When Language Documentation becomes Language Archaeology: Methods for data retrieval in a highly moribund language
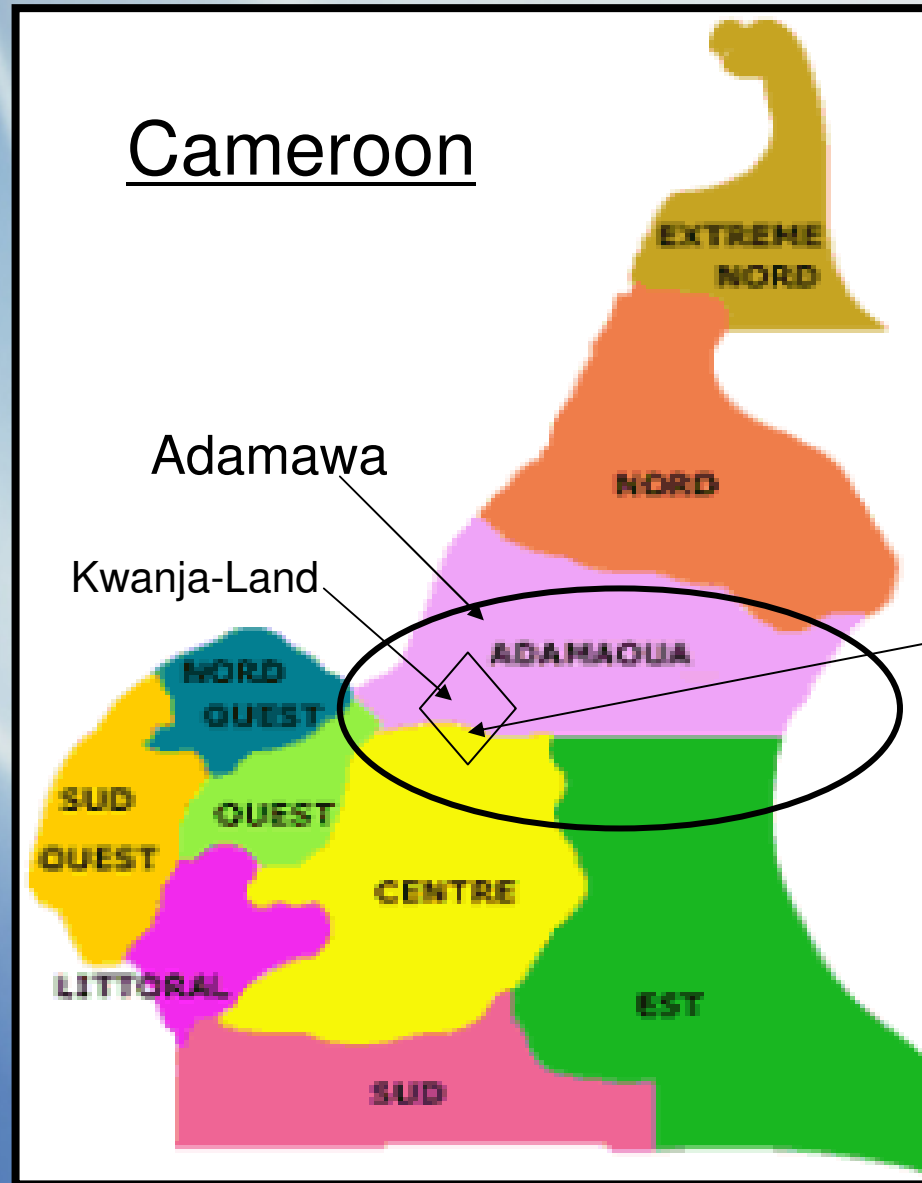
3L Summer School Lyon 2008

Cameroon

www.cameroun-guide.com/provinces.htm.

The Kwanja Region

Yimbere
(Sundani)

Nyamboya
(Ndung)

Nigeria

Anglophone
Provinces

Yaounde

Mbondjanga (Njanga)

Difficulties in documenting a moribund language

1. Lost Data:
   - forgotten (speaker level) / lost (language level)

2. High Levels of Assimilation: (delimiting/ defining the language)

   a) Speaker reliability (inconsistency, reliance on a limited pool of knowledge)

   b) Recognising language features from idiolectal features

   c) Sorting language features from other-language features

Encouraging Speaker Memory

- **Regularity and Continuity (!)**
  - Photos / video footage
    - cultural events; from other villages

    - Domains
      - 'Natural collection'
        - Culturally-appropriate
  - Group-work?

Relaxed environment

Texts: Searching for fossilised / unique forms

- All linguistic levels (text level-phononology)

NB. Codeswitching and Borrowings even in culturally important/salient texts

Delimiting and Defining the Language: Speaker Reliability

- Meticulous Recording of Data (!)

- Knowledge of peripheral speakers

- Different forms of triangulation
  - Lang comparison (see below)
  - Feedback
  - Matched guise (see below)

- Competence Tests

Delimiting and Defining the Language II: Recognising language features from idiolectal features

- [ɕ] / [s]

Sundani: [sùndù]

Njanga: [ɕʊɪndi] OR [sùndì]

MBJ

ALIMA

NYA
BEN

Delimiting and Defining the Language II: Recognising language features from idiolectal features

- triangulation with other speakers,

- intra-speaker comparison when speaking another language,

- linguistic tendencies,

- likelihood/naturalness,

- behaviour of related lects,

Delimiting and Defining the Language: Sorting language features from other-language interference

- MATCHED-GUISE
  - Etic perspective
  - Knowledge of non-Njanga Kwanja

- LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS: Language Reconstruction and Discovering Borrowings

Productive Correspondences:

[ɨ] (Sun) --> [i] (Nja): mandɨ/mandi; dʒebɨ̀/dʒèbí, nunɨ (bouchon), nɛ́mnɨ̀ waˇ(flame)

Semi-productive

[u] (Sun) --> [i] (Nja): njumu/njimi, sundu/ɕindi, nduŋ/ndɪŋ

Other (possible*) correspondences:

[e] (Sun) --> [a] (Nja): seːŋge/saːŋga, -re/-ra particle, …

Thankyou

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