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The Multilingual Zoo:

Animals, Languages, and Symbolic Capital in Yaoundé, Cameroon

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts in Anthropology

by

Rosalie Beth Edmonds

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Multilingual Zoo:
Animals, Languages, and Symbolic Capital in Yaoundé, Cameroon

by

Rosalie Beth Edmonds

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Norma Mendoza-Denton, Chair

Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens, located in the capital city of Yaoundé, brings together dozens of Cameroon's 280 languages with dozens of species of its wildlife, serving as the touristic face of the country. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the summer of 2014, this paper looks at the issue of symbolic capital and multilingual communication at Mvog-Betsi, by focusing on the animals cared for by three keepers from different parts of Cameroon (the Fulfuldophone north, Anglophone southwest, and Francophone southeast). Each of these keepers occupies different spaces in the zoo, has access to different animals and resources due to their affiliations, and faces different challenges in communicating with other staff members and the visiting public. At Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens, keepers gain social capital through the linguistic communities to which they belong – local, regional, national, and international. This *social* capital, in turn, offers keepers access to the *cultural* capital of the animals associated with those communities. However, drawing on Achille

Mbembe's description of the postcolony as a "plurality of spheres" (2001, 5), I argue that these affiliations offer access to different types, rather than different quantities, of symbolic capital.

The thesis of Rosalie Beth Edmonds is approved.

Elinor Ochs

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University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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Introduction

“*Les lions ne sont pas trop compliqués,*” Mamoudou explained to me in French, pushing a wheelbarrow full of raw meat toward an enclosure. Inside, Junior, a large male lion, paced back and forth against the bars, growling at passersby. Lions aren’t that complicated.

“*Oh, c’est quoi?*” Mamoudou teased Junior, in the same tone that one would use to gently mock a crying baby.

“*A warti na?*” Joseph, another lion keeper, greeted Mamoudou in Fulfulde as we approached. You’ve arrived?

“*Mi warti.*” Mamoudou confirmed, setting the wheelbarrow down to help the other lion keepers coax Junior into a smaller enclosure so they could safely unload the meat.

I followed the lion keepers for the next hour as they fed the four lions at Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens. The commotion attracted a small crowd of visitors, who chatted excitedly in English and French. One small girl, frightened by the lions’ roars, was led away by her parents in tears. In the next enclosure, a lone gazelle eyed the visitors nervously. Across the path, a group of Olive baboons perched on a platform grooming each other, oblivious to the distractions.

This routine activity reflects the day-to-day entanglement of diversity at Mvog-Betsi, as numerous types of animals, people, and languages are brought together within Yaoundé, the capital city of Cameroon. Viewing the zoo as the touristic face of Cameroon, one of Africa’s most linguistically and biologically diverse countries, what is the value of these different languages and types of animals, and what impact do these different valuations have on the staff who use and care for them? This paper seeks to answer the above questions through the lens of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984, 1986), exploring how animals and languages take on different

types of social and cultural value according to the spheres (Mbembe 2001) to which they belong. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted during the summer of 2014, this paper looks at the issue of symbolic capital and multilingual communication by focusing on the animals cared for by three keepers from different parts of Cameroon (the Fulfuldophone north, Anglophone southwest, and Francophone southeast). Each of these keepers occupies different spaces in the zoo, has access to different animals and resources due to their affiliations, and faces different challenges in communicating with other staff members and the visiting public. At Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens, keepers gain social capital through the linguistic communities to which they belong – local, regional, national, and international. This *social* capital, in turn, offers keepers access to the *cultural* capital of the animals associated with those communities. However, drawing on Achille Mbembe’s description of the postcolony as a “plurality of spheres” (2001:5), I argue that these affiliations offer access to different types, rather than different quantities, of symbolic capital.

Symbolic Capital and Spheres in the Postcolony

Pierre Bourdieu defines capital as:

a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible....[it] represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints inscribed in the very reality of that world, which governs its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (1986:241)

This capital can be economic (i.e. an object directly exchangeable for money), or symbolic, “refer[ring] to degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour and is founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*)” (Randal Johnson in Bourdieu 1993:7). This paper will focus on symbolic capital as it relates to 1) the cultural

capital of the animals housed at Mvog-Betsi; and 2) the social capital of the languages spoken by the people who care for these animals.

Bourdieu (1984) describes cultural capital, a type of symbolic capital, as a form of cultural knowledge or competence that allows one, for example, to decipher cultural objects such as paintings, whose meaning is dependent upon membership in or knowledge about that particular culture. Cultural capital can be embodied within the individual, objectified in the form of cultural goods such as art or writing, or institutionalized in the form of, for example, academic qualifications (Bourdieu 1986). Alternatively, Bourdieu defines social capital, the other type of symbolic capital, as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu 1986:252). Social capital derives its value from the network of people one is associated with. Knowing more people, or particularly more of a certain type of people, can increase one’s social capital.

At Mvog-Betsi, keepers have social capital based on where they are from, but also on what languages they speak, i.e. who they are able to talk to. While French and English are the official languages of Cameroon, as in much of Africa, indigenous languages continue to be used whenever possible and have great social capital as well (see Vigouroux & Mufwene 2008). As Monica Heller notes, the commodification of language in the postcolony can serve to reify colonial relationships under the guise of economic development:

Relations of power established earlier in the political, social, and cultural terms characteristic of colonialism and the immediate postcolonial period are being recast in economic terms to relegitimize and preserve them. The national and imperial markets set up in previous centuries still operate, but they are reframed as collaborative rather than hierarchical and as aimed at economic development and competition rather than at servicing the nation or the imperial center. (2010:103)

French and English thus are described both as the languages of being authentically Cameroonian and languages which will allow one to achieve economic success as a member of the global economy. The Cameroonian state's education system and lack of jobs that require English and French mean that possession of the standards is not necessarily a realistic or even economically practical goal. However, because of the value given to English and French by the government and former and neocolonial powers, as well as the indexical value they receive because of their use by elites, bilingualism in English and French is seen as desirable. This bilingualism is even portrayed as an essential quality of authentic Cameroonian citizenship, while the plurality of indigenous languages are seen as threats to national unity and the antithesis of modernity. Nevertheless, at Mvog-Betsi, although English has international prestige, within the French-dominant zoo, it is a marginalized code both numerically and politically. Alternatively, while French is dominant in most conversations, its use is mostly limited to formal and intergroup communication, and indigenous *linguae francae* like Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE), Fulfulde, and Ewondo remain the preferred codes for informal communication.

In the introduction to their volume *African Languages, Development, and the State*, Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss describe what they call the fabricated "language problem" of Africa: Africa is seen as having too many languages, and languages which do not behave as they are supposed to (2002:1). However, they note that the problems posed by multilingualism are in reality only problems for people in the government attempting to hegemonize a diverse population, and do not pose a problem for the majority of citizens of African countries.

