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A grammar of Nchane: A Bantoid (Beboid) language of Cameroon
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Chapter 1

Introduction

This descriptive grammar represents research carried out over a period of fifteen years, much of that time while I was residing in the Nchane-speaking village of Nfume. Numerous aspects of the grammar proved challenging to puzzle out, and they reveal a Bantoid language with valuable things to add to the discussion of languages in the area. As befitting an introduction, the current chapter provides an overview of the language of study and the people who use it in §1.1. Previous research is presented in §1.2, including important works in nearby languages. Details regarding the methods of research utilized in this work are given in §1.3, providing the orientation needed by the reader to properly interpret the analyses and conclusions. A general orientation to the study appears in §1.4.

1.1 Language ecology

The cultural milieu of a people is critical to understand how they express themselves through language. This section provides a snapshot into the way Nchane people live and how they are oriented in their environment. I begin with some general facts about the geographical location, tribal makeup, economic activities, etc. Language use and contact is discussed next, followed by details regarding Nchane's place in the linguistic setting. The final section considers the questionable classification of the Mungong speech variety.

1.1.1 Ethnography

Nchane is a Beoid language spoken in the North West Region of Cameroon, Donga-Mantung Division, Misaje-Subdivision. The *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* (ALCAM) lists the language as: Ncane [873] (Dieu & Renaud 1983). The autonym Nchane is used as the primary entry by the *Ethnologue*, which also lists the following as language name variations: Cane, Ncane, Nchaney, Nchanti, and Ntshanti, (ISO 639-3 language code: ncr) (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2020). The number of local speakers is estimated to be 13,000-15,000, with perhaps 1,000 or more Nchane people in the diaspora.

The Nchane kingdom is comprised of five distinct chiefdoms, each of which have separate villages which are often further divided into village quarters: Nkanchi, Chunge, Nfume, Bem and Kibbo. Each chiefdom is naturally headed by its own chief (or *nfon*) and usually one or more subchiefs. These villages and village quarters are mostly situated in a valley running largely northwest to southeast, with the subdivisional head Misaje at the northern end and the Nfume quarter Kamala at the southeastern end.

The Nchane language area is illustrated in Figure 1.1. Primary access to the area is via the Ring Road, which forms a ring covering much of the Northwest Region, with Misaje situated along the northernmost stretch. The road is approximately 350 km long and consists of both paved and graded dirt sections. The elevation of the valley is approximately 500 meters, with the peaks of the surrounding mountains at 700-800 meters. The two Kibbo quarters are located just outside of the valley in what could be described as a mountain pass, which leads to the Noni language area. The two Bem quarters are situated on a plateau formed on the western side of a ridge separating them from the valley-side Nchane villages. The Nkanchi quarter Chako also sits on this plateau, but at a lower elevation. The Nfume quarter Abeng is located on a plateau belonging to the opposite (eastern) ridge. As the map shows, these “outer” villages are accessible only by footpath. It should be noted that the map shows only some of the more well-traveled footpaths. The entire area has a well-developed system of footpaths, providing a more or less direct route to the various markets and access to the numerous garden plots farmed by the people.

