

# An Ethnographic Appraisal of Multilingualism and Intergenerational Relationship in Lower Fungom of the North West Region of Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

People born at about the same time grow up sharing an historical period that shapes their views. These people are often referred to as a "generation" and are often entrusted with a social, political, divine or natural responsibility. The methods of expressing these relationships can be cordial or hostile depending on the peer groups, gender or cultural norms of the group. Expressing these relations becomes more complex in multilingual communities as we see in Lower Fungom. This paper examines the interface between indigenous knowledge and identity management, particularly the relevance of generation in multilingual communities. A sociolinguistic survey was carried out in four of the thirteen villages of Lower Fungom with an ethnographic interview guide that handled both linguistic and ethnographic information. The information collected through in-depth interviews was later verified through focus groups discussions where the participants refuted or confirmed what was provided as information during in-depth interviews. The data collected revealed that significant rates of multilingualism in the area are explained socially in terms of blood relations, marriage, perceived proximity and similarity, religion, education, individual relations and movements. Also, the data suggests that household multilingualism transmitted from one generation to another has become a culture and is responsible for the peaceful community and intercommunity coexistence in the area. Hence, there is no identity crisis in Lower Fungom communities but a new way of negotiating identity which begins from the household where there is tolerance and consensus in the use of different languages. Unlike in Lower Fungom where there is tolerance and consensus between generations in the practice of multilingualism, the situation has not been the same at the national level where a language crisis has engendered other crisis such as economic, political, and social crisis and consequent dysfunction in the country.

**Key Words:** Communities, Generation, Intergeneration, identity, multilingualism, parents, grandparents.

## INTRODUCTION

Multiple meanings have been attributed to the term "generation" among which is generation as a principle of kinship descent; generation as a cohort; generation as a life stage, and generation as a historical period. The notion is central to the work of Ortega Y Gasset and richly analyzed by Julián Marias (1967).

Social anthropologists use the concept of generation in referring not so much to parent-child relations as to the larger universe of kinship relations (Fox 1967; Baxter & Almagor 1978; Fortes 1974; Foner & Kertzer 1978; Jackson 1978; Kertzer 1978; Legesse 1973; Needham 1974; Stewart 1977). Demographers have utilized this sense of the term in attempting to develop measures for "length of generation." Here, the interest is in population replacement, based on the reproduction of females (Preston 1978; Krishnamoorthy 1980).

(Preston 1978; Krishnamoorthy 1980). refers to "generation" as the succession of people moving through the age strata, the younger replacing the older as all age together. This usage is widespread beyond sociology as well and finds frequent expression in intellectual history, where, for example, literary, "generations" may succeed one another each 10 or 15 years Cowley (1978). This cohort notion of generation has been extended beyond that of birth cohorts to apply to any succession through time, so that we find reference to first, second, and third "generations" of health behavior studies (Weaver 1973; Farge 1977) or to marital "generations" Hill (1977).

In its life-stage usage, we find such expressions as the "college generation." Sorokin (1947: 192-93) discusses the conflict between "younger and older generations" to the differential response of people of different ages to the same events. Eisenstadt (1956) combines the descent and life-stage meanings of generation.

The use of "generation" to characterize the people living in a particular historical period is less common in sociology than in history, where books bearing such titles as *The Generation of 1914* Wohl (1979) and *The Generation before the Great War*, Tannenbaum (1976) are numerous. In this sense, "generation" covers a wide range of cohorts. However, though it is the great historical event that defines such "generations," they are often linked in practice to the cohorts of youths and young adults thought to be particularly influenced by such events. Various usages of the generation concept are commonly mixed together, sometimes intentionally. Laslett's (1977), *Family Line and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations*, profits from the descent and period meanings of "generation." Moreover, the generation idea has great popular appeal e.g. the "generation gap" concept of the 1960s; the term is thus used in many social scientific books written for the mass market (Cohen & Gans 1978; Franzblau 1971; Jones 1980).