Comparing national and local levels of language usage, they note that:

Language as an object of concern finds itself subjected to, usually incompatible, desires for purity, authenticity, modernity, Africanness, national usage, equality and statal identity. Meanwhile, language as practice develops as if it had a life of its own under the influences of the pursuit of wealth or political influence, or more neutrally

communication and sociality, to which ends it is only a means. (Fardon & Furniss 2002:6)

For the majority of Africans, multilingualism has functioned and continues to function without issue, largely because the state and its languages represent only one of the salient arenas that make up daily life. As Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe describes:

The postcolony is made up not of one coherent ‘public space,’ nor is it determined by any single organizing principle. It is rather a plurality of ‘spheres’ and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics when operating in certain specific contexts...Faced with this plurality of legitimizing rubrics, institutional forms, rules, arenas, and principles of combination, the postcolonial ‘subject’ mobilizes not just a single ‘identity,’ but several fluid identities which, by their very nature, must be constantly ‘revised’ in order to achieve maximum instrumentality and efficacy as and when required. (2001:5)

Symbolic Capital and Spheres at Mvog-Betsi

Within the eleven acre space of the zoo, several spheres exist. Mvog-Betsi is located in southern francophone Cameroon, and so French serves as a common language for formal and intergroup communication. However, it is also in the national capital – the seat of the officially bilingual government, and a space which brings together people from all over the country, bringing their local languages with them. Additionally, the zoo is co-run by a British NGO, and as such is part of the international conservation community, where English is the most common *lingua franca*. Finally, it is located in the Center region of the country, where Ewondo is a widely spoken local language.

In this environment, while it may be possible to create a hierarchy of languages based on their perceived prestige (with English potentially being most prestigious, then French, then Fulfulde, then smaller indigenous languages, then Cameroonian Pidgin English), in reality, having the appropriate language for each sphere one must navigate is most important. When asked about the value of different languages, zoo staff commonly responded that the more

languages one could speak, the better. As Luc, a francophone animal keeper described, “It’s important to speak *many* Cameroonian languages. Eh? Because you might have to live somewhere where you can’t talk with people who speak other languages. You have to try to talk to them.”¹

The social capital associated with linguistic repertoires is not the only type of symbolic capital at play at Mvog-Betsi – the animals themselves each have their own types of cultural capital. Zoo animals often serve as tokens for their species, and conservation-oriented zoos are designed with the goal that by experiencing one of these token animals, visitors will come to care for both that animal’s wild counterparts, and for nature in general (Braverman 2012:20). This is the case for animals at Mvog-Betsi such as primates, who are seen as commonplace and are generally ignored by Cameroonian visitors, but are used by NGO staff to explain Cameroon’s environmental problems. While interacting with visitors, NGO staff thus attempt to raise primates’ local cultural capital. However, although their perceived local value is low, they indexically have great international cultural capital because of their association with the British NGO, which brings with it considerable economic resources and the potential to make connections outside of Cameroon. Alternatively, Mvog-Betsi’s lions, although biologically South African, stand as tokens for Cameroon’s dwindling indigenous lion population. Instead of being used to raise awareness about environmental problems, however, the lions gain their cultural capital from their association both with the presidential family (after whom they are named) and with the prestige of northern Cameroon, where their wild counterparts live.

¹ “*Il faut parleeer, plusieurs langues camerounaises. Eh? À vivre la où tu ne peux pas causer avec les gens des autres langues. Tu essaies de parler*” (Interview with Luc, 7/14/14).

As with the social capital tied to the languages spoken at the zoo, the cultural capital surrounding the animals at Mvog-Betsi is not necessarily hierarchical (with lions above primates), but rather tied to different local, regional, national, and international spheres. Animal keepers at Mvog-Betsi, then, gain symbolic capital based on where they are from, what languages they speak, and which animals they care for. However, in order to have access to particular kinds of animals (and their cultural capital), keepers must have the required type of social capital. Having the social capital associated with speaking English makes one more likely to be able to work with primates (and gain their international cultural capital). Having the social capital associated with speaking Fulfulde, the *lingua franca* of northern Cameroon, makes one more likely to be able to work with lions, who then gain the lions' national cultural capital. Social capital (in the form of linguistic repertoires) and cultural capital (in the form of animals) are then directly linked at Mvog-Betsi. The prestige of animal keeping is tied to language, and operates across different spheres, rather than hierarchically.

Methodology

I collected the data analyzed in this paper during the summer of 2014, when I spent ten weeks conducting ethnographic fieldwork at Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens. During this time, I made daily visits to the zoo and shadowed staff in a variety of positions (animal keepers, educators, ticket booth attendants), in addition to attending staff meetings and workshops at the zoo. Throughout these activities, I collected approximately 20 hours of audio and video recordings. This variety of activities allowed me to get a comprehensive sense of the type of work that goes on at Mvog-Betsi, which languages people use at which times, and how people feel about what they do and the languages that they speak. Shadowing of zoo staff allowed me to

witness and take part in informal, naturally occurring conversations between staff and between staff and visitors and experience firsthand how language use was negotiated and conceptualized, and how people thought about and interacted with the zoo's animals.

Additionally, I conducted semi-formal interviews with 21 people at Mvog-Betsi, including animal keepers, educators, and administrative staff. Topics covered in the interviews included participants' backgrounds and how they came to work at the zoo, their perceptions of the zoo and its animals, and their linguistic repertoires and feelings about the use of both official languages (English and French) and indigenous languages. The purpose of these interviews was to clarify and elaborate upon the observations and informal conversations that made up the bulk of my work, as well as to compile an assortment of information across perspectives at the zoo, regarding life, work, and linguistic experiences and attitudes.²

Cameroon's Colonial and Linguistic History

The creation of Cameroon as a European colony took place in 1884, when an area roughly the size of California was carved out of West-Central Africa between British Nigeria to the west and the French Congo to the east (although few natural boundaries separated it from the other colonies (Eyongetah and Brain 1974:1)). The Germans controlled this area between 1884 and 1915, using a harsh style of direct rule and dealing with almost constant violent uprisings from 1888 onward.³ In 1915, after Germany lost World War I, the territory was split between the

² I was able to put much of what I observed at the zoo into wider perspective due to my prior experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon from 2010-2012, during which time I lived in the Extreme North of the country and worked as a high school English teacher

³ Despite the brevity and brutality of their rule, the Germans are favorably remembered by Cameroonians and are credited with creating infrastructure (in the form of roads in particular) which still exists today (Eyongetah & Brain 1974:93).

British (who claimed the area to the west, nearest Nigeria and including the port city of Douala), and the French (who claimed the much larger eastern portion) (see figure 1).

