SOCIOLINGUISTIC DOCUMENTATION OF LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE IN IYASA

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Abstract

This dissertation examines language shift and maintenance in Iyasa, an endangered Coastal Bantu language spoken in southern Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. By combining sociolinguistic language documentation with qualitative and quantitative sociolinguistic methods—including experimental variationist work, ethnographic interviewing, and assessment of linguistic vitality using different scholarly metrics—I aim to provide a more holistic understanding of the processes and causes of shift away from Iyasa and factors supporting the maintenance (and possible revitalization) of the language, as well as creating a body of documentation about the Iyasa language and its current context.

Language shift cannot be understood without close attention to the context in which it occurs; therefore, this dissertation also situates language shift and maintenance within the historical, social, and geographic contexts in which Iyasa speakers currently live. In addition, this dissertation aims to foreground the perspectives, opinions, language practices, and experiences of the Iyasa community themselves, and to ground its study of language shift within the lives of the individuals involved.

Findings show that, like languages in many other parts of Africa, the Iyasa language faces growing pressure from an official ex-colonial language (French), increasing economic hardships, urbanization and rural exodus, ideologies of subtractive multilingualism, and the challenges of sustaining a language with a relatively small speaker population which is surrounded by demographically larger languages. In addition, speakers report changes in the structure of the language, which they perceive as being related to language attrition among younger speakers; experimental work confirms these changes as being correlated with younger speakers, but not with reduced Iyasa proficiency.

Finally, this dissertation examines factors which contribute to the maintenance of the Iyasa language, and which may be drawn upon to support language revitalization efforts. It presents a successful youth-led language revitalization initiative, which was designed in response to the understandings of language shift gained from sociolinguistic work within the Iyasa community, and provides recommendations for implementing youth language revitalization programs in similar contexts.

By combining a number of sociolinguistic approaches with language documentation, this dissertation provides a detailed case study of language shift and maintenance in an African context, as well as methodological recommendations for other researchers interested in documenting processes of language shift and maintenance.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I investigate sociolinguistic aspects of language shift and maintenance in Iyasa, an endangered and under-documented Coastal Bantu language spoken in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, and contribute a case study to the growing field of sociolinguistic language documentation.

By exploring ways to integrate qualitative and quantitative sociolinguistic methods, I aim to provide a more thorough understanding of the processes, causes, and perceptions of language shift and maintenance within the Iyasa-speaking community in the vicinity of Campo, Cameroon. The goals of this dissertation are:

1. To provide preliminary documentation of the Iyasa language’s sociolinguistic context.
2. To contribute to the sociolinguistics of language endangerment, shift, and maintenance and revitalization, particularly in African contexts of urbanization.
3. To contribute to the growing field of sociolinguistic language documentation by demonstrating ways to integrate qualitative and quantitative sociolinguistic inquiry with the creation of multi-purpose documentary materials.
4. To generate actionable knowledge and understanding of the factors contributing to language shift and language maintenance in Iyasa, in order to support the Iyasa language community’s goals for language documentation, maintenance, and revitalization.

1.2. Dissertation overview

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of language documentation and sociolinguistics, within the growing subfield of sociolinguistic language documentation. Documentary linguistics, in its broadest definition, is “primarily concerned with the compilation and preservation of linguistic primary data and interfaces between primary data and various types of analyses based on these data,” and the creation of a “lasting, multipurpose record of a language” (Himmelmann 2006:1). Descriptive linguistics, which was in many ways the predecessor of documentary linguistics, concerned itself primarily with the description of linguistic structure, with its canonical products being the “Boasian trilogy” of lexicon, grammar,
and texts. Accordingly, the “linguistic primary data” compiled in the early tradition of descriptive linguistics was largely focused on structural aspects of a single language. However, as language documentation grew into a distinct subfield in its own right, the range of data it gathered, and the breadth of analysis it aimed to serve with this data, expanded beyond linguistic structure to include linguistic context, multilingualism, language use, language acquisition, language attitudes, and linguistic vitality (among other issues). While documentation largely concerns itself with data—including the methodologies used to gather it, best practices for disseminating and archiving it, and the types of metadata and representation/distillation of data which might be most useful to analysis—it is important not to mistake language documentation for merely “language description plus technology,” as Austin (2010:14) phrases it, nor is its aim simply “collecting material to preserve it without analysing it” (ibid.). Instead, it aims to generate primary data which is accountable to context: the context in which that data was recorded, the context of the language(s) in question, and the context of how that data was created. As argued by (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014), documentation of sociolinguistic context is crucial for a documentary record to be considered sufficient; Penfield (2013:364) similarly notes that “to document or revitalize an endangered language, without a nod to the forces [of sociohistorical context] that brought it to that place, is an incomplete study in many ways.” Moreover, a movement within the study of language loss and revitalization, particularly in work by Indigenous scholars, has called for a move away from discourses of “linguistic extraction,” or “the process of discussing languages […] extracted from the personal lives, communicative practices, and embodied experiences in which they are inherently embedded” (Davis 2017:39-40); Davis argues that this discursive strategy is tied to erasure of Indigenous autonomy, and “is itself a colonial enterprise” (ibid.:40). In this dissertation, I follow a suggestion with which I strongly agree: “the centering of languages within social contexts, individual lives, and embodied experiences provides counter-strategies to linguistic extraction” (ibid.:48). The work described in the following chapters aims to foreground the relationships between historical and social context, community members’ personal experiences and viewpoints, and language shift and maintenance. The discipline of language documentation has, by and large, moved away from the purely extractive focus of language description, but the methodologies for conducting documentation work in some subfields—such as the sociolinguistics of language shift and maintenance—are
still relatively new. While the “why” of sociolinguistic documentation finds general buy-in among most documentary linguists, the “how” is still very much being explored.

Luckily, a growing number of researchers are pursuing work which incorporates sociolinguistics with the documentation or description of under-studied languages. For example, within quantitative sociolinguistics, Stanford & Preston (2009) present a collection of variationist studies on indigenous, minority, and endangered languages; Hildebrant, Jany & Silva (2017) follow in this vein, arguing for the value of variationist work on endangered languages, and presenting a number of case studies; and Abtahian, Cohn & Pepinsky (2016) provide recommendations for statistical modeling of social factors in language shift. Qualitative approaches to language shift and endangerment are also increasingly common, such as Odango (2015), Di Carlo (2018), Marlow & Giles (2008), Sicoli (2011), Orcutt-Gachiri (2011), and Lüpke (2015), all of which examine ideological and attitudinal factors in language shift. Migge & Légise (2012) integrates quantitative and qualitative sociolinguistics into new methods for the documentation of languages in multilingual contexts. Research on language shift has also been at the forefront of integrating language documentation and sociolinguistic inquiry, particularly within doctoral dissertations; for example, the dissertations of Romero (2008), Ravindranath (2009), Smith-Kocamahhul (2003), and Wertheim (2003) all provide sociolinguistic analysis of the causes and effects of language shift in minority and endangered languages, while also creating documentary materials in these languages.

This dissertation contributes to this body of work by providing documentation of a specific facet of Iyasa’s sociolinguistic context: language shift away from Iyasa, language maintenance in the face of shift, and speakers’ perceptions and experiences of this shift and maintenance. Its general approach will be structured around the following questions:

1) What do Iyasa people say is happening with regard to language shift (and how do they talk about it)?
2) What experimental methods can be used to further explore the symptoms and patterns of language shift?
3) How can this knowledge about language shift in the Iyasa context be applied to designing effective methods for language maintenance and revitalization?
The dissertation is guided by these three questions, and its structure is as follows.

Chapter 2, “Iyasa language shift in context,” provides an outline of the context of the Iyasa language and factors which may be contributing to shift away from it, including a brief sociohistorical overview of the Iyasa region, the geographical distribution of Iyasa speakers, changes in the social and economic context in which Iyasa is spoken, other languages present and their speaker populations, current patterns in migration and economic change, changes in local social structures. Following a description of the Iyasa language and its context, Chapter 2 also outlines the context of the research for this dissertation, including an autoethnographic sketch of the background, training, and subjectivities of the researcher, and a description of the timeline and activities undertaken for this research.

Chapter 3, “Speaker perspectives on language shift in Iyasa,” presents the current situation of language endangerment, shift, and maintenance from the perspective of Iyasa people themselves. The chapter presents extracts from interviews with Iyasa speakers, and examines speakers’ beliefs about what factors contribute to language shift and maintenance, as well as their beliefs about the language’s vitality and prospects for survival. Speakers’ reports of factors affecting linguistic vitality are then discussed in relation to academic metrics for vitality assessment.

Chapter 4, “Experimental approaches to language shift: Variation in noun class production,” presents the results of a variationist experiment which examined speaker-identified changes in noun class markers among younger and allegedly less proficient speakers. The aim of this experiment was to gauge whether an innovative form of noun class marking did in fact correlate to speaker age, and speaker proficiency in Iyasa, and whether this innovative form could be interpreted as an indicator of language shift. While variation in noun class marking on one lexical item was attested, and its correlation to speaker age was significant, it did not correlate to speaker proficiency in Iyasa; thus, this pattern of variation may not be an indicator of imperfect language acquisition due to language shift.

Chapter 5, “Iyasa bo: Towards a youth-driven model for language revitalization,” presents the development and outcomes of a workshop that was designed around the understandings of Iyasa language shift and maintenance described in the previous chapters. The workshop aimed to foster youth participation in language documentation and revitalization, as well as providing capacity-building for Iyasa youth in practical skills in technology and literacy.
The initial two-week workshop was highly successful in meeting its goals, and the chapter discusses implications and takeaways for other youth-oriented language revitalization programs.

Finally, Chapter 6, “Conclusions and discussion,” brings together the findings of the previous chapters for an overall look at the sociolinguistics of language shift in Iyasa, and suggests potential avenues for continued efforts in sociolinguistic studies, language documentation, and revitalization in similar contexts.

It should be noted that any of the topics addressed in this project could be examined in sufficient depth to serve as separate dissertations; entire monographs could be written about experimental variationist research, perceptions of language shift, or youth-based revitalization programs. Similarly, there are many other topics pertaining to language shift in Iyasa which are not addressed here but are worthy of further study. However, this dissertation aims to explore the application of several sociolinguistic approaches to the documentation of languages undergoing shift, and demonstrate the possibility for improved understanding of language shift and sociolinguistic contexts gained by integrating multiple methods. For this reason, I have chosen to privilege breadth over depth of focus on any single methodological approach. It is my hope that combining three separate sociolinguistic approaches has resulted in a better, more holistic understanding of language shift in the Iyasa context, leading to the possibility of more effective revitalization efforts, as well as contributing a body of primary materials in and about Iyasa for the documentary record.

1.3 Notes on navigating this dissertation

All research for this dissertation was completed under the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa IRB, approval CHS #22498. Data collected for, and referenced within, this dissertation (audio files and, where possible, ELAN annotations for these audio files) are archived at the Kaipuleohone1 archive at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. Timestamps in blue text (e.g., AKB1-035:00:20:11) are references to specific audio files in Kaipuleohone, with the following format: filename:hour:minute:second. These references are hyperlinked directly to the relevant entry in the Kaipuleohone archive, in the interest of facilitating further interaction with the data. Interview excerpts presented as block quotes are presented first in the original French, in regular

1 http://ling.hawaii.edu/kaipuleohone-language-archive/
sans serif text, with English translations below in italic sans serif text. Interview excerpts are transcribed using the conventions of Discourse Transcription 2 (Du Bois et al. 1992), modified slightly for space by condensing sequential intonation units into one line.

Ages listed after participant names are their age at the time of their participation in the study (between 2016 and 2018; if a person was interviewed or recorded during multiple years, the age listed reflects their age at the time of the recording being discussed). I asked participants in this research to choose whether they wished to be identified by name, and to have their first names used in conjunction with their responses. Some participants wished to be given credit for their knowledge and contributions, so I have honored that wish by using their first names in the body of this dissertation, and their full names may be found in the metadata file archived with these recordings in Kaipuleohone. Others did not feel comfortable being identified; if they expressed this preference, I did not ask any follow-up questions which might have been construed as encouraging them to change their minds. Those who collaborated most closely with me and were integral to the success of this work, such as the teachers of the Iyasa bo workshop, are identified by their full names within the body of the dissertation. Names beginning with a tilde (e.g., ~Serge), following the conventions of the Discourse Transcription 2 system (Du Bois et al. 1992), are pseudonyms assigned by me to participants who chose not to be identified by name. All pseudonyms are consistent across chapters, so that a ~Serge referred to in Chapter 2 would be the same person as a ~Serge referred to in Chapter 4.

Below is a list of conventions used in transcriptions in this dissertation.

1.3.1 List of transcription conventions

Discourse Transcription 2 (DT2) conventions, used for excerpts in Chapters 2–4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNA;</td>
<td>Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNA\HAWAOU;</td>
<td>Speaker’s specific addressee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Continuative intonation unit boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
<td>Terminative intonation unit boundary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@</td>
<td>Truncated intonation unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@</td>
<td>Laughter (each @ represents one “pulse” of laughter)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 I have chosen to use pseudonyms rather than referring to e.g., “Speaker 62,” because the use of numbers for some participants (especially when others are identified by a first name) feels rather sterile and dehumanizing to me. For all pseudonyms, I have chosen common Francophone first names which reflect the gender of the participant.
Audible inhalation
Vocalism, e.g., (TSK)
Elongated syllable (multiple colons represent more elongation)
Author comments
Pause (in seconds)
Inaudible segment
Uncertain word or syllable
Overlapping speech (multiple overlaps indicated by subscript numbers)
Content omitted for space

Glossing transcriptions, used for Iyasa data in Chapter 4:

1/2/3 first/second/third person
ART article
AUX auxiliary
CL noun class
CONJ conjunction
FUT future tense
INF infinitive
PL plural
PREP preposition
PST past tense
SG singular
Chapter 2: Iyasa Language Shift in Context

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the context in which Iyasa is spoken. I begin with a sketch of the Iyasa language and its cultural and historical context. I then discuss the geographic context in which Iyasa is spoken, as well as patterns of mobility described by the Iyasa speakers interviewed. Next, I provide an overview of the other languages spoken in the Campo Sub-Division, and their relationships to Iyasa. Information about Iyasa’s geographic, linguistic, and historical context is drawn from a range of sources, including colonial, missionary, and scholarly documents, conversations with local officials, and personal observation; however, I aim in this chapter, as throughout this dissertation, to foreground accounts of the language’s context as described by Iyasa people themselves. The chapter concludes with a description of the context of the research conducted for this dissertation, including an autoethnographic account of the researcher’s background, training, aims, and experiences conducting the research.

2.1. The study of language shift, endangerment, maintenance, and revitalization

In talking about situations in which speakers are ceasing to use a language, a wide variety of terms, ideas, and frameworks are commonly used. Some will be adopted for the purposes of this dissertation, while others are not entirely appropriate for the Iyasa context. All, however, have contributed to the scholarly dialogue on language endangerment, shift, and maintenance, and have influenced the thinking which went into this project. This section briefly outlines some of the key concepts in language endangerment, shift, maintenance, and revitalization, notes the terms which will be used (or not) in this dissertation, and the rationale for applying them.

2.1.1. Terms used to discuss linguistic vitality

The systematic study of language shift and maintenance is widely considered to have been pioneered by Joshua Fishman, the “father of the sociology of language,” whose interest in the topic was sparked by concerns for the maintenance of his own language, Yiddish. While Fishman built upon earlier works by scholars in sociolinguistics, anthropology, and dialectology such as Uriel Weinreich, Charles Ferguson, and Einar Haugen, he was the first to propose a dedicated field of study pertaining to macro-level processes of language shift. Fishman’s (1964)
“Language maintenance and language shift as a field of inquiry” proposes the first systematic definition of LS/LM:

The study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change (or stability) in habitual language use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language use are in contact with each other. That languages (or language variants) SOMETIMES replace each other, among SOME speakers, particularly in CERTAIN types or domains of language behavior, under SOME conditions of intergroup contact, has long aroused curiosity and comment. However, it is only in quite recent years that this topic has been recognized as a field of systematic inquiry among professional students of language behavior. (Fishman 1964:32)

In short, language shift is a possible outcome of any language contact situation, but by no means a guaranteed one. LS/LM is concerned with changes in habitual language use, specifically the wholesale replacement of one linguistic variety by another, over time. Fishman’s (1964) definition is still applicable to the study of LS/LM today; the fundamental question he sets forth, why certain speaker populations sometimes undergo language shift under specific circumstances while others do not, is still a hotly debated one. More than fifty years later, linguists are still proposing new typologies of LS/LM, and devising new frameworks to predict the impacts of a given set of factors on a language shift situation (for discussion of Iya’sa’s place within various vitality assessment metrics, see §3.5).

Language endangerment (LE) is, broadly speaking, a subcategory of language shift. While LS may refer to any speaker population’s shift away from the use of any language, LE refers to a scenario in which a language faces the loss of all of its speakers through shift to (an)other language(s). The general concept of language “death” extends back to antiquity, but modern study of language endangerment began in earnest with early twentieth-century linguistic anthropology, particularly in North America, which gave significant attention to “salvage linguistics” and description of “moribund” languages, motivated by the widespread destruction of North American cultures and languages brought about by European colonization and the North American genocide. The romanticized notion of “last speakers” gained traction with well-publicized cases of individuals like Ishi, the final survivor of the Yahi tribe (Kroeber 1961; see Evans 2001, Hill 2002, Muehlmann 2012, Leonard 2008, and Davis 2017, inter alia, for
contemporary discussion of the notion of “last speaker”). Early anthropologists working in language documentation and description such as Leonard Bloomfield, Morris Swadesh, Franz Boas, and Edward Sapir took initial steps towards examining the mechanisms of language endangerment. Bloomfield (1927) discusses issues in studying languages with contracting speaker populations (specifically Menominee), and makes early reference to what are now termed the “structural consequences of language death” (cf. Campbell & Muntzel 1989), which he called “the impact of the conquering language” (Bloomfield 1927:437). Two decades later, Swadesh (1948) introduced the term “obsolescent” to refer to languages in the process of losing all of their speakers, though it should be noted he had been using the term “dying tongues” since at least 1938 (1948:226).

Below, I list some of the most common terms in the field of language endangerment, whether or not they will be used in this dissertation, and why.

**LANGUAGE SHIFT:** the process by which a speech community in a language contact situation stops using one of their languages in favor of (an)other(s)\(^3\).

This term is widely used in this dissertation in lieu of the term “endangerment”—not because there is not a very real possibility of the Iyasa language ceasing to be spoken altogether, but because “language shift” refers more broadly to the processes and mechanisms of replacing one language with other language(s), as well as out of respect for the discomfort some researchers have with using terms that invoke the rhetoric and logic of conservation biology to describe linguistic realities.

**LANGUAGE ATTRITION:** the process by which an individual ceases to use, or be able to use, a given language.

I use the term **ATTRITION** in this dissertation to refer to an individual’s loss of ability in, or cessation of use of, a language – essentially as the individual-level equivalent of community-level **LANGUAGE SHIFT**.

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\(^3\) Definition adapted from Ravindranath 2009:v; modified to reflect the Iyasa context of societal multilingualism rather than bilingualism.
**Language Endangerment**: a scenario in which a language faces the loss of all of its speakers through shift to (an)other language(s), or, in the most extreme cases, through the death of all of its speakers. This has also been described with the related term **Language Obsolescence** (e.g., Dorian 1986).