While the roots of the current confusion in generational studies can be traced back to millennia, the proximate intents can be identified in the works of Karl Mannheim and Jose Ortega y Gasset. Mannheim's writing has heavily influenced sociological works on generation, and his own confounding of the genealogical meaning of "generation" with the cohort sense of the term continues to be reflected in current research. Mannheim (1952: 290) wrote that the "sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death."

Several sociologists, under the stimulus of Mannheim, have considered the question of generational change, character, duration, and identity. David Riesman (1950) began by identifying generations in American culture in terms of their social character. Unlike sociologists, social anthropologists use "generation" in referring not so much to parent-child relations but to the larger universe of kinship relations.

White et al (2008) say generation is a relational term that refers to familial reproduction but by extension may denote categories of seniors and juniors in society at large. Focusing on the active version of generation, they refer to 'generations' as groups and categories of people *belonging to* a certain period of time, social category, or position in descent line with specific rules and conventions. To them, members of a generation are not surrendered to their cultural and societal position, but are able to use that position to bring about new ideas and practices and pursue their own interests within the historical circumstances in which they live.

Schwartz et al (1975, 312) looks at "Generation" as those individuals in the flow of population through time who see themselves or are seen by others as culturally distinguished from others who preceded or followed them. Bennett Berger (1971) notes that even for the same age group, there exist a plurality of "generations" or cultural style. Social scientists have traditionally looked upon the diverse popular meanings of "generation" as an opportunity for extension of the term *in* social science, rather than as a source of imprecision to be avoided. Troll (1970), for example, lists five different concepts of generation, and finds them all useful.

Over time, a succession of waves of new individuals reach adulthood, coming at that time into contact with the prevailing culture and remodeling what they find. Mannheim refers to it as "fresh contact." He identified these waves with generations but distinguished between those individuals within such generations who shared a common outlook on the basis of their common experience and those who did not. The former he labeled "generation units." A fuller discussion of Mannheim and Ortega y Gasset's influence on generational studies may be found in Kertzer (1982).

Ortega y Gasset formulated a similar concept of generation based on the notion that people born at about the same time grow up sharing an historical period that shapes their views. Arguing that generation "is the most important conception in history," Oregia y Gasset (1933: 15,19) wrote that each generation has its "special mission," though this mission might be left "unachieved" Such followers of Ortega y Gasset as Marias (1968) have renounced the kinship descent definition of generation, championing the historical cohort meaning alone. Once the concept was thus cut loose from its genealogical anchor, followers of Mannheim and Ortega y Gasset

could claim that a new "generation" might appear as frequently as every year, depending on the rapidity of change new cohorts face as they come of age in their society (Rintala 1968; Berger 1959)

The polysemous usage of generation came under attack by Ryder (1965), who argued for restricting generation to its kinship descent meaning. There exists an unambiguous term-cohort-to refer to the succession of individuals who pass through a social system, and there exists a similarly clear term-life stage-to refer to a particular segment of the life course. Processes of family transmission should not be confused with processes of cohort succession and social change. This paper examines the interface between indigenous knowledge and identity management, particularly the relevance of generation in multilingual communities (categories of seniors and juniors in society at large) as in Lower Fungom.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected between March 2017 and August 2018 using the qualitative research method (interviews, observations and Focus group discussions).

A sociolinguistic survey was carried out with an ethnographic interview guide that handled both linguistic and ethnographic information. Data were collected through in-depth interviews from ten households in each of the four chosen communities. Data was collected within households from individuals who were both monolingual and multilingual in the local languages. Our base was the households where people with multilingual aptitudes were said to live but once in the home, we interviewed even the household members who were not multilingual. From the people we hoped to make detailed interviews on their linguistic habits and attitudes as well as their relationship with the elder generations.

We asked questions on the number of languages they could speak, those that they could hear a bit, and those that they could hear without being able to speak as well as those that they could speak a bit.