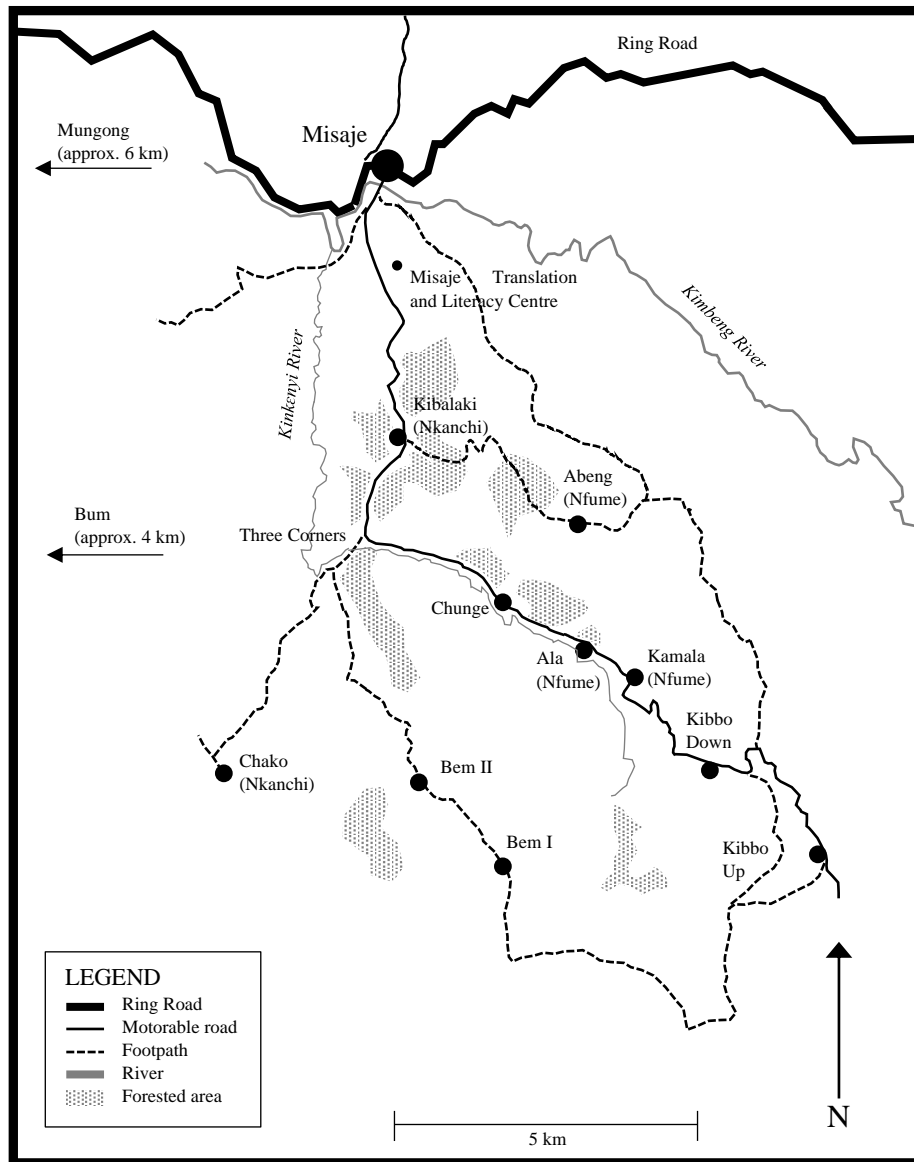


Figure 1.1 Map of the Nchane language area.

The most common historical accounts claim that the Nchane people migrated to the area from Tika, roughly 100 km to the southeast. A less common account reports the migration as being from Kano in Nigeria, a distance of 700 km to the north. In truth, the accuracy of such accounts is difficult if not impossible to verify. See

Pelican (2006) for further discussion of Nchane history and the problems associated with verification.

The language and culture of the people are similar to those of the neighboring peoples. There is some level of multilingualism, particularly with Noni, and lesser with the other Beboid varieties. Inter-marriage between the Nchane people and other Beboid languages is fairly common, and in some cases institutionalized. For example, the chiefs of certain Nchane villages traditionally take a wife from certain villages outside of the Nchane kingdom. This practice results in regular, ongoing language contact and the ensuing multilingualism.

The people are mostly subsistence farmers, growing diverse crops of corn, pumpkins, peppers, cassava, yams, peanuts (called “groundnuts” in Cameroon Pidgin English), sugar cane, tomatoes and onions. Huckleberry (*solanum scabrum*) is grown year-round for its green leaves from which *njama* is made. This dish is referred to as “soup” and is the favorite accompaniment for *fufu*, the primary meal item in the local area, which is made from corn flour. (Note that *fufu* is made from other starchy vegetables such as cassava in other parts of Cameroon.) Meals may include meat, fish or chicken when available, and certainly for special occasions.

The above vegetables are often taken to the local markets to be sold, an economic activity carried out primarily by women. Mangoes and papayas are common to the area, as are African plums (*dacryodes edulis*). Some people grow these items specifically to be sold in the markets. Men also have “cash crops”, such as palm oil and palm wine.

Domestication of animals among the Nchane people includes chickens, pigs and goats. The raising of goats serves as a type of savings account, with wealth accumulated and stored through the herd. When special financial needs arise such as school fees or medical bills, one or more goats can be sold for the required money. Cattle are common in the area as well, but ranching is mostly an activity carried out by the semi-transitory Fulani, who are spread throughout the region.

African traditional religion is widely practiced by the Nchane people and elements are infused into much of the culture (e.g., behavior deemed as respectful of elders, eating rituals, dances, adherence to local societal rules, taboos, etc.). A local Christian presence has been in the area since at least the 1920’s and its influence appears to be growing. Many people claim membership with one of the several Christian churches in the area, although their attendance of services might be rare and they often continue traditional religious practices. The presence of the largely Muslim Fulani population also means that the Nchane people are exposed to and influenced by Islam. But the number of Nchane adherents appears to remain small.