This term is used somewhat interchangeably with “language shift” in this dissertation, as the Iyasa context is one of both language endangerment and language shift, but where possible I will refer to “language shift.” When specifically referring to the concept that Iyasa may cease to be spoken entirely, I use the term “language endangerment.” I do not use the term **Obsolescence** both because it is no longer commonly used at the time of writing, and because it could be interpreted to imply that languages facing endangerment are somehow “obsolete” in the modern world.

**Language Death** and **Language Extinction**: the situation in which a language has completely ceased to be used, and has no remaining speakers. **Language Extinction** is sometimes used to specifically denote languages which are no longer spoken, which have no “rememberers” (Grinevald 2003:66), and which have no ties to a community’s ethnic or social identity, as in the EGIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010) and the UNESCO framework for measuring language vitality (UNESCO 2003).

I use neither of these terms in this dissertation, except when quoting or referring to materials which use these terms, primarily for the reason that they incorrectly imply that language loss must necessarily be permanent, like biological death, which discourages revival efforts (see Leonard 2011; Belew & Simpson 2018). The terms **Death** and **Extinction** may also carry problematic implications that the people who speak or spoke a given language no longer exist, perpetuating the already-rampant erasure of Indigenous and minoritized peoples from dominant discourses.

**Language Dormancy**: the situation in which a language has no remaining speakers, but may be “awakened” (i.e., may begin to be used again).

I use the term “dormant” in this dissertation to refer to languages which have no living speakers, as this term allows for the possibility of the language to be revived and spoken once more, unlike the terms **Death** and **Extinction**.
**Language Vitality:** a general term for a language’s overall sustainability and need for maintenance or revitalization interventions. **Language Vitality** may be understood as something like the inverse of endangerment—a more endangered language can be considered less vital, and vice versa. On another level, **Vitality** may also be used as an umbrella term for assessing degrees of shift, endangerment, maintenance, and revitalization.

I use the term **Vitality** in this dissertation primarily to describe overall assessments of languages’ state of shift, endangerment, or sustainability, e.g., in §3.5.

**Language Maintenance:** efforts or processes which facilitate an existing group of speakers to continue using a shifting, or potentially shifting, language.

While “it may be difficult to sharply differentiate between [language maintenance and language revitalization]” (Grenoble 2013:793), I use this term throughout this dissertation to refer to processes or factors which support the continued use of the Iyasa language among those who are able to speak it.

**Language Revitalization:** efforts to reverse language shift (originating in the concept that Fishman (1991) calls **Reversing Language Shift**), and to facilitate a language being spoken more often, in more situations, more proficiently, and/or by more people.

As Grenoble (2013:793) defines the two terms, **Maintenance** is “intended to foster language use when there is already a speaker community in place but that community feels pressure from other languages,” whereas **Revitalization** is “needed when the language is undergoing shift, with the single biggest indicator of attrition being that children—most or many—are no longer learning the language.” Both terms could felicitously describe language efforts in the Iyasa context, since there is both an existing speaker community, and shift/attrition with disrupted intergenerational transmission (see

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4 Definition adapted from Roche (2017:193), who adds the important caveat: “Vitality is not a property of a language itself, nor of a population that speaks a language, but rather a description of the relationship between a language, its speakers, and its wider linguistic, social, and political context.”
§3.2.2 and §3.5). I will use the term **LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION** to refer to efforts to *reverse* processes of language shift and endangerment in Iyasa, not simply to stave them off or prevent their effects (as with **LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE**). The project described in Chapter 5 is thus described as a revitalization program, since its goals include actively reversing some effects of language shift, such as limited (or non-) acquisition and use of Iyasa by younger speakers.

2.2. The Iyasa language: Overview

Iyasa [ISO 639-3: yko], also known as Yasa, Yassa, or Iyassa, is a Northwest Bantu language, classified in the A.30 Guthrie group by Chumbow et al. (2007), and more precisely as (A.33a) by Maho (2009). Iyasa is a relatively under-documented and under-described language; there are few existing descriptive materials on Iyasa language and culture. Known exceptions include Mondjeli-Mapeta (2009), an Iyasa author’s history of the Iyasa people; Bouh Ma Sitna (2004), an MA thesis describing Iyasa’s nominal syntax; Lonfo (2009), an MA thesis which includes a sketch of Iyasa’s phonology, linguistic vitality, and proposals for revitalization activities; Ndiva Bolongo Elomba (2015), a brochure with a number of Iyasa proverbs; and Bōt (2011a), a description of Iyasa nominal prefixes, and (2011b), a description of derivational verbal morphology. None except Mondjeli-Mapeta (2009) and Bōt (2011a; 2011b) has been formally published. In addition to these materials, Cyrille Bothe, an Iyasa speaker, has written a descriptive grammar of the language; it is in the process of being typed and digitized by SIL-Cameroon. Compared to related groups such as the Duala and Bakweri, Iyasa culture and language have received very little scholarly attention (see, e.g., Ardener 1956, an ethnographic description of the “Kpe [Bakweri]-Mboko, Duala-Limba, and Tanga-Yasa groups,” which contains a cumulative three paragraphs regarding Iyasa in its 114-page span).

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5 This work bears the gloomy title *The Iyasa: From Glory to Decline*, which serves as a poignant illustration of some speakers’ perception of their prospects for cultural maintenance.

6 Cyrille Bothe is an Iyasa self-trained linguist, language activist, and local organizer for the Sawabantu (the larger cultural complex of which Iyasa is a part) community. His grammar of Iyasa, in addition to being an extremely useful record of the language’s structure and usage, has been compiled without formal training in linguistics, and should be of considerable interest to linguists researching metalinguistic knowledge and speaker representations of language. I hope to secure an unedited copy of the handwritten manuscript, with Mr. Bothe’s permission, to include in the archival materials for Iyasa.
Iyasa speakers consider themselves to belong to two large cultural complexes, both of which are linked strongly with coastal identity and lifeways: Ndowe and Sawabantu (Cyrille Bothe p.c., Dan Duke p.c.). The term Ndowe (or playeros, ‘beach people’ in Spanish) is associated with the coastal Bantu peoples of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon—the Ndowe area may be seen as stretching south from the Iyasa area down to Gabon. The Ndowe peoples are considered to have two primary subdivisions: the Bongwe, those whose languages have ngwe or iwe for the first person singular pronoun (Iyasa, Kombe, and the majority of other Ndowe languages stretching down to Rio Benito in Equatorial Guinea), and the Boumba (or Bomba), those whose languages have mba orumba for the first person singular (Batanga, Duala, Balimba, and Benga) (Ambroise Bolongo, AKB1-066:00:11:08; A’Bodjedi 2009; Cyrille Bothe p.c., Simons and Fennig 2018).

The Sawabantu (‘coast/beach Bantu’ in Duala) languages are those spoken along the coast extending north from Iyasa territory (see Figure 2.1), and include most languages in Guthrie groups A.20 and A.30, including the vehicular language Duala [dua], the indigenous language of Douala, Cameroon’s largest and most economically powerful city. Sawabantu-speaking peoples have a number of shared cultural practices which are seen as iconic of coastal identity, including jengu festivals (wherein yearly offerings are made to the jengu, or sea people) and a distinctive formal outfit for male nobles comprising a white shirt, black skirt, and knit cap (Austen & Derrick 1999). Many Iyasa people describe themselves as members of both the Sawabantu and Ndowe groups, as today’s Iyasa territory falls approximately at the geographical divide between the two areas.

A thorough description of Ndowe and Sawabantu languages and cultures is beyond the scope of this chapter, but see Austen & Derrick (1999) on Duala and Sawabantu history; Greig (1881) for an early anthropological account of Ndowe and Sawa cultures; A’Bodjedi (2009) on Ndowe history and culture; and Dyangani (2008) on Ndowe cultural identity.

2.3. Iyasa in historic context

A volume on the history of the Iyasa people has been published by Iyasa author Hilarien Ndjokou Mondjeli-Mapeta (2009), as well as a forthcoming manuscript by Iyasa historian Oscar Makou. The Spanish-language newsletter S’ngo Mboka,7 which covers news and events for the

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7 http://en.calameo.com/accounts/661225
Equatorial Guinean Ndowe community, also runs periodic features on Ndowe history. This section is not intended to serve as a comprehensive or definitive account of Iyasa history; rather, it aims to supplement the aforementioned sources with accounts of Iyasa history as told by several other Iyasa speakers, and to contextualize the present situation of the language.

The Iyasa are reported to have migrated to the Cameroon coast, led by a general named Mosuwa mwa Ekube, from present-day Congo (–Serge, AKB1-011:00:15:06; –Gabriel, AKB1-005:00:40:45; Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:38:25; Ma Tekila, AKB1-054:00:31:09) several centuries in the past, though Ambroise Bolongo places the origins of the Iyasa in Gabon (AKB1-066:00:00:41). Many accounts place the Iyasa migration as having first arrived in Equatorial Guinea, and then moving northwards to Cameroon (Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:38:30; Oscar Makou, AKB1-075). Exact dates provided for the Iyasa migration vary, ranging from the 13th century (Adolphe Idjabe, AKB1-010:01:23:11) to the 15th or 16th century (Oscar Makou, AKB1-075). Oscar Makou describes the Iyasa heading towards the coast in search of salt, arriving at the coast of Equatorial Guinea near the present-day village of Edjabe, just inland of the mouth of the Rio Campo. However, they were forced out of Edjabe by conflict with the Kombe, and traveled north to the site of Itonde Mer. Itonde Mer is reported to be the first Iyasa village founded in Cameroon, and the site of the tomb of Mosuwa mwa Ekube. Soon, the population of Itonde Mer grew too large to remain in a single village, and Bouandjo, Mbendji, and Ebodje (/e bo je?/ ‘how is it up ahead?’ being the question posed by a party of settlers to the scouts seeking a site for a new village) were founded. Other Iyasa villages were founded subsequently, though no speakers interviewed were able to provide additional information about the founding of Campo Ville, Beyɔ, or Ipenyenje. Some speakers have also reported that the Iyasa and other coastal peoples were particularly afflicted by the slave trade between the 17th and 19th centuries, and many Iyasa were sold into slavery via the port at Douala (AKB1-054:00:34:46).

In 1883, American Presbyterian missionaries at Corisco founded a printing press to print a Benga version of the Bible, and in 1885 set up a mission station around Grand Batanga, roughly 40 km north of Mbendji (Missions 1893). A group of Iyasa youth from Mbendji traveled to Grand Batanga to study theology, and thereafter, Mbendji was the first Iyasa village where a church was established; a missionary orthography for Iyasa was subsequently established (likely first in Mbendji) at some point, and is still in use among a few older speakers today. Campo Beach was founded in the late 19th century, when Mosuwa Mwindjeba, a resident of Mbendji,
developed an interest in commerce. He traveled to Equatorial Guinea and made contact with a Spanish merchant, and subsequently set up a trading post at the mouth of the Rio Campo (reportedly at the very spot where Campo Beach’s small store now stands). Shortly thereafter, Mosuwa Mwindjeba passed away and left the trading post to his son Dipika, who found great commercial success in trade with the German firm of Roderling (Oscar Makou, AKB1-075). The island of Dipikar, 5 km upstream from the mouth of the Rio Campo, which is now a gorilla sanctuary and military base for the Cameroon Navy, is said to be named after the trader and founder of Campo Beach (with an epenthetic “r” due to German misspelling).

Traces of the German occupation of the present-day South Region of Cameroon (then the German Kamerun), from 1884 to 1916, can be seen today in several Iyasa villages: the Catholic church at Ebodje constructed by Germans in 1900 (Nguepjouo 2005); the remnants of a large coffee and cocoa plantation constructed by a German on the island of Dipikar (Oscar Makou, AKB1-075; Ambroise Bolongo, AKB1-066:00:16:16); and a small German graveyard at the edge of Campo Beach, near the present-day BAFUMAR base.

During World War I, the naval operations of the Kamerun campaign had a disastrous impact on the coastal peoples of southern Cameroon, including the Iyasa. Naval battles took place between 1914 and 1916 along the coast from Douala to Cocobeach in present-day Gabon. Campo, at the time a German base, was shelled in August of 1914. Many people were killed at Itonde Mer and other Iyasa villages during the Kamerun campaign’s naval operations; when the battle at Itonde Mer began, fishermen were at sea and did not hear (or did not understand) the warning signals. ~Serge describes the bombardment of Itonde Mer:


At Itonde Mer, the 1914 war [...] the Germans against the French. Yes. They came out of Itonde Mer from behind. The people were fishing. That’s it. Fishing over there, they started shooting

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8 While ~Serge at the time of the interview was in his 70s, and was not born at the time of World War I, he recalled the events as told by family members.
people. They were at sea and the war arrived. We didn’t know the signals, the signals that the Fang were signaling. We didn’t know to beat [the drums]. Yes. When they were beating the march there. That look—here are the soldiers, here are the soldiers. Everyone was fishing. So as we didn’t—we didn’t hear that. There they started shooting, boom boom boom boom boom. It was a field—ah you went there everywhere everywhere there were there were the the the—there were bones. Bones. Yes. Bones of—of—of people. Everywhere. 

(AKB1-011:00:07:55)

Some Iyasa people who survived the bombardments fled to Equatorial Guinea, specifically Edjabe, and remained there after the conclusion of the war. Following the surrender of the Germans, the German forces formerly stationed in Campo fled to Equatorial Guinea, at the time a Spanish colony (Ambroise Bolongo, AKB1-066:00:18:40). Most of the former German Kamerun, including the present-day South Region, became the French territory of Cameroun, and French colonial systems were implemented, including French-only education which generally forbid students from speaking languages other than French at school. ~Louise discusses her experiences at school in the 1950s⁹:

On commençait nous punir parce que, on a parlé la langue maternelle dans la cour de récréation. [...] Les enseignants nous ont tapé. Oui. Ils punissaient, tout parce que, et puis ## en plus, c’est les camarades qui, parce que tu as parlé yasa il va aller dire, @@ au maître que, "oh [Louise] a parlé la langue maternelle".

They started to punish us because, we’d spoken the mother tongue in the yard at recess. [...] The teachers hit us. Yes. They punished us, all because, and then ## more, it’s the classmates who, because you spoke Yasa he’s going to tell @@ the teacher that, “oh [Louise] spoke the mother tongue”.

(AKB1-007:00:25:04)

In the 1970s, the Kribi-Campo road was constructed, providing a direct link between Campo and Kribi, a sizeable Cameroonian city. Prior to the construction of the Campo-Kribi road, says Oscar Makou, the Iyasa area had closer contact with Equatorial Guinea than with the rest of Cameroon (AKB1-075). The road is reported to have been well-maintained and functional from the 1970s through the late 1990s, unlike today (see §3.1.2), and provided greater mobility between the Iyasa area and Kribi, as well as the rest of Cameroon via Kribi.

The 1990s and 2000s saw a number of significant changes in the Iyasa area, including the construction of two military bases in Campo Beach, the creation of the Campo-Ma’an National

⁹ See page 6 for a list of transcription conventions used in this dissertation; as a reminder, @ represents pulses of laughter, while # indicates an uncertain word or syllable.
Park adjacent to Campo Ville, and the construction of a deep-water shipping port at Lolabe; §3.1.1-3.1.9 provide further details about the recent changes in each of these towns.

2.4. Iyasa in geographic context

![Figure 2.1: Iyasa population centers in Cameroon](image)

Today, Iyasa is primarily spoken in southern Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, in several coastal villages which span the Cameroon-Equatorial Guinea border (delimited by the Rio Campo river). The Iyasa area is comprised of sandy coastline to the west, immediately bounded by rainforest to the east. In Equatorial Guinea, Iyasa is spoken in one to five villages, including
the village of Edjabe along the Rio Campo. The status of other reported Iyasa-speaking villages in Equatorial Guinea is unclear, but E.G. villages listed as Iyasa-speaking include Edjabe, Tika, Isamba, and Bouabe (Paul, AKB1-092:00:22:44)\(^\text{10}\) and perhaps another called Mbonda. It should be noted that the status of Iyasa in Equatorial Guinea is outside the scope of this dissertation. The E.G. border crossing and customs station is located at Campo Beach, where I resided when in the Campo area, and the house where I stayed is perhaps 100 yards from the Rio Campo. However, I have been repeatedly warned by Campo residents that foreigners, especially Americans, who do not possess a carte organisme (organizational ID) identifying them as missionaries or diplomats will experience serious difficulty, and possibly trouble, crossing the Rio Campo into Equatorial Guinea.\(^\text{11}\) For these reasons, as well as my lack of proficiency in Spanish (the national language of Equatorial Guinea), I have not attempted the border crossing.

As of 2018, there are nine villages in Cameroon which speakers identify as wholly or partly Iyasa-speaking. All of these villages lie within the Campo Sub-Division (Arrondissement de Campo) of Océan Division, South Region. The Campo Sub-Division was the sixth most sparsely populated of Cameroon’s 336 Sub-Divisions and urban divisions as of the 2005 national census, and the most sparsely populated Sub-Division in the South Region, with 2.51 persons per square kilometer (BUČREP 2005). Figure 2.1 above presents a map of the Iyasa-speaking area, with villages marked with geocoordinates collected in 2016. Table 2.1 outlines these villages and provides rough estimates of their populations.

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\(^{10}\) Paul is the only Equatoguinean interviewed for this project; he was visiting a relative in Campo Beach at the time of the interview.