With regards to intergenerational interaction, we listened to the records to find out who among the youths and elders was more interested in the transmission of multilingual competence as well as the domains in which interactions mostly occurred. Most especially, we paid attention to;

- What was transmitted?
- How it was transmitted
- The language choices
- Impressions about the choice of language
- The preferred setting
- The level of enthusiasm between the young and the elders.

These enabled us to notice the differences and similarities among the consultants and categorize them. It also revealed the reasons for the language ideologies of the consultants such as security and economic activities. Questions were also asked about the life histories of their families and their friends as well as their level of schooling and their daily interaction with other households in the quarter, villages or neighboring villages. To understand the role of multilingual practices in their socio-economic and political development, we asked questions on the social, physical and human capital of the households, quarters, and the entire village as well as the neighboring villages.

Except for one interview which was done in the consultant's office because it was threatening to rain, the venue of the interviews was always in a more or less peaceful spot somewhere around the consultant's area of living. Most interviews were conducted in Pidgin English and only a few were conducted in English. The language could change from Pidgin English to English language in the flow of the interview.

We observed some cultural practices among the groups during which the moods, facial expressions and gestures were observed, as they constitute an important part of non-verbal communication. We also visited some of the consultants in their homes when living in a village and thus made unstructured observations. During such occasions we would observe or make recordings of some salient events which would be vital in our understanding of the themes of research. Thus we visited and observed our consultants in their meeting groups, churches and mosdt especially in the lone market of the community; the Abar market.

Ethical issues such as anonymity, privacy and informed consent were some of the challenges of this study from designing to reporting the data. To avoid coercing the consultants, we provided an information sheet explaining the purpose of this study while an ascent and consent form were given to major and minor consultants before interviewing them.

### **Presentation of Lower Fungom**

Lower Fungom is an area around 240 square kilometers in size – located in the Grassfields' northwest periphery within the North-West Region of Cameroon. The area is inhabited by about 10,000 people distributed in thirteen villages whose population ranges from less than 200 people (such as Biya, Buu, and Ngun) to about 3,000 ( like Koshin and Fang). To Di Carlo (2012), Lower Fungom is a region of extreme interest as it is characterized by an amazing degree of linguistic diversity. The resulting language density averages one language per thirty square kilometers, making Lower Fungom one of the linguistically most diverse micro-areas of the Cameroonian Grassfields – itself a well-known area for its remarkable degree of linguistic diversity. While the languages are all reasonably classified as Bantoid, five of them do not have any established close relatives outside of the region, nor can they be straightforwardly shown to be closely related to each other. Di Carlo (2011: 54) notes that the astonishing degree of language density so far lacked historical and ethnographic contextualization and therefore any serious attempt to understand its etiology.

### **Multilingualism in Lower Fungom**

The locals hold that, each ethnic group speaks a separate linguistic form, especially with the case of single villages. With this in mind, Di Carlo (2011) asserts that an individual speaking a different language can be accepted in that community and as such, receives protection from the invisible world by the chief. In other words, being multilingual can fetch a golden ticket of protection to invisible threats by a chief representing that ethnic community. Also, Di Carlo and Pizziolo (2012) in their study of Lower Fungom., showcase the importance of multi-disciplinarily approaches in probing linguistic issues. How then dose the household accept a member speaking a differ language?

Angwara (2013) seeks to define the macro sociological factors that account for individual multilingualism in Lower Fungom and attempts an exposition of multilingualism in pre-colonial times in Lower Fungom while highlighting the importance of gathering data from an ethnographic perspective thus revealing possible language choices. The local language ideologies of the Lower Fungom people which consist of creating the maximum number of social networks for their own benefits (economic, political and social) underlie whatever sociological factors that account for high rates of multilingualism in Lower Fungom.