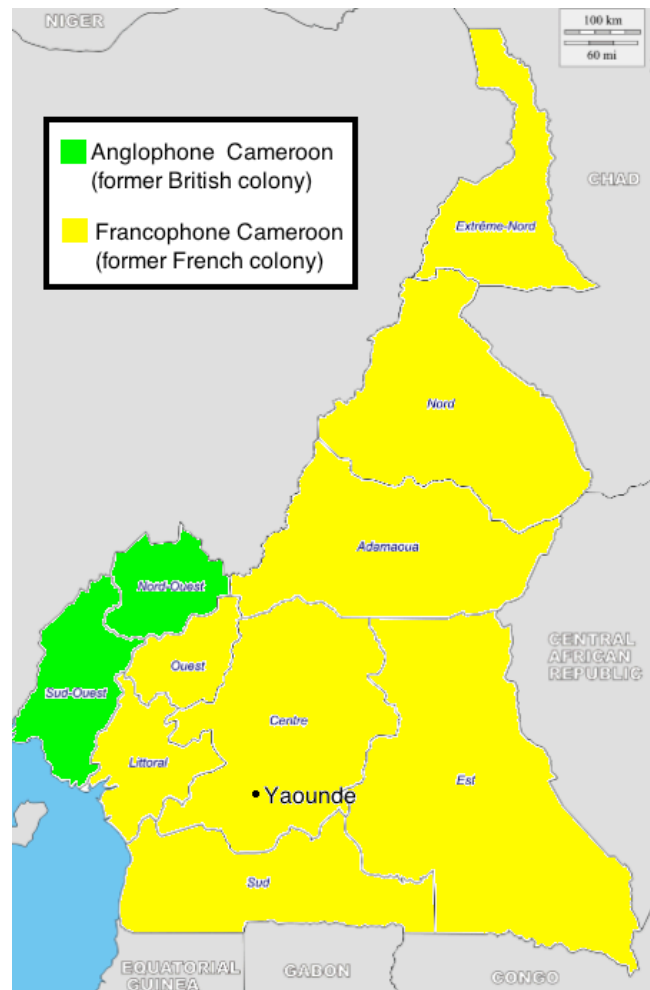


Figure 1 –Regions of Cameroon⁴

This division between Britain and France ran along natural rather than ethnic boundaries, and so many groups in the south found one half of their population under the indirect, exploitative rule of the British, while the other half faced the direct, assimilationist rule of the French. The boundaries of the Cameroons at this time included close to three hundred ethnic groups, although Eyongetah and Brain note that “it was the colonial and modern situation which

⁴ Base map from D-maps at <http://d-maps.com/m/africa/cameroun/cameroun21.gif>, edited and annotated by the author to show location of capital city and highlight significant regional boundaries, May 30, 2015.

in most cases made Cameroonian cultural groups aware of themselves” (1974:8), as tribal names were created and recorded by European linguists and administrators. In southwestern Cameroon, the British adopted a style of indirect rule, focusing on the extraction of resources rather than investing in the colony.

The French ruled much more directly, however, in the southern half of their colony, implementing an assimilationist policy which led to the creation of a class of Cameroonian elites (*évolués*) who had different rights than unassimilated, indigenous people. In northern French Cameroon, however, the French ruled through the existing political organizations, Fulbe caliphates which were established during Shekh Usuman Dan Fodio’s 1804 *jihād* (Regis 2003:4). These different styles of rule led, among other things, to a higher acquisition rate of French by people in the southern half of the French colony, whereas Cameroonian Pidgin English developed as a *lingua franca* in the English colony in place of British English, and Fulfulde (the language of the Fulbe people, and a *lingua franca* shared by approximately 13 million speakers across West Africa⁵) remained the dominant language for intergroup communication in northern Cameroon (see figure 2).

After World War II, movement toward independence increased, and the gradual process of decolonization took place in both colonies over the next fifteen years, with the help of the United Nations (Eyongetah & Brain:120). During this process, British Cameroon was faced with the decision of whether or not to join the newly-independent former British colony of Nigeria, or to reunite instead with French Cameroon. Ultimately, they chose the latter option, and anglophone Cameroon and francophone Cameroon became the independent Republic of

⁵ This estimate comes from Ethnologue (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/fub>), although as Fulfulde has such a wide distribution and large number of varieties (Harrison 2003), it is difficult to determine the exact number of speakers.

Cameroon on January 1st, 1960, led by Amadou Ahidjo, a Fulbe man from northern Cameroon who appointed a majority Muslim administration (Regis 2003:18). The new republic was split into ten regions, two of which are anglophone, and the other eight of which are francophone.

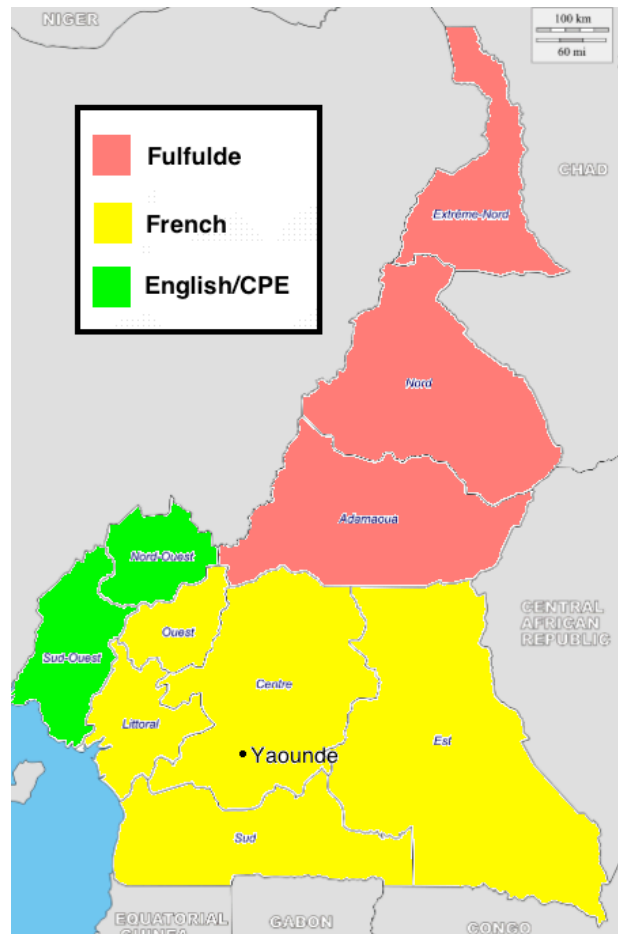


Figure 2 – Distribution of Dominant *Linguae Francae* of Cameroon⁶

While all ten regions remain united under one government, administrative activities and government education take place in English in the anglophone regions and French in the francophone regions.

British Cameroon’s decision to rejoin French Cameroon marked a rare instance of new African nations erasing colonial boundaries, although this erasure did restore the former German

⁶ Base map from D-maps at <http://d-maps.com/m/africa/cameroun/cameroun21.gif>, edited and annotated by the author to show location of capital city and highlight significant regional boundaries, May 30, 2015.

colonial boundaries (Birmingham 1995:6). The decision to join French Cameroon remains controversial, as anglophone residents feel underrepresented in government affairs. Additionally, because of this unique situation, the new government of Cameroon was forced to choose both English and French as the republic's official languages, rather than using a single, unifying national language or privileging one of its nearly three hundred indigenous languages. However, in a 1996 amendment to the constitution, indigenous Cameroonian languages were uniformly upgraded to the status of "national languages", although this promotion did not come with any increased institutional support (Nforgwei 2009:98).