\(^{11}\) I spent many pleasant evenings sitting on the Cameroonian side of the Rio Campo looking across at Equatorial Guinea, but this sometimes attracted armed military officers who demanded to know what I was doing and ordered me to leave the sensitive border area. These stern warnings, coupled with reports of the “brutality” of Guinean soldiers, deterred me from attempting the crossing.
Table 2.1: Cameroonian population centers where Iyasa speakers are concentrated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town12</th>
<th>Population Size13</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M hombo (Campo Beach)</td>
<td>~300</td>
<td>Small majority of Iyasa residents; immigrants working at military and customs; heavy traffic for border crossing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bok mbɛ (Campo Ville)</td>
<td>~7,000</td>
<td>Very mixed: Iyasa, Mvae, Mabea, Fulbe, Bamileke, Hausa, other Cameroonian and Nigerian groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ipenyenje</td>
<td>~10</td>
<td>Iyasa; nearly abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bwanjo (Bouandjo)</td>
<td>~200</td>
<td>Iyasa and Mvae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itonde Mer</td>
<td>~15</td>
<td>Iyasa, Mvae, Nigerian (formerly, largest Iyasa village; now a small fishing camp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyɔ (Rocher du Loup)</td>
<td>~15</td>
<td>Iyasa; very few houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbenji (Mbendji)</td>
<td>~5</td>
<td>Iyasa; nearly abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eboje (Ebodj )</td>
<td>~700</td>
<td>Iyasa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lolabe</td>
<td>~200</td>
<td>Iyasa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4.1. Iyasa villages

The following section provides background information on the villages and towns where Iyasa is spoken today. The descriptions that follow are constrained by the limits of my firsthand experience (I have not been able to spend time in all of the villages listed), and the information provided by interview participants; as a result, the following focuses on the villages of Campo Beach, Campo Ville, and Ebodje, where I have spent the most time. However, these three towns are also the sites of three very different situations for language shift and maintenance, which will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

2.4.1.1. Campo Beach (M hombo mwa Etémbo ‘fishing [camp] on the Ntem River’ in Iyasa, usually referred to as M hombo for short14), is the southernmost Iyasa village in

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12 Iyasa names for each village are presented first, with any differing official/popular names in parentheses.
13 Population estimates are drawn from the Cameroonian national census, conversations with local officials and Iyasa speakers, and personal observation, and should be considered only estimates.
14 Though Ambroise Bolongo, the oldest person in the area, reports that the true name of M hombo is in fact Mbo mbo, I could not confirm this with any other speakers who were asked about it.
Cameroon, as well as my place of residence during fieldwork. It has roughly 300 residents, of whom a small majority are Iyasa (though some Iyasa speakers perceive Beach as now being predominantly “foreigners,” e.g., ~Justine, AKB1-035:0045:14). In the past 10 to 20 years, a growing number of “foreigners” (people from outside Ocan Division) have moved to Campo Beach, due to its military bases and its trade activity with Equatorial Guinea. It is located at the mouth of the Rio Campo, which forms the border with Equatorial Guinea; the city of Rio Campo is just across the river. Within the past decade, an outpost for the Cameroonian Bataillon de Fusiliers Marins (BAFUMAR) has been constructed in Campo Beach, and a base for the Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (BIR) was constructed within the past five years (~Charlotte, AKB1-094:00:12:40). As a result, several hundred soldiers from other parts of the country are now stationed in Campo Beach (though many of them reside in Campo Ville, 2 km up the road), which represents a significant change in the demographics of the village. In addition to the BIR and BAFUMAR, there is a police station and customs control at the Equatorial Guinea border crossing, at the mouth of the Rio Campo. Soldiers stationed in Campo and Campo Beach do not generally learn any Iyasa, nor did those I asked about it express any interest in doing so (though during a recording in Campo Beach’s small store, a soldier thanked the shopkeeper with “ak va,” and responded in French to a few simple questions in Iyasa; AKB1-058:00:02:00). Most travel and trade between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea passes through the border crossing at Campo Beach, and Campo Beach is strongly linked to E.G. both economically and in terms of mobility. Travelers going to or from E.G. frequent the bars near the border crossing, and one of the main cash jobs available to young men in Campo Beach is offloading and transporting products and passengers from E.G. As the economy of Equatorial Guinea has taken a steep downturn since E.G.’s economic recession in 2014, and trade via Campo Beach has declined, less and less work of this kind is available. Many residents are concerned about what this will mean for the town; “if Guinea dies, Campo Beach dies,” noted ~Pierre (AKB1-058). However, Campo Beach is also a center for Iyasa cultural activity; there is an Iyasa women’s association which meets weekly, as well as semi-regular cultural events such as dances. Campo Beach, along with Ebodje, is reported to be one of the villages which has retained more Iyasa tradition and culture than other villages (Sammy Mbipite, AKB1-071:00:30:48).

2.4.1.2. **Campo Ville** (Bok mbe in Iyasa) is the primary urban center of the Iyasa area, and the capital of the Campo Sub-Division, with roughly 7,000 residents as of the 2005 national
census (a number which has almost certainly grown a great deal between 2005 and 2018, when my fieldwork concluded). Campo has undergone major changes within the past few decades, particularly in its demographics and the status of the land surrounding it. In 1999, the Campo-Ma’an National Park, which incorporated the former Ma’an Plantation into the Campo Reserve as a protected biodiversity area, was established by the Cameroonian government to offset some of the environmental damage from the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline (Owono 2001). This has led to the opening of a WWF office in Campo, and a number of tourism initiatives centering around the park (though tourists are rare in Campo; I have only seen a handful). Despite the possible influx of funding and tourism from this park, Campo’s economic conditions and infrastructure are seen by most residents as having worsened in recent years. The dirt road which links Campo to Kribi, the main city in the South Region, is in very poor condition (although promises of major renovations have been circulating for the last several years); during the rainy season in particular, it is completely impassable to large vehicles like buses and cargo trucks, and even small cars and motorcycles often become lodged in the mud. This has had an adverse effect on the economy of Campo, as manufactured goods and consumer products are increasingly difficult to import, and the difficulty of travel to Campo hampers trade and tourism. As Sammy Mbipite describes, Campo has grown in population but declined in terms of development since he was a child in the 1980s:

[Quand j’étais petit] bon Campo était plus petit en termes de, d’habitants, nombre de personnes, des maisons, tout ça, et bien ###, mais ce n’était pas petit de point de vue de développement. Ça n’a pas beaucoup évolué de point de vue de développement […] Mais il y a beaucoup de choses qui sont venues, beaucoup de nouvelles choses, il y a beaucoup plus de boutiques, beaucoup plus d’étrangers, beaucoup d’activité mais, c’est pas vraiment la développement en tant que tel. La route était beaucoup meilleur que celle-ci par exemple, la route était très bonne. […] Donc pour moi de point de vue de, du modernisme et développement, Campo était meilleur avant que maintenant.

[When I was small] well Campo was smaller in terms of, inhabitants, number of people, of houses, all that, and well ###, but it wasn’t small from the point of view of development. It hasn’t evolved much from the point of view of development […] But there are a lot of things which have come, a lot of new things, there are a lot more shops, a lot more foreigners, a lot of activity but it’s not really development per se. The road was a lot better for example, the road was really good. […] So for me in terms of, of modernity and development, Campo was better before than now.

(AKB1-071:00:35:41)
Within many interviewees’ memories, Campo Ville was primarily occupied by Iyasa, Mvae, and Mabea speakers. However, in the past several decades, there has been an influx of residents, traders, and workers from other parts of Cameroon. Campo Ville today is a linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous city, which has affected the role of Iyasa in the local linguistic ecology. As recently as the 1990s, most of Campo Ville’s quartiers were primarily inhabited by Iyasa, with only the neighborhood of Doum-Assi being comprised of mostly Mvae residents; today, however, most of these are ethnically mixed neighborhoods, with only the neighborhood of Bok mbe-Centre still being primarily Iyasa (AKB1-071:00:38:00). This is alarming to some Iyasa speakers in its possible effects on language and cultural maintenance; ~Serge expressed grave concerns about these demographic changes: “les Yasa sont finis. Bien sur que la ville, la ville grandi avec les étrangers” (“the Yasa are finished. Of course the city, the city [of Campo] is growing with foreigners”) (AKB1-011:00:35:47). Chapter 3 will discuss demographic changes in the Campo Sub-Division as related to speakers’ perceptions of language shift in more depth. When discussing populations who have recently settled in Campo, Iyasa speakers most commonly cite the Bamileke (e.g., AKB1-080:00:17:15, AKB1-005:00:21:02, AKB1-007:00:19:24, AKB1-008:00:17:13, AKB1-071:00:38:46, AKB1-011:00:36:05, AKB1-016:00:33:19, AKB1-035:00:45:48, AKB1-049:00:25:20), often with some concern about their presence — ~Georges referred to “les Bamileke qui envahissaient [Douala]” (“the Bamileke who devoured [Douala]”), fearing that the same would happen in Campo. Other large populations of recent immigration to Campo include “northerners,” primarily speakers of Fulfulde or Hausa (attitudes towards northerners may be inferred from “nordiste” being one of the most frequent responses to “are there any languages you don’t like to hear?”, e.g., AKB1-087:00:28:08); Basaa speakers; and speakers of Beti languages.

2.4.1.3. Ipenyenje is the third most southerly Iyasa village in Cameroon. I have not been able to visit Ipenyenje beyond passing it on the road, and have only limited information about it. Reportedly, it is entirely inhabited by Iyasa speakers (Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:27:45), but currently has a very small population, estimated at twenty people (Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:30:43) or four houses (~Elise, AKB1-036:00:23:25).

2.4.1.4 Bouandjo is another village I have not been able to visit beyond passing it on the road, but its population is reported to be around 200 (Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:30:58), and many
people describe it as being comprised of roughly half Iyasa residents and half Mvae residents. However, ~Justine reports that Bouandjo is mostly inhabited by Mvae today (AKB1-035:00:44:49).

2.4.1.5 Itonde Mer was, as recently as 20 years ago, one of the largest Iyasa villages. As described in §2.3, it is reported to be the first Iyasa village founded in Cameroon, and is still significant for being the site of the tomb of the great general Mosuwa mwa Ekube. In the past, it was also one of the primary centers of Iyasa culture (AKB1-071:00:30:48). However, it was abandoned over the last 20 years, reportedly after a spate of deaths occurred in the village (AKB1-011:00:06:45), and its residents dispersed to other cities, primarily Campo and Kribi. As Sammy Mbipite (35), who grew up at Itonde Mer, describes:

Bon moi j’ai vécu Itonde j’ai # grandi Itonde, Itonde maintenant il ya plus rien. Donc ça c’est ce qui ce—ce—c’est un village qui s’éteint devant moi. Parce que j’ai vécu l’-bas j’ai grandi l’-bas, tout les vacances j’étais l’-bas, quand il y avait encore beaucoup des gens.

Well me I lived in Itonde, I # grew up in Itonde, Itonde now there’s nothing left. So that’s what—it’s a village that was extinguished in front of me. Because I lived there, I grew up there, every holiday I was there, when there were still a lot of people.

(AKB1-071:00:34:05)

Today, Itonde Mer is still a fishing camp, though one without permanent residents. Fishermen from Campo frequently stay at Itonde Mer while fishing at sea.

2.4.1.6 Beyo, or Rocher du Loup, is another formerly large Iyasa village which has very few residents today. Its namesake coastal rock formation, the Rocher du Loup (‘Rock of the Wolf’) or Elombo, is among the most spiritually significant sites in Iyasa culture. There are currently three or four occupied houses at Beyo, but friends and relatives of the inhabitants come to stay there during the fishing seasons. Some speakers consider it one of the villages where one finds “good” or “pure” Iyasa.

2.4.1.7 Mbendji, about 2km south of Ebodje, is another village which was formerly populous, but has dispersed within very recent times; for example, Daniel Charmant Molongwa (born in 1993) grew up in Mbendji, and described it as being quite populous during his childhood. It was one of the first three villages founded after Itonde Mer, and was the first Iyasa village to build a Christian church after the arrival of American missionaries in the late 19th century, a notable fact for the development of Iyasa’s first orthography (see §2.2). Today, there are perhaps five to 20 residents at Mbendji. Daniel Charmant Molongwa also describes a unique
variety or register of Iyasa being spoken in Mbendji, one which he describes as being indirect, making heavy use of proverbs, and difficult for speakers from other villages to understand; when he is talking with friends from Mbendji, other speakers complain that their “Mbendji Iyasa” is difficult to follow. Further documentation of this variety is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but would be an interesting project for researchers interested in variation in Iyasa.

2.4.1.8 Eboje (Ebodje) is generally considered by Iyasa speakers to be the largest, or perhaps only, remaining “pure” Iyasa village in Cameroon. It has approximately 700 residents, of whom the vast majority are Iyasa, with the exception of a few in-married women and the schoolteachers assigned to the Ebodje schools (AKB1-010:01:44:44; AKB1-016:00:26:34). It is one of two Iyasa-speaking towns which have schools up to the secondary level (Campo Ville also has a secondary school, though it is currently defunct after a storm destroyed its roof). ~Marc (born in 1991) notes that when he was a child, all the students at the Ebodje schools were Iyasa, but there are now some Mvae students from Bouandjo. Ebodje is considered to be one of the strongest sites of Iyasa culture, and many speakers, when asked where the “best” Iyasa is spoken, or where Iyasa is spoken the most today, name Ebodje (AKB1-018:00:16:22; AKB1-038:00:13:58).

Eboje is also home to Tubè Aw (‘Our Ocean’), a community organization promoting conservation of marine life, combating poaching, and offering educational programs related to sea turtles and ecological conservation\textsuperscript{15}. In association with Tubè Aw, Eboje is home to an ecotourism initiative which attracts tourists primarily from Europe, the United States, and other countries to see the sea turtles which nest on the beaches at Eboje. Aside from these tourists, who number several hundred per year, outside traffic to Eboje is limited: the road which passes by Eboje from Kribi to Campo is in severe disrepair, and most passenger vehicles now go by the logging road which does not pass Eboje.

On the whole, Eboje is seen by many Iyasa speakers as the largest remaining bastion of “pure” Iyasa language and culture, and language maintenance there seems to be stronger than in other villages and towns (see Chapter 3).

2.4.1.9 Lolabe is the northernmost Iyasa village, and the most closely linked to Kribi; some Iyasa speakers report that Lolabe Iyasa is more influenced by Batanga than other varieties. Sammy Mbipite also reports that Lolabe residents claim their Iyasa is more influenced by Benga, though he disagrees with this assessment (AKB1-071:00:27:13). I have not yet had the chance to

\textsuperscript{15} https://www.facebook.com/Tube-Awù-Ebodjé-221432694993620/
spend time in Lolabe\textsuperscript{16}, so firsthand information is limited, but it is one of the larger Iyasa villages, with roughly 100-200 residents, of whom most are Iyasa. Lolabe is also the site of the new deep-water shipping Port Autonome de Kribi (PAK), which serves the Mbalm iron ore railway from the inland mining town of Mbalm. Construction began on the port in 2008, and it opened to general shipping traffic in March 2018\textsuperscript{17}. Much of the former site of the village was bulldozed for the construction of the port, and some residents left the village altogether, while others relocated to the new site of the village. The construction of the shipping port has brought an influx of workers from outside the region, both Cameroonian and Chinese (the port being constructed by Chinese firm China Harbour Engineering Co.); the linguistic landscape along the road in the vicinity of Lolabe is dotted with somewhat incongruous signs in Chinese and English, despite these being languages spoken by almost no one in Ocean Division. Many young people in the Campo Sub-Division expressed a desire to find work at the port after it opened, and the port’s presence is likely to change the demographic and linguistic makeup of the area around Lolabe. There are also concerns that the shipping activity at the port, and the marine pollution which may result, will harm the coastal fisheries which many Iyasa people rely on for their living.

\textbf{2.4.2. Geographic mobility among Iyasa speakers}

Mobility has been identified as a highly relevant factor in patterns of language shift and maintenance, though one which to date is understudied in sub-Saharan Africa. Geographic mobility, and the ties between language and place, are also identified by Iyasa speakers as one of the most salient factors in their perceptions of language shift and its causes (see Chapter 3). For that reason, the following section outlines patterns of geographic mobility among Iyasa speakers, drawn from speakers’ descriptions of their life histories during sociolinguistic interviews.

Of the 52 Iyasa speakers who provided information about their mobility history, 39 were born in one of the Iyasa villages described in §2.4.1 (one in Bouandjo, 17 in Campo Ville, eight in Campo Beach, 10 in Ebodje, and three in Mbendji). Two participants were born in Yaoundé, the national capital, and one was born in Douala, Cameroon’s largest city. In all of these cases,

\textsuperscript{16} I had planned to attend the Ndowe cultural festival held at Lolabe in December 2017, but the trip was cut off by a storm.

\textsuperscript{17} \url{http://www.pak.cm/en/kribi-port/}
the participants’ fathers were Iyasa civil servants who were stationed in these cities. Six others were born in other cities in Cameroon, including Bafang, Mbouda, and Bangou in the West Region, and Kribi and Ebolowa in the South Region. Three speakers were born in Equatorial Guinea, of whom two were brought to Cameroon as young children.

Geographic mobility is a near-ubiquitous feature of contemporary Cameroonian life; traveling for work, education, or short- and long-term visits to family is the norm for many people, and the Iyasa community is no exception. Of the interviewees who participated in this research, 21 had spent more than a year living outside the Campo Sub-Division at some point in their lives. The majority of these 21 had lived in Kribi, Yaoundé, or Douala, though several had also lived in the West Region (Ntung, Foumban, or Bafang), and one speaker had spent much of his childhood in Gabon.

Education was a common reason cited for mobility among Iyasa speakers. Especially for older speakers, who grew up when there were limited schooling options in the Campo Sub-Division, many traveled to other villages or cities for school (e.g., ~Justine was born in Campo Beach and raised in Ipenyenje, and ~Pierre was born and raised in Campo Beach, but both attended school in Campo Ville in the 1970s). Secondary education was not available in the Campo Sub-Division until recently, and it is still necessary to go to Kribi, Douala or Yaoundé for post-secondary education. Ambroise Bolongo, born in 1927, notes that in his day, one had to go to Gabon for education at the diplôme (high school diploma) level. Ebodje’s school system ends at 5ème (roughly 7th grade in the American system), and students who wish to complete their secondary education must go to Campo Ville. Only three interviewees had had post-secondary education. Cyrille Bothe, who is currently engaged in creating a directory of Sawabantu doctorates, reflected on the dearth of higher education among Iyasa speakers, especially with the more profitable prospect of fishing available to young men:

Malheureusement, les Iyasa n'ont qu'une poignée de docteurs [...] La cause de ce déficit d'intellectuels étant comprise et explicable par chacun, je suppose que de plus en plus Campo par famille va produire plus de scolarisés. Aujourd'hui, les pêcheurs qui disaient que la pêche (la tête vide) qui était l'unique activité est plus rentable que l'école. Nous avons perdu des générations d'hommes qui gagnaient en moyenne 30000cfa par jour de pêche [...] s'étant mis en tête que le poisson ne finit pas en mer.

Unfortunately, the Iyasa don’t have more than a handful of doctorates [...] The cause of this deficit being understood and explainable by everyone, I suppose that more and more families in Campo will produce more educated people. Today, fishermen who said that fishing (an empty head)
which was the only activity more profitable than school. We have lost generations of men who earned on average 30,000CFA [about $60 USD] per day by fishing [...] having gotten it into their heads that there is no end to the fish in the sea.

Cyrille Bothe, p.c., January 29, 2018

Mobility for purposes of employment, in addition to education, was common among interviewees. Several participants in this research had traveled extensively for their careers, particularly in the West Region. Many young men in the Campo Sub-Division also work as motorcycle drivers either in addition to, or instead of, fishing, and regularly travel between Campo and Kribi as part of their work.

In addition to speakers who travel between the Campo Sub-Division and other parts of Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, there are small diaspora populations of Iyasa speakers in Yaoundé, Douala, and Kribi. The number of Iyasa in Yaoundé and Douala is estimated at “hundreds” by Thierry, though in the late 1970s and early 1980s he reports there being only 36 members of the Iyasa njangi (community association, usually also a small-scale financial cooperative; see Ojong 2011; 2018 for descriptions of the njangi system) in Yaoundé, as not all Iyasa people in the city participated (AKB1-096:00:03:32). The status of the Iyasa language in larger cities was described differently by different interviewees, from Iyasa not being used at all in cities, to Iyasa being used fairly consistently among Iyasa speakers. However, speakers generally reported that there is no Iyasa quartier, or neighborhood where Iyasa speakers live in close proximity, in Douala, Yaoundé, or Kribi (AKB1-087:00:23:33). The existence of a quartier for a language group in Cameroonian cities seems to be a major factor in urban language maintenance, and the absence of such a quartier for Iyasa may affect its prospects for continued use among speakers in large cities. However, though speakers are geographically scattered in larger cities, as mentioned above, there are Iyasa njangi in Yaoundé, Douala, and Kribi.