1.1.2 Sociolinguistic picture

The status of Nchane language vitality is consistent with level 5 “developing” on the EGIDS scale¹. The language is used as the primary means of communication in Nchane homes, among young and old people, in local markets and in village council meetings. Local Christian churches use Nchane and Cameroon Pidgin English, depending on the makeup of attendees and whether or not the preacher is fluent in Nchane. (Pastors from outside the language area are often assigned to Nchane churches). Songs during services are also a mix of Nchane and Cameroon Pidgin English, with Nchane songs less common, but appearing to be growing in use. Community-wide events are also often characterized by Nchane language use, except in Misaje, which has a mixture of people groups.

As mentioned above, contact with other languages is fairly common through intermarriage, as well as at local markets and special events focused around Misaje. Cameroon Pidgin English use is moderate, particularly among men, and English is the language of instruction in local schools. Nchane people also have a good chance of exposure to Fulfulde, spoken by the Fulani living nearby, and limited exposure to Hausa through traders coming from Nigeria.

1.1.3 Language context

The *Ethnologue* gives Nchane the following genetic affiliation: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Beboid (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2020), with Mungong listed as an Nchane variety. Nchane’s place in the Bantoid family is illustrated in Figure 1.2, which reflects classifications proposed by the *Ethnologue*, Williamson and Blench (2000: 18) and my own fieldwork.

The presentation of the Beboid languages in this figure deserves a few comments. First, the dashed line connecting Mashi and Naki indicates that Mashi is considered a variety of Naki by Good et al. (2011). A second remark pertains to the language “Chungmboko”, which is a compound designation comprised of the two speech varieties spoken in Chung (Kimbi) and Mbuk respectively. These two varieties are currently working together in language development facilitated by SIL, but could later prove to represent separate languages. Lastly, as stated above, the *Ethnologue* lists Mungong as a variety of Nchane. However, I believe this designation to be unsupportable for reasons laid out in the following section.

¹ The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons 2016) is an expansion of the GIDS developed by Fishman in 1991. A language designated as Level 5 is described as qualifying for level 6a, with vigorous oral use, in addition to also having standardized literature available and in use at least by a small segment of the population. One could argue that Nchane is better designated as level 6a “vigorous”, although standardized literature is available. The near future will determine if the current language development activities are sufficient for solidifying the level 5 designation.

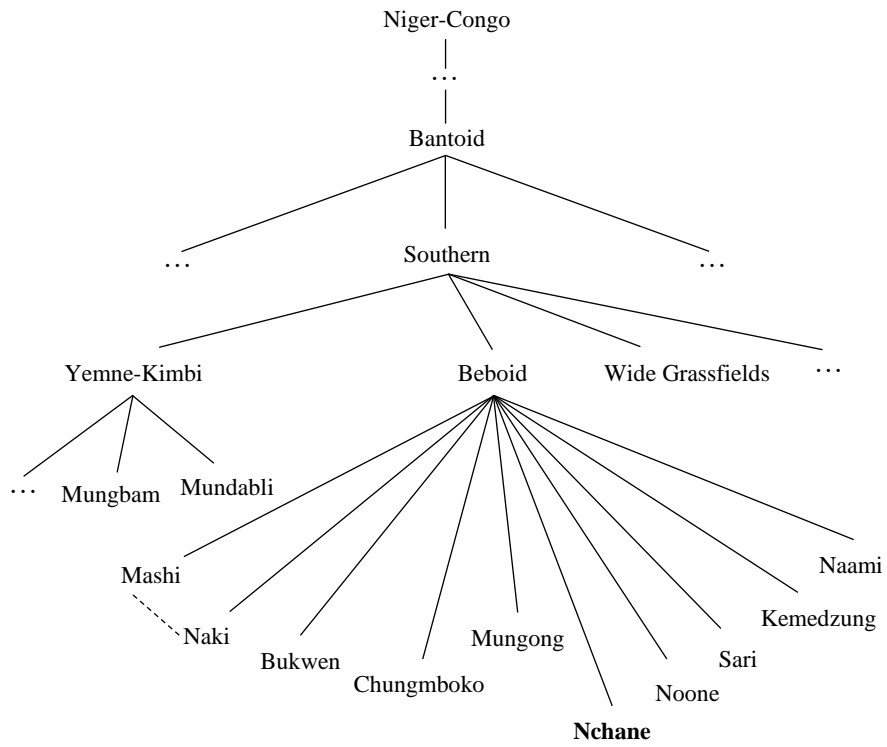


Figure 1.2 Nchane genetic affiliation tree.