The promotion of both English and French to the status of official languages has led to the imagination of an ideal bilingual Cameroonian, who speaks both French and English equally (Bilola & Echu 2008; Tadadjeu 1985). However, as education opportunities in both languages are limited, fluency in both official languages is relatively uncommon, particularly among francophones. Today, Cameroon's indigenous languages continue to be used for informal communication, particularly in rural areas. The main *lingua franca* for each area of the country varies, largely due to the different styles of colonization described above. In the francophone regions of the country, French is the language of instruction in schools and is used for administrative purposes as well. However, in the southern half of Francophone Cameroon, French serves as the largest *lingua franca*, while in the northern half of Francophone Cameroon, Fulfulde continues to be used as the main *lingua franca*, and rates of fluency in French remain low. In anglophone Cameroon, English is used in schools and administration, but residents of the anglophone regions use Cameroonian Pidgin English for intergroup communication.

It is important to note that the English and French that is written in Cameroon and taught in Cameroonian schools is based upon British English and the French of France, although what is

spoken has significant enough phonological and lexical differences to be better referred to as Cameroonian French and Cameroonian English. Scholars have called for the standardization of Cameroonian French and Cameroonian English (see Echu & Grundstrom 1999, Echu 2004), but to this date they remain little studied in their own right.

More work has been done on Cameroonian Pidgin English (CPE or Pidgin) (see for example Mbangwana 1983, Gilman 1979, Schroder 2003), although like many hybrid varieties, it is often seen by its speakers as unprestigious or “bad English”. Various forms of CPE have been used since the arrival of British traders and missionaries in the 18th century. This creole has a lexicon that is approximately 80 percent English, 14 percent indigenous Cameroonian languages, and 6 percent French and other languages and is used for the majority of interethnic communication in the anglophone regions of Cameroon (Mbangwana 1983:82). Although its use is discouraged in schools, it is already spoken by the majority of children in the Northwest and Southwest regions before they begin their formal education (Mbangwana 1983).

Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens

Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens is an 11 acre institution located in the capital city of Yaoundé, in the francophone region of Cameroon. It is jointly run by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF), a division of the Cameroonian government, and Ape Action Africa (AAA), a British NGO which also operates a much larger primate sanctuary about an hour outside of Yaoundé. Mvog-Betsi became a site for the housing of animals in 1951, when a German man began working with the Cameroonian ministry of forestry to rehabilitate wild

animals rescued from poachers.⁷ The space continued to be used as a type of quarantine for recovering wild animals until 1969, when the popularity of the animals with Mvog-Betsi's neighbors inspired agents of the Cameroonian government to officially open it to the public as a zoo.

Although the zoo was originally very well-received, over the next couple of decades it deteriorated in quality, housing fewer animals and not attracting many visitors. Then, in 1996, the British NGO at the time named Cameroon Wildlife Aid Fund (CWF) was formed with the goal of improving the living conditions of Mvog-Betsi's animals. CWF rebuilt the zoo's facilities and improved the quality of the life of the animals, in addition to creating the zoo's botanical gardens. Shortly after, CWF opened Mefou Primate Sanctuary about an hour outside of the city, where it rehoused Mvog-Betsi's chimpanzees and gorillas in semi-natural conditions. In 2009, CWF was renamed Ape Action Africa (AAA), and AAA continues to partner with Mvog-Betsi, providing the zoo with veterinary staff, primate keepers, and educators.

Today Mvog-Betsi is one of the main tourist attractions within Yaoundé, and like many zoos across the world, serves simultaneously as a space for the housing and rehabilitation of animals as well as a space for educating and entertaining the public. As Mvog-Betsi's zoo director explains, the zoo serves as the touristic face of the country:

The zoo being in the national capital, is a way you can see Cameroon ... When you come here you see biodiversity, when you come here you see hospitality. You come here you see a sample of the Cameroonian culture, Cameroonian vegetation, wildlife. (Interview with Christopher Ndangoh Fowambeng, 7/7/2014)

⁷ When asked about the formation of the zoo, staff said simply that it was started by a German man (“*un alleman*”). He is referred to in a pamphlet about the zoo as “Monsieur Pfeiffer”, but additional information about him was unavailable.

Cameroon is often referred to as “Africa in Miniature” because it is one of the most biodiverse countries in Africa (Alpert 1993, Ambe et. al. 2010), containing every biome present on the entire African continent within a space approximately the size of California. However, it is diverse culturally and linguistically as well, with approximately 280 different ethnic groups and indigenous languages. According to its director, then, the zoo is making a conscious effort to represent that which is quintessentially Cameroonian, both in terms of wildlife and people.

Communication at Mvog-Betsi

Mvog-Betsi employs 39 people, 28 through MINFOF, and 11 through AAA (see table 1). Staff come from all over Cameroon, and reported speaking over 28 different languages, with an average of 3.9 languages per person. French, English, and Cameroonian Pidgin English were the languages with the most speakers, although several other languages had multiple speakers as well, including Fulfulde (a *lingua franca* of northern Cameroon), Ewondo and Beti (*linguae francae* local to the Yaoundé area).

Position	Employer	Number of Employees
Administration/management	MINFOF	7
Technicians, Maintenance, etc.	MINFOF	12
Ticket Booth	MINFOF	3
Animal Keepers (non-primate)	MINFOF	5
Animal Keepers (primates)	AAA	5
Educators	AAA	5
Veterinary Staff	MINFOF / AAA	2

MINFOF = Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (Cameroonian government)
AAA = Ape Action Africa (British NGO)

Table 1 – Mvog-Betsi Staff

Anglophone and Francophone Tensions

Although the zoo is located in a francophone region and staff members come from all over the country, 86% of the ministry staff comes from francophone regions, while 82% of the NGO staff (mainly primate keepers and educators) comes from the anglophone regions. Despite the government’s official policy of bilingualism in French and English, in general throughout Cameroon Anglophones tend to have much more fluency in French than Francophones do in English. This was particularly true among Mvog-Betsi’s staff, as 76.8% of Francophone staff reported being able to speak very little English, and 15.3% of Francophone staff reported being able to speak no English at all. On the other hand, 75% of Anglophone staff reported being fluent in French, with the remaining 25% saying they spoke only a little (no Anglophones reported that they could not speak any English).⁸

⁸ In my observations, all anglophone employees were able to carry on a conversation in French, and indeed the majority of their interactions with non-NGO employees as well as visitors were in French. The

The tensions playing out between Anglophones and Francophones at Mvog-Betsi mimic larger tensions at the national level about the representation of Anglophones. Both Anglophones and Francophones complain about lack of quality instruction in the opposite language in school, but Anglophones attributed their increased success in French to necessity – eight of Cameroon’s ten regions are officially francophone, and those regions contain both the capital city of Yaoundé as well as the largest city and commercial center, Douala. The majority of educational and professional opportunities within Cameroon thus require leaving the anglophone regions and being able to speak French. At Mvog-Betsi Zoo-Botanical Gardens, although Anglophones will speak English (or in informal situations, Cameroonian Pidgin English) with each other, if there is even one Francophone present in a group, conversation will take place in French. When I asked one of the only francophone NGO employees if it was difficult working with so many Anglophones, he said “no, it’s like they are all Francophones with me”⁹ (Field Notes, 8/8/14).