The scholarly linguistic classification of the speech varieties of this area suggests: that seven languages, or small language clusters, are spoken in its thirteen recognized villages Good et al. (2011:102). However, this characterization is at odds with the local conception of linguistic distinctiveness which treats each of the region's thirteen villages as having its own “talk”. These “talks” identify a community which needs to interact with another for cultural or economic purposes which we call intercommunity interaction.

Ojong (2014) has studied how people make use of their multilingual repertoires in lower Fungom while Nsen (2014) has worked on the assessment of Individual Multilingualism. Dicarlo 2011 further stresses that Lower Fungom is a multilingual very restricted geographical area, to the extent that the network of multilingualism is so interwoven that you might not even know who the native speaker of which language is.

## Intergenerational Relationship in Lower Fungom

Among the communities of Lower Fungom, generation is perceived as a life stage where the elder is *someone who saw the sun before you and thus deserves some form of cordiality when being approached.*<sup>1</sup> As individuals live longer, their opportunities for multiple generational contact increases. For example, there is a 60 percent chance that a 60 year old female will have a living parent (Watkins, Menken, & Bongaarts, 1987), and it is likely that she is also a grandparent Robertson (1996).

In Lower Fungom, regardless of the generation (older, middle, and younger) the intergenerational relationships are characterized by respect, responsibility, reciprocity and resiliency which are evident within the relationships and these characteristics are relevant to individuals who work with older people and their families. These characteristics can be used as foundations on which to further strengthen intergenerational bonds as shown below.

### Respect

In lower Fungom, the relations with the next generation starts at the level of the household before being carried out to the community and beyond the community. Among the people of Mashi and among the people of Abar, Koshin and Buu, every household possess its rituals during which the values, symbols and kinship relations are transmitted from father to son or from mother to daughter

Among the people of Koshin, the *Mbegeh* is the occasion when the youths and the elders interact as distinct generations and during which they exchange ideas concerning the welfare of the village. The younger generations demonstrate respect for older generations in numerous ways. The elder *muinteh, nata* as they are variously called, deserve respect during work, marriage, eating or any other occasion where they are present.

According to (Belsky & Rovine, 1984; Sujor & Pillemer, 1988; Roberts, Richards, & Bengtson, 1991), the usual levels of growth experienced by younger generations such as getting married, living independently, becoming parents, and developing a work pattern, reduces the gap in relationships between the generations. The responsibilities and joys of marriage, independent residence, employment and adulthood encourage younger generations to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of older generations and, as a result, many younger family members develop a respect for their parents and grandparents.

Among the people of Abar, Buu, Koshin and Mashi, the elder (muientie, nata) are given the respect in all occasions. A participant in the focus group discussion in Koshin relates that: *"When a muientie comes in here, we first of all need to get up and give him a seat to sit. Then when you meet him on the road carrying something, you help him to carry it to his house. Then he should not be insulted on the road when he is saying something. That is the respect for the muientie and wherever he comes in, be it in a drinking place the first wine should be put in his cup to show that he is the elder person and the last drops must also go to his cup unless he decides otherwise."*<sup>2</sup>

During the adolescent and early adult years, younger persons may not be cognizant of the respect they hold for their elders. They may minimize the relevance of the older generations' information because the younger generation feels more contemporary. But, as the younger generation experiences typical life events (marriage, work, parenthood), a renewed respect for family elders often ensues. Requesting advice from parents and grandparents, visiting grandparents, inquiring about parents' and grandparents' lives, and valuing relationships with older members of the family are manifestations of the respect younger generations have for older family members. It is respect for intergenerational relationships that provides some explanation for the importance younger family members place on relationships with older generations.

Prior to making any marriage public, the girl first discusses with her mother who out of respect informs the father of the child who in turn informs his kin and kindred. Some young adults consistently indicate that relationships with grandparents are important to them. They respect their lineage, and most younger persons have emotional

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Pa Boaten Mannaseh in Koshin July 21 2018

<sup>2</sup> Intervention from participant 2 during a Focus Group Discussion in Koshin July 2018

ties to their older generations. For example, deference to older persons at family meetings, expressed by placing them in seats of honor or preparing meals as the elder generation prepared meals are demonstrations of the respect younger generations have for older generations.

