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A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 The Mundabli language

1.1.1 Geography and infrastructure

Mundabli is spoken in a village generally known by the name *Mundabli* (for more on this name, see §1.1.3). The village is located in the Northwest region of Cameroon and more specifically in a region called Lower Fungom. Figure 1.1 shows a map of this region. Lower Fungom is part of the Fungom subdivision of Menchum division, which corresponds to the administrative *commune* of Zhoa. Lower Fungom does not form a separate administrative unit but it is distinguished from the rest of Fungom by its lower elevation and the ecological characteristics that go with it.

Lower Fungom is a mountainous area with elevations ranging roughly from 500 to 900 meters in elevation.¹ The Mundabli village is situated on top of a steep hill, at a height of about 900 meters, overlooking all of Lower Fungom. The farming plots are found at lower elevations, close to the rivers Mbum and Kimbi, at a walking distance of up to around 7 kilometers. Mundabli is also spoken in two smaller settlements, **ndzâm**, also known as “Mundabli over-side”, and **būm ā ndzàŋ**, a small settlement near the heritage site **kwè kūm-bò** (see Di Carlo (2011: fig.2, p.58)), and in a few detached hamlets which are scattered in the bush adjacent to the village and form part of the chiefdom of Mundabli. While **būm ā ndzàŋ** is situated on top of a hill across the Mbum

¹The highest point of Fungom division lies at about 1300 meters.

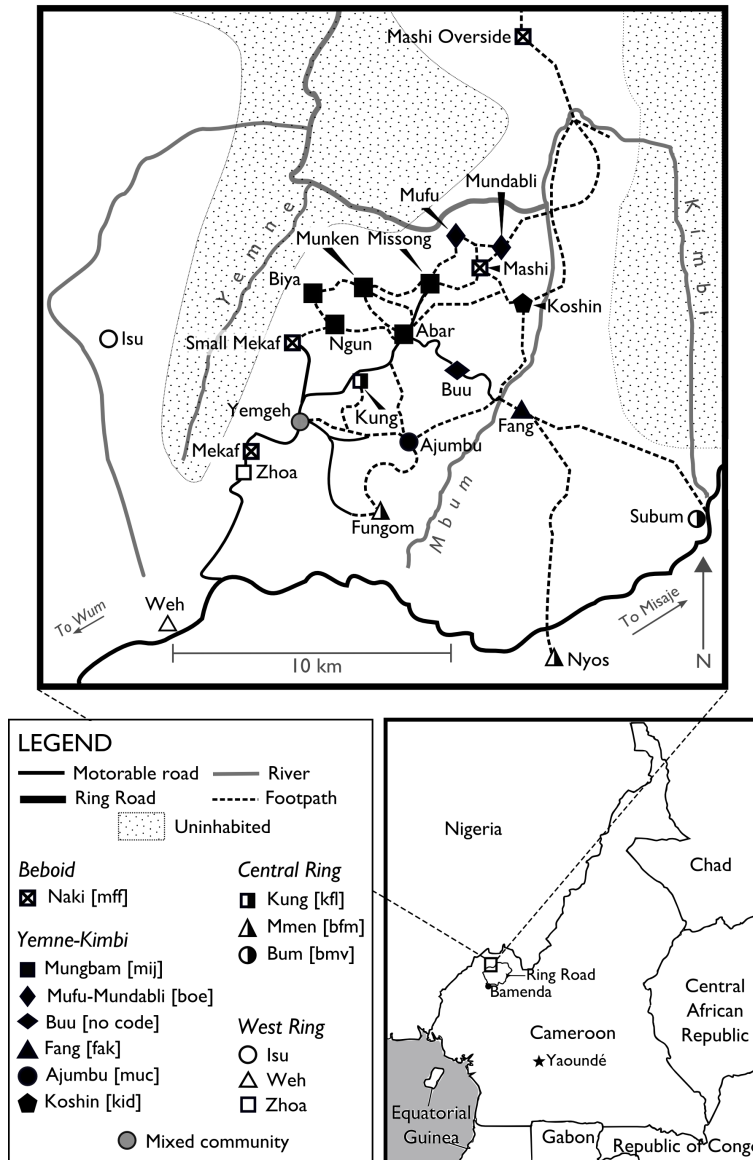


Figure 1.1: Lower Fungom Language Map, courtesy of Pierpaolo Di Carlo

river, also at a height of about 900 meters, **ndz̄əm** and most of the smaller hamlets are found at lower elevations, close to the river.