The accuracy of this statement became clear one morning, as the NGO employees were waiting for a staff meeting to start. Four Anglophones stood in a circle discussing the benefits of adding salt to water for rehydration. Martin – the only francophone present – sat adjacent to their circle on a bench. After listening to his coworkers’ English conversation for a couple of minutes, he grabbed the sleeve of one of the primate keepers and asked him quietly in French what the word ‘salt’ meant. The keeper translated the word for him, and the other three participants simultaneously switched to French to continue the conversation.

In such a French-dominant environment, the use of English among non-Anglophones is marked and can serve to demonstrate one’s superiority or shame others. While the majority of

majority of francophone employees, although unable to hold a conversation in English, understood at least a little English and could use a few words when they shared no common language with their interlocutors.

⁹ “*Non, c’est comme ils sont tous les francophones avec moi.*”

the government staff is francophone, the zoo director is anglophone and would often address people in English, even when he knew they could not speak it. For example, in an orientation for newly arrived trainees (all of whom were francophone, although a couple were semi-fluent in English), the chief education officer (an Anglophone) began in French, soliciting questions (also in French) from new trainees. However, when it was time for the zoo director to introduce himself, he began in rapid-fire English, introducing himself, then asking trainees to go around the room and say who they were, where they had come from, and what they were interested in.

Although it was clear that no one (except myself and the chief education officer) had understood what he had said, he turned expectantly to the francophone trainee sitting next to him and waited for him to begin talking. When the trainee stared at him blankly, then began apologizing in French, the director feigned surprise. “What do you mean you cannot speak English? Cameroon is a bilingual country, isn’t it?” The trainee then began attempting to introduce himself in English, but the director quickly cut him off, saying “*Ça va en français. Allez-y*”¹⁰ (Field Notes, 7/8/2014).

When entering into a conversation with other multilingual individuals, staff choose the language they are going to use based on a) the formality of the situation and b) the codes that they have in common. Although the state has developed an ideology that values bilingualism in French and English (deployed strategically by the zoo director above to demonstrate new trainees’ shortcomings), the state is not necessarily the most powerful factor influencing the linguistic marketplace. As a much smaller proportion of the population lives in anglophone regions, and employees are therefore much more likely to share French than English.

Compounded with English’s greater influence abroad and association with Ape Action Africa,

¹⁰ “French is okay. Go ahead.”

English is viewed at Mvog-Betsi not as a national language, but as an international language, while French is the main language for formal, intergroup communication.

Indigenous Language Tensions

As Woolard describes, “authority is established and inculcated not most importantly through schools and other formal institutions, but in primary relations, face-to-face encounters, and the invidious distinctions of informal, everyday life” (1985:742). Although Mvog-Betsi is a state institution, state ideologies of language use are not uniformly enacted on the ground, as seen above in the case of French dominance over English, and additionally in the variety of other languages that are used in everyday face-to-face encounters at Mvog-Betsi. While the institutional affiliation possessed by French and English give them a particular type of symbolic capital, indigenous languages and the indexical relationship they share with particular regions of Cameroon also have great value.

Fulfulde

Fulfulde, the language of the Fulbe ethnic group, is a common *lingua franca* across West Africa, with approximately 13 million speakers across seventeen countries (Harrison 2003). As most people in northern Cameroon speak several local languages, and a much lower percentage of people are fluent in French than in southern Cameroon, Fulfulde is the main language of intergroup communication, and thus comes to stand for the region as a whole.

Although only two of Mvog-Betsi’s staff members – lion keepers Joseph and Mamoudou – are from northern Cameroon and speak Fulfulde, the language is a significant part of the institution’s linguistic repertoire. The Fulbe are traditionally nomadic herders and continue to

manage the majority of Cameroon's cattle. Mvog-Betsi must purchase an entire cow a week in order to feed its four lions, and the negotiation and purchase of this meat takes place mostly in Fulfulde. Additionally, the zoo often hosts important visitors come from the north and while they may speak French, the use of Fulfulde demonstrates solidarity and respect. In this way, speaking Fulfulde can translate into both economic capital as it lowers the price of meat, and social capital, as it allows Mvog-Betsi to foster relationships with elites.

Ewondo and Beti

Outside of the major *linguae francae* of the country (French, English, CPE, and Fulfulde), Mvog-Betsi staff reported speaking 24 additional Cameroonian languages. The most widely spoken of these languages are Ewondo and Beti, languages spoken in the Center region of Cameroon, where Yaoundé is located. Ethnologue describes Beti as a dialect of Ewondo, and lists 578,000 speakers total for Ewondo. However, at Mvog-Betsi speakers viewed them as related but distinct varieties, and when asked about what languages they spoke would list both Ewondo and Beti.

While many of the more prestigious positions at Mvog-Betsi are held by government functionaries, who come from all over Cameroon and receive their job assignments from the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOP), much of the maintenance staff (groundskeepers, construction workers, etc.) is from the surrounding area, and as such use primarily Ewondo and Beti in informal situations. Ewondo is the main indigenous language of Yaoundé, and even Mvog-Betsi's staff members from outside of the region describe having to learn at least a little to get by in the city.

Languages and Social Capital

The linguistic tensions that exist in the densely multilingual environment at Mvog-Betsi mimic those that play out at the national level, as indigenous languages like Fulfulde and Ewondo compete with the official languages of English and French, and the official languages in turn compete with each other. While speakers' social capital is tied to the languages that they speak, this capital changes across contexts and thus cannot be ranked hierarchically in terms of which language has 'more' or 'less'. Rather, looking at Mvog-Betsi as a "plurality of 'spheres'" (Mbembe 2001:5) it is possible to see each language as offering its speakers access to different types of capital.

French has social capital as the dominant language at Mvog-Betsi and the language that is obligatory for the majority of formal, intergroup communication, however this capital is limited to the national level and French thus lacks prestige, except in opposition to indigenous languages. English is marginalized within Cameroon and Anglophones must learn French to succeed at the national level, but English offers great social capital in terms of providing access to NGO employment and potential international opportunities. Fulfulde represents another marginalized region of Cameroon, but one that also offers great social capital in its connections to prestigious northern elites and Fulbe-owned cattle, essential for lion keepers. Indigenous languages like Ewondo and Beti, although not seen as prestigious, have local social capital, as they are what most people in the region use most of the time.

	French	Fulfulde	English	Pidgin (CPE)	Ewondo/Beti
<i>Lingua franca</i>	Throughout Cameroon	Northern Cameroon	Southwestern Cameroon (formal)	Southwest Cameroon (informal)	Central Cameroon
Status	Dominant	Northern prestige	International prestige	Not prestigious	Not prestigious
Indexical of	Francophone majority within Cameroon	Northern power/identity, Islam	Marginalized anglophone community	Marginalized anglophone community	Being native to the Yaoundé area
Offers access to	Government jobs, university education	Northern culture, cattle	International opportunities, NGO employment	Southwestern culture	Central culture, good market prices in the city

Table 2 – Mvog-Betsi’s Major *Linguae Francae* and their Spheres

Animals, Keepers, and Communication

Retaining its roots as an animal sanctuary, nearly all of Mvog-Betsi’s animals are indigenous to Cameroon, and came to the zoo after being rescued from poachers or injured in the wild. The zoo therefore hosts an eclectic collection of animals including four lions, several species of monkeys, a Nile crocodile and several dwarf crocodiles, a Red River hog, a gazelle, a civet cat, around 40 African grey parrots, a bateleur eagle, a stork, a dozen turtles, and several large venomous snakes, including Gaboon vipers (one of the most poisonous snakes in the world). These animals are cared for by ten animal keepers, half of whom are employed through Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MINFOF) and usually specialize in a particular kind of animal (lions, reptiles, etc.), while the other half work for the NGO Ape Action Africa and take care of primates.