## Responsibility

Studies in gerontology and family, (Suttor, Pillemer, Keeton, & Robison, 1996) have reported younger generations' feelings of responsibility for older generations who are their kin

Filial responsibility; "a sense of personal obligation for the well-being of aging parents" Hamon, (1996, p. 2), is felt by younger generations. In other words, adult children and grandchildren have a sense of obligation for their parents and grandparents. It is characteristic for young adults to express a desire to offer support if their parents need it in the future. Within families in Lower Fungom, it is typical for the younger generation to believe that they are responsible to provide some support to their older relatives, and many are conscious of this responsibility when they make major life decisions such as where they will live. It is the case with some of our consultants in Abar. The mother of one of them is from Munken and his father from Abar. He is married from Fang and lives in Abar with his family among his father's people but he also goes to Munken from time to time to stay with his mother's people and help them in farm work and other activities. His wife also goes from time to time to her father's people in Fang to help them. Sometimes they go together to Fang or Munken. The other consultant is from Mumfu where his parents originate and he is also a notable but he lives in Abar with his wife and children where he is also a member of some sacred groups. Sometimes they go to Mumfu to work on his father's farms to help his father's people.

Adult children make extraordinary sacrifices in supporting older relatives because they feel responsible to provide care. In lower Fungom, a girl who marries out of the village often comes home to work on the mother's farms or assist her in the house especially when there is a festive occasion or when there is death. In other villages, the elderly women who belong to social groups are often visited and provided support in household chores by the younger ones.

*One consultant recounted that: "I belong to the women group in the church and we often visit the elderly women. I went to visit a chereta (an elderly woman) who was sick. Then I came and fetched firewood to go and give her but her condition was very serious so I went and told the church that there was a member who was sick and her condition was very bad because she was defecating only on the bed. We went and cleaned her compound, removed her dresses, washed them and wore her clean dresses then she said we should take her to the church but we told her there was no church service on that day. She stayed only for three days again and died."*<sup>3</sup>

Responsibility may be built in a feeling of obligation or "return" for all the older generation previously did for the younger generation. For some, parenting is rewarded by the acceptance of care in the later years, and the responsibility for such care is embedded within the family's values. During a focus group discussion in Mashi one participant related that: *Here in Mashi, we have our country fashion in the family which we call uku, we cook cornfufu and we sit together with the elders and eat and they teach us the things of the family and the village which we have to know so that we can help ourselves and others when they are no longer there.*<sup>4</sup>

For others, the sense of responsibility is based upon feelings of affection for the older persons. Feelings of love are translated into a sense of responsibility to care for an older parent.

In Mashi, some consultants feel that the sense of responsibility is basic to their parent-child relationship. "It is not a responsibility that can be lessened by palliative circumstances in the adult child's life. Irrespective of the reason (obligation, affection, or a combination of both), it is clear that younger generations have a sense of responsibility to provide assistance to older relatives."

This responsibility may differ depending on the need. For instance, some youths within Koshin hold a sense of responsibility for the psycho-emotional needs of older relatives during which they have to perform the folklore

<sup>3</sup> Interview with madame Mbome in Abar (August 4<sup>th</sup> 2018)

<sup>4</sup> Participant 6 during Focus group Discussion in Mashi (August 6<sup>th</sup> 2018)

which has been transmitted to them by the older relative. A participant in the focus group discussion in Koshin noted that: *During annual festivities when all the harvesting has been done in the village we organize the peer group dances like the munkwem and invite the elders to participate in detecting the best dancers.*<sup>5</sup>

Also, visiting, corresponding, or telephoning, are a few examples of ways in which younger generations fulfill the responsibility that they feel. In so doing, they provide psycho-emotional support to their older relatives. The attention given to older persons informs them that they are important to the younger generation. When an older relative has physical limitations, it is expected that younger relatives will be willing to provide transportation, help with meals and other personal needs, clean the yard and the house, fetch firewood, hunt game, run errands and do other tasks that assist the older person with daily living. Feelings of intergenerational responsibility are translated into action within many families in Lower Fungom. However, many elders accused the younger ones of being irresponsible, drunkards, prostitutes, lazy and gossips.