In order to get to Mundabli from the closest town (Wum), it is possible to take a pickup truck which goes to Abar once a day (see map in Figure 1.1).

Although the distance is only around 26 kilometers by road, the ride takes several hours due to the extremely bad condition the road is in. The road gets fixed every couple years, but in such a manner that by the time the rainy season has reached its full height, the road has become impassable again and only courageous motorbike taxi drivers take the risk. From Abar, it is still a two to three hour walk to Mundabli on a foot path which crosses through the villages Missong and Mashi. Up to Mashi (at ca. 770 meters elevation), at the foot of the Mundabli hill, the path is good enough for a motorbike to drive on, but from there on only steep and narrow paths lead up to the village itself, which is thus only accessible by foot. It is not uncommon for Mundabli people to walk to Weh (the closest marketplace on the Ring Road) or to Wum, in order to save the fare for public transport.

Footpaths connect all the villages in the area. The Nigerian border, which is at a distance of about 30 kilometers as the crow flies, can also be reached on foot. The closest market is Abar market, which takes place once a week. Other markets frequented by Mundabli people are Yemgeh, Weh and (less commonly) Wum market. The closest health station is also found in Abar. The closest hospital is in Wum. However, in many cases, people attend traditional doctors before or instead of turning to a nurse or physician. There is one traditional doctor in Mundabli whose reputation attracts people from Wum and even further away. Mundabli has a primary school which was accredited by the government of education, a few years ago, after it had been run as a community school for several years. The closest secondary school is found in Missong. For further education, teenagers move to Wum where many of them live with relatives or better-off Mundabli people. Mundabli has a make-shift radio station which is operated by Tembo Adamu Mohammed and broadcasts in Mundabli. Due to the high altitude of the village, the station can be received over a great distance. In 2012, there were two generators in the village which were in private possession and which were mainly used to operate a corn mill and to play dance music at special occasions. Access to clean water is restricted to two springs located on the side of the Mundabli hill. Water must be carried up from the springs along a steep dirt path. In the rainy season, rain water for doing the laundry and for consumption is collected in the village, which is fortunate because in the rainy season the steep path that leads to the village from the spring resembles a slippery mud slide. In the dry season, one may have to wait half an hour for the little pool to refill in order to get drinking water. Sometimes, the spring closer to the village dries up completely. In order to save time and energy, people wash themselves and their clothes at streams on the hillside.

1.1.2 The Mundabli people - Culture and economic activities

Mundabli is a chiefdom led, at the time of publication, by chief Tem Nyungfu and sub-chief Mambo Goodboy Bumnyam, in collaboration with the village

council which is headed by the chief. Mundabli is neither itself part of another chiefdom, nor does it incorporate any other villages in its own chiefdom. While many villagers are Christians and a handful are Muslims, probably everyone also practices the local traditional religion. As pointed out in §1.1.1, the village is organized in quarters which are geographically separate. The people who live in a quarter form a separate exogamous kin group (Di Carlo 2011: 62). Names are often connected with certain quarters so that one can deduct from a person's name which quarter they belong to.

The main economic activity in Mundabli is farming. Probably the most important source of income for the Mundabli is palm oil. As Lower Fungom is at a relatively low altitude, it is suitable to grow palm trees. Palm oil is made in the village and sold at local markets. Coffee and cocoa are also grown for trade, but only in small quantities. Other crops are corn, peanuts (locally known as 'groundnuts'), plantains, cassavas, cocoyams, pumpkin seeds (locally known as 'egussi'), gourds, calabashes, okras, etc. Other economic activities in Mundabli include hunting, trapping, animal breeding and fishing. Nowadays mainly small animals are hunted, e.g., cane rat (in Pidgin 'cutting grass'), rat mole, rock hyrax (in Pidgin 'stone beef'), different kinds of squirrels, snakes and monkeys, certain birds, such as e.g. the francolin (in Pidgin 'bush fowl') and, rarely, antelopes. In the past buffalos (in Pidgin 'bush cows'), african wild pigs (in Pidgin 'bush pigs') and gorillas were also hunted, but due to extensive hunting, they have nearly disappeared from this area. While meat is a special treat for people in the village, it is also something that can be traded. Dried and smoked "bush meat" is very popular with Cameroonians. The Mundabli also gather plants including various wild vegetables and wild spices such as e.g., 'bush pepper' (*Piper guineense*) and 'njangsa' (*Ricinodendron heudelotii* var. *africanum*), mushrooms, fruit and certain insects, for subsistence or in order to sell them at the market. People breed chickens and occasionally ducks for eggs and meat, and goats and sheep for consumption and sale. The rivers that cross Mundabli territory are home to various species of fish which people catch with rods and nets, and to crabs which are caught by hand. Due to the lack of employment opportunities in the area, many young people move to South-west Cameroon (or other places) to work on plantations, on oil pipelines, in factories, in the port, to do business and so on. These people often invest in the village and many of them come back at some point of time to marry and eventually to settle down and spend their retirement in the village.