The map in Figure 1.3 shows how the Beboid languages are situated.

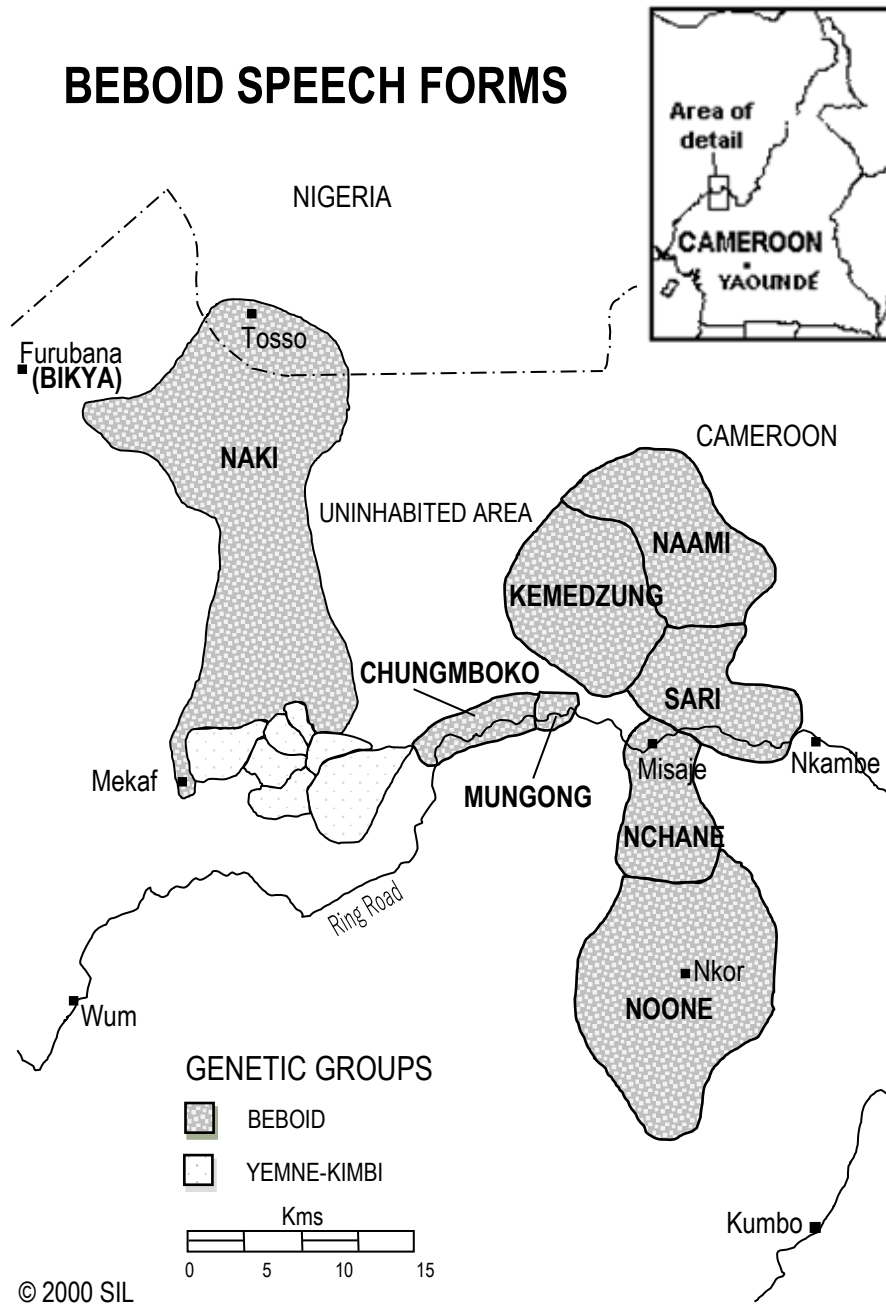


Figure 1.3 Map of Beboid speech forms (adapted from Hamm et al. 2002: 28).

The Nchane language area is insulated from influence from non-Beoid languages on the north and south by other Beoid languages. It is bordered by Bum (Grassfields, Central Ring) on the west and Limbum (Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam) on the east. The Yemne-Kimbi language area is provided in the map as well, since it is geographically close, and prior to 2014 those languages were classified as Western Beoid, while the current Beoid languages (including Nchane) were designated as Eastern Beoid at that time.