In recent research on mobility between urban and rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa, it is emphasized that the “rural exodus,” in which rural populations are moving en masse to urban areas around the world, is likely to impact linguistic vitality. This often involves a transition from linguistic “homelands” (often rural areas), where a given language has many speakers in geographic proximity and opportunities for daily use are plentiful, to linguistically heterogeneous urban areas where public life is conducted primarily in a lingua franca (usually French, in the case of Francophone Cameroon). During the transition to urban areas, speakers of small languages may experience attrition due to reduced use of the language(s) associated with their
“homeland,” and if their children acquire their language(s) at all, they may acquire it in a limited way and/or use it infrequently. This is not always a linear process, though. It is common in Cameroon for mobility to be cyclical over people’s lifetimes, wherein young adults migrate to cities to work, have a career for several decades, then return to their villages for retirement. This is attested in the life histories of several Iyasa interviewees, but other speakers report that this pattern is somewhat different among Iyasa speakers; Thierry notes that some Iyasa families go to Yaoundé and stay there for generations, not returning due to conflicts with the wider community (AKB1-096:00:04:03), and ~Gabriel reports that many Iyasa people who migrate to cities never come back (AKB1-005:00:39:09). This may affect the patterns of language shift in this small speaker community, as speaking Iyasa in large cities is reported to be sporadic at best. (Although Mufwene 2017:e215 claims that migrants to cities from rural areas in Africa "feel little pressure to give up their ethnic languages, which help them bond among themselves" and that he has "seen no reports of small African rural populations decreasing in size owing to massive exodus to urban centers,” most reports of the Iyasa situation contradict this; see Chapter 3.) However, the relationships between mobility and language shift are complex; some families successfully transmit strong Iyasa skills to their children while living in large cities, and some children growing up in cities with Iyasa parents may feel a strong attachment to, and command of, the language despite the dearth of other speakers around them. Individuals’ accounts of Iyasa maintenance and shift in cities outside of the Campo Sub-Division will be explored further in Chapter 3.

2.5. Languages of the Campo Sub-Division

The Campo Sub-Division, like all of Cameroon, is a fairly linguistically diverse area. However, in keeping with its relatively sparse population (as described in 2.2), it is not home to the level of linguistic hyper-diversity found in areas like the Lower Fungom area of the North West Region (Di Carlo 2011; Good et al. 2011; Di Carlo & Good 2014) or the Mambila Plateau in the Adamawa Region (Connell 2009). There are four primary languages which, according to
the speakers interviewed\(^{18}\) (e.g., Charmant, AKB1-060:00:10:13; Thierry, AKB1-096:00:19:44), are considered indigenous to the Campo Sub-Division: Iyasa, Mvae, Mabea\(^{19}\), and “pygmy”\(^{20}\).

Mvae is a variety of Fang [fan], a major vehicular language of Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, and Sao Tome e Principe, estimated by the *Ethnologue* to have over one million speakers (Simons & Fennig 2018). In the Campo Sub-Division, Mvae speakers generally live further inland than Iyasa speakers, including within the Campo-Ma’an Park, and many Iyasa interviewees stressed the difference between the Mvae as “forest people” and the Iyasa as “coastal people.” Hunting is seen as primarily a Mvae activity in Campo Sub-Division, whereas Iyasa speakers generally focus on fishing\(^{21}\). Most Iyasa speakers interviewed consider the Mvae to be the other primary inhabitants of Campo Sub-Division, and particularly the city of Campo. Many Iyasa speakers report some degree of competence in Mvae. Language contact between Iyasa and Mvae has resulted in convergence of some common terms such as greetings and thanks: *mb lo* (with the response *mbolo*) is a shared greeting across Iyasa, Mvae, and Fang varieties extending into Gabon. Similarly, Iyasa *ak va* ‘thanks’ is reported to be a borrowing of Mvae *ak ba* ‘thanks’ (or vice versa). There seems to be an asymmetry in Mvae and Iyasa speakers’ competence in each other’s languages: Iyasa are more frequently reported to speak Mvae than vice versa. Arnauld Djowe notes:

> Les Mvae sont avec nous. Donc voilà pourquoi un Yasa forcément parle Mvae. Mais les Mvae c’est par #— c’est par orgueil qu’ils ne veulent même pas parler. Mais il y a quelques-uns quand même qui parlent Yasa.

> The Mvae are with us. Thus that’s why a Yasa necessarily speaks Mvae. But the Mvae it’s out of #— it’s out of arrogance that they don’t even want to speak. But there are some even so who speak Yasa.

\(^{18}\) However, the fact that interviewees were almost exclusively Iyasa may have affected the responses given on this count; it is possible that Mvae, Mabea, or Bagyele respondents might consider different groups to be indigenous to the Campo Sub-Division.

\(^{19}\) There is some controversy among residents of Ocean Division about whether the Mabea should be considered indigenous to the area, rather than relatively recent arrivals from further inland; the topic was sufficiently sensitive that several interviewees refused to speak about it until the recorder was turned off. I offer no opinion on the Mabea’s status as indigenous to Ocean Division, nor as coastal people; however, historical documents (such as Greig 1881) make reference to the Mabea in the vicinity of Grand Batanga, 17 km north of Lolabe, as early as the 1880s.

\(^{20}\) The Bagyele and Bakola groups of so-called “pygmies” in the Ocean Division speak several varieties of neighboring languages (see Ngu Um 2015), but Iyasa speakers generally refer to “pygmy” as both a language and ethnic group.

\(^{21}\) Sammy Mbipite, describing his erstwhile hobby of raising hunting dogs, said that while he doesn’t speak Mvae well, the dogs were trained entirely in Mvae and only responded to Mvae commands, since he learned to hunt and train dogs from Mvae friends.
Similarly, Charmant reports that most Iyasa speak Mvae, but it’s quite rare to find a Mvae person who speaks Iyasa:

Même les Mvae c’est #Cam—bon on leur—on leur compte. Ils n’atteignent même pas dix, ceux ce qui causent le Yasa. Ils n’atteignent pas dix. Mais presque tous les Yasa causent le Mvae.

Even the Mvae it’s in #Cam—well one—one can count them. They don’t even reach ten, those who speak Yasa. They don’t even reach ten. But almost all the Yasa speak Mvae.

A full description of Mvae-Iyasa language contact is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but would be a fruitful area for future research.

Mabea, also called Mabi, is a variety of Kwasio [nmg], which is spoken along the coast of southern Cameroon and in Equatorial Guinea by an estimated 22,000 people (Simons & Fennig 2018). The number of speakers of the Mabea variety is unclear. Today, the Mabea people reportedly occupy a liminal place between the status of “forest people” and “coastal people” (e.g., Arnauld Djowe states that “by contrast [to the Iyasa], the pygmies stayed in the forest with the Mabea,” AKB1-008:00:24:07), but they are generally perceived as coastal people like the Iyasa. Fewer Iyasa speakers report having competence in Mabea than Mvae, but 7 interviewees did report some active or passive knowledge of Mabea, and Thierry noted that most Mabea people in Campo Sub-Division are able to understand Iyasa (AKB1-096:00:19:57).

Finally, the “pygmy” peoples of Campo Sub-Division include the Bagyele and Bakola groups. These groups have traditionally been nomadic hunter-gatherers, but are increasingly settling (or being forcibly settled) in more permanent villages. The Bagyele in particular have been in contact with the Iyasa. In recent years there has been a Bagyele camp, Bibira, “attached” to Lolabe (Daniel Duke22, p.c., August 28, 2014; for more on the relationship between “pygmy” groups and agriculturalists in southern Cameroon, and the practice of “attaching” to a settled village for trade purposes, see Ngima Mawoung 2001; Bahuchet 2012; and Rupp 2003, inter

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22 Daniel Duke is a linguistic consultant with SIL-Cameroon who has lived and worked in the South Region for over 20 years, and has been involved in SIL’s Bagyele, Batanga, and Iyasa projects, among others.
alia). With the construction of the deep-water shipping port and bulldozing of much of the area around Lolabe, the former inhabitants of the Bibira camp have been settled in a new permanent village constructed by the government. There is also a Bagyele camp which is periodically “attached” to Ebodje (Albert Ndomi, p.c.). As a result, some Bagyele groups are reported to use Iyasa as one of their primary languages; however, none of my trips to Ebodje coincided with the Bagyele being there, so I cannot provide detailed information about the Bagyele’s use of Iyasa. Most of the Bagyele and Bakola groups are more likely to claim Kwassi or Fang varieties as their primary language (though this is complicated and difficult to assess; see Ngu Um 2015, Mous et al. 2012).

In addition to the “indigenous” languages of Campo Sub-Division, a number of “foreign” languages are now spoken in the area. With respect to Iyasa language shift, the most relevant of these is French, the official language of the South Region and one of two23 official languages of Cameroon. As discussed in §2.2, policy during the French colonial period, from 1919 to 1960, mandated that all public education and government business be conducted in French. Today, French continues to be the exclusive language of public education in the Campo Sub-Division; all public schools in the area are French-medium only, despite Cameroon’s official policy permitting mother tongue-medium education (see Anchimbe 2006). To my knowledge, all Iyasa speakers are to some degree proficient in French; I did not encounter, nor did anyone report the existence of, Iyasa speakers who did not speak any French, even the very elderly (though some older speakers reported that their mothers did not speak French). French appears to be a target of language shift among Iyasa speakers, supporting Connell's (2015:126) assertion that, despite earlier assessments in the African language endangerment literature, “European (colonial) languages cannot be written off as a non-threat to African languages.” Whether the French variety being used in the Iyasa community is in fact a localized or appropriated form of French (see de Féral 1994) remains to be seen, and merits further study; however, interview data makes clear that the aspirational variety of French, and the target of language shift for Iyasa-speaking parents’ primary language used with their children, is mainstream European French (see §3.2.4).

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23 While English is an official language of the nation, its use in education, the judicial system, media, etc. is hotly contested and a major issue in the ongoing conflict in the Anglophone North-West and South-West Regions. For more on the status of English in Cameroon, see Biloa & Echu (2008), Anchimbe (2011), and Ngefac (2010).
Spanish is another European language with a notable presence in the Campo Sub-Division, due to its status as the official language of Equatorial Guinea. Many Iyasa speakers who live on the Cameroon side of the border make frequent trips to Equatorial Guinea to visit family members or friends, and report that the border crossing is easy if one speaks Iyasa because the border guards cannot distinguish between Cameroonian Iyasa and Guinean Iyasa. Many Iyasa speakers report some level of competence in Spanish, but it does not appear to be a target of language shift among Iyasa speakers in Cameroon. However, from anecdotal observation, Spanish seems like it may play a role in constructing a “cross-border” or “cosmopolitan” identity for young Iyasa speakers on the Cameroon side—on weekend evenings in Campo Beach, when I encountered groups of young Iyasa Cameroonians dressed up for an evening out at the bar, I would often overhear them flamboyantly interjecting Spanish words into their predominantly French conversations. (Examination of the use of Spanish at the Cameroon-Guinea border, while beyond the scope of this research, would be a fruitful topic for future study.)

English and Cameroonian Pidgin (hereafter “Pidgin”) are two additional languages which play a role, though a more minor one, in the linguistic context of Campo. There are relatively few immigrants from Anglophone regions in the Campo area, as compared to those from Francophone regions (although the number of Anglophones moving to Campo Sub-Division has increased steeply since roughly 2018, as the Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West Regions has intensified). However, there are a number of Anglophone military members stationed in Campo and Campo Beach, and there is a sufficient Anglophone population to sustain a small church in Campo Ville. Some residents of Campo Sub-Division have spent time working in Limbe, Buea, Bamenda, or other Anglophone cities where they developed proficiency in Pidgin (and sometimes English). English is taught as an elective at the Lycée de Campo, and many Iyasa speakers who have pursued post-secondary education have some degree of proficiency in English. There is also a population of Nigerians, primarily fishermen and their wives, living in Campo Beach at the mouth of the Rio Campo, in the quartier known as the “Nigerian camp” (though it is actually a well-established permanent settlement dating from the 1980s). Both Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin are used in the camp, though to varying degrees by different families; most of the Nigerians have proficiency in French. Some of the Nigerians have married Francophone Cameroonian spouses, including Iyasa speakers. However,
most children in the camp, even those with two English- or Nigerian Pidgin-speaking parents, speak primarily French (another pattern of language shift taking in Campo Beach). While Camfranglais (an English-French hybrid variety) is a widely used code in many Cameroonian urban settings, few people mentioned it being used in Campo, and no Iyasa-speaking participants in this research identified it as part of their linguistic repertoires.

There are also various additional languages which are present in some Iyasa speakers’ repertoires, whether because there is a population of immigrant speakers in the Campo Sub-Division, or because of individual speakers’ family or mobility backgrounds. These include Basaa [bas], Kwasio [nmg], Hausa [hau], Fulfulde [fub] or “nordiste” (likely a reference to Fulfulde, as this is the most widely spoken language by immigrants from the north of the country), Bamum [bax], “Bamileke”24, Mbo [mbo], Gbaye [gba], Lingala [lin], “Bayangam” (likely the variety also known as Batoufam, a dialect of Nda’nda’ [nnz]), and Ewondo [ewo], Bulu [bum] and other Beti varieties. This also includes two closely related neighboring languages: Batanga and Kombe.

Batanga [bnm] is not widely spoken in the Campo Sub-Division, but many Iyasa speakers have some proficiency in it. It is the indigenous language of Kribi, the primary urban center of South Region, and it is very closely related to Iyasa (A.32 in the Guthrie classification; Maho 2009). Many Iyasa speakers report a high degree of mutual intelligibility between Iyasa and Batanga (e.g., ~Gabriel, AKB1-005:00:04:55; ~Martin, AKB1-012:00:16:06), though some speakers report that it is entirely unintelligible to them. Batanga and Iyasa are also closely culturally linked, and there is a great deal of mobility between Campo and Kribi (see §2.2.4). Due to Batanga’s association with the city of Kribi, and larger speaker population of over 13,000 (Simons & Fennig 2018), more Cameroonians are aware of Batanga than Iyasa, and Iyasa speakers outside the Campo Sub-Division are often assumed to be speakers of Batanga (~Louise, AKB1-007:00:21:32; ~Isabelle, AKB1-017:00:05:23). Some speakers accept this misperception and choose to present themselves as Batanga at times (Arnauld Djowe, AKB1-008:00:36:47).

Finally, Kombe [nui], also known as Ngumbi, is the most closely related language to Iyasa (A.33b in the Guthrie system, Maho 2009). It is spoken in Equatorial Guinea by an

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24 “Bamileke” refers to roughly a dozen Eastern Grassfields languages spoken in the western part of Cameroon, but Iyasa speakers generally do not distinguish between them in describing their languages, and use “Bamileke” as a cover term.
estimated 9,200 people (Simons & Fennig 2018). Kombe is considered by some Iyasa speakers to be the same language as Iyasa (e.g., Ambroise Bolongo, AKB1-066:00:10:42; ~Gabriel, AKB1-005:00:42:37), but most speakers reported it to be a separate language, albeit one which is mutually intelligible with Iyasa (~Serge, AKB1-011:00:10:05; ~Veronique, AKB1-013:00:14:02; ~Robert, AKB1-021:00:21:12; ~Victor, AKB1-037:00:28:24; Charmant, AKB1-060:00:13:17). Most Iyasa speakers report that they can understand Kombe either very well or completely, though few claim that they can speak it.

The following chapters will draw on the context described here, and build upon this information to arrive at an understanding of the processes of language shift and maintenance in Iyasa as situated in the historical, social, and geographic context in which it is spoken.

2.6. Context of this research: Documenting the documentation

Linguistic research, and in particular sociolinguistic research and language documentation, is an intensely interpersonal endeavor. When one narrows the focus to language shift and maintenance, which is essentially the study of choices made by individuals reacting to pressures within their social worlds (and how these choices pattern within groups), the necessity of understanding the people involved only grows. The topic of this research did not arise in a vacuum; it was devised by an individual, and further shaped by other individuals (my professors, my colleagues, the participants in this research, the scholars whose work I have read, neighbors and acquaintances in the Campo Sub-Division, and many others). The research for this dissertation involves interactions between individuals—in fact, much of the research data itself is comprised of these interactions, particularly interactions with the researcher. As described by Cameron et al. (1992:5) in their insightful monograph on language research, “researchers cannot help being socially located persons. We inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process, and this influences the questions we ask and the ways we try to find answers.”

For these reasons, an understanding of the context in which this research was conducted—how? by whom? for what purpose?—is important to understanding the information presented in this dissertation. In addition, in the spirit of the enterprise of language documentation, which encourages researchers to maximize the collection and dissemination of potentially informative metadata along with the related language data, I believe that
“documentation of the documentation/documenter” will help to better contextualize the information presented in following chapters. In this section, I outline how this dissertation came to be, and provide a brief autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011) account of my own background, subjectivities, orientations, social roles, and ideologies relating to the study of language shift. Autoethnography “helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic” (Ellis et al. 2011:275). This is by no means a complete account of how my status as a “socially located person” may have influenced the outcomes of this research, and the social complexities of my interactions as a researcher and visitor in the Iyasa community cannot be fully addressed within a brief overview. However, I hope the following information will be useful in contextualizing this research, explaining how who I am influences both my research and interpretations of it, and ensuring that the work presented here is not a “one-way mirror.” In §2.6.1, I outline my training and background as a linguist, the language (and social) ideologies I brought to this work, and a timeline of my work with the Iyasa language. In §2.5.2, I provide a brief overview of some of my social identities, and my subjective impressions of how these identities shaped my interactions while conducting this research.

2.6.1. Background: Who conducted this research, when, how, and why?

A brief description of my training as a linguist will be relevant to interpreting the work described here, and understanding how and why it was conducted. I majored in linguistics as an undergraduate, and first enrolled in Catherine O’Connor’s field methods class during the final year of my BA at Boston University. Three things in this course cemented my desire to pursue further education in language documentation: my aesthetic and intellectual appreciation of the language studied during that course (KiNande [nnb] of the Democratic Republic of the Congo); the passion for sustaining language and culture expressed by our consultant, Congolese playwright Pierre Mujomba; and my introduction to the concept of language documentation, as defined by Himmelmann’s seminal (1998) paper. I felt that language documentation was a path by which I could combine a lifelong interest in language and verbal art, a burning interest in the concept of posterity (via language archival), and a desire for a career path which could be of tangible benefit to my fellow humans. I continued on to complete my MA in applied linguistics at BU in 2010, with a continued focus on language documentation; my thesis involved designing
and constructing a web-based tool for linguistic data management and annotation, populated with
a dataset in Mədumbɑ [byv]. At this time, I had little knowledge of, or desire to work in,
language revitalization. I thought of myself as a documentarian, and rationalized this focus in
two primary ways: first, revitalization is challenging work, and by no means guaranteed to
succeed (and many of the linguistic discourses at the time considered revitalization a “lost cause”
in Africa, e.g., Newman 2003); language documentation, however, is “guaranteed” to do what it
intends to do, i.e., create a lasting record of a language (or so I thought at the time). Second, I felt
that language revitalization was far outside my skillset; I was trained only in language
description and data management, and knew nothing about pedagogy, language acquisition, or
the other topics necessary to engage in language revitalization. (My access to formal training was
also largely restricted to language documentation and not revitalization; this is by no means a
failing of the BU linguistics department, but simply reflects dominant trends in linguistics at the
time – even language documentation was not as widespread an area of interest for linguists a
decade ago.) 2010 was also the year I first visited Cameroon, accompanying three other BU
linguistics students and Dr. Ariane Ngabeu, our longtime field methods consultant for the
Mədumbɑ language during my MA studies, on a three-week trip to Bangangt, West Region.
The experience of conducting linguistic fieldwork in Cameroon was profoundly positive for me
– I loved the landscape, the food, many of the social structures I glimpsed in Mədumbɑ country,
and most of all, the work of interacting with a wide range of people in order to learn about
language. My initial research with Mədumbɑ focused on topological relations25, rather than
sociolinguistics, but I found myself more drawn to chatting with people about social structures
and language use than elicitation of locatives.