1.1.3 The name "Mundabli"

'Mundabli' is the English name for the Mundabli people, their home village and their language. The speakers of Mundabli refer to themselves and their village as **ndz̄ān**. In the Mundabli language, a Mundabli person is referred to as **m̀ndz̄ān**, the Mundabli people are the **b̀ndz̄ān**, their language is **ɲ̄ndz̄ān** and the Mundabli village is referred to as **ndz̄ān kú**. However, the Mundabli also acknowledge the name "Mundabli" and they use it when conversing with

outsiders. It is unknown where the English name “Mundabli” (also Mundabili or more rarely Ndabile²) originated from. People in Mundabli think the name may be based on a misunderstanding. They think that someone must have mistaken part of a greeting ceremony as the language name. According to this theory, the original phrase must have been something like *mī n = dǎ lǐ* ‘As for me, I am still well.’ or *bī dǎ bǎ-li* ‘We are still well.’.

In the way they are used by the Mundabli speakers and their neighbours, the names *ndzān* and *Mundabli* represent only the variety spoken in Mundabli, i.e. in the village and associated hamlets. They do not include the variety spoken in *Mufu*, although the two varieties are so close that, from a linguistic standpoint, the two can be viewed as dialects of a single language.

In opposition to local use, the Ethnologue entry “Mundabli” (ISO 639-3 code: *boe*, Lewis et al. 2009) represents three varieties: *Mundabli*, *Mufu* and *Buu*.³ Whereas *Mundabli* and *Mufu* are reasonably close and could be considered dialects of the same language, *Buu* is so different from *Mundabli* and *Mufu* that it should be considered a separate language (see §1.1.4 for details). The use of the name “Mundabli” to subsume all three varieties falsely implies that we are dealing with a single language. But also to represent only *Mundabli* and *Mufu*,

The name *Mundabli* is also a bad choice for representing only *Mundabli* and *Mufu*, because in its public use, it refers only to the *Mundabli* dialect, to the exclusion of *Mufu*. *Mufu* people would most certainly feel offended if their variety were called a dialect of *Mundabli*. I suggest instead using the compound name *Mufu-Mundabli* to represent this dialect-cluster. While the existence of a common name implies that the two varieties are so close that they can be considered a single language for linguistic reasons, the fact that the name is a compound made up of the names of the two varieties reflects at the same time that these two dialects have independent socio-political status.

It must be remarked though that such a common name represents a purely linguistic entity. While *Mundabli* and *Mufu* are “culturally closer to each other than to any other Lower Fungom society.” Di Carlo (2011: 87), they still form separate politically distinct socio-cultural groups. In this description, I use the name “Mundabli” to refer only to the *Mundabli* dialect, as spoken in the *Mundabli* chiefdom, including the village and associated settlements and hamlets (thus excluding *Mufu* and *Buu*).

1.1.4 Contact and cross- and intra-dialectal variation

Mundabli is in contact with other *Yemne-Kimbi* languages, *Ring* languages and *Jukunoid* (to the north, see Hombert (1980: footnotes 3-4)), Cameroon

²The name “Ndabile” is primarily found in (Chilver and Kaberry 1968) and sources based on it.

³Ngako Yonga (2013: VII) suggests renaming the language from *Buu* with a long <uu> to *Bu* with a short <u> because the language does not have long vowels. However, I stick to the name ‘*Buu*’, for reasons laid out in Good et al. (2011: 124).

Pidgin, English and - to a much lesser degree - French.

