Multilingualism without borders?

Perspectives on language and development from a cross-border region

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Outline of this talk

• A zoom on small-scale multilingualism in the Casamance area in the Upper Guinea Coast of Africa:
  - Sociolinguistic setting of Senegal
  - Multilingual repertoires in the Casamance
  - Language ideologies vs. language use
  - Fluid and bounded writing

Frame: reification vs. fluidity

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The Crossroads transcribers
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Zoom on Senegal
**Spoken multilingualism**

- Official contexts, including schools;
- Some urban settings;
- Contexts where formally educated speakers don’t share another lingua franca

- French
- Wolof
- Pulaar
- Creole
- Mandinka
- Joola Fony
- Homes;
- Schools;
- Translocal contexts

- Lébou
- Bassari
- Pepe
- Guaher
- Soninké
- Gumak
- Homes;
- Local contexts

- Bayot
- Seereer
- Mënëk
- Mancagne
- Gubëeher
- Niominka

**Official written multilingualism**

- The official language of Senegal is French.
- French and Arabic are the only languages that are the official media of instruction in schools.
- All languages spoken in Senegal can attain the status of national language through their codification.
- Ca. 19 languages have attained codified status so far.

Text in three Bainounk languages illustrating the codification of “Bainounk” in the official alphabet for Senegalese languages

**Actual written multilingualism**

- Official and standardised
  - In the Latin alphabet and standard spelling
  - French
  - Mandinka
  - Wolof
  - Arabic
  - Joola Fony
  - Creole
  - Lébou
  - Seereer
  - Mënëk
  - Mancagne

- Unofficial but conventionalised
  - In the Latin alphabet in francisised spelling in text messages and social media
  - In the Arabic script for religious, ritual and personal use and poetry in francisised Latin spelling in social media etc.
  - In the Arabic script for religious and ritual purposes
  - Guaher
  - Soninké
  - Gumak
  - Niominka

**The lead writing cultures exemplified**

- Sopp sërîf Falu – Revere Sërîf Falu!
- French orthography is used for writing in Latin script. The Warsh tradition is used for writing in the Arabic script.
A glimpse at small scale multilingualism in Casamance

A multilingual area

- No large centralised polities or state formations
- Some small polities (grouping around 10 villages)
- Refuge zone at the fringes of states (marshlands, climatic conditions, geographical isolation through rivers...)
- High linguistic diversity
- At the epicentre of globalisation since the 15th century and the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade
- High extent of micro-migration, but great ethnolinguistic stability since the 15th century

A prototypical Frontier society (Kopytoff 1987)

(Some) named languages of Casamance

- Joola Fogy
- Creole
- Mandinka
- Pulaar
- French
- Wolof

Multilingual and mobile individuals

- Speak between 3 and 10 named languages
- Languages closely or remotely related or unrelated genetically
- Repertoires dynamic because of:
  - Fostering
  - Marrying in/out
  - Economic, religious and ritual mobility

The Christian « Bainourk » Hélène Coly turned into the Muslim « Mandinka » Teye Suko as part of the gubos ritual.
Only few settings where language choice is constrained

• Ritual contexts
  – Ceremonies associated with land, ancestors and spirits use patrimonial language of the place

• Religious contexts
  – Catholic services use languages into which the bible was translated by missionaries

• Prescriptive contexts
  – Linguists asking for particular language choice in elicitation and staged communicative events
  – Some diglossic contexts

Libations for the ancestors are accompanied by benedictions and injunctions in patrimonial languages in Casamance.
Shared cultural practices

- Initiation rites
- Masked dances
- Fertility rituals (kanyalen/gubos)
- Exogyny
- Wet rice cultivation
- Religion (+ path of the forebears), Christianity and Islam
- Many rituals are timed across the area and involve several groups, although they have ethnic labels

Sacred grove & masked dance in Niamone.

Places as ideological home bases for languages

- Its affiliation with an (ethnic) group and/or a code

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baïnounk-Jóola</th>
<th>Gu-bëeher</th>
<th>Ji-bëeher</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baïnounk</td>
<td>U-/Ñan-bëeher</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Territorialising a language (Blommaert 2010)

Ancestral language (Woodbury 2005)

Language of the ancestors of present-day inhabitants

I ideological home base

Patrimonial identity and language in the Lower Casamance

Landlords: descendants of the (remembered) founding clan

Patrimonial language associated with landlords of a place; strangers don’t claim this language, even if they speak it. Over time, strangers can become landlords of their new dwellings.

Strangers

Landlords have land rights and can receive strangers

Brooks 1993; Lüpke 2016
Territorialised languages based on selective ideologies

Many inhabitants of a place are ideologically erased from representing it; others are iconized (Irvine & Gal 2000, Gal 2016, Irvine 2016)

Contested spaces and indexical misunderstandings

Categorical vs. relational indexicality


Bainounk as autochthones. Mixture signals decline.
Settlement history of Agnack

• Agnack Grand:
  - Founded by the great-grandfather of the current village chief
  - Founder moved from Sangaj, a now abandoned village ca. 20km south-west of Agnack

• Agnack Petit:
  - Is composed of an older Bainournk settlement called Gunfhol and a newer street village
  - Street village attracts a cosmopolitan population

Marriage exchange between Gujaher and Gugècer communities

Places where Casamance Creole is “traditionally” spoken, although by few true monolinguals.”
**Fluid writing in the conventions of a lead language**

The writing does not distinguish codes, using French orthography as a lead (Lüpke & Bao Diop 2014).

**Gay** can be analysed as Wolof ‘lion’ (Mia Weidl), or as English guy (Friederike Lüpke). The speaker in question has been noted by Rachel Watson to use a lot of English in his speech.

**Boundaries evoked by standard language culture**

"No, mélanger ak olof barewul de. Mélanger ak français, moo bare, mo gëna bare. Mélanger ak olof? No no no no."

"No, there is not a lot of mixture [of Casamance languages] with Wolof. The mixture with French, it is a lot, it is more. A mixture with Wolof? No no no no."

Data and photo: Mia Weidl
Standard writing has great symbolic power...

Standard writing creates an ethnolinguistic group for the national polyglossic market place.

... but can’t reify the language itself

Like the other languages that transcription has liberated forever from the anathema cast on them since always by the written languages, for the BOREPAB, the transcription of the Baïnounk language will be a necessary complement, allowing it to be codified, stabilised, to enrich itself in the contact with other languages or be enriched by them.

Extract from the statutes of the Baïnounk lobby organisation BOREPAB (1982)

Colonial borders in writing

Spellings of the family name /jami/ in different postcolonial nation states of the area
LILIEMA

- Language-independent literacy for inclusive education in multilingual areas
  - "language"ing" in the written domain
  - Developed and piloted in multilingual areas with high (cross-border) mobility in view of the SDGs for sustainable education

Coming soon

The British Council Language and Development Conference in Dakar (Senegal) in November