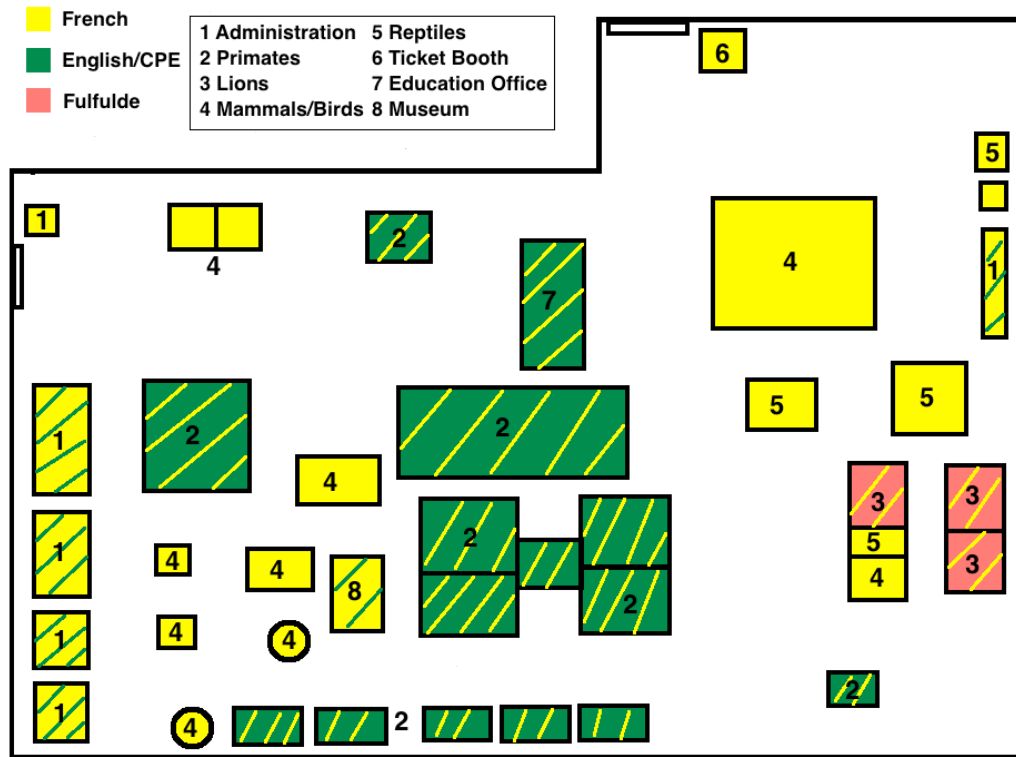


Figure 3 – Map of Linguistic Divisions at Mvog-Betsi

The division of animal care at Mvog-Betsi tends to take place along regional linguistic boundaries, as the majority of primate keepers are from anglophone Cameroon, the majority of lion keepers are from northern Cameroon and speak Fulfulde, and the one keeper who is responsible for the animals that do not easily fit into any particular category is from southern francophone Cameroon, and in addition to French speaks Ewondo and Beti, major languages local to the center region. Looking at the roles played by the different types of animals at Mvog-Betsi, as well as the experiences and linguistic repertoires of the keepers who care for them, it is possible to see how the cultural capital of the animals maps onto the social capital of their keepers. Because of the way the animals are acquired and the roles they play at Mvog-Betsi,

keepers' ability to speak certain languages offers them access to certain types of animals, and the type of prestige that goes along with them.

Mvog-Betsi's Lions

Mvog-Betsi's lions are by far the zoo's largest attraction, and they are also the only animals that were not rescued from the wild. Lions (*Panthera leo leo*) are indigenous to northern Cameroon, although their populations are waning. In Waza National Park, one of Cameroon's largest tourist attractions, Tumenta et. al. estimated that while 100 individuals were observed in 1962, in 2009 only 14-21 adult lions remained (Tumenta et. al. 2009:888). They describe human-lion conflict as a large cause of this decline, as the increase in semi-nomadic herding activities in the area leads to lions replacing wild prey with livestock, and subsequently being killed by livestock owners. South of Waza Park in the Benoue Complex, there is still a population of about 200 lions (Riggio et. al. 2012), although these too are under threat from increased human activity as well as desertification.

At Mvog-Betsi, the original pair of lions were bought in South Africa by a rich northerner and shipped to Cameroon in 2000. Although they were siblings, they were named Paul and Chantal after the first couple. Paul died in 2006, and a replacement – Prince – was brought in, again from South Africa. Prince and Chantal had their first litter in 2007, and the cubs were brought to the presidential palace to be christened by president Paul Biya, who named them Junior, Soleil, and Brenda, after his children. About a year later, Prince and Chantal had a second litter. However, these were not christened by the president, and so are referred to as "*les deuxièmes*", the second generation.

After the second generation was born, Mvog-Betsi was home to nine lions, and began to run out of both space to house them and resources to feed them. The decision was then made to stop Chantal from continuing to reproduce, and two of the younger lions were sent to other zoos in Cameroon. Two of the other cubs did not survive to adulthood, and Prince passed away as well in 2011. As such, today there are four lions at Mvog-Betsi: Chantal, her son Junior, and two daughters: Brenda and “*la deuxième*”. While the decrease in the lion population has made them more manageable (economically and in terms of space), it is also linked with a loss of cultural capital. A 2007 pamphlet describing Mvog-Betsi states that “the presence of nine lions is the principal attraction of the zoo”,¹¹ and members of the staff linked the subsequent decline in the lion population at the zoo to a decline in the overall quality of the zoo as a whole.

Northern Animals, Northern Keepers

As lions are simultaneously the most popular and most dangerous of the animals at the zoo, caring for lions is difficult but prestigious work. Mvog-Betsi employs three lion keepers through MINFOF: Joseph, Mamoudou, and Roger. Joseph and Mamoudou are the only two staff members at Mvog-Betsi from northern Cameroon, and their backgrounds thus serve to reinforce the “northern-ness” of the lions, despite the fact that the individual lions at Mvog-Betsi are biologically South African.¹² The impact of symbolic capital among lions and lion keepers is best illustrated by looking at the experience of one particular keeper, as he performs his duties in a variety of languages.

¹¹ “*La présence de neuf lions est la principale attraction du zoo.*”

¹² While indigenous Cameroonian and indigenous South African lions both fall under the subspecies *Panthera leo leo* (the African lion), phylogenetic analyses performed by Bertola et. al. (2011) suggest that West and Central African lions are more closely related to *Panthera leo persica* (the Asiatic lion) than Southern and East African lions. The lions at Mvog-Betsi are listed as *Panthera leo leo*, although crossing of subspecies is common in captivity, and their exact genetic origins are unknown.