Upon completion of my MA, I was hired as a project manager at the LINGUIST List, at
the time based at Eastern Michigan University, where I began work on the Catalogue of
Endangered Languages (ELCat) in 2011. My work there focused on technical infrastructure for
the academic discipline of linguistics, but my role with ELCat, as project manager of the
Catalogue’s Africa and Australia sections, continued to deepen my understanding of patterns of
language endangerment in Africa, while also immersing me more deeply in the discourses and
ideologies Hill (2002:127) refers to as enumeration (“essentialization and individualization of a

25 A version of this research later became Belew (2017), a sociophonetic study using data from topological relations
elicitations.
language as a sort of unit,” a concept inherent to any language cataloguing project). My interest in African sociolinguistics was reinforced when I attended the 2012 “Workshop on sociolinguistic language documentation in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014 summarizes the results of this workshop), held in conjunction with the 7th World Congress on African Linguistics at the University of Buea, Cameroon. In 2013, I left my position at the LINGUIST List and was accepted into the PhD program in linguistics at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, where I began my doctorate in 2014. I remained a graduate assistant on the Catalogue of Endangered Languages for the first three semesters of my doctoral program, deepening my knowledge of global patterns of language endangerment, and continuing to focus my studies on concepts of language endangerment: I continued to focus largely on language documentation, but slowly became more versed in the “conservation” side of things (to use the parlance of the UHM linguistics program, and its affiliated journal and conference, while acknowledging the problems with this term and with using the conservation rhetoric of biology for languages). I also received more formal training in sociolinguistics, particularly variationist sociolinguistics, in the context of Indigenous and minority languages. In addition, I continued to learn about ethics in language documentation and conservation, a topic which had always been of urgent interest to me (though my understanding of it continues to evolve, and some of my past stances cause me to cringe now), and to expand my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, unpacking the discourses around language endangerment, and becoming increasingly interested in more qualitative, ethnographic work on individuals’ language attitudes, choices, and experiences (e.g., Belew 2015).

As I began to consider my dissertation topic, I knew I wanted to continue working in Cameroon, but since my research interests had coalesced around issues of language endangerment, I wanted to conduct my doctoral research on a language which was endangered to some degree. Mədumba is a fairly vital language, and relatively well-documented; for these reasons, I felt it wasn’t the language to focus on for my dissertation. But then, what language? I had long envisioned an ideal scenario for dissertation research in which I was “summoned” to work by a language community who actively wanted a linguist’s involvement—this is often seen as the best possible inroad to language work (e.g., Chelliah & de Reuse 2011; Hauk & Heaton 2018:260). But the miracle didn’t transpire: I didn’t find myself “summoned” by a speaker or community. I instead needed to choose a language to work on, according to several criteria: I
was looking for an endangered African language, preferably spoken in Cameroon, preferably a Bantu language, and preferably a less-documented language so that I would be directing documentation resources where they seemed most needed\(^26\). Fortunately, I was already involved with a resource which was ideal for this kind of search: the *Catalogue of Endangered Languages*. I have occasionally relayed the story of how I found Iyasa, with some sheepishness, as one of the “least good” ways a researcher may begin working with a language: I opened the *Catalogue*’s map of endangered languages in Cameroon, selected a handful of the least documented ones, and found out what I could about them. I found the name “Yasa” aesthetically pleasing (not a great reason to begin work with a language!), and set out to find contacts who could connect me with speakers – in early 2015, Daniel Duke, a SIL-Cameroon member who I had met at WOCAL Buea in 2012, was able to put me in touch with the new SIL team who had just moved to Campo Beach.

In June 2015, I made a three-week pilot trip to Iyasa country, staying with SIL-Cameroon members Benis Nyensi and Wendy Gale in Campo Beach. There, I met many of the people I would continue to work with throughout my work with Iyasa, and collected basic grammatical and phonological data – I thought I might write a grammar as my dissertation – as well as a few narratives. My initial experiences in the Campo area were very positive, and I was excited to continue working with Iyasa for my dissertation research: the people I worked with were largely welcoming, I liked many of them a great deal, Campo Sub-Division was beautiful country, and the Iyasa language itself was hugely aesthetically pleasing to me (I arrived in Iyasa country never having heard the language spoken, as I could not find any recordings, and Anita Mehemba was the very first person to speak Iyasa to me at her home in Ebodje – *ak va*, Anita!).

By the summer of 2016, I had decided that rather than writing a descriptive grammar of Iyasa, I wanted to focus on the sociolinguistics of language shift and maintenance. I returned to Campo Sub-Division in August 2016 and began research on the sociolinguistic context of Iyasa by conducting semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 3), with the assistance of Hawaou (no surname) and Judith Christelle Koague Nkamsuh, both master’s students in linguistics at the University of Yaoundé I, who I met through Jeff Good and Philip Mutaka\(^27\). The interview

\(^{26}\) Though there are difficulties inherent to conducting sociolinguistic research on a language which is sparsely documented; these will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

\(^{27}\) A professor of linguistics at University of Yaoundé I who is, coincidentally, a native speaker of KiNande, the language which sparked my interest in African linguistics.
template, in particular, was much improved and refined with Hawaou’s assistance. Once again, I stayed with Wendy Gale and Benis Nyensi in Campo Beach for just over a month, working primarily in Campo Beach and Campo Ville, but spending some time in Ebodje as well. In September 2017, I defended my dissertation prospectus, and from October to December 2017 spent nine weeks living in Campo Beach with Benis Nyensi (Wendy Gale had at that point left SIL-Cameroon and returned to the US) conducting the research for this dissertation, primarily in Campo Beach and Campo Ville, but with about a week spent in Ebodje as well. Rachel Ojong Diba, a doctoral student in linguistics at the University of Buea, joined me for the first two weeks in Campo Beach to assist with the research, and Hawaou also joined me for the final five days I spent in Campo Beach. This trip was largely spent collecting additional interview data, discussed in Chapter 3, and the experimental data discussed in Chapter 4. However, I also attempted to initiate a community archival project during this trip: I had a strong belief that communities should be able to determine the contents of any archive of their languages, and that any “comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community” (Himmelmann 1998:166) should necessarily include the materials which that speech community deemed most important – in a sense, a community’s choices about what to archive could be considered part of that record. I wrote and printed some handouts in French (edited by Sammy Mbipite, a close collaborator and the son of an Iyasa language committee officer) inviting all Iyasa speakers to contribute any materials they wished to an archive; explaining what an archive was and what its purpose was; and giving some examples of things which people might wish to archive. I attempted to put all of this information in fairly plain language, so that it would make sense to people who were unfamiliar with the concept of archives, but it was a dense document with a lot of text and nothing eye-catching – no photographs of language being recorded or listened to, and not even any interesting layout or design. I posted these handouts in public spaces around Campo Beach and Campo Ville, such as in stores and bars, as well as giving them to the people I conducted interviews and elicitions with. The flyer invited any interested parties to contact me via phone, or visit the house where I stayed, and I would be happy to record anything they liked and deposit it in the Kaipuleohone archive at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The archival invitation can be found in Appendix B. Unfortunately, I received no contributions to the community archival project; no one contacted me to record or deposit materials, although some children did call me on the phone just to chat. I attribute this entirely to
error on my part: I should not have expected that anyone would take time out of their day to read a lengthy document about a very dry and esoteric topic, or trust the intentions outlined in a flyer written by an unknown foreigner. While some of the people I conducted interviews with were eager to record stories or songs for me, this was only after we had already interacted during the interview, and their main interest was in the recordings being disseminated and listened to (online or among my colleagues in the US), not archived.

At the end of this trip, I threw a goodbye party for the entire town of Campo Beach, and gave a brief speech in Iyasa, which my colleagues Arnauld Djowe and Sammy Mbiipite helped me translate and practice (this speech gained me some fame in Campo Sub-Division, as discussed below in §2.5.2). In August 2018, I returned to Cameroon for three weeks to conduct the literacy and language documentation workshop described in Chapter 5, staying with Benis Nyensi and her family in Campo Ville and making two weekend visits to Ebodje. Braden Brown, a doctoral student in linguistics at SUNY Buffalo, accompanied me on the 2018 trip, and continues to work with Iyasa for his doctoral research. I have not been able to return to Cameroon since 2018. I hope one day to secure funding to return, and continue supporting the Iyasa youth language project discussed in Chapter 5.

2.6.1.1. Attitudes and ideologies “brought along” to this research

As described above, my academic background is in the study of language documentation, revitalization, and sociolinguistics. My own language ideologies, as shaped by a decade spent in academic linguistics, are largely in line with discourses prevalent in contemporary language documentation and sociolinguistics. These ideologies include a belief in the inherent linguistic validity of all speech varieties; a general support for the maintenance of global linguistic diversity; a belief in the maintenance and use of one’s languages as a human right, as outlined by UNDRIP; a belief that language endangerment is a social issue arising from systemic social pressures, rather than a specifically linguistic issue (as acknowledged nearly a century ago by Swadesh 1948:245: “the factors determining obsolescence of languages are non-linguistic”); and the goal to “provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a given speech community” (Himmelmann 1998), rather than to describe a specific lexico-grammatical code in isolation.
My overall goal for this dissertation was to bring together several methods, drawn largely from sociolinguistics, to produce a more holistic understanding of what systems and factors are causing language shift in Iyasa; how this shift is experienced, perceived, and discussed by Iyasa speakers; how variationist experimental methods might be used to examine language shift; and how the knowledge gleaned from this sociolinguistic study could be used to support language maintenance and/or revitalization. I aimed to document and describe various aspects of the current language ecology in which Iyasa exists, as well as the factors affecting language shift and maintenance in the Iyasa community, rather than document the “ancestral code” (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014) of the Iyasa language itself (although of course I draw on data from the language itself in this work). Within the typology of language documentation proposed by Woodbury (2011), I intended my research to fall somewhere in the less-nostalgic categories of “documentation of contemporary linguistic ecology,” which “would aim in some sense at the ‘real’ or immanent as opposed to the nostalgic” (much like the “sociolinguistic documentation” called for by Childs et al. 2014), and “documentation of an emergent code,” with special focus on what Woodbury highlights as “the study of so-called semi-speakers, and of the variation in communities undergoing rapid language shift” (2011:179–180). But as Woodbury also notes, “[documentation of an emergent code] may go against the grain of anyone, academic or not, with a strong sense of nostalgia” (ibid.). Unsurprisingly, conflicts between my research goals and a nostalgic, purist set of language ideologies held by some Iyasa speakers did arise during this work, as discussed in Belew (2018). However, the endangerment perspective in which I am trained is also inherently nostalgic to some degree, in that it focuses on what is being lost today in comparison with a (real or imagined) linguistic past. My doctoral education has focused on the processes and causes of language endangerment, and one of the reasons I chose to pursue research on Iyasa was its (reported) status as an endangered language. A fundamental assumption in designing and conducting this research was that processes of language shift (particularly disrupted intergenerational transmission) and shift-induced language change are underway, and that something is being “lost” as a result – although this rhetoric often surfaced in Iyasa speakers’ descriptions of their language context as well (see Belew 2017a and Chapter 3). This undercurrent of nostalgic thinking certainly influenced the questions I asked, and the ways I asked them.
Another major component of the language ideologies I brought to this research is a desire to foreground the perspectives and voices of the people whose language is being discussed. When reading papers on endangered languages, even early in my education, I was always most interested in direct quotations from speakers of these languages on the topic of their language attitudes, aspirations, and experiences. As discussed further in Chapter 3, I strongly believe that incorporating the experiences, attitudes, rhetorics, and perspectives of endangered-language speakers and community stakeholders is essential to arriving at a more thorough, nuanced, and holistic understanding of language shift, and to developing better methods to meet community language goals such as language maintenance or revitalization. In addition, I brought along an ideology that the most effective, ethical, and sustainable language work is work which is done by (or with), rather than on or for, the language community, in the terms of Czaykowska-Higgins (2009). For this reason, I wanted some of my language work to spark projects which the Iyasa community would have ownership of, which resulted in the failed community archival initiative, as well as the more successful Iyasa bo initiative described in Chapter 5.

I have been trained and employed in contexts of Indigenous language and culture reclamation, although I am still a newcomer with much to learn about these issues. At the time of completing this dissertation, I am employed as a contractor with the First Peoples’ Cultural Council\(^\text{28}\) (FPCC) as the Outreach Coordinator for the Endangered Languages Project. Working with FPCC, and grounding myself in Indigenous language work in the North American context, has been highly influential on my understanding and thinking on language work – including a mental repositioning of language as not just a social and cognitive system, but recognizing it as also a key component of personal and community wellbeing, political and cultural sovereignty, spirituality and religion.

My position as a non-Indigenous settler in the mainland American colonial context (as well as the Hawaiian colonial context) has certainly shaped my understanding and experiences of language issues, and I continue to strive towards more decolonial understandings and practices in my work, while acknowledging that by virtue of my position in society, I have certainly been a participant in the systems which cause language loss and impede linguistic justice. In looking back over my views on language work over the last decade, I believe and hope that my purposes,

\(^{28}\) A First Nations-run Crown Corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization of Indigenous languages, arts, culture and heritage in British Columbia; [http://www.fpcc.ca](http://www.fpcc.ca)
methods, and understandings of language work have evolved away from a more narrowly Western academic perspective, to one which is more informed by a wide range of ideologies and worldviews – especially the ideologies common in the Campo area, decolonial methods as discussed by (Smith 1999), and language ideologies in circulation in the places I have lived and worked (particularly Hawai‘i and the Pacific Northwest). As I have continued working and studying in the field of language endangerment, documentation, and revitalization, my focus on documentation and posterity has decreased, while my focus on language loss and reclamation as social and political issues has increased; my interest in, and desire to work in the field of, language revitalization has drastically increased from when I began in 2010. I currently consider my stance towards language to be essentially defined by political and social justice, and this stance has been informed by writers and practitioners inside and outside academia, from Indigenous and endangered-language communities in North America, Australia, and Africa – some of the most influential works which have shaped my thinking include Hill 2002; Dobrin, Austin & Nathan 2007; Davis 2017; Dobrin & Good 2009; Dobrin & Schwartz 2016; Good 2012; Smith 1999; Leonard & Haynes 2010; and Roche 2017, as well as countless discussions and presentations at conferences like the International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation29, HELISET TTE SKÁL – ‘Let the Languages Live’30, the Collaborative Language Research (CoLang) summer institutes, and more. In brief, I now see language loss as inextricably tied with systemic injustices and pressures, whether they be economic, political, or social, and consider working to support language reclamation, revitalization, maintenance, and “survivance” (Davis 2017), as well as documentation (for purposes in addition to simple posterity, such as the creation of materials to meet community language goals), as the largest component of my ethical and professional mandate as a linguist. I designed this dissertation with the hope that it would be both useful to future academic research on language shift and maintenance, and useful to those who want to sustain and strengthen the Iyasa language and culture.

2.6.2. Social identities of the researcher during research

29 https://icldc6.weebly.com/

30 https://www.fpcflanguageconference.com/
As discussed above, this research was largely centered around interpersonal interactions – the development of social networks and relationships with people who agreed to participate in my research, the act of interviewing itself, organizing and participating in a youth language workshop, and my daily life in Campo Beach and Campo Ville – and so the social roles I played (or was assigned) in the Iyasa context are highly relevant to the results of this research. The following sections briefly outline my personal background, and some of the identities I consider most salient to how I was perceived, and the social interactions I had, during my research in the Iyasa area. To begin with broad demographic attributes, I am a white Euro-American woman of largely British ancestry, and a settler in the US colonial context whose family roots are in Appalachia and central Georgia for the last two to three hundred years. I am easily identifiable as white, though my national identity does not seem to be immediately perceived by many Cameroonians (in Cameroon, strangers usually first ask if I am French, though sometimes I am assessed as German, English, or American\textsuperscript{31}). I grew up in Washington, DC in a context of fairly high socioeconomic privilege, and was educated in private Quaker and progressive schools with overt mandates to teach and instill social justice in their students. I have studied French since preschool, and my competence in the language is sufficient to travel and work in francophone Cameroon (though this of course does not preclude my making L2 errors and sometimes struggling to express complex concepts, as will be seen in the following chapters). This research was conducted while I was between the ages of 27 and 31, functionally (though not legally) married, and childless. All of these personal attributes almost certainly had an effect on how I was perceived by different people in Cameroon, and the types of interactions I had during the research (see Grimm 2017 for a more in-depth discussion of the role of linguistic researchers' gender and marital status in Cameroon).

\subsection*{2.6.2.1. \textit{La blanche}}

There is no question that my identity as a white foreigner was a major defining factor in how I was perceived, and the interactions I had, while conducting the research for this dissertation. It would take an entire monograph (and more expertise than I possess) to untangle

\textsuperscript{31} Although once, a group of children in Campo Beach informed me confidently that I was Chinese, and asked to learn some Chinese words. I was baffled by this until I realized that since the port at Lolabe was being constructed by a Chinese firm, Chinese workers may be the only fair-skinned people that many kids in the Campo Sub-Division have met.
the many different social identities which accompanied the label *la blanche* (‘white woman’), which was often how I was greeted or flagged down by strangers. I came to understand that my whiteness signified many things to many people, some of which were profoundly uncomfortable to me – for one, I was often treated with much more deference than my Cameroonian colleagues at the same professional/academic level, which rankled my American-socialized values of egalitarianism and meritocracy. Some people expressed beliefs about racial superiority to me, strongly positioning white people as more “advanced” or “civilized” or otherwise “better” than “Africans,” and I struggled to walk the line between listening openly and nonjudgmentally to their opinions, as the “fieldworker” identity seemed to require of me, and overtly refuting a concept which is noxious and unacceptable to me on a personal level. (In general, my usual tactic was to deflect with humor where possible – “I burn my cooking just like everybody else” – or to calmly express that I disagreed, and leave it at that). My economic privilege, which was visibly signaled by my whiteness, was also a challenge to navigate at times. I was perceived as having nearly limitless financial resources (the Iyasa term for a white person, *nt ng n*, is sometimes used colloquially to mean a “big person” or someone of high socioeconomic status, even a Cameroonian) and was often asked for money or goods by strangers. I struggled to find a balance between generosity when and where I could afford it (e.g., if someone just asked me to buy them some food and I could afford it), and saying no when I was unable to fulfill the request. My willingness to sit and buy a round of beers or give 500 francs when requested often earned me the appellation of *simple* ‘easy, straightforward’, instead of *compliquè* ‘difficult’ like “other white people” (as one woman said), but also created some uncomfortable situations where I was asked for much more than I could give (e.g., my own telephone or laptop, or very large sums of money). At one point, I had a casual conversation with a group of older people about my own financial situation—how much students received as a stipend, how much my small studio apartment cost, how much food and utilities cost in the US, my level of personal debt, etc.—and that poverty and homelessness do exist in America despite it being a wealthy nation, and they were extremely surprised at this. For many people, though, my status as a white foreigner was treated as a passing curiosity, or something to ask some questions about and then move on. People seemed tickled to have me pass an afternoon in their kitchen doing domestic work and chatting, and sometimes commented “I have to call so-and-so and tell them a white girl wrapped
Along these lines, though, my whiteness and foreignness also positioned me as a “child” in many ways – it was taken as obvious that I lacked competence in life skills like farming, cleaning fish, or avoiding snakes, and people were generally happy to instruct me in how to do these things without scolding me for my ignorance. I am immensely grateful to those people who took the time to teach me these skills, and were patient and kind with my ineptitude. My whiteness also dovetailed with my identity as a language learner, and I would often be recognized by people I had never met as “the white woman who speaks Iyasa” (even though my proficiency was very poor) – this seemed to be an endearing fact to most folks, and helped me build relationships in the community.