1.1.4 The Mungong question

The Mungong speech variety, spoken in a single village to the northwest of the Nchane area (see Figure 1.3), was unclassified prior to 2005, with Eastern Beoid membership considered a possibility. Classification as an Nchane variety was largely predicated on language survey results (Brye & Brye 2001), with study of lexical similarity carried out in 1999 followed by intelligibility testing later that same year. The lexical comparison showed a similarity close to 90% for Mungong and both Nchane and Noni. My own comparisons of lexical items from Mungong and Nchane varieties result in lower similarity numbers, but only modestly so.

The intelligibility testing carried out by Brye and Brye also supported Mungong and Nchane as a single language. However, the research method used did not measure mutual intelligibility, with only Mungong speakers' comprehension of Nchane tested. Nchane speakers routinely report that they do not understand Mungong, and certainly do not think of it as a form of Nchane. Regardless, the two studies engendered a view of Nchane and Mungong as a single language.

With the recently adopted notion of Mungong as an Nchane dialect, a language development project then began in 2003, utilizing a language cluster approach targeting the Beoid languages in the Misaje area. The Mungong and Nchane communities were asked to work together, treating their distinct varieties as dialects of a single language. This request was met with tentative openness on one side and aggressive refusal on the other. This disparate reaction is reflective of what I later saw as a characteristic of the Mungong people—that they are positively disposed towards language acquisition. In effect, the Mungong people appear to be active “collectors” of the languages surrounding them.²

In part, the pursuit of polyglossia among the Mungong people surely has to do with their relatively small population, which is estimated to be between 1,200 and 1,500. This is compared, for example, to Nchane (15,000), Kemedzung (4,500), Bum (21,000) or Lamnso (240,000). Each of these languages has a much larger population and fluency in each is positively viewed and pursued by the Mungong people. Having fluency in these “more powerful” languages allows the Mungong people flexibility in aligning themselves with whichever sociolinguistic identity best serves their purposes

² Over the course of several weeks of visits to Mungong for data collection, I identified at least six languages other than Mungong being spoken in and around the Mungong palace, many of which were heard several times during that period.

in any given social interaction. (Di Carlo (2018) speaks of the complexities of multilingualism in this area of Cameroon, including language choice as it relates to matters of spirituality, viewed as the source of power disparities realized in social encounters.)

Setting aside for the moment the perceived value given to multilingualism, linguistic differences between Mungong and Nchane varieties are somewhat modest. However, the two sound systems are notably different; Nchane has only 18 consonants and 7 vowels, while Mungong has 21 consonants and 9 vowels. Furthermore, significant differences between the grammars are observed as well, some of which are listed in Table 1.1.

| Element | Nchane | Mungong |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Demonstratives | two-distance system (proximal/distal) | three-distance system (proximal/medial/distal) |
| Anaphoric Reference | two dedicated anaphoric demonstratives, with emotional deictic expression | one dedicated anaphoric demonstrative, no emotional deixis apparent |
| Noun Classes | 15 non-locative classes | 12 non-locative classes (classes 5, 6 & 13 lacking) |
| Quantifiers | “few” and “some” notions expressed through single word | “few” and “some” notions expressed through separate words |
| Future tense | future distances expressed through non-grammaticalized auxiliaries which precede the copula (i.e., AUX _{FUT} COP VERB) | future distances expressed through grammaticalized tense markers following the copula (i.e., COP F1 VERB) |
| Hortative | H clitic on preverbal constituent | L clitic on verb (usually final syllable) |
| Subject agreement | non-1SG subject agreement usually occurs on verbs preceded by P1 and P2 markers | non-1SG subject agreement usually does not occur on verbs preceded by P1 and P2 markers |
| Applied Objects | Recipients and Addressees not preceded by any functional marker and usually marked by applicative postposition | Recipients and Addressees usually preceded by infinitive-like marker, Recipients sometimes marked by postposition, Addressees never marked by postposition |
| SVCs | serial verb constructions less structurally typical, with all verbs usually preceded by subject element | serial verb constructions more typical, with subject marking phrase-initial only |
| Conditionals | protasis-apodosis order invariable | protasis-apodosis order variable |
| Focus | postverbal focus limited to Agent-focus constructions | postverbal focus available to non-Agent constituents |

Table 1.1 Some contrasting elements of Nchane and Mungong grammar.