Joseph is from a small town in the Extreme North of Cameroon. He finished secondary school there, then moved to southern Cameroon to study forestry and wildlife. Upon completing his education, he received a government post at Mvog-Betsi in 2008. He was originally posted as a lion keeper, but he moved into more administrative responsibilities after a lion attack in 2010 left him without full use of one of his arms. After several surgeries, his arm is mostly functional, and he now splits his time between being the chief ticket inspector (a prestigious position within the zoo's administration) and assisting with the care of the lions. Because of his education, Joseph is fluent in French, and this is the language he uses the most at work, particularly for his administrative duties and when speaking with visitors. When the three lion keepers all work together or others are around, they also use French. However, when not in conversation with Roger, Joseph and Mamoudou use Fulfulde. The ability to code-switch thus allows Joseph to access the symbolic capital associated with both the nationally dominant French and the northern prestige of Fulfulde.

Joseph describes Fulfulde as “what ties us all together”¹³ in the north, and what helps his children remember where they come from (they were born in Yaoundé, but his wife is also from northern Cameroon, and Fulfulde is what they speak the most at home). In addition to this, Fulfulde is essential for purchasing food for the lions, each of which consumes approximately 50 kilograms of meat per week. As the majority of cattle is controlled by the Fulbe people, it is mainly Joseph and Mamoudou who arrange the delivery and payment of meat, which takes place largely in Fulfulde.

Joseph says French is the main language of the zoo, although he can “get by” (“*bricole*”) in English when he needs to. Joseph studied English in school and has even taken private English

¹³ “[Ce] *que nous reliant tous*” (Interview with Joseph, 7/3/14).

classes, but does not consider himself a fluent speaker. When speaking with anglophone co-workers, he always uses French. However, he said when he listens to his anglophone co-workers speak English together, he understands “a little a lot” (“*un peu beaucoup*”). He says his limited proficiency in English has prevented him from being able to take advantage of professional advancement opportunities, particularly international ones. He also says he has learned a little Ewondo, because when he first moved to Yaoundé and went shopping in the market, the vendors teased him and charged him exorbitant prices for daily goods because they could tell he was not from the area. It was only after he learned some Ewondo that he was able to go back to the market and get a fair price.

Mvog-Betsi's Primates

The majority of the physical space at the zoo is reserved for primates, including Olive baboons (*Papio anubis*), Tantalus monkeys (*Chlorocebus tantalus*), mangabeys (*Cercocebus agilis* and *Cercocebus torquatus*), drills (*Mandrillus leucophaeus*), and mandrills (*Mandrillus sphinx*), many of whom were rescued from traps and have scars or missing limbs as a result. When offering guided tours, educators use the primates to talk about Cameroon's environmental problems, such as habitat loss and poaching, but also problems stemming from the bushmeat trade, which poses threats not only to the survival of many primate species in Cameroon (particularly great apes), but also to humans in the form of zoonotic diseases such as the Ebola virus, which can be transmitted to humans.

Although they take up most of the physical space at the zoo, Mvog-Betsi's primates are the least popular with Cameroonian visitors, for whom they are not an uncommon sight. They are however much more popular with international visitors. While primates are not particularly

prestigious animals locally, because the British NGO is responsible for their care, positions as primate keepers are highly valued as they both pay more, and are seen as opening up other employment possibilities in the future, including opportunities abroad.

English and Primate Keeping: National Marginalization, International Prestige

Ape Action Africa employs five primate keepers at Mvog-Betsi, three of whom come from anglophone Cameroon. The entire AAA staff at Mvog-Betsi meets every morning before they start work to discuss their plans for the day. Although nine of the eleven staff are anglophone, these staff meetings take place in French. In my observations, I found that all communication between Anglophones and Francophones took place in French, even if there were several Anglophones and only one Francophone. Although Francophones tended to view English as highly desirable (in terms of its ability to offer access to the rest of the world), within the zoo Anglophones expressed feeling marginalized as they were forced to accommodate the linguistic abilities of their francophone colleagues.

This contradiction – between English as a prestigious international code, and simultaneously as something which ostracizes the anglophone Cameroonian community – was a daily reality for Phillip, one of Mvog-Betsi's primate keepers. Phillip comes from a small town in the Northwest region of Cameroon, in the anglophone section of the country. His introduction to conservation work began when he was hired as a security guard by a zoological research group from New Zealand in the early 1990s. They had a couple of chimpanzees, and he eventually became responsible for their care as well. After this, he worked at the Limbe Wildlife Center (an NGO-run primate sanctuary in the Southwest region) for a couple of years, before starting work with Ape Action Africa in 1997. At this time, AAA was helping Mvog-Betsi

improve its facilities and animal care. Most AAA keepers have worked both at Mvog-Betsi and Mefou (the larger primate sanctuary outside of the city). However, Phillip has spent almost all of his career at Mvog-Betsi.

Phillip attributes his fluency in both English and French to his ability to find employment with international organizations. However, while fluency in English is a coveted quality within the NGO staff, within Mvog-Betsi as a whole (as within Cameroon), Anglophones are the minority, and French is the dominant language. When I asked Phillip which languages he spoke at work, he responded:

We speak uhm, it depends on the one on the person with whom you are interacting with in the zoo....If you are interacting with somebody who speaks the same uh mother tongue with you you will speak (...) your dialect....If you are working with uh somebody who is not of your own dialect then the common language is French....Now if I am interacting with an Anglophone in the zoo I speak naturally English. Or, Pidgin. Pidgin English. If I am interacting with a francophone, I speak French. So that is how it is. (*Interview with Phillip, 8/8/2014*).

Although Phillip's ability to speak both English and French is part of what helped him gain employment, it is also a constant source of tension and serves to reinforce divisions between government staff and NGO staff, who are often viewed as having different priorities. Despite the recent appointment of an anglophone zoo director, the NGO staff expressed feeling as if the problems they expressed were not heard by the ministry staff. This situation mirrors the political situation in Cameroon, as Anglophones feel underrepresented in government affairs as well (see Nyamnjoh 1999).

In addition to switching between French and English, Phillip and the rest of the anglophone staff also frequently switched between English and Pidgin (Cameroonian Pidgin English), the main *lingua franca* of the anglophone southwest. Although Pidgin was viewed negatively by

anglophone staff,¹⁴ they used it for the majority of informal communication. Several Francophones also described Pidgin as a valuable tool. While they reported not being able to speak English, several said they could “get by” (*débrouille*) in Pidgin, and I observed numerous informal conversations (particularly with lower-ranking staff, such as maintenance workers) where Francophones used Pidgin with Anglophones, while in formal situations they would use French. Finally, one other AAA employee also spoke Lamnso, Phillip’s mother tongue, and when the two of them would work together that is the language they would use.