2.6.4.2. The “university person”

My perceived identity as a representative of higher education or scientific expertise also frequently arose in interactions. I was sometimes deferred to in matters of knowledge far outside my expertise, such as botany or Cameroonian history, and it was difficult for me to refute or step out of this assigned role of authority. I was sometimes asked questions I had no way of answering, on topics ranging from climate change to American foreign policy, and it was sometimes challenging to re-position myself as only having professional knowledge about language issues. I was sometimes able to re-position myself out of this “expert” role by stepping into the “child” identity that accompanied my foreignness, and asking for instruction in things I had no idea about, but which my interlocutor knew well (e.g., making shrimp traps or Iyasa vocabulary).

2.6.4.3. The language learner

Much of my down time, or time in between research interviews, was spent “hanging out” in the village with whoever would tolerate my company, trying to improve my proficiency in Iyasa. Especially during my 2017 stays in Campo Beach and Ebodje, I enjoyed passing the time with groups of women who were cooking, drinking beer, or doing domestic work, and just chatting while attempting to learn and write down words. In Campo Beach, in particular, it quickly came to be known that I was doing something like learning to speak Iyasa, and people would often approach me to exchange small talk in Iyasa, tell me a word I should write down, or

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32 A staple food made of boiled cassava flour wrapped in banana leaves.
teach me a sentence or two. Most people wildly overestimated my ability to learn and retain language quickly, as well as my proficiency in Iyasa, but most people I interacted with seemed at least amused, if not outright pleased, that I had a keen interest in learning the language. At the end of my 2017 trip, I held a goodbye party for everyone in Campo Beach and some friends from nearby towns, in which I delivered a short speech in Iyasa (translated by Arnauld Djowe and Sammy Mbipite, and far beyond my own speaking level). My attempt to deliver a short speech in Iyasa was very well-received, and people seemed to warm to my identity of “language learner” more than any other identity I inhabited. I believe that my earnest attempts to learn to speak Iyasa, as well as cheerfully participating in everyday life as a learner of daily skills, were the most important factor in the degree of acceptance I found within the community.

2.6.4.4. The childless married woman

My status as a functionally married woman who was spending a great deal of time away from her husband was brought up quite often, sometimes in sexually suggestive ways, sometimes implying it was a regrettable breach of decorum, or sometimes as a simple point of curiosity. My status as a woman around 30 years old with no children also made me something of an oddity; one woman, upon learning I had no children, immediately expressed her condolences for my “infertility” and began blessing me so I could conceive. I think my childlessness, and status as a woman traveling alone in a foreign country, probably allowed me to occupy social roles more usually perceived as male in the South Cameroonian context – such as conducting research, occupying positions of academic authority (or having them imposed on me), and leading project teams. (Again, see Grimm 2017 for useful reflections on being a female researcher in southern Cameroon.) This identity also constrained my ability to conduct research, e.g., limiting my ability to travel at night, or spend time in bars or public spaces alone, but for the most part, I felt especially welcome in women’s domestic and social spaces like kitchens and casual afternoon group hangouts, while also being able to work comfortably with men (and, to a lesser degree, socialize with them).

2.6.4.5. The “SIL missionary”

I was often (understandably) mistaken for a member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a US-based Christian mission organization which carries out language description,
development, and Bible translation for the world’s languages. I lived with members of SIL while in Cameroon, traveled with them, worked with the Iyasa language committee which had been assembled in conjunction with the SIL team, and was a white American linguist studying a Cameroonian language (which is nearly synonymous with SIL in southern Cameroon – almost every foreign linguist who works in southern Cameroon is with SIL). If asked directly if I was with SIL, I would usually say no, I was a university student, but a friend of the SIL team, though I am not sure how much this distinction meant to most people. It is possible, or even likely, that the perception of me as a SIL member influenced the interactions I had, or the ways people described their own language use and attitudes; for more on SIL’s language ideologies, and how they might interact with Iyasa speakers’ language ideologies, see Belew (2018). This perception of me as a SIL member may also have influenced how much people were willing to talk to me about language-related issues which touched on spiritual and religious issues; as briefly discussed in Chapter 3, Excerpt (38), one of the factors that speakers identified as relevant to the maintenance of the Iyasa language was its use in ritual, and evangelical Christianity (which SIL is affiliated with) in southern Cameroon is overall quite hostile to this kind of spiritual practice. When asked directly if I was a Christian, I would usually honestly say that I was not, but that I had been raised Methodist; even when not asked directly about my religious affiliation, I generally expressed open and respectful interest in learning about traditional spiritual practice, and tried (with some success, I think) to position myself as an open-minded and receptive person to talk about traditional beliefs with.

The data in the following chapters will be best understood in conjunction with the above description of the researcher and the research context. While no brief overview could provide a complete account of my own subjectivities, nor the full extent of social factors which affected the conversations and interactions which constitute the body of this research, I hope that the above “documentation of the documentation” will provide useful context in interpreting the information I present in this dissertation.
Chapter 3:
Speaker perspectives on language shift in Iyasa:
Perceptions of shift, maintenance, endangerment, and vitality

This chapter presents the current situation of Iyasa language shift, maintenance, and endangerment from the perspectives of Iyasa speakers themselves. The chapter examines extracts from interviews with Iyasa speakers, and presents speakers’ beliefs about what factors contribute to language shift and maintenance, as well as their beliefs about the language’s vitality and prospects for survival. Speakers’ reports of factors affecting linguistic vitality are then discussed in relation to academic metrics for vitality assessment. First, in §3.1, I discuss the motivations for focusing on speakers’ perceptions of LS/LM, language endangerment, and linguistic vitality, and provide background on the methodology and data collection for this chapter. In the next sections, I present excerpts from a series of sociolinguistic interviews conducted with Iyasa speakers from 2016 and 2017. In §3.2, I present factors which speakers identified as driving language shift, while in §3.3 I discuss factors which speakers identified as supporting language maintenance. In §3.4 I present speakers’ perspectives on the future of the Iyasa language. I conclude the chapter with §3.5, bringing together data from speaker reports and researcher observation, and providing an overview of the linguistic vitality of Iyasa within several academic frameworks for assessing language shift, including the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) (Fishman 1991), EGIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010), UNESCO scale (UNESCO 2003), and the Language Endangerment Index (LEI) (Lee & Van Way 2016).

3.1. Why study speaker perceptions of language shift and maintenance?

Assessment of linguistic vitality has, in most scenarios, involved a researcher—usually one who is not a member of the speech community under investigation, though not always—gathering information about patterns of language transmission and use. The researcher then “plugs in” this information to an assessment framework to produce an overall assessment of vitality. For example, a researcher may conduct a rough census to determine overall number of speakers, ask local leaders or laypeople about patterns of language transmission and use in the

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33 An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 5th International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation as Belew (2017).
community, obtain official documents pertaining to language policy in the region, and conduct some degree of observation; they could then categorize this information using a specific assessment framework, e.g., the EGIDS, and transform this information into a numeric rating of the language’s vitality. The information may be gathered over a relatively long time, as in the case of researchers who reside in the language area for years, or fairly quickly, such as during a few days’ visit to the area. While at least some speakers’ reports of language transmission and use are likely to be incorporated into the assessment of vitality (particularly local leaders, schoolteachers, or others who are seen as having the authority to speak for the broader community), it is still relatively rare for linguistic researchers to investigate a wide range of “folk linguistic” (per Niedzielski & Preston 2000) perceptions of shift/maintenance and language vitality in depth, or to foreground speaker accounts of these issues (though see Smith 2001; Muaka 2011; and Nic Fhlanachdha & Hickey 2018 for exceptions).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of language shift, maintenance, endangerment and vitality in Iyasa through the firsthand accounts of Iyasa speakers themselves. The motivations for focusing on speaker perceptions and reports of language shift are multiple. Foremost among these is the recognition, both on a pragmatic and ethical level, that Iyasa speakers’ experiential knowledge of their sociolinguistic context goes beyond what an outside researcher could ever hope to gather — even through years of working in the community, much less (as in my case) several months. This means that documenting speakers’ own accounts of language shift and maintenance adds a great deal to our collective knowledge of Iyasa’s sociolinguistic context, beyond what can be learned from the reports of an outside researcher alone, and will provide better understanding of the sociolinguistic circumstances of a given language.

A second motivation is to highlight the variation in speakers’ perceptions of (and discourses about) language shift, and to explore how this variation may interact with patterns of language use and linguistic behavior: for example, as I will discuss in §3.4, older speakers generally expressed more pessimistic views of Iyasa’s prospects for survival than younger speakers, and this could affect youth participation in language maintenance efforts if young people feel the problem of language shift is not particularly pressing.

A third motivation for focusing on speaker perceptions is to publicly acknowledge speakers’ deep knowledge of matters involving their own linguistic context, and to ensure that
the speaker community has a say in outside portrayals of their language—rather than declaring a language “critically endangered” based on an outside researcher’s perceptions alone, this approach recognizes speakers as having unique, valuable knowledge and perspectives about their own language. This knowledge is too often unrepresented, dismissed, or ignored in outside accounts of language vitality. By focusing on speaker voices in this chapter, I hope to honor and give appropriate weight to the perspectives of those people who are most directly affected by, and whose lived experience includes, language shift. Finally, I posit that documenting speakers’ accounts of language shift and maintenance is a crucial component of “sociolinguistically informed language documentation” (Childs, Good & Mitchell 2014). As these authors note, the “primary reason for collecting sociolinguistic documentation is that it helps us get closer to the documentary promise of capturing a full record of the language practices of a community” (ibid.:171). Patterns of language choice, maintenance, and shift are a key part of a community’s language practices, and speakers’ firsthand accounts of these patterns can provide crucial data on the ideologies and attitudes which shape them. Not only that, but as Childs et al. (ibid.:172) note, “sociolinguistic contexts are more fragile than lexico-grammatical codes and, therefore, intrinsically more endangered. It is these contexts that will disappear first as smaller communities become transformed by contact with larger ones.” The specific sociolinguistic context in which Iyasa is currently spoken is likely to be more endangered than the Iyasa language itself, especially given the major changes described in Chapter 2. The speaker perspectives presented in this chapter reflect firsthand accounts of a sociolinguistic context which is likely to change significantly in the near future. Thus, documentation of individuals’ experiences of this context is a key part of sociolinguistically informed language documentation.

I would like to emphasize here that this chapter’s goal is to represent subjective, or “folk linguistic” (per Niedzielski & Preston 2000), experiences of language shift among Iyasa speakers, and not to thoughtlessly present individuals’ accounts as objective fact (or “unproblematic window[s] on psychological or social realities,” in the words of Wengraf 2001:1). There is a substantial body of literature in qualitative social science research about how to interpret interviews and other ethnographic data, be it drawing a distinction between reading interview data as “veridical” (reliable, objectively truthful) or “symptomatic” (more about the interview context and participants than the topic itself) (Kvale & Brinkmann 2008), or seeing interview data as more “representational” (of real-world events) versus “presentational” (of the
individuals involved) (Freeman 1996). I acknowledge that interviews are best understood as “co-constructed discourse events [...] and therefore not as direct windows on the minds of interviewees” (Block 2000:758), and that the viewpoints and stances expressed within these interviews were certainly affected by how the researchers and participants viewed each other, their relationship, the purpose of the interview, etc. However, since the focus of this chapter is on speakers’ subjective views of Iyasa language shift and maintenance, and not an interactional analysis of the interview context, I will set aside a close examination of these issues for the purposes of this chapter. (However, see Belew 2018:281–290 for discussion of how stances towards Iyasa were “brought along” versus “brought about,” per Gumperz 1982, in these interviews.)

3.1.1 Methodology and data collection

The data presented in this chapter were collected through a series of sociolinguistic interviews conducted during field research in August–September 2016 and October–December 2017. All interviews were conducted in French by myself, and most were conducted in collaboration with one or more Cameroonian colleagues. These colleagues included Hawaou (no surname), a MA student in linguistics at the University of Yaoundé I, who assisted with interviews in 2016 and 2017; Judith Christelle Koague Nkamsuh, another MA student in linguistics at University of Yaoundé I, who assisted with interviews in 2016; Rachel Ojong Diba, a PhD student in linguistics at the University of Buea, who assisted with interviews in 2017; and Benis Nyensi, a linguist working for the SIL-Cameroon Iyasa project, who assisted with interviews in 2017 (and was also present for several elicitation sessions in 2015 and 2016). Each interview lasted between 20 and 140 minutes (most fell in the 30- to 60-minute range), and most were conducted at the interviewees’ homes. A handful were conducted at shops, bars, the SIL project office in Campo Ville, or the home I shared in Campo Beach. Most of the interviews conducted in 2017 were immediately followed by the experimental tasks described in Chapter 4.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, loosely following the questionnaire template provided in Appendix A. “Semi-structured” here means that follow-up questions were improvised, and redundant or inapplicable questions skipped, in response to interviewees’ answers. I aimed to have the interviews take the form of a relatively natural conversation in which interviewees were free to steer the discussion to some degree, while still
collecting information on similar topics from each person. The purpose of these interviews was to investigate the sociolinguistic context of Campo in a broad sense, with a focus on the Iyasa language. The interviews explored topics such as language use and multilingual repertoires among Iyasa people, speakers’ perceptions of Iyasa’s linguistic vitality, attitudes towards the language (and language ideologies in general), and biographical information such as participants’ clan, employment, religion, and geographic mobility. Interviews were selected as the primary research tool rather than written questionnaires or surveys for several reasons: first, literacy in French is not guaranteed among all older speakers (though most people are literate in French, and some in Iyasa). Second, there is understandable mistrust around written documents thrust upon rural people by foreigners—I did not want to be suspected of trying to trick people into signing legally binding documents. Third, interviews are generally more fruitful for exploratory ethnographic or sociolinguistic research, since they allow the respondents to express experiences and opinions in more open-ended ways without confining them to predefined questions (and in a case like this, where the researcher has little prior knowledge of language practices in the community, predefined questions on a survey are likely to miss what is important to investigate). Interview data can also be “richer” than survey data in its usefulness for discourse or conversation analysis, ethnography of interactions between researchers and participants, “bonus” data (such as songs, proverbs, or folktales speakers wished to contribute during the interview), and so on.

Participants were initially recruited using “snowball sampling” (Milroy 1987), in which existing participants help recruit future participants from their social networks. I began by interviewing people introduced to me through the SIL language committee34 in 2015 and 2016, and their friends and family members. Arnauld Djowe (in Campo Ville) and Albert Ndomi (in Ebodje), in particular, were indispensable in helping me meet potential interviewees; both often accompanied me to the homes of people they knew and asked them to work with me. Many participants were also recruited through something like door-to-door sampling: most days, I simply walked around town, asking anyone who didn’t look busy if they’d be willing to talk to me about language for a while (“opportunistic” recruitment was also done in this way—e.g.,

34 While I have no affiliation with SIL or any other religious group, I was introduced to the Iyasa community via SIL-Cameroon linguists Wendy Gale and Benis Nyensi (see Chapter 2); local SIL workers’ experience and contacts in the community aided my research significantly.
~Pascal was a young motorcycle taxi driver in Campo Ville who won my business by greeting me in Iyasa, and then agreed to be interviewed). In short, recruitment was haphazard in a way that is likely familiar to most field linguists, but aimed at a representative sample that included adult Iyasa speakers of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic positions in the villages and towns where I was able to work.

3.2. Speaker perceptions of factors contributing to language shift

This section presents an overview of Iyasa speakers’ perceptions of factors contributing to language shift, using data from the sociolinguistic interviews conducted during 2016 and 2017. While space constraints make it impossible to present data from all participants here, I have selected excerpts which I believe are representative of common discourses within the Iyasa community in Campo Sub-Division. All excerpts in this chapter are presented using the conventions of Discourse Transcription 2 (Du Bois et al. 1992); however, for purposes of space, sequential intonation units have been condensed into single lines. Some names given are pseudonyms (see Chapter 1; I have honored the wishes of those speakers who preferred that their real named be retained, and their contributions attributed to them).

3.2.1 Demographic factors in Iyasa language shift

Demographic, political, social, geographic, and other contextual factors are crucial components of assessing language shift. In particular, speaker demographics—especially how many speakers there are, and how old they are—are used as primary assessment criteria in vitality metrics such as the GIDS/EGIDS, LEI, and UNESCO scales (though see Moore, Pietikäinen & Blommaert 2010 and L. Pke 2018 for critical discussion of relying on speaker numbers in vitality assessment). Intergenerational transmission is another central concern in assessing language vitality; it is the eponymous factor in the GIDS/EGIDS scale, and the LEI algorithm gives twice as much weight to intergenerational transmission as to any other

35 I discussed this practice with Arnauld Djowe, who also drives a motorcycle taxi in Campo Ville; he said that it is common for moto drivers to guess at a prospective client’s ethnic language and use it to “bid” for their business. Having become known in Campo as the white woman who was learning Iyasa, my “bidding” language was apparently Iyasa.

36 For readers unfamiliar with Discourse Transcription symbols, colons represent an elongated syllable, @ represents a pulse of laughter, (double parentheses) enclose author comments, (single parentheses) enclose vocalisms such as (TSK), numbers in single parentheses (0.7) indicate a pause in seconds, (H) and (Hx) represent audible inhalation and exhalation respectively, # indicates an uncertain word, and speech overlaps are enclosed in [square brackets].
endangerment factor (Lee & Van Way 2016). In addition, changes to a demographically small language’s sociolinguistic context are likely to affect its vitality, especially changes in the types and degrees of language contact in the community (e.g., if there is more intensive contact with a majority language like French, or growing linguistic heterogeneity in a formerly minority-language-dominant area).

This section presents Iyasa speakers’ perspectives on demographic issues impacting Iyasa’s vitality. In particular, the small total number of Iyasa people, the growing ethnic heterogeneity in the Campo Sub-Division, ethnically mixed marriages, and growing rates of migration to cities were frequently cited as concerns.

3.2.1.1. How many people speak Iyasa?

The total number of Iyasa speakers worldwide has been estimated by various sources as 3,000 (Bouh Ma Sitna 2004), 3,200 (Simons & Fennig 2018), 1,500 (Connell 2007), 2,401 (Ricquier 2005), and 10,000\(^37\) (Bt 2011a); Binam Bikoï (2012) reports 1,488 speakers in Cameroon. Interviewees’ estimates of the number of Iyasa speakers varied widely. While most participants found it difficult to estimate a precise number, overall, younger speakers tended to give larger estimates than older people.

The most common answer to “how many speakers of Iyasa are there?”\(^38\) was something along the lines of “not numerous,” e.g., in the responses from Ma Tekila (62, Campo Beach), ~Thomas (76, Mbendji), and ~Elise (58, Campo Ville) quoted below. Some speakers, such as Thomas, described the current Iyasa population as being diminished as compared to the past:

**Excerpt (1)**

~THOMAS;    Je peux pas vous mentir Yasa, (H) nous sommes pas nombreux.
            \(I\) can’t lie to you Yasa, \((H)\) we’re not numerous.