For purely linguistic reasons, Mundabli may be viewed as one of two dialects of a common language called Mufu-Mundabli. The name is composed of the English names of the two chiefdoms in which these varieties are spoken. Although the dialects have a lot in common and are mutually intelligible, at the same time there are striking differences which make the two clearly distinguishable. Acoustically, the most striking difference is that Mundabli uses pharyngealized vowels where Mufu has syllable-final velar stops. More research is needed in order to determine the exact relationship between the two varieties. In spite of their closeness, Mundabli and Mufu are viewed by their speakers as different languages, mainly for socio-political reasons. As is characteristic of Lower Fungom villages, each of the two villages has its own chief and forms its own socio-political unit.

According to the speakers of Mundabli, there is no dialectal variation within the Mundabli variety and speakers of the different quarters, as well as those living in detached hamlets all speak more or less the same way. However, there is a certain degree of intra-lectal variation based on age rather than on the affiliation to a certain quarter or lineage. This variation seems to reflect an ongoing process of language change. Younger speakers (approximately up to the age of 40-50) speak differently from older speakers. The elders variety is perceived to be more correct. E.g., the chief is said to speak “real” Mundabli, whereas younger people are allegedly corrupting the language. The most prominent difference is the gradual loss of final **l** in younger speakers, which is accompanied by a change in vowel quality (cf. Table 1.1). The version used by the chief and other older people is regarded as the “correct” form, but speakers use the other form just as often.

older speakers	younger speakers	gloss
kwə̀l	kwè	homestead, sacred grove
kwā̀l	kwé	house rat
bwḕl	bwè	calabash (used as oil container)
dā̀l	dē	weight
tā̀l	tè	pull (v)

Table 1.1: Age-based variation in the pronunciation of original CVl stems

In the past, Mundabli has been viewed as part of the “Ji cluster” (Good et al. 2011: 124), together with Mufu and Buu, because these three languages seem to share certain similarities. However, recent studies led by myself and by Doriane Ngako (2013) on Buu and Mundabli suggest that Buu is a separate language. This is supported by the findings presented in Di Carlo (2015) on the linguistic prehistory of Lower Fungom. It had already been noticed by Hamm et al. (2002: 12) that the status of Buu regarding its affiliation to Mufu-Mundabli was unclear, but Hamm et al. (2002: 12) did not draw any consequences from this and lumped the three together.

Although impressionistic judgements on the degree of closeness of Mufu and Mundabli on the one hand, and between Mufu-Mundabli and Buu on the other can be made, these statements are still hypothetical due to a lack of data on Mufu and Buu. While a comparison of some aspects of Buu and Mundabli phonology has been carried out by Ngako Yonga (2013) based on Buu data collected by herself and on my Mundabli data, a comparison of Mundabli or Buu with Mufu is more difficult because only very little Mufu data have been collected. Statements on the similarity between Mundabli and Mufu are based on my own intuitions, but also on statements of Mundabli speakers and, to a certain degree, on the collected Mufu data.

1.1.5 Classification

Mundabli (ISO 639-3: boe, Glottocode: mund1328) is part of the Southern branch of Bantoid, itself a subbranch of Benue-Congo in the Niger-Congo language phylum. Mundabli used to be included in the “Beboid” branch of Southern Bantoid; see Figure 1.2.

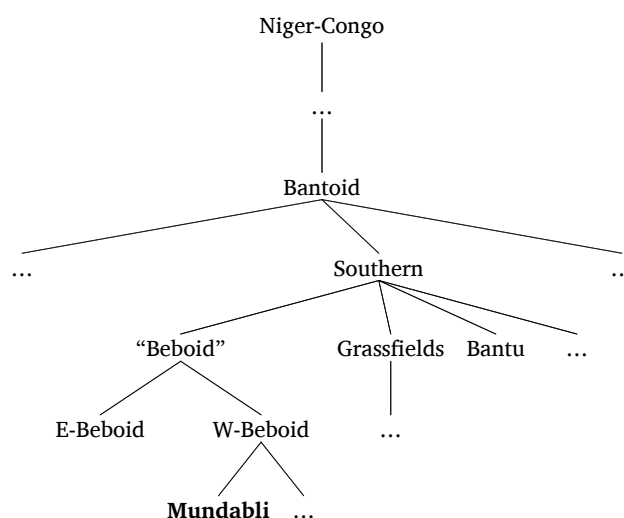


Figure 1.2: Niger-Congo family tree, adapted from Schadeberg (2003: 155)