Luc’s Animals

While most animal keepers at Mvog-Betsi specialize in the care of a particular type of animal (lions, primates, or reptiles), one keeper is responsible for a variety of animals that do not fit into any particular category. Luc takes care of a range of animals all over the zoo, including approximately forty African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*), a Red River Hog (*Potamochoerus porcus*), a red-fronted gazelle (*Eudorcas rufifrons*), and several small turtles (species unlisted). The animals in his care were all rescued from poachers or found injured in the wild. African grey parrots, for example, are some of the most common rescues at Mvog-Betsi, as they are frequently rescued from traffickers hoping to sell them as pets abroad.

Luc’s animals are distributed sporadically throughout the zoo, seeming to occupy whatever space was available when they arrived (the Red River Hog, for example, occupies the largest enclosure at the zoo, which was originally built for a flock of ostriches). They range in popularity amongst the visitors – the large number of African grey parrots (along with the sounds that they make) attracts many visitors, while the gazelle is usually upstaged by the lions. They

¹⁴ Multiple anglophone staff members said they tried not to speak it at home, because they did not want their children to learn “bad English”.

are regularly passed over on tours as well, where the focus tends to be on lions, primates, or other larger animals such as the stork.

Luc is originally from the West region of Cameroon and describes his mother tongue as Fefe or Bafang. He has been working at Mvog-Betsi since 2000. He received no formal education or training in animal keeping (either through the government or NGO), but was originally hired as a groundskeeper when the zoo was building its botanical gardens. Luc describes his position as a ‘temporary agent’, and says he was able to move from being a groundskeeper to animal keeper because those in charge recognized that he was a hard worker.

Unlike other animal keepers, Luc does not have a special team with whom he works. However, because of his origins as a groundskeeper, and the fact that his main workspace is located in the center of the zoo, he is in frequent contact with zoo employees from many different sectors. He also frequently volunteers at the ticket booth when they are busy, greeting visitors and helping to sell tickets. Luc uses mostly French with co-workers and visitors, although with groundskeepers (most of whom come from the Yaoundé area) he speaks Beti. He says he cannot speak English, although he learned some Cameroonian Pidgin English while living in the southwest of the country, and, like many other Francophones at the zoo, he can use that to ‘get by’ (*débrouille*) with English speakers when he needs to. When I asked Luc about the importance of French and English in Cameroon, he said that both were important, because they were both official languages. However, he saw English as having wider significance:

“Ce sont deux langues euh, officielles de notre pays....Et puis surtout l’anglais c’est, c’est l’anglais qui est la clé du monde....Parce que quand tu parles le français c’est que tu as déjà ouvert une grande porte....Quand tu parles l’anglais je veux dire c’est que tu as vraiment une grande porte dans le monde. L’anglais est la langue la plus parlée. La langue d’affaires, la langue du travail.” (Interview with Luc, 7/14/14)

[“These are the two official languages of our country....and then above all English, it’s, it’s English that is the key to the world....Because when you speak French you’ve already opened a big door....When you speak English I want to say that you’ve really opened a big door *into the world*. English is the most spoken language. The language of business, the language of work.”]

Discussion

The social capital of the languages spoken by animal keepers at Mvog-Betsi offers them access to the cultural capital associated with particular animals. As Joseph is from northern Cameroon and speaks Fulfulde, he is able to gain the prestige associated with Mvog-Betsi’s lions, who are symbolically (if not biologically) from northern Cameroon. The social capital of his ability to speak Fulfulde can translate into economic capital, or what Bourdieu would describe as the most basic form of capital, in negotiations over the purchase of meat to feed the lions. However, it also allows him to serve more symbolically as a bridge between Mvog-Betsi’s zoo (as a governmental entity) and northern Cameroon, which is often segregated geographically and culturally from southern Cameroon. While Joseph’s fluency in Fulfulde is an asset at his job, it is not sufficient. He could not have gained employment at Mvog-Betsi without being fluent in French, the dominant national language, nor could he perform daily tasks in Yaoundé as easily without some knowledge of Ewondo. Finally, although his linguistic repertoire offers him access to the symbolic capital associated with French, Fulfulde, and Ewondo, he sees his lack of fluency in English as preventing him from taking advantage of international opportunities.

Alternatively, Phillip, coming from southwestern Cameroon, is fluent in both English and Cameroonian Pidgin English, as well as Lamnso, his mother tongue. But while the social capital associated with English can potentially provide access to participation in the international conservation community, it is necessary for him to speak French as well, both within Cameroon and particularly in Yaoundé. The social capital associated with official bilingualism in French

and English led, in Phillip's opinion, to his ability to be employed with various NGOs within Cameroon, and thus to his working with primates. Similar to English's status within Cameroon, primates are not particularly prestigious, but it is through their association with the international conservation community that they gain great cultural capital.

Luc's experience as a Francophone with multiple linguistic alliances is in many ways characteristic of the experience of many workers at Mvog-Betsi, and the social capital he gained from his linguistic repertoire is reflected in his responsibility for the care of a seemingly random assortment of animals. He has the social capital associated with his mother tongue as well as French, Ewondo, and Beti, and as such he has access to many resources local to the Yaoundé area. Because he can fit into so many places, he has been able to work his way up from groundskeeper to animal keeper. The animals he cares for similarly have varying amounts of cultural capital, but they all fall under the umbrella of Cameroonian wildlife, as Luc and all of his varying linguistic competencies fall under the umbrella of francophone Cameroon.

As Pierre Bourdieu argues, "a language is worth what those who speak it are worth, i.e., the power and authority in the economic and cultural power relations of the holders of the corresponding competence" (1977:652). However, this statement presupposes that symbolic and economic capital function in the same way, in which there is a clear value, that can be defined as 'more' or 'less' than other values. It also assumes that there is a single, state-controlled market within which this capital has worth, rather than a multiplicity of markets (family, school, work, etc.), each of which privilege different types of capital (Woolard 1985). The experience of individual animal keepers at Mvog-Betsi reflects larger patterns related to language and symbolic capital within the postcolony more generally. Taking into account the "plurality of spheres" (Mbembe 2001, 5) that exist at Mvog-Betsi, one can see how the symbolic capital associated

with animal keeping is determined by an individual's ability to have the right type of capital for the right context. To gain the cultural capital associated with nationally prestigious lions requires the social capital of French and Fulfulde, while acquisition of the international cultural capital associated with primates require the social capital of English and Cameroonian Pidgin English. At the same time, Ewondo and Beti are necessary social capital for successful communication within Yaoundé itself.

Mudimbe (1988:5) describes the false paradigm of oppositions created by colonial structures, which at their base pit what is traditional against what is modern. These dichotomies are still prevalent in literature describing communication in the postcolony (Nettle & Romaine 2002, Crystal 2002, Hale 1992), as powerful European languages are described as threatening smaller indigenous languages. At Mvog-Betsi, there is neither a uniform shift toward nor idealization of European languages. French and English each take their place alongside Cameroonian Pidgin English, Fulfulde, Ewondo, and Cameroon's other 280 languages – as tools to be deployed in the appropriate context. Therefore, symbolic capital at Mvog-Betsi is not a simple binary of more or less, but rather of having the appropriate type of capital for the situation where one finds oneself.

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