ANNA;       Mm.
(0.4)

\(^{37}\) No further information is given about the source of this estimate, which is at least three times larger than most counts.

\(^{38}\) This was occasionally phrased as “are the Iyasa numerous?” since a clear distinction between “being” and “speaking” Iyasa was not acknowledged by most interviewees.
~THOMAS; Nous ne sommes pas, nombreux. (0.9) Comme par exemple, comme, (TSK) (0.8) toujours::, il y a la haine. (0.6) Il y a la sorcellerie, (0.4) il y a la tuerie, voyez ça, donc on était nombreux mais avec cette #allure-ci, ça finit le monde.

We’re not, numerous. (0.9) Like for example, like, (TSK) (0.8) always, there’s hatred. (0.6) There’s sorcery, (0.4) there’s slaughter, see that, so we were numerous but with this #pace here, (2.2) it ends the world/everybody.

(AKB1-029:00:20:41)

Epiphanie (21, Campo Ville) wasn’t sure of the number of Iyasa people, but reported that her grandmother, like ~Thomas, often talked about the number of Iyasa being reduced as compared to the past (interestingly, using ils ‘they’ instead of nous ‘us’ to refer to Iyasa people):

**Excerpt (2)**

ANNA; Est-ce que les Yasa sont nombreux?

Are the Yasa numerous?

(3.0)

EPIPHANIE; C’est la grand-mère qui me disait souvent que les Yasa étaient nombreux mais maintenant, comme il y a les, deuils,

It’s my grandmother who often told me that the Yasa were numerous but now, as there are, funerals,

ANNA; Mm.

EPIPHANIE; donc ils sont plus peu nombreux comme avant.

so they’re not as numerous as before.

(AKB1-053:00:36:34)

Ma Tekila (62, Campo Beach) also stated that the Iyasa are not numerous, and a Batanga man visiting at the time reported that this was partly due to the slave trade:

**Excerpt (3)**

ANNA; Est-ce que—est-ce que vous trouvez que les Yasa, aujourd’hui sont nombreux?

Do—do you find that the Yasa, today are numerous?

(1.3)

MA TEKILA; Non. (3.1) Surtout::, les Yasa ne sont pas nombreux.

No. (3.1) Above all::, the Yasa are not numerous.

ANNA; Mm.

MA TEKILA; Tu entends non? Pour dire la vérité les Yasa ne sont pas nombreux.
You hear no? To tell the truth the Yasa are not numerous.

ANNA; Mm.
MA TEKILA; Mm-hm. (0.9) Les Yasa ne sont pas nombreux.

MAN; Ils ne sont pas nombreux ils sont allés beaucoup l’esclavage. ### les achetaient.

#They’re not numerous they went into slavery a lot. ### bought them.

(ASK1-054:00:34:29)

Similarly, highlighting the association between language and geographic place discussed in §3.3.2 below, ~Elise framed the small number of Iyasa speakers in terms of how many villages were associated with the language:

Excerpt (4)

~ELISE; Nous ne sommes pas nombreux eh.

ANNA; Pas nombreux?

~ELISE; Mm-mm. (1.0) Si vous voyez même la distance de Beach, jusqu’Lolabe,

ANNA; Mm.

~ELISE; Mm, voilà tous les Yasa là. Rien que le—les petits villages qui #sont. (0.6) Les mêmes—les—les villages qui sont seulement deux maisons, mm-hm sommes pas nombreux.

Mm, there’s all the Yasa there. Nothing but the—the little villages that #are. (0.6) The same—the—the villages who are at only two houses, mm-hm ((we)) are not numerous.

ANNA; Mm.

~ELISE; Nous sommes pas nombreux.

We’re not numerous.

(ANB1-036:00:22:58)

The estimate of “not numerous” was sometimes accompanied by a comparison to the demographic size of other languages in the area or in Cameroon. Some respondents like Thierry (47, Campo Ville) drew a distinction between Iyasa’s demographics at the local vs. national
levels, and like ~Elise, framed the language’s size in terms of geographic reach (number of villages):

**Excerpt (5)**

ANNA; **Et selon vous est-ce que le yasa c’est une langue—une grande langue ou une petite langue?**

*And in your opinion is Iyasa a language—a big language or a small language?*

THIERRY; **Bon au niveau de—de notre arrondissement c’est une grande langue.**

*Well at the level of—of our sub-division it’s a big language.*

ANNA; **Mm-hm.**

THIERRY; **Mais au niveau du Cameroun c’est une petite langue parce que, on n’est pas assez; peuplé ou bien on n’est pas assez nombreux pour pouvoir faire, front avec des, (0.6) des langues qui ont beaucoup des villages.**

*But at the level of Cameroon it’s a small language because, we’re not sufficiently; populated or well we’re not numerous enough to be able to, confront the, (0.6) the languages who have a lot of villages.*

(1.6) (AKB1-096:00:20:57)

However, as mentioned above, some younger interviewees considered Iyasa speakers numerous, in contrast to middle-aged and older interviewees. ~Robert (19, Ebodje) was firm that the Iyasa are numerous:

**Excerpt (6)**

ANNA; **Selon toi, (0.5) combien est-ce qu’on peut estimer le nombre de locuteurs de yasa?**

*In your opinion, (0.5) at how many can one estimate the number of speakers of Yasa?* (1.6)

~ROBERT; **Mmmm[m:::].**

ANNA; **[Est-ce que]—est-ce que les Yasa sont nombreux?**

*[Are]—are the Yasa numerous?*

(1.1)

~ROBERT; **Oui les Yasa sont nombreux. Je n’ai aucune idée de, du nombre.**
Yes the Yasa are numerous. I have no idea of, of the number.

ANNA; Mm.
~ROBERT; Ils sont franchement nombreux.
  *They’re frankly numerous.*

Like Robert, ~Mireille (18, Campo Ville) reported Iyasa speakers to be numerous (~AKB1-045:00:09:37); ~Bertrand (24, Ebodje) and his sister took an even more optimistic view of the number of Iyasa speakers:

**Excerpt (7)**

ANNA; Est-ce que c’est impossible de, estimer combien de locuteurs de yasa existent au monde?
  *Is it impossible to, estimate how many speakers of Yasa exist in the world?*

~BERTRAND; Hmm:: (1.7) (TSK) (4.5) Au monde—bon on #comptait même;, (TSK) (2.3) dans les:, cette, (1.5) un million #d’habitants eh? Ya[sa].
  *In the world—well we counted even:, (TSK) (2.3) in the:, this, (1.5) a million population eh? Ya[sa].*

ANNA; [C’est] beaucoup.
  *[It’s] a lot.

~BERTRAND\SISTER; Môó ((nom)),
  *Isn’t that so ((name)),

SISTER; E ?
  *Yeah/hm?*

~BERTRAND; Mayasa ilongônjé monde donc na panyôli na v na v, liyê ngudi et m k m—
  *The Iyasa if we look in the world so even in Guinea, even in, even in, we could reach a m—*

SISTER; W b liô.
  *They’ve exceeded ((that)).*

~BERTRAND; E ?
  *Hm?*

SISTER; W b liô.
  *They’ve exceeded ((that)).*

~BERTRAND; Oui @ma petite sœur @dit @que, (0.3) qu’on d passe.
  *Yeah @my little sister @says @that, (0.3) that we exceed.*

ANNA; Mm.
Despite initially responding *pas trop nombreux* (‘not too numerous’) to an initial question about whether the Iyasa were numerous, Bertrand estimated a million—or more, according to his sister—total Iyasa people in the world. He went on to comment that his sister’s estimate stemmed from having lived in Equatorial Guinea, implying that she formed an impression that the Iyasa are quite numerous there. While the original question was framed in terms of the number of Iyasa *speakers*, Bertrand here treats the number of Iyasa *people* as the answer I was looking for—equating ethnic identity and linguistic proficiency for the purposes of this question, as discussed further in §3.3.1.

As far as concrete estimates of speaker numbers, Anita (44, Ebodje) estimated roughly 3,000 speakers (AKB1-018:00:16:37). A more precise estimate of speakers provided by Arnauld Djowe (AKB1-008:00:30:31) estimated the number of speakers in Cameroon by village from north to south: 100 in Lolabe, 30 in Beyɔ, 20 in Ipenyenje, 300 in Ebodje, 20 in Mbendji, 200 in Bwanjo, 10 in Itonde Mer, 410 in Campo Ville, and 300 in Campo Beach, for a total estimate of 1,390 Iyasa speakers in Cameroon.

### 3.2.1.2 Demographic issues: urbanization and linguistic heterogeneity

Many interviewees expressed concern about the changing demographics in the Campo Sub-Division, particularly the influx of “foreigners” (see Chapter 2, §2.3), which many participants expressed negative feelings towards—using words like French *enveloppé*, ‘invaded’, as did ~Alain, 71, of Ebodje (AKB1-016:00:34:54). In particular, development in Campo Ville, which was previously a major Iyasa population center, was cited as a concern in relation to the maintenance of Iyasa language and culture. ~Serge (70+, Campo Ville) described the threat to Iyasa in dire terms, stating that as a result of this wave of immigration, the Iyasa were “finished” (*sont finis*):

39 Arnauld concluded this estimate by saying “par voisine 2,000, 2,400, quelque chose” (“around 2,000, 2,400, something”), but this final number may have included Iyasa speakers outside Campo Sub-Division, or may simply have been a miscalculation in the moment.
Some younger speakers also described the urbanization of Campo as driving language shift towards French. Robert (19, Ebodje) describes the language preferences of Iyasa youth as being affected by the perception of Campo Ville as a city (as opposed to a village):

Excerpt (9):

~ROBERT; Ils disent que déjà Campo c'est une ville, (0.8) #donc ils ne peuvent pas parler le yasa, en ville.

*They ((other youth)) say that Campo is already a city, (0.8) so they can't speak Iyasa, in the city.*

(AKB1-021:00:18:42)

It is of course possible that a town may undergo rapid urbanization, and grow more linguistically diverse, without serious threats to the formerly dominant local language(s). However, a common scenario is that lingua franca(e) gain ground as the code of everyday communication in public life, replacing local languages which formerly held this role, and this may accelerate language shift. Several interviewees expressed sentiments along these lines. In the excerpt below, ~Mary (32, Campo Ville) describes the “accommodation struggle” in Campo Ville, and describes how negotiation of language choice in inter-group interactions ends up defaulting to French:

Excerpt (10):

~MARY; Parce que parfois je m'## souvent avec les gens ici. (0.3) Quand je croise quelqu'un peut-être qui est Mvae, (0.4) je lui parle yasa ou je lui salue en yasa, (0.4) il me répond
qu’il n’est pas: iyasa. Que je dois le répondre, salue en mvae. (0.5) Je lui dis que "oui, je te salue en mvae parce que je suis Mvae?" (0.2) Donc mieux, (0.3) pour ne me pas apporter le discussion c’est en français.

Because sometimes I often with the people here. (0.3) When I run into someone maybe who’s Mvae, (0.4) I speak Yasa to him or I greet him in Yasa, (0.4) he replies that he’s not: iyasa. That I should reply to him, greet in Mvae. (0.5) I tell him "yeah, I greet you in Mvae because I’m Mvae?" (0.2) So better, (0.3) for not bringing the discussion on myself it’s in French.

(AKB1-037:00:29:58)

Overall, most participants expressed concerns about the growing linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity in Campo Sub-Division in relation to the linguistic vitality of Iyasa, and many people expressed the idea that the current influx of new, non-Iyasa residents to the area was resulting in decreased use of Iyasa.

3.2.1.3 Demographic issues: interethnic marriage

While many participants expressed concern about increased contact with other language populations due to immigration to the Campo Sub-Division, many also cited the potentially negative effects of interethnic marriage, and of the increase in these mixed marriages, on Iyasa’s vitality. Based on the interviews conducted for this dissertation and anecdotal observation, marriages between two Iyasa spouses are indeed less common among younger people than older ones. Concerns about interethnic marriages’ impact on the vitality of Iyasa were often framed in terms of struggles over which parent’s language would “dominate” in the home. The end result of such struggles was usually described as either the parents compromising and using mostly the neutral code of French in the home, or the child acquiring the mother’s language and not the father’s. While several interviewees stated that the father’s language should be the one to “dominate,” as the husband is the head of the family, it was more commonly reported that children in interethnic marriages would learn either the mother’s language and French, or only French.

Thierry (47, Campo Ville) framed the loss of “smaller” languages due to intermarriage as something universally common, in which people from less numerically dominant ethnolinguistic groups (conflating “small languages” and “small tribes”) seek spouses from larger groups, resulting in the loss of the smaller language:
Excerpt (11)

THIERRY; # vous savez les— les langues qui sont un peu majoritaires essaient un peu d'envahir les autres.
You know the—the languages which are a bit majority try a bit to invade the others.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

THIERRY; Et quand il y a des: (0.6) des mariages qui se font, (0.3) c'est sur les petites langues, les petits pat— eh, tribus, (0.3) qui cherchent #ah aller épouser peut-être, (0.3) chez les grands— dans la grande tribu. (0.4) Et le— maintenant la grande tribu cherche donc ce moment vouloir un peu l'envahir.
And: when there are: (0.6) marriages which are made, (0.3) it’s on the small languages, the small pat—eh, tribes, (0.3) who seek #ah to go marry perhaps, (0.3) from the big—in the big tribe. (0.4) And the—so now the big tribe seeks at this moment to want to invade it a little.

ANNA; Uh-huh.

THIERRY; C'est souvent ça la mécanisme de ces choses là dans, dans la vie. (0.2)
That’s often the mechanism of these things in, in life. (0.2)

ANNA; Oui.
Yeah.

THIERRY; Et ce qui fait que, il y a une langue finalement dominatrice. (0.4) Qui peut être #solide de la langue, qui est: plus nombreuse. Ou bien plus grand.
And what makes it so that, there’s finally a dominant language. (0.4) That can be #solid in the language, that is: more numerous. Or bigger.

(0KB1-096:00:20:25)

Thierry also went on to suggest that increasing the number of marriages between Iyasa people was one of the most important steps for language maintenance (see §3.6). Sammy (35, Yaoundé) provided several perspectives on why marriages between young Iyasa people were so rare, including the simple fact that in a small population, with strict prohibitions on marrying anyone who has a shared ancestor within the past four generations, it is difficult to find a marriageable partner:

Excerpt (12)

SAMMY; Mais il y a aussi cette histoire de parent , (0.5) qui dérange beaucoup parce que— beaucoup plus du cot des garçons. (0.6) Les garçons toujours pensent que lorsque tu
croises—si tu croises trois filles Yasa, (0.8) deux sur trois seront tes parentés. (0.6) Ah : il vaut mieux aller ailleurs, puis c’est plus facile.

But there’s also this story of kinship, (0.5) that bothers a lot because—a lot more on the side of the boys. (0.6) The boys always think that when you meet—if you meet three Yasa girls, (0.8) two out of three are going to be your relatives. (0.6) Ah: it’s better to go somewhere else, then it’s easier.

(AKB1-071:00:18:24)

~Justine (54, Beyɔ), in discussing her daughters who’d married non-Iyasa husbands, described the resulting “obligation” for their children to speak French:

Excerpt (13)

~JUSTINE; Et, ceux qui sont Kribi, ma fille, son mari n’est pas Yasa.

And, those who are in Kribi, my daughter, her husband isn’t Yasa.

ANNA; Mm.

~JUSTINE; Donc c’est le français. @ Même l’autre qui a # Batanga son mari n’est pas Yasa c’est un Batanga, c— ils parlent toujours en français. Ils sont— les enfants sont obligés de parler le français.

So it’s French. @ Even the other who # in Batanga her husband isn’t Yasa he’s a Batanga, c—they always speak in French. They are—the kids are obligated to speak French.

(AKB1-035:00:19:27)

Interestingly, despite Batanga being closely related to Iyasa, and many speakers reporting that there is a high degree of mutual intelligibility between the two languages (to the extent that some Iyasa speakers reported using Iyasa with their Batanga friends or spouses, and the Batanga speakers using Batanga in response), Justine’s children and their spouses apparently settled on French as their primary home language. However, some interviewees described a pattern of home language use in which, while still dominated by French, the children were also learning both parents’ ethnic languages. Thierry (47, Campo Ville), who is married to a Batanga speaker, reported this pattern in his home:
Excerpt (14)

ANNA;   Bon avec vos enfants c’est quelle langue que vous parlez plus fréquemment?
        Well with your kids which language is it that you speak most frequently?

THIERRY; Bon comme on a une multitude de—on a—(0.7) des enfants qui sont issus de deux côtés, (0.6) et le français est un peu—beaucoup plus utilisé.
       Well as we have a multitude of—we have—(0.7) kids who come from two sides, (0.6) and French is a bit—a lot more used.

ANNA;    Mm-hm. (1.2)

THIERRY; Mais ça n’empêche pas que, la maman des fois elle communique avec eux, sa langue maternelle.
        But that doesn’t prevent, the mom sometimes she communicates with them, her mother tongue.

ANNA;    Mm-hm.

THIERRY; Et moi aussi des fois c’est ;, (0.7) la langue maternelle aussi. (0.3)
        And me too sometimes it’s;, (0.7) the mother tongue too.

ANNA;    D’accord.
        Okay.

THIERRY; Donc ils essayerent d’apprendre les deux la fois.
        So they try to learn both at the same time.

(AKB1-096:00:12:09)

In addition, some interviewees reported that non-Iyasa women who marry Iyasa men do often develop some degree of proficiency in the language (e.g., AKB1-087:00:25:58), and in-marrying men sometimes learn some Iyasa, even if it isn’t “fluent” (e.g., AKB1-021:00:24:04). It is not necessarily the case that in-marrying spouses fail to acquire Iyasa, and some, especially those who come to live in their spouses’ predominantly Iyasa villages or neighborhoods, develop fairly good proficiency within only a few years (see, e.g., the interview with ~Rosine, a young Basaa woman who had married an Iyasa husband and described her process and motives for learning Iyasa, in AKB1-090).

It bears repeating that the perception of diminishing Iyasa language use due to intermarriage was not shared by all interviewees. Arnauld, for example, stated the opposite, that intermarriage was declining due to increased awareness of the small number of Iyasa people:
Excerpt (15)

ANNA; Est-ce que— est-ce que tu penses que aujourd'hui les gens parlent yasa plus ou moins que au pass ?
*Do—you think that today people speak Yasa more or less than in the past?*
(1.1)

ARNAULD; Uh je vais dire plus.
*Uh I'm going to say more.*

ANNA; Plus.
*More.*

ARNAULD; Mm-hm.

ANNA; Mm. (0.7) Peut-être la langue se répand un peu ?
*Mm. (0.7) Maybe the language is expanding a bit?*

ARNAULD; Oui. (0.7) Tout simplement parce que aujourd'hui, (0.2) les gens ont compris, (0.7) que nous étions trop minoritaires. (0.6) Parce que il fut un temps, (0.3) cause de:, (0.4) de se dénigrer se # minimiser, on préférait l'étranger. (0.2) Aujourd'hui elles ont compris elles préfèrent aujourd'hui se marier avec uh, (0.3) Yasa. Pour avoir le vrai sang Yasa.
*Yes. (0.7) Very simply because today, (0.2) people have understood, (0.7) that we were too minority. (0.6) Because there was a time, (0.3) because of:, (0.4) denigrating oneself belittling # oneself, we preferred the foreigner. (0.2) Today they've understood they prefer today to marry with uh, (0.3) Yasa. To have the real Yasa blood.*

(AKB1-008:00:34:41)

As always, it is important to bear in mind that perceptions of language shift, especially those linked to sensitive social issues like marriage, are likely to vary within a given community. While several interviewees positioned increasing rates of intergroup marriage as contributing to language shift away from Iyasa, some stated that intergroup marriage was decreasing, and others highlighted the fact that in-marrying spouses may learn Iyasa and the language may be maintained as one of the languages of the home.