The term “Beboid” was first used by Hombert (1980). Hombert (1980) includes Mundabli in the group of “Western Beboid” languages, an alleged subgroup of what he refers to as the “Beboid” languages. However, former “Western Beboid” is no longer accepted by all as closely related to “Eastern Beboid”. For lack of substantiating evidence for either a “Western Beboid” subgroup or any close affinity between “Western Beboid” and “Eastern Beboid”, Good et al. (2011: 108) abandon the label “Western Beboid” - along with its associated genetic hypotheses - and instead propose the name ‘Yemne-Kimbi’

for this group of languages; see Figure 1.3. This label references two rivers that are found at the western and eastern borders of the Lower Fungom region. It is intended to be a purely referential label without any implications regarding the genetic affiliation or coherence of the languages it includes.

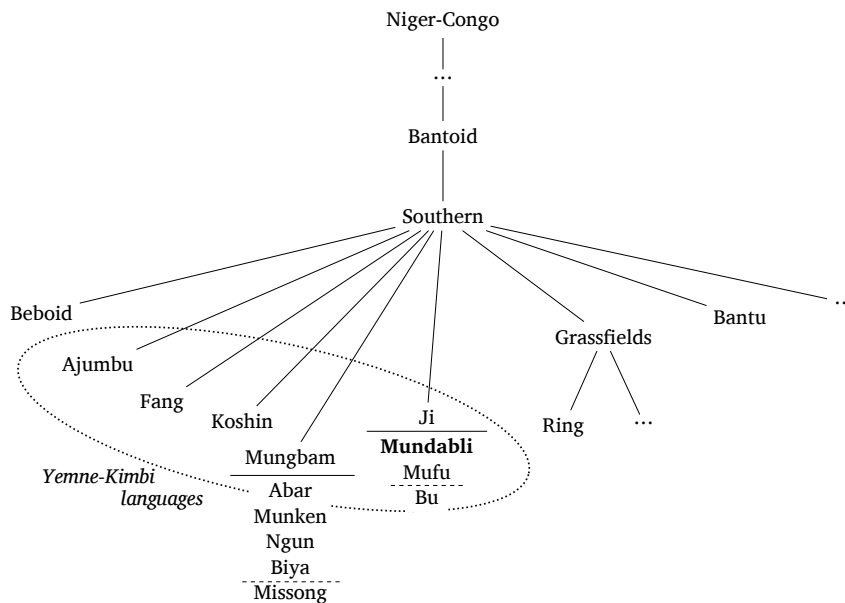


Figure 1.3: Bantoid family tree, following Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2017)

The Yemne-Kimbi group contains several clusters of closely related languages or dialects, one of which is the ‘Ji-cluster’. The Ji-cluster comprises the varieties Mundabli, Mufu and Buu. While Mundabli and Mufu are close enough to be considered dialects of a single language, Buu is different enough that it should be considered a separate language (Good et al. 2011: 105). In accordance with the purely referential character of the label “Yemne-Kimbi”, e.g. Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2017) does not recognize a Yemne-Kimbi subgroup and instead lists all languages and language clusters which are subsumed under the reference label Yemne-Kimbi as isolates at the same level as Beboid (with the more recent interpretation of this term, which corresponds roughly to former “Eastern Beboid”), Grassfields and Bantu. Note that the sub-classification within all of Southern Bantoid is preliminary.

The Grassfields and Bantu languages are especially relevant because they are closely related to Mundabli and the Grassfields languages in particular are potential contact languages. Grassfields includes the Ring-languages, which

are spoken in the direct vicinity of the Lower Fungom region, where Mundabli and the other Yemne-Kimbi languages are spoken. The Grassfields languages have received some attention, even outside of Niger-Congo Studies, since the Grassfields Working Group did extensive fieldwork on these languages in the 1970s and 1980s (cf. Heine and Nurse (2000: 34) for details). There is an interesting historical link between the Bantu languages and the Grassfields and Yemne-Kimbi languages, as the area where the latter are spoken is believed to be the cradle of the Bantu languages.

1.2 Description and analysis of Mundabli

1.2.1 Previous research on Mundabli

Little work has been published exclusively on Mundabli. In the last decades, Mundabli was included in a survey of noun classes in what Hombert (1980) referred to as *Beboid*⁴ (Hombert 1980) and in survey work done by SIL (Hamm 2002; Hamm et al. 2002) which includes a word list for Mundabli, albeit without tone. More recently, a few articles have been published on specific aspects of Mundabli grammar, namely Voll (2010) on tonal inflection in the tense system, Voll (2014) on the grammaticalization of body part terms in Mundabli and an article on the structure of relative clauses in Mundabli and Mungbam (ISO 639-3 code: mij), a dialect cluster belonging to Yemne-Kimbi, which includes the dialects Munken, Ngun, Biya, Abar and Missong (Lovegren and Voll 2017).