Perhaps even more substantial distinctions between the two language varieties are observed when considered from a sociolinguistic perspective. There is no shared

history between the two peoples as far as I am aware of. Indeed, Pelican, whose dissertation on interethnic relationships (2006) and follow-up study on identity politics (2015) in the Misaje area, makes no mention whatsoever of Mungong. These works include a thorough account of Nchane history from multiple sources, and yet there is no reference to Mungong.

Pelican points out that historical accounts in the area are subject to “production” and closely aligned with identity (2006: 105). In other words, history is formulated to accommodate the current socio-political realities in an ongoing effort to best situate one’s people for advantage. But, for there to be no mention of Mungong in any of the Nchane historical accounts is telling. In fact, some sources (e.g., Chilver 1993; Glauning 1906) suggest that Mungong is more closely associated historically with the Bum people (Grassfields), at least in the more recent past. This is supported by the fact that Mungong belongs to the Bum subdivision (along with the village Bum), while Nchane belongs to the Misaje subdivision.

Significant differences between the Nchane and Mungong speech varieties have been outlined above, including grammatical structures and sociolinguistic characteristics. In addition, language development activities are ongoing in both language communities, with a growing body of literature unique to each speech variety.³ These factors support the recognition of Nchane and Mungong as distinct from one another, the view taken in this dissertation. I have attempted to provide details of Mungong grammar for contrast and comparison whenever appropriate and when such details are available, to further support this conclusion.

1.2 Previous research and relevant literature

The earliest substantial linguistic work on Nchane was in the form of a cross-linguistic study of the noun class systems of the Beboid languages, excluding Chungmboko and Mungong (Hombert 1980). Many of Hombert’s initial findings are substantiated in this current analysis. A dissertation phonology was also done, describing the sound systems of Nchane, Noni and Sari (Richards 1991).

More recently, another dissertation on the Beboid languages was completed in (2010). This work was carried out by Nathan Kimbi, a native Nchane speaker, and sought to establish a theoretical basis for a unifying orthography to serve the Nchane, Sari, Kemedzung, Naami, Mungong, Chungmboko and Naki language communities. It includes some phonological and grammatical details of the languages of study, as well as a practical plan and materials for implementing the pan-Beboid writing system. Interestingly, Nchane serves as the basis for the proposed orthography. This

³ Since the start of language development among the Beboid languages, Mungong and Nchane have both moved ahead separately, using their own orthographies and producing several pieces of literature each. Modest support of language development activities is present in both language communities and locally elected language committees are involved.

is argued for as Nchane is viewed as geographically and linguistically central to the language cluster and therefore, the most widely accessible to all the speech varieties.

As Kimbi's work was being finalized, an SIL sponsored project involving most of these languages was just beginning, which resulted in a number of preliminary works by my colleagues and myself. Those works concerned with Nchane include an orthography proposal (Boutwell & Boutwell 2008), a sketch grammar (Boutwell 2010), a preliminary phonology (Boutwell 2014a), and a description of tone in the noun phrase (Boutwell 2015). The most recent work is an analysis of the demonstrative system, with particular attention given to the anaphoric demonstratives (Boutwell 2018).

Studies involving Mungong generally occurred in parallel with those of Nchane. These include a phonology sketch (Boutwell 2011), orthography proposal (Boutwell & Boutwell 2011) and sketch grammar (Boutwell 2014b). The sketch grammars of Nchane and Mungong demonstrate many similarities between the two speech varieties. However, a number of differences are also apparent, as pointed out in §1.1.4.

In addition to Hombert's research on Beboid noun classes, three other works stand out as particularly important to my analysis of Nchane grammar. First is a 121-page grammar of Noni produced by Hyman (1981). Because of the linguistic nearness of Noni and Nchane, this work provided a helpful start in understanding many of Nchane's grammatical structures. Second and third are two recent dissertations on Yemne-Kimbi languages: Mungbam (Lovegren 2013) and Mundabli (Voll 2017). The importance of these three works is revealed through the many references to them employed throughout this grammar.

1.3 Research situation

Data for this descriptive work come from several sources and were collected over a period extending between 2004 and 2018. The work commenced upon my assignment to the Misaje Cluster project, sponsored by SIL, along with two other families. My family moved to the Nchane village of Nfume in 2004 and lived among the people until 2014, with year-long "sabbaticals" in the States about every fourth year.