## Reciprocity

Throughout most of life, intergenerational relationships are characterized by reciprocity. While younger generations support older relatives, older relatives are assisting younger persons. Briefly put, intergenerational relationships in the later years are a two-side coin. The classic example that many people readily observe is the child care provided by many grandparents and the emotional support adult children and grandchildren give to the grandparents.

Among the people of Lower Fungom, whereas the younger ones have a duty to respect the elders by carrying water for them, keeping their compounds clean, being polite to them and helping them on the way if they are carrying any heavy load among others, the (elder) muentie in the village has a reciprocal role to teach respect. A participant in the focus group discussion in Koshin explained that: *He teaches how to work on the farm, how to cultivate food, how to be polite to the elders without challenging them*<sup>6</sup>. They have to transmit multilingual competences through the symbols and values of the family and community to the younger generations during social gatherings, in the law houses and other socio-cultural milieus like Njangi (thrift -and- loan scheme) or meeting groups.

The transmission of multilingual competence begins within households when the parents enable their children to be able to express themselves in the languages of the parents and that of the host communities where they live. In the multilingual households that we observed in Abar, Buu, Koshin and Mashi, the father does not impose his language to the family. Instead, all the languages are used in the household either for secrecy or to consolidate the bonding between in-laws, the children and the community as a whole. In a household where the father was from Buu and the mother from Mumfu, the mother did not only speak Buu to the children at home but would switch to Mumfu even when there were no visitors in the house. In another household where the father was from Buu and the wives were from Abar and Missong, the father had to learn Abar and Missong so that he can be able to talk to his children and in-laws with authority as if they came Buu. In another household in Abar where the mother was from Buu and the father from Esu, the mother had a command of over ten languages and she would speak as many as six languages a day to her children in a single day. The other household in Abar where the husband's father was from Abar and his mother was from Munken while the wife came from Fang, they spoke to the children in Munken, Fang and Abar. In Koshin, the father who is from Koshin, had to learn the language of his wife who is from Bum so as to prove his love to his in-laws whenever he visits them. These languages are used in the house with the children and especially when his in-laws come visiting or when he goes to visit them. In all cases, the children are not forced to learn the languages but they acquire the multilingual competence as a spontaneous exercise from the households and they now practice or complement it in the community in other socio-cultural domains.

In Koshin, the *feküle* (village gathering), *mbegeh* (joint transportation of foodstuff from the farm) *nemgah* (annual festival), are some of such occasions where intergenerational interaction takes place and where the elders reciprocate in their duties to the youth. During the *feküle*, the entire village (young and old, male and female) is

<sup>5</sup> Participant 6 during Focus group Discussion in Mashi (August 6<sup>th</sup> 2018)

<sup>6</sup> Participant 3 during Focus group Discussion in Koshin (August 6<sup>th</sup> 2018)

summoned at the chief's palace either to celebrate an event or to discuss an impending doom to the village. Here, the elders lecture the youths on the symbols and values of the community thus preparing them to take over the relay baton when they are no longer there. If it is a joyful event, those who brought the joy are praised and rewarded and the villagers are urged to emulate their good deeds. If it is a sad event, the culprits are exposed and sanctioned by the elders according to the laws of the land so as to deter other villagers from repeating the same deeds. The *mbegeh* is the joint transportation of foodstuff from the farms to the homes during harvest. The topography of Koshin is very rough and farming is done several kilometers from the homes and even in neighboring villages. During the harvest, a family organizes a *mbegeh* where the quarter or the entire village is invited to come and assist the family in transporting their foodstuff (usually maize or groundnut) from the farm to the house. The family provides food (fowls, cornfufu, corn beer or palmwine mixed with honey) to the youths and elders who take part in the *mbegeh*. The participation of the elders in this activity is not much the quantity of maize or groundnut that they will transport from the long distance to the house but it is to set an example to the youth who will now have to emulate the humility of the elders to serve one another in the community. During the eating of the *mbegeh*, other matters concerning the village are discussed and oral tradition concerning the village is handed down to the youths that are present at the occasion.