Information on Mundabli is also included in some recent more general articles. Good et al. (2011) contains some basic grammatical information on Mundabli, including data on phonology, the noun class system and verb morphology. Good (2012) contains an overview of the Mundabli noun class system and a theoretical discussion of its implications. Di Carlo (2011), Di Carlo and Pizziolo (2012) and Di Carlo and Good (2014) discuss the settlement and migration history of Mundabli and the history of the Mundabli language.

In the last decade, some material has been published on other Yemne-Kimbi languages. An excellent multi-dialectal grammar of Mungbam has been published by Lovegren (2013) who has also written articles on specific aspects of Mungbam phonetics and phonology (Lovegren 2011b;a). Ngako Yonga (2013) has published a phonological and morphological sketch of Buu, which is of special relevance because Buu is one of the three dialects which supposedly make up the “Ji cluster”, the others being Mundabli and Mufu. Ngako Yonga (2013) also contains a brief comparison of some aspects of Mundabli and Buu phonology and morphology. Finally, Mve (2013) published a phonological description of Fáj (ISO 639-3 code: fak), another Yemne-Kimbi language.

⁴Hombert assumed that *Beboid* (Good et al. 2011) and Yemne-Kimbi (Good et al. 2011) were related. He referred to them accordingly as “Eastern *Beboid*” and “Western *Beboid*” which he believed made up the genealogical group “*Beboid*”.

The data resources I used other than my own recordings are restricted to a wordlist compiled by SIL (Hamm 2002) and recordings of elicitation sessions of about five hours each by Scott Farrar and Jeff Good. The work of Jesse Lovegren, who published his multi-lectal grammar of Mungbam in 2013, was a great inspiration.

1.2.2 Fieldwork setting

This description is based on recordings made during three field trips (2008, 2009 and 2012) to Cameroon totalling a period of 9 months. During these trips, I spent about half of my time in the Mundabli village and the other half in the nearby town of Wum, where I worked with Mundabli-speakers. While the village setting allowed me to make recordings of authentic natural speech data, working in town facilitated elicitation and transcription, especially because electricity is practically unavailable in Mundabli. Therefore, most stories and conversations were recorded in the Mundabli village and only a few in Wum. Recordings of spontaneous speech were transcribed and glossed with the help of consultants. Part of the translation and elicitation work was done in the Mundabli village with the help of my main consultant in Mundabli, Jacqueline Ntie Kimba and, to lesser parts, with Alfred Ngasha Shami and Barnabas Nyambong. The rest of the elicitation and translation work was done in Wum (and also in Bamenda during a later trip), where I worked together with my main consultant in town, Donatus Yung Kungmba, and, to a lesser extent, with Jonathan Yessa and a few other speakers. Elicitation was done partly in English and partly in Cameroon Pidgin. I am aware of the pitfalls of elicited data, such as the danger of direct translation from English/Cameroon Pidgin, or the possibility of eliciting unnatural utterances. Ideally, a description would be entirely based on natural speech data. However, elicitation allows one to selectively extract comprehensive information on specific topics, which is necessary given temporal restrictions.

My database comprises digital audio recordings of a total length of around 200 hours, of which a few hours are transcribed and glossed. It comprises recordings of spontaneous and planned speech, such as natural conversations, biographies, anecdotes, narratives, riddles, songs, and instructions, as well as numerous recordings of elicitation sessions. For a discussion of the use of elicited data vs. natural speech data, see Lovegren (2013: 8-10).

All recordings were made with a flash recorder (Edirol R-09), in wav quality. I used the in-built microphone to record natural conversations and more generally recordings with more than two speakers. For elicitation, I used either the in-built microphone of the flash recorder or a headset (Sennheiser PC 131). Only in a few cases, I used a directional condenser microphone (Rode NTG-2). I also made a video recording of one elicitation session. In order to transcribe and store the recordings, I later transferred the sound files to my computer. For notes and primary transcriptions, I used an old-fashioned paper note book, especially in the village, where access to electricity is strongly

restricted. For transcription and annotation, I used computer programs, such as ELAN and, to a lesser extent, Toolbox. Due to practical restrictions, not all recordings are translated, transcribed and glossed, yet.

