent. Language is primarily used to connect people to family groups. Children may learn multiple languages depending on their family background as well as where they receive their education.

Chapter six approaches multilingualisms from a different angle as it discusses the paradox of language creation. When a new language is created, similarities exist between it and another language. Being too similar to another language, however, allows for the questioning of the linguistic legitimacy of the new language. One example of this is the *Lítâ* language spoken only by a single generation of people ages 40-50 in the multilingual region of Nkambe of NW Cameroon. The author describes how *Lítâ* is similar in sentence structure to Limbum (another grassfields Bantu language) but is otherwise very distinct from all other languages spoken in the area. Ndamsah, the author of this chapter, does not provide an origin of this language or why only one generation speaks it.

### **Multilingualisms in Contact**

While previous chapters serve as a survey of the state of multilingual Africa, the following four chapters examine how contact between peoples affect language development. Chapter seven describes how, in an increasingly globalized world, travel and migration are becoming standard occurrences. Areas with beneficial environments such as fertile land may encourage migration and therefore become saturated with complex community and linguistic dynamics. In such multilingual spaces, community dynamics are often established around language use. Despite the growing linguistic complexity of rural environments, however, not all members of the community may hold positive views regarding the use of certain languages. While older generations may hold individual conversations in a single language, constant code switching amongst young people in the increasingly externally connected Ossing village (Cameroon) has become the norm. The author expands upon this to suggest that an entire generation - as a result of code switch continuously - may hold a wider linguistic repertoire than previous generations while not being able to claim full mastery over a single language. For small rural communities, this trend may be viewed as a problem. For many, a community's culture is tied to the language. As young people lose their mastery of the language, so too is a piece of their culture lost; and vice versa, a common pattern in rural spaces. The main conclusion here is that while multilingualism holds obvious benefits, communities which are traditionally monolingual or bilingual are being forced to change.

Continuing the discussion of migration and urbanization, chapter eight explores how in the Casamance (the southern strip of Senegal), Wolof and French have largely become the norm, with Wolof serving as Senegal's lingua franca. Despite the widespread use of these languages, choices around which languages are used may involve more than hegemonies of dominance. The author explains that deliberate language choices are often based on a speaker wishing to connect themselves to a particular group. Speaking multiple languages, therefore, encourages one to cross linguistic boundaries. At the same time, crossing linguistic boundaries itself encourages multilingualism; multilingualism therefore serves as both a cause-and-effect for navigating different language spaces.

Chapter nine brings us outside of the everyday dealings of the individual and into a space where legislative matters take precedent. Chapter nine discusses how official courtroom proceedings in Cameroon are legally obligated to take place in one of the country's two official languages, French and English. Having over 250 national languages, however, makes navigating courtroom proceedings complex. Though the law stipulates that translation must occur if necessary, the challenge becomes knowing how to translate legal matters while ensuring equal meaning and importance is given under the law. The author concludes the chapter by noting that the needs of the individual when brought against the laws regarding official proceedings may lead to one or the other being neglected. In an increasingly globalized world, new courtroom strategies may be required as the world becomes more multilingual.

Chapter ten presents a more serious case study of how and why linguistic migration and integration occurs. The Minawao Refugee Camp in northern Cameroon showcases how languages may interact with each other as refugees live together in times of hardship. Several languages are spoken among the refugees in the camp. The authors note that the more speakers of a language there are in the camp, the more migrants of the language were forced to relocate to the area (the more this group was affected by war). As a natural process of living together, the camp group is reported to have selected certain languages to be more common *lingua francas*. Despite some languages being more commonly used between different family groups, participants of this case study report that no language has taken complete dominance in the camp. Multilingualism serves as the peacemaker and bringer of calm to an otherwise emotionally charged situation.

### **Methodologies for the Study of Rural Multilingualisms**

In the third and final section of the collection, readers are given suggestions for furthering the research presented in this collection. Chapter eleven encourages the creation of new research questions to identify the different trends of multilingualism in rural societies. In response to the common debate regarding what is a language and what is (merely) a dialect, Agwara offers a solution for navigating the differing aspects of language and linguistic vocabulary. Agwara recommends using the term *lects*. Believing that the language-dialect debate is itself a flawed viewpoint, Agwara suggests that every type of unique speech form should be understood from the local perspective and not the traditional linguist's. The author provides recommendations regarding which sociolinguistic features may assist researchers in their studies of African multilingualisms.

While chapter eleven discusses various features found in multilingualism, chapter twelve presents methods for assessing multilingualism in small languages without a written script; particularly the difference between active and passive competences. While passive competence is described as a basic comprehension of a language, active competence involves the learner being able to communicate effectively and accurately in a target language. Suggestions are given by the authors in how to administer tests to garner an understanding of these two competencies. The authors believe that a comprehensive approach to language assessment is needed due to the multilingual life of speakers.

The final chapter and case study of this collection discusses questions of personal attitudes toward languages. In this study by Chenemo and Neba, a sociolinguistic approach is taken to understand the power dynamics of Lower Bafut in Cameroon. With the authors note that many linguists may speculate that, as a result of the social dominance of the Bafut language, minority languages in the area would likely die out over time. Contrary to such an expectation, minority groups have shown a strong value of their identity and have continued to speak their languages, though not in the presence of Bafut people.

The entire collection case studies presented in this book discuss the state of multilingualisms, research methods regarding multilingualisms, and the importance of

multilingualisms. I believe that focusing on the affective state of multilingualisms in chapter thirteen serves as a fitting conclusion to this collection.

### Concluding Thoughts

As someone with very limited knowledge about African culture, language, and multilingualism, I approached the reading of this volume from a novice perspective. I also quickly realized that while I assumed the collection would involve the study of individual languages of Africa as distinct entities, the editors explain that the term “multilingualisms” (as is used in the book’s title) is used in its plurality to emphasize the linguistic communities present in Africa.

As I began reading through this collection, I was unaware of my own assumption that becoming multilingual was a luxury reserved for the educated elite of nations such as those found in Europe. After reading this collection, I believe that research on African multilingualisms holds important truths regarding the nature of language and the capability of humans in even the most remote settings of the world.

This collection presents a fascinating discussion of how and why people make their language decisions. Particularly interesting is the ways in which different relationship dynamics affect language choice. These choices could be due to features such as respect, family, classism, religion, etc. One of the conversations recorded in this volume involves two people using eight languages, while others involve three speakers conversing in more than three languages. Though the concept of possessing a “linguistic repertoire” (Di Carlo & Neba, p. 47) may feel like an unachievable feat, the communities presented in this collection prove that multiple languages may be learned not only for financial gains but for social gains. For many of the participants in the presented case studies, multilingualism is less a decision of what to say. Rather, it is more a reflection of who the speaker is and their relationship with whom they speak.

For those seeking a powerful introduction to African multilingualisms, this collection by Di Carlo and Good is an insightful start to a much broader focus of research. I believe that a more fitting title for the collection would include the word *rural* as this book speaks very little about urban centers (although, the editors point out in the introduction that the lines between rural and urban are often unhelpful distinctions in Africa). Having that said, the case studies in this collection examine both Cameroon and Senegal, showing how similarities may be found between comparatively different cultures. Many of the works included in this collection contain maps and charts which make the complex or unique studies clearer for readers. Future scholarship regarding linguistic research in Africa would be well-advised to consult this collection for suggestions on research as well as for evidence of successful research strategies and pedagogy.