1.3.1 Nature of the data corpus

The recording of cultural observations was the first formal activity, coupled with attempts at learning to speak and understand the language (with only very modest initial success). The collection of a wordlist⁴ also was accomplished during the first year of our stay in Nfume, with an Nfume resident serving as my primary language consultant. The wordlist was inputted into SIL's Toolbox and Flex databases. Initial

⁴ The wordlist used for this collection consisted of 1,500 words organized around domains appropriate for the African context. Of the 1,500 words attempted during elicitation, approximately 1,200 words were obtained.

phonological analysis utilized data from this wordlist, leading to a proposed alphabet, orthography guide and phonology sketch.

A sketch grammar followed, based on a small number of texts that I collected, and elicited materials to fill in some of the gaps, including some paradigms. Tone analysis was a real challenge, with tone frames collected to reveal underlying tones and tonal behavior. Noun phrase tone was studied first, followed by verb tone. At about the same time, the Misaje Cluster project translators (discussed more in §1.3.2) collected several texts as part of their training, some of which they then transcribed and interlinearized. With their assistance, these texts were then checked and reanalyzed by myself.

The data collected prior to the formal commencement of my doctoral studies in 2016 proved insufficient in a number of areas. Once unanswered research questions were identified, I traveled back to Cameroon for a 3-week fieldtrip in July 2018 to supplement the data. Working with Kilese Raphael Ngong (member of the Nchane translation team) and Elijah Kwawe (the Nchane literacy coordinator), I elicited data targeting numerous areas of the grammar such as locative constructions, compound pronouns, copula selection, etc. A selection of verbs was also sorted into tone groups and tense-aspect-modality frames were elicited utilizing representative verbs from each tone group. Furthermore, I was in contact with members of the Nchane translation team during the period of my doctoral studies (2016-2020) via texting media through which confirmations and/or clarifications for certain analyses were accomplished as well as eliciting a small amount of additional data.

All of these activities combined to form the data corpus serving as the basis for the description presented in this work, including a lexicon, texts and several sets of paradigms. The lexicon database contains about 1,600 items. The text corpus includes 23 texts with almost 8,000 words. Well over half of these texts are fully interlinearized. The text corpus contains a variety of text types, including Narrative (historical as well as folk tales), Hortatory, Procedural and Expository.

1.3.2 Language consultants

It will come as no surprise that many individual speakers have impacted this study. Accounting for all of them is an impossible task, since even passing interactions with friends and neighbors certainly affected the way I understood the language. However, it is fitting that certain individuals are recognized for their contributions to this effort. Therefore, the following list is provided (in no particular order) of speakers who contributed in a formal way, usually by giving of their time with the specific purpose of data collection or fielding my questions regarding interpretations and analyses. Following each name, the gender and approximate age (at the time of interaction) of the speaker is given, as well as his or her birth village.

Key language consultants: Shey Tamfu Ephriam (male 30-40 from Nfume), Emmanuel Chambang (male 20-30 from Bem), Nji Enock Tanjong (male 30-40 from Nkanchi), Tata Andreas Tawong (male 40-50 from Nfume), Bekwa Oscar (male 50-

60 from Nkanchi), Hilda Ayaba (female 20-30 from Nfume), Muabong Fon Michael (male 30-40 from Nkanchi), Sjinkwe Thomas (male 60-70 from Nfume), Elijah Kwawe (male 30-40 from Nkanchi).

In 2010, the Misaje Cluster project began the arduous task of Bible translation. Several Nchane speakers submitted themselves to an application process, with the following candidates accepted to serve as translators: Chila Frederick Kilese (male 30-40 from Kamala), Kilese Raphael Ngong (male 30-40 from Nkanchi), Kilese Samuel Nfonkwa (male 30-40 from Kamala) and Soka Sylverius Dosi (male 30-40 from Nkanchi).

These four (along with their counterparts from the other Beboid languages involved in the cluster project) received training in many different aspects of translation work, including limited instruction in linguistic analysis. Their almost daily struggles with translation issues coupled with exposure to linguistic concepts meant that their assistance was particularly insightful. My data corpus also grew as a result of their linguistics training, which sometimes involved the collection and analysis of texts, as mentioned earlier.

1.3.3 Presentation of the data

Most of the data presented in this description is given as numbered examples. The general format of these consists of three lines, with line one giving the vernacular usually analyzed for morphology, line two providing morpheme glosses, and the English translation appearing in line three. For text examples, a reference designation usually appears at the far right of the last line. The vernacular is presented utilizing a practical orthography, the details of which are provided below. Particular structures illustrated by the examples are usually bolded or set apart by brackets. Grammatical glosses appear in small caps and are guided by the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Comrie, Haspelmath & Bickel 2008). The English translations are italicized and enclosed in single quotation marks (double quotation marks are used to set off quoted speech).