1.2.3 Presentation of data

This description contains in-text examples and numbered examples. In-text examples are written in bold letters and, when they contain a translation, the translation is enclosed in single quotation marks. Other examples are numbered continuously, from the beginning to the end of the book. They consist of three lines: a source language line, a line with morphological glosses, and a translation in English. The English translation may in some cases contain Cameroon Pidgin terms which are attested neither in Standard British English nor in Standard American English. Elicited examples are marked with a small diamond symbol “◊” preceding the translation. This is done in order to raise awareness: elicited data may be subject to interference from English or Cameroon Pidgin, which were used as meta-languages in elicitation.

1.2.4 Practical transcription

The current orthography is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) but is partly adjusted to resemble the “General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages” (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo 1979), henceforth simply referred to as the ‘Cameroonian alphabet’, in order to try to conform to Africanist standards, to enhance comparability with other Cameroonian languages and, last but not least, to make this work more accessible to the language community and eventually make it easier for the language community to develop a practical orthography. Thus, the grapheme <y> is preferred over IPA <j> to represent a palatal approximant because it conforms both to its use in English (the language of education) and in orthographies of other local languages. The orthography was not discussed with the speech community and it is not meant to function as a practical orthography to be used for writing or in teaching the language. A practical orthography should be developed in collaboration with the speech community based on practical considerations, giving priority to language use rather than language description. The graphemes used here widely coincide with the IPA symbols. However, there are a few exceptions. In what follows, I first discuss vowel graphemes, then tone marks, and finally consonant graphemes.

The use of vowel symbols in the current orthography diverges only slightly from their use in the IPA or in Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979). Table 1.2 contains an overview of the vowel graphemes used in this book.

The diacritics which mark pharyngealized vowels in the left column are neither found in the Cameroonian alphabet (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo 1979), nor in the IPA. As there is no conventionalized symbol for pharyngealized

grapheme	IPA symbol	Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979)	description
a	a	a	low front unrounded vowel
æ	æ	æ	near-low front unrounded vowel
ɛ	ɛ	ɛ	low-mid front unrounded vowel
e	e	e	high-mid front unrounded vowel
ə	ə	ə	mid central vowel
ɪ	ɪ	–	near-high near-front unrounded vowel
i	i	i	high front unrounded vowel
ᵢ	–	–	pharyngealized high front unrounded vowel
ɨ	ɯ	ɨ	high back unrounded vowel
ᵢ	–	–	pharyngealized high back unrounded vowel
u	u	u	high back rounded vowel
ᵤ	–	–	pharyngealized high back rounded vowel
ʊ	ʊ	–	near-high near-back rounded vowel
o	o	o	close-mid rounded vowel
ɔ	ɔ	ɔ	low-mid back rounded vowel
ɒ	ɒ	ɑ	low back unrounded vowel

Table 1.2: List of vowel graphemes compared with IPA symbols and symbols used in the Cameroonian alphabet (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo 1979)

vowels, I had to find a different solution. The diacritic chosen here to represent pharyngealization, two dots arranged horizontally below the vowel, as in <ᵢ>, is the IPA diacritic for breathy voice. This diacritic was chosen because the articulation mechanisms of pharyngealization and breathy voice resemble each other and because, to the best of my knowledge, the two do not coexist in any language. Breathiness is not attested in Mundabli and it is rare in this part of the world in general. The chosen diacritic also has a practical advantage: it occurs below the vowel and does not interfere with tone marking. The second point in which the vowel transcription system used here does not conform with the IPA on the one hand and with the Cameroonian alphabet on the other is the use of the grapheme <i> to represent a high unrounded back vowel. The grapheme <i> was chosen rather than IPA <ɯ>, because the former is commonly used in Cameroonian orthographies, while the use of the symbol <ɯ> is not. Whereas Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979: 15) recommend the use of the grapheme <ɨ> for a high back unrounded vowel, I chose to use <i> instead, because the IPA uses <ɨ> to represent a *rounded* vowel.