When all the harvesting has been done, the *nemgah* festival is organized to thank the gods and ancestors for a bountiful harvest, cleanse the village of the evil deeds which occurred in the village for that year and prepare for a new planting season and New Year. This festival marks the peak of intergenerational interaction in Koshin as all the children, the notables and chiefs both in and out of village come together to interact with the elders where they learn the traditional lore and mores of the village from the older generation. This festival can continue for up to a week.

Among the people of Buu, there is a cultural week organized by the development association during which the youths take over the running of the village institutions from the elders and the elders sit back to observe if the youths had assimilated traditional knowledge that they learnt from the elders throughout the year. Traditional institutions like the *nkoh*, *kwifan*, *ntoo* and *muabuh* among others are run by the youths who mimic such actions as settling of household, inter quarter and village disputes as well as the induction of new members in the various sacred societies and law houses. At this time, the elders only step in to give corrections on what they might be doing wrongly.

Apart from the cultural week, the people of Buu share the *bikan* sacred festival with Abar, Ngun, Kung and Munken. During the festival, intergenerational interaction goes beyond villages because the festival takes place in one village and the youths and elders from the other villages converge in the one village to interact while the youth tap from the wisdom of the elders who come from different villages with different languages.

On their part, the elderly women also interact with the younger women in their sacred institutions like the *shaamte* and in meeting houses and Njangi (thrift -and- loan scheme) groups. The *shaamte* is the female secret society which cuts across all the villages in Lower Fungom. Membership is hereditary in most cases against a very high fee. During their outings (usually when a member dies) the younger women who stand to succeed their mothers are often invited to visit their mothers in the *shaamte* house so as to learn the activities in the house. In Buu, the elderly women are said to invoke the *mgbaaleh* (blessings) on the village whenever they are called upon. In Abar, the *chereta* (elderly women) and *na'tum* (queen mother) have to administer the women on the daily bases and settle any disputes among them. During village gatherings in Koshin or Mashi, the elderly women are called to give advice to the younger women when they are drinking palm wine or corn beer.

In Abar, the "work hard" women meeting group has members who come from almost all the villages of lower Fungom where there is the display of multilingual ability by the women. Sometimes, the elderly women who cannot come to the meeting will send their girl children to sit in for them. It is during the deliberations that the younger women interact with elderly women and they learn the lores and mores of the various communities.

The reciprocal relationship between the generations in Lower Fungom is illustrated by the effects one generation has on another. Suitor, et al., (1996) report that life transitions (e.g., marriage divorce, child birth) experienced by adult children affect the lives of older persons and, in return, life changes (widowhood) have an impact on

the younger generations. Intergenerational relationships are characterized by interdependency. Consequently, the relationships between the generations are often reciprocal.

However, the younger generation in the villages of Lower Fungom squirm this reciprocity as they accused the older generations (male and female) of being greedy, witchcraft practices, irresponsible acts, and being gossips.

The greed of the older generation is expressed in the management of farmlands, orphans and widows as well as the high fees demanded for one to have access to the law houses and sacred societies like *nkoh* for men and *shaamte* for women. Any youth who challenges the established order of the older generations has to contend with the witchcraft practices of the latter. In Mashi, we saw a case of one lame youth whom the villagers confirmed had been bewitched by one elder in the village because the youth had challenged the decision of the elder to deviated a gutter for the smooth flowing of rain water. Irresponsible behavior from the older generation was also decried by the youth as the elders did not send their children to school, sold off all family land and married off their daughters at early ages. Any youth who is trying to excel in life becomes the subject of gossip among the older generation. The younger generation said they would be resilient when interacting with the older generation.