The orthography used in this description is generally comparable to the practical orthography adopted by the Nchane community, but with three exceptions. The first involves the palatal nasal, which is represented with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) form to allow for transparent portrayal of instances of /**n**/-/**j**/ sequences, since [**ɲ**] can be ambiguous as to its underlying form. In other words, **ny** is reserved for a nasal-approximant sequence (see §2.1.1 for more details). The description's consonant orthography is given in Table 1.2, along with the Nchane practical orthography (Boutwell & Boutwell 2008), IPA and the comparable Cameroon alphabet letters (Tadadjeu & Sadembouo 1984).

| Description orthography | Practical orthography | IPA | Cameroon alphabet |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----|-------------------|
| b | b | b | b |
| ch | ch | tʃ | c |
| d | d | d | d |
| f | f | f | f |
| g | g | g | g |
| gh | gh | ɣ | gh |
| j | j | dʒ | j |
| k | k | k | k |
| l | l | l | l |
| m | m | m | m |
| n | n | n | n |
| ɲ | ny | ɲ | ny |
| ŋ | ŋ | ŋ | ŋ |
| s | s | s | s |
| sh | sh | ʃ | sh |
| t | t | t | t |
| w | w | w | w |
| v | v | v | v |
| y | y | j | y |

Table 1.2 Consonant graphemes compared with the practical orthography, the Cameroon alphabet and IPA.

Note that the voiced velar fricative is a recent addition to the Nchane orthography and does not appear in the 2008 edition of the orthography guide.

The second departure from the Nchane practical orthography involves the mid back rounded vowel. The 2008 orthography guide called for the use of the graphemes **u**, **o**, and **ɔ** to represent high, near high and mid back vowels respectively. However, implementation of these graphemes proved problematic. Upon further study, it was clear that the high-near high distinction had largely been neutralized for the back vowels. The community very quickly abandoned the use of the grapheme **ɔ**, preferring to represent the mid back vowel with the less exotic grapheme **o**. The **u** grapheme was maintained, but put to use in representing the near high back vowel, as well as the fricative vowel “**Fu**”, which is always written following either **f** or **v**.

The **ɔ** grapheme is chosen for the description’s orthography in an attempt to alleviate possible confusion that **o** might bring, since in the practical orthography, **o** represents /ɔ/ and **u** represents /o/. The grapheme **u** is maintained, since there is no /u/ with which it could be confused, /u/ being synchronically represented as /^Fu/. To illustrate the point further, **jú** represents /dʒo/ ‘sun’, while **juvü** represents /dʒ^Fu/ ‘cobra’. In addition, phonetically /o/ is realized higher than [o] anyway, and it behaves phonologically as a high back vowel. See §2.2 for more details.

The vowel graphemes are listed in Table 1.3.

| Description orthography | Practical orthography | IPA | Cameroon alphabet |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| a | a | a | a |
| e | e | ɪ | - |
| ɛ | ɛ | ɛ | ɛ |
| i | i | i | i |
| ɔ | o | ɔ | ɔ |
| u | u | o | o |
| Fu | Fu | Fu | - |

Table 1.3 Vowel graphemes compared with the practical orthography, the Cameroon alphabet and IPA.

The third difference is the regular representation of nasal vowels with a tilde ~ placed underneath the vowel (e.g., **kā̃**). There is no phonemic difference between CṼ and CVN, allowing for the use of CVN in the practical orthography. But the distinction is maintained in this presentation to better reflect the phonetic characteristics of the utterances, as well as to point out the process of syllable reduction observed in the language, which sometimes results in free variation between CṼ and CVN. Placement of the tilde under the vowel rather than above (which is the IPA convention) is a practical choice, avoiding the occurrence of two diacritics (nasalization and tone) in a single space.

Note that, for the most part, IPA is used for chapters 2, 3 and 4, since they are concerned with the phonology of the language. Most of the time, examples in these chapters utilize brackets to indicate phonetic forms.

1.4 Organization of description

The overall order of presentation follows in part a smaller to bigger pattern, dealing with discrete units, such as phones, in chapters 2-4. Progressing to larger units, chapters 5-10 are largely concerned with various word classes, beginning with Nouns and Pronouns in Chapters 5 and 7 respectively. Other word classes are covered in chapter 8, verbs in chapter 9 and copulas in chapter 10. Chapters 11-15 describe the language at the clause level and chapter 16 looks at discourse level issues such as Topic and Focus. The description concludes with an interlinearized text presented in chapter 17.