The high front and back [-ATR] vowels are represented by the IPA symbols

<ɪ> and <ʊ>. The use of IPA symbols is necessary to distinguish between [+ATR] and [-ATR] vowels. Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979: 13) completely lack graphemes to express this distinction. Finally, the use of IPA <ɒ> to represent a low back rounded vowel is preferred over the use of <ɑ>, as suggested by Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979: 13). In the IPA the symbol <ɑ> corresponds to a low back *unrounded* vowel.

Tone is marked with diacritical tone marks. There are four tone levels: low, mid, high and superhigh, marked by diacritics above the vowels, as e.g. in *ké* 'leg'. Two tone marks can be combined to form a complex tone pattern, as shown in Table 1.3.

diacritic	IPA	Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979)	description
˘	˘	˘	low
-	-	-	mid
˙	˙	˙	high
˝	˝	˝	superhigh
˘˙	˘˙	˘˙	low-high rising
˙˘	˙˘	˙˘	high-low falling
˘˙˘	˘˙˘	˘˙˘	mid-low falling
˙˘˙	˙˘˙	˙˘˙	mid-high rising
˙˘˙˘	˙˘˙˘	˙˘˙˘	high-mid falling

Table 1.3: List of tone marks compared with IPA symbols and symbols used in Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979)

Most consonants are also represented by IPA symbols. Only in a few cases did I choose to use symbols that fit better in a Cameroonian context. Table 1.4 shows the graphemes used to represent consonants.

For practical reasons, the tie-bars used in complex consonants in the IPA (cf. Table 1.4) are not used. Instead, complex consonants are simply represented by the relevant consonant combinations without tie-bars, as suggested by Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979). I chose to conform with the IPA in transcribing the affricates <tʃ> and <dʒ> rather than using the symbols <c> and <j> (or <č> and <ǰ>), as suggested by Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979). This is done in order to avoid the impression that the consonants in question are palatal plosives. While palatal plosives ([c] and [j]) are not attested in Mundabli, they *are* attested in Mufu.⁵ Having made this choice, I have decided to transcribe the palatal sibilant using <ʃ> rather than <sh> because it would be too awkward to have the sequences <tsh> and <dzh> represent single sounds, and it would be even worse to use <tʃ> for the

⁵Note that the distribution of palatal plosives in Mufu does not mirror the distribution of palatal affricates in Mundabli.

current grapheme	IPA symbol	(Tadadjeu and Sadembouo 1979)	description
p	p	p	voiceless bilabial plosive
t	t	t	voiceless alveolar plosive
k	k	k	voiceless velar plosive
kp	\overline{kp}	kp	voiceless labial-velar plosive
b	b	b	voiced bilabial plosive
d	d	d	voiced alveolar plosiv
g	g	g	voiced velar plosive
gb	\overline{gb}	gb	voiced labial-velar plosive
f	f	f	voiceless labio-dental fricative
s	s	s	voiceless alveolar fricative
ʃ	$\overline{ʃ}$	sh	voiceless post-alveolar fricative
ts	\overline{ts}	ts	voiceless alveolar affricate
tʃ	$\overline{tʃ}$	c, č	voiceless post-alveolar affricate
dz	\overline{dz}	dz	voiced alveolar affricate
dʒ	$\overline{dʒ}$	j, ĵ	voiced post-alveolar affricate
m	m	m	bilabial nasal
n	n	n	alveolar nasal
ɲ	ɲ	ny	palatal nasal
ŋ	ŋ	ŋ	velar nasal
ɲm	$\overline{ɲm}$	ɲm	labial-velar nasal
l	l	l	lateral alveolar approximant
y	j	y	palatal approximant
ɥ	ɥ	–	labial-palatal approximant
w	w	w	labial-velar approximant

Table 1.4: List of consonant graphemes compared with IPA symbols and symbols used in Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979)

affricate but <sh> for the corresponding fricative. The graphemes for the palatal and velar nasal are identical with their IPA symbols <ɲ> and <ŋ>. On the one hand, this reflects their status as single segments and on the other hand, it eliminates ambiguity between the nasal [ɲ] and the sequence [ŋ]. The palatal approximant is represented by the grapheme <y> rather than IPA <j>. The use of <y> to represent a palatal approximant is standard in the area, whereas <j> commonly represents IPA [dʒ]. Finally, the IPA symbol for the labial-palatal approximant <ɥ> is sporadically used to show the phonetic realization, but the sound is usually written <yw> because it represents a consonant sequence rather than a single complex consonant (see §2.2). A nasal is syllabic when it bears a tone mark, otherwise it is not.