## Resilience

The resilience of intergenerational relationships can be illustrated by the ways in which families and communities develop strategies to deal with change within the family. For example, when divorce and remarriage occur within any generation, the intergenerational relationships are affected. Johnson (1988) found that middle class families experienced different kinship patterns after divorce. Paternal grandparents experienced a decline in support. However, in another study, Johnson & Barer (1987) reported that paternal grandmothers increased their kin networks because they continued contact with the former daughters-in-law and added the new daughter-in-law to the kin network. The differing ways of dealing with the changes because of divorce underscore the resiliency of intergenerational relationships.

Provision of care for older generations and the times when older generations become primary caregivers for grandchildren demonstrate the resiliency of intergenerational relationships. Burton (1992) and Minkler, et.al (1992) provide data on surrogate parenting by older generations. Older persons, who have already parented, step in to parent when the younger generation is unable to do so. The resiliency of the intergenerational relationships provides a continuous emotional and physical support system to the youngest generation in Lower Fungom through parenting and education in tradition norms and mores.

## Implications for Intergenerational Interaction

The social systems perspective recognizes the recurrent changes to which social systems must effectively respond in order to uphold their structure as a system. Intergenerational families and communities are constantly placed in situations which call for adaptation and adjustment so that they can continue their functioning as a family or community. For example, the illness of an older family member may result in the adaptation of assistance by a younger family member, most likely a daughter. The older family member must also change by accepting the help of the daughter. The daughter may need to make adaptations at her place of employment and in her own family, with her spouse and children, in order to provide the caregiving needed by her mother. As older family members undergo changes through life transitions and occasional crises, they show resilience through their ability to change the balance they have retained throughout their families' lives while retaining their family structure. It is through intergenerational cooperation and the working together of many parts of the family unit that this occurs.

Viewing intergenerational families from a continuity perception helps to understand how an older individual and his or her family have adapted and responded to crises and transitions throughout the life of the family. This knowledge provides information about a particular intergenerational family's past history and can, therefore, assess their present ability to: (a) deal with life transitions and crises while evidencing respect for one another; (b) adapt to crises and life transitions by working together responsibly; (c) respond to life changes by giving to one another reciprocally; and (d) make necessary changes yet maintain family structure in a resilient manner.

Families that in the past have responded to life situations with respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and resilience will likely continue those coping mechanisms in their present situations.

Through family assistance, the respect intergenerational family members hold for one another can be solidified by knowledge of family history. In this way, older family members are reminded of their respectful treatment of one another and support to continue that behavior in the present.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we looked at the intergenerational relations in multilingual lower Fungom communities. Intergenerational relationships within Lower Fungom are generally marked by respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and resiliency. Throughout the family history, younger, middle, and older generations develop ways to support one another in the later years. In fact, as the generations age, the intergenerational connections become more important. The intergenerational bonds provide a framework for support to the families and the entire community in the later years. The abilities of families' to reorganize in order to deal with life transitions in a respectful, responsible, reciprocal, and resilient manner can enhance the intergenerational relationships of their families and communities at a microscopic level. In lower Fungom, there is no visible conflict of generation because of the resilience and reciprocity where everyone is considered useful within the household and the community at large. Practitioners and programs which support intergenerational families in their endeavor to deal with later life caregiving issues will find that family members, old and young, are valuable partners in the service delivery process. This has however not been the case at the macro national level where the elitist generations view each other as a threat to their survival thus creating a permanent dysfunction in the state. The case of Lower Fungom can thus serve as an eye opener to national policy makers on generational approach to multilingual practices and consequent social cohesion.

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