3.2.1.4 Demographic issues: migration and rural exodus

As discussed in Chapter 2, §2.3.2, migration between rural villages and major cities is fairly common among Iyasa speakers, in line with the phenomenon of rural exodus discussed in contemporary African language shift literature (e.g., Vigouroux & Mufwene 2009; McLaughlin 2001). Although some scholars have disputed the role of urbanization and rural exodus as
necessarily a cause of language shift or endangerment (see Lüpke 2015:68–72), the perception of urbanization as driving language loss was prevalent among Iyasa interviewees. Just as the urbanization of Campo was reported to be a factor in language shift, migration to cities outside Campo Sub-Division was also commonly perceived as causing shift away from Iyasa (or shift towards an “incorrect” Iyasa). ~Justine (54, Beyɔ) described upbringing in cities as harming Iyasa proficiency:

Excerpt (16)

~JUSTINE;  Même les vieux même maintenant—les #trentaines—il y a beaucoup qui font les erreurs l .
Even the old folks even now—the #thirties—there are a lot who make those mistakes.

ANNA;  Ah oui?
Ah yeah?

~JUSTINE;  Beaucoup. Parce que, les parents ont travaillé en ville, ils sont nés en ville, (0.8) tu vieillis en ville, tu ne peux plus parler le yasa correcte, normalement comme une personne qui a grandi au village.
A lot. Because, the parents worked in the city, they were born in the city, (0.8) you get older in the city, you can no longer speak correct Yasa, normally like a person who grew up in the village.

(AKB1-035:00:21:53)

~Robert (19, Ebodje) also identified migration to cities for schooling as a cause of language shift, and positioned it as a relatively new phenomenon:

Excerpt (17)

ROBERT;  Beaucoup d'enfants font les études maintenant en ville, (0.8) et en ville l -bas ils oublient leur patois uh, maternelle. Par contre par avant il y avait pas question de, (1.2) d'étrangers, que tu te déplaces de la ville— du village vers la ville, (0.5) oui c'est qui fait #tout tout le monde dans le village qu'on sait parler, (0.6) le patois.
A lot of kids do their studies now in the city, (0.8) and in the city there they forget their uh, maternal patois. By contrast before there was no question of, (1.2) of foreigners, that you move to the city—from the village to the city, (0.5) yeah that’s what made #all everybody in the village that we knew how to speak, (0.6) the patois.

(AKB1-021:00:26:11)
~Gabriel (35, Campo Beach) also equated being raised in a city with learning only French, and not acquiring Iyasa—he implies that parents who raise their children in the city will speak exclusively French to them. Conversely, he positions the village as a place where everyone is “under the obligation” to speak Iyasa. Though he referred to city people who come to the village “start[ing] with” Iyasa, i.e., beginning to learn Iyasa while spending time in the village (where everyone is obligated to speak), he stated that these people will experience language attrition (“forget everything”) once they return to the French-dominated city:

**Excerpt (18)**

GABRIEL; Generally even, those who, those who, those who are born: (0.4) in the village, (0.7) who grandissent au village, (0.4) sont dans l'obligation de le—parler la langue, (0.4) yasa. Mais, (0.2) si tu n—tu es n , (0.3) en ville, (0.5) et que, (0.2) au départ, (0.2) tes parents ne t'apprennent pas, (0.3) le yasa, (0.6) que tu ne parles que le français, tu vas grandir comme ça l . (0.4) Tu vas grandir grandir, (0.2) et parfois, tu peux être ici au village, tu commences avec le patois, tu arrives en ville, c'est le français, et, tu vas oublier tout.  

**Generally even, those who, those who, those who are born: (0.4) in the village, (0.7) who grow up in the village, (0.4) are under the obligation to—speak the language, (0.4) Yasa. But, (0.2) if you b—you’re born, (0.3) in the city, (0.5) and that, (0.2) from the beginning, (0.2) your parents don’t teach you, (0.3) Yasa, (0.6) that you speak nothing but French, you’re going to grow up like that there. (0.4) You’re going to grow up grow up, (0.2) and sometimes, you can be here in the village, you start with the patois, you arrive in the city, it’s French, and, you’re going to forget everything.**

(ABK1-005:00:09:46)

Overall, the notion of urbanity being linked to language attrition, as well as incomplete (or nonexistent) acquisition of Iyasa, was widely reported by interviewees. The perception of urban areas as linked to language shift, which is common in the language endangerment literature, was widely shared by interviewees. While urbanization is not necessarily always a threat to languages, it seems that in the Iyasa context, it is strongly perceived as one.

### 3.2.2 Intergenerational transmission issues

In general, the most important factor in language vitality assessment frameworks is intergenerational transmission. When transmission to children breaks down or is seriously reduced, particularly over a relatively short time, the communities involved may experience a
sudden “tip” (per Dorian 1986) towards the dominant language. Questions related to intergenerational transmission formed a core part of my interview template, and the heavy focus on transmission in the interview data may be seen as part of the research design rather than spontaneous input from participants, but interviewees also raised intergenerational transmission issues when asked about language use more generally. Discourses of children no longer learning Iyasa, or speaking a variety which was generally positioned as deficient or impure, were widespread among the Iyasa people I talked with. (Though it should be noted that these are not being posited as “local” or “traditional” discourses, necessarily, since they are similar to those circulated by missionaries and researchers—see Belew 2018:267–268).

When asked whether young people in general were proficient in Iyasa, there were sometimes striking differences between the answers given by older vs. younger respondents. (Though at times, there were also striking differences between speakers’ statements and observed fact—for example, before his interview began, ~Robert (19, Ebodje) claimed that all children in Ebodje spoke Iyasa all the time; 20 meters away, a group of children were playing soccer in French.) In general, older speakers took a more pessimistic view of Iyasa’s (non-)transmission to children, and positioned youth and children either as non-speakers, or as faulty or deficient speakers. Some younger speakers, on the other hand, described young people and children as reasonably good speakers, even if they were missing some lexical knowledge, as ~Nina (24, Campo Ville) does:

**Excerpt (19)**

ANNA;        Est-ce que les jeunes yasa ici à Campo, est-ce que, tous les jeunes ici parlent le yasa ?
*Do the Yasa youth here in Campo, do, all the youth here speak Yasa?*

~NINA;       Non.
*No.*

ANNA;        Tous les jeunes qui sont yasa ?
*All the youth who are Yasa?*

~NINA;       Les jeunes qui sont yasa ?
*The youth who are Yasa?*
ANNA ; Mm.

~NINA ; Oui tous les jeunes qui sont yasa parlent yasa.
Yes all the youth who are Yasa speak Yasa.

ANNA ; Et selon toi est-ce qu'ils parlent bien le yasa ?
And according to you do they speak Yasa well?

~NINA ; Bon ceux qui ont #mis du temps ailleurs, il y a certains mots qui se manquent.
Well those who have #spent time elsewhere, there are certain words which are missing.

ANNA ; Mm.

~NINA ; Mais ceux qui sont des natifs ici là, s'expriment très bien.
But those who are natives here, express themselves very well.

ANNA ; Et, les enfants ici à Campo qui sont yasa, est-ce que, tous les enfants qui sont yasa parlent yasa ici ?
And, the children here in Campo who are Yasa, do, all the children who are Yasa speak Yasa here?

~NINA ; Oui.
Yes.

ANNA ; Et est-ce que les enfants ici à Campo, est-ce qu'ils parlent bien le yasa ?
And do the children here in Campo, do they speak Yasa well?

~NINA ; Bon pas approfondi comme des parents eh ? Ou des âgés mais ils parlent, parlent bien.
Well not deep like parents eh? Or old people but they speak, speak well.

~Christine (29, Campo Ville) had a somewhat more cautious assessment of how many children are acquiring Iyasa: she notes that there are geographic areas where transmission is strong, but not outside of those areas. After describing her own use of predominantly French with her children, she gave the following assessment of how many children speak Iyasa:
Excerpt (20)

CHRISTINE; Il y a les zones. Il y a Ebodje, où les enfants s'expriment bien en yasa, (0.9) il y a Campo Beach, (1.3) il y a Campo Beach et un peu Bok mbc-Centre40 Campo. (0.5) Voilà les trois # où, (0.5) tu vas parler plus—les enfants qui parlent typiquement yasa.

There are zones. There’s Ebodje, where children express themselves well in Yasa, (0.9) there’s Campo Beach, (1.3) there’s Campo Beach and a bit Bok mbc-Centre in Campo. (0.5) There are the three # where, (0.5) you’ll speak more—the children who typically speak Yasa.

CHRISTELLE; [Mm.] ANNA; [Mm.] Les autres ailleurs qui sont hors de ces zones, est-ce qu’ils parlent bien?

Mm. The others elsewhere who are outside of these zones, do they speak well?

CHRISTINE; Il y en a ceux qui parlent bien mais—ici aussi, mais la plupart quand tu fais la pourcentage est bas.

There are some who speak well but—here too, but most when you do the percentage it’s low.

(AKB1-038:00:13:57)

Speakers older than their twenties generally described children as speaking predominantly French, regardless of their proficiency in Iyasa, though some did position children as occasionally speaking Iyasa. Marie-Claire (33, Campo Beach) counters ~Christine’s claim that Campo Beach is a “zone” where children typically speak Iyasa:

Excerpt (21)

ANNA; Et entre les enfants ici à Beach, est-ce que tu penses que tout les enfants parlent bien yasa? (0.8)

And among the children here in Beach, do you think that all the children speak Yasa well?

MARIE-CLAIRE; (TSK) Non. (0.5)

(TSK) No. (0.5)

ANNA; Ah?

MARIE-CLAIRE; #— je n’ai pas constaté ça. Tout les enfants parlent pas bien yasa.

40 Bok mbc-Centre is a small, predominantly Iyasa quartier (neighborhood) in Campo Ville (see Chapter 2).
I haven’t noticed that. All the children don’t speak Yasa well.

MARIE-CLAIRE; Certains enfants parlent yasa, plus que, les autres. Mais quand on— quand on essaie de grouper tout les enfants, pas trop de yasa. Français, les gens parlent français.

Certain children speak Yasa, more than, the others. But when you—when you try to group all the children, not too much Yasa. French, people speak French.

Marie-Claire’s assessment of some children as speaking Iyasa more than others is reflected by several other speakers; many other interviewees also positioned some children as good speakers, but not all, or even most. Some speakers, like ~Christine in Excerpt 20, discussed the differing use of Iyasa by children in different villages. Others, like ~Elise (58, Ebodje) focused on the factors of mobility and urban schooling when explaining why some children do not speak Iyasa:

Excerpt (22)

ANNA; Et est-ce qu’il y a des jeunes ici qui ne parlent pas bien le yasa? Qui sont yasa?

And are there youth here who don’t speak Yasa well? Who are Yasa?

~ELISE; Oui.

Yes.

ANNA; Ah.

~ELISE; Mm-hm. (0.5) Comme beaucoup de les enfants qui fréquentent en ville là. Leur—

Mm-hm. (0.5) Like a lot of the children who go to school in the city there. Their—

# le seulement français, rien que. (1.2) Ils ne savent pas parler yasa. Comme nous sommes les les mamans comme ça, les vieilles mamans comme ça, quand ils viennent en vacances, ils n’arrivent pas parler notre langue.

# the school only French, nothing but. (1.2) They don’t know how to speak Yasa. Like we’re the the mothers like that, the old mothers like that, when they come on vacation, they don’t manage to speak our language.

In referring to children “coming on vacation,” ~Elise singles out the children who are being educated in cities (outside the “zones” described by Christine) and who return to Ebodje or
other Iyasa villages for holidays. Rather than positioning them as faulty or incomplete speakers, as does ~Nina in Excerpt (19), ~Elise positions them as non-speakers altogether: “they don’t know how to speak Yasa”; “they don’t manage to speak our language.”

Aside from children raised outside of Iyasa “zones,” many younger interviewees inside these Iyasa “zones” described speaking primarily French to their children. When asked for the motives underlying this choice, most speakers either referred to their spouse not being an Iyasa speaker, or said something like “it happened automatically; I didn’t really think about it.” However, Celine (23, Campo Beach) articulated another reason for choosing French, which several other interviewees echoed less directly: ideologies of subtractive multilingualism, or the idea that a child’s acquiring Iyasa might interfere with the acquisition of French. This concept was overtly contested by some interviewees who had given it a great deal of thought (e.g., Adolphe and Sammy, both of whom are active in language issues), but Celine’s stance below is reminiscent of what some other young parents described:

**Excerpt (23)**

ANNA;  Donc le plus grand ((de tes enfants)) de 6 ans est-ce qu’elle parle yasa?

So the oldest ((of your children)) of 6 years does she speak Yasa?

CELINE; Elle— donc— elle se débrouille même.

She—so—she manages even.

ANNA;  Mm-hm.

CELINE;  Pou— mais elle com[prend]. Mais elle ne parle pas bien sort pas bien les mots yasa.

Fo—but she understands. But she doesn’t speak well doesn’t put out Yasa words well.

ANNA;  [Oui.] Mm-hm.

CELINE;  Parce que je ne lui parle pas le yasa.

Because I don’t speak Yasa to her.

ANNA;  Okay. (0.5) Et pourquoi est-ce que tu as choisi de ne pas parler yasa la fille? (1.0)

Okay. (0.5) And why have you chosen to not speak Yasa to the girl? (1.0)

CELINE;  (TSK) (0.5) Je trouve—moi—(0.8) (TSK) Beaucoup p— moi j’ai beaucoup d’abord g— j’ai trop grandi avec le patois. Donc je ne veux pas que ma fille doit aussi #garder le patois. (0.3) donc ça me dérange quand je suis venu — causer même une phrase bien en français l , (TSK) (0.5) je ne peux pas facilement sortir une phrase sans avoir des fautes.

(TSK) (0.5) I find—me—(0.8) (TSK) A lot p—me I first of all a lot—I grew up too much with the patois. So I don’t want that my daughter should also #keep the patois. (0.3) So it
bothers me when I came to—speak even one sentence well in French there, (TSK) (0.5) I can’t easily put out one sentence without having errors.

ANNA; Mm en français?

CELINE; Oui donc je ne veux pas que ma fille doit aussi avoir des problèmes là.

Yeah so @I don't want my daughter to also have problems there.

ANNA; Ah:

CELINE; Donc je force l’école français la maison français.

So I force French at school French at home.

(AKB1-091:00:17:23)

Overall, many younger parents described speaking mostly or exclusively French to their children, as did Celine, although not all described the same motive (of not wanting to interfere with the acquisition of French). Older speakers also reported younger parents speaking primarily French to their children, and many expressed concern that today’s children would not be able to speak Iyasa when they grew older. While there was a general consensus that children still speak Iyasa in some “zones,” particularly Ebodje, there was less agreement on whether the children of Campo Ville and Campo Beach generally speak Iyasa. However, on the whole, speakers’ reports describe a situation in which intergenerational transmission of Iyasa is undergoing a fairly recent, and potentially accelerating, breakdown.

3.2.3. Economic issues

As acknowledged in most literature on language shift and endangerment (e.g., Crystal 2002:68-90; Nettle & Romaine 2000:126-147; Thomason 2015:18-41; Grenoble 2011, inter alia), a major contributing factor to language shift is the economic, educational, and sociopolitical advantages which speakers perceive to be conferred by the use of a dominant language(s). Many speakers, particularly younger parents, expressed a desire that their children excel in French in order to have better prospects for education and employment (see also §2.4). Most interviewees also professed positive feelings towards Iyasa, a pride in the language, and a desire to see it maintained. However, ~Mary (32, Campo Ville) was an exception, in that she positioned Iyasa language and culture as useless for economic and educational purposes, and therefore as of no interest to her:
Excerpt (24)

ANNA; Est-ce que ça vous intéresse? Le—le culture Yasa?
And does it interest you? The— the Yasa culture?

~MARY; Non.
No.

ANNA; Ah pas de tout?
Ah not at all?

~VICTOR; @@@

~MARY; Ça m’intéresse pas. Ça me—ça me sert quoi? Ça va me donner quoi?
It doesn’t interest me. It— what’s its use for me? What will it give me?

~VICTOR; @@@@

~MARY; Ça me donne au travail? Ça va # donner l’argent? Pour moi ça ne m’intéresse pas.
Does it give me work? Will it # give money? For me it doesn’t interest me.

She went on to disparage the usefulness of the Iyasa language for her children’s upbringing, and her indifference towards whether they acquired the language. Interestingly, her father Victor is involved with the work of CELI, the Iyasa language committee; however, he simply laughed and agreed with his daughter throughout the interview, even agreeing with her when she said it was okay if her child didn’t speak Iyasa well. When I posed a hypothetical question about how she might feel if her child never acquired Iyasa, she returned to the theme of Iyasa’s perceived lack of usefulness for economic purposes:

Excerpt (25)

ANNA; Et, peut-être si, un enfant ne parle pas couramment, il ne sait pas bien s’exprimer, est-ce que ça va? Si—il qu—il s’exprime très bien en français, mais il ne s’exprime pas bien en yasa. Ça va?
And, maybe if, a child doesn’t speak fluently, he doesn’t know how to express himself well, is that okay? If—he wh—he expresses himself very well in French, but he doesn’t express himself well in Yasa. Is that okay?

~MARY; Pour moi ça va.
For me that’s okay.

ANNA; Pas de problème?
No problem?

~VICTOR; Ça va non?
That’s okay no?

~MARY; Pour moi. Mm-hm.

For me. Mm-hm.

~VICTOR; #Il #n’y #a pas de problème.

#There’s no problem.

~MARY; Pour moi je n’ai pas de problème.

For me I have no problem.

ANNA; Ah bon.

Ah okay.

~MARY; Comme je vous disais, #tant #qu’il va trouver un bureau Yasa où #il #fallait travailler.

Like I told you, #as much #as #he is going to find a Yasa office where #he #had to work.

~VICTOR; @Un bureau Yasa où ?

@A Yasa office where?

ANNA; @D’accord.

Okay.

~MARY; Mais c’est le français qu’on demande toujours.

But it’s French they always ask for.

While no other speakers were as overtly disparaging as Mary in their assessment of Iyasa’s (non-)usefulness, and no one else outright positioned Iyasa as useless for earning money, economic issues were also frequently tied to issues of urbanization, rural exodus, and migration in interviewees’ accounts. Many younger speakers expressed a desire to leave the Campo area to seek work (see also Chapter 2); given the reports of loss of Iyasa proficiency when speakers move to larger cities, economic factors which drive Iyasa speakers to relocate to urban areas appear to have a substantial impact on the language’s vitality.

3.2.4. The role of French in language shift

The primary target of language shift in the Iyasa context is French, according to the Iyasa speakers interviewed, and my own observations corroborate this. While Connell (2015:107) notes that “[t]he view most often offered [in the endangered-languages literature] suggests that in Africa it has typically been African languages, in the form of national languages and regional lingua francas, that endanger smaller, local languages,” it is not the case in the Iyasa context that an African language is the target of shift. No interviewees positioned any language other than
French as the target of shift away from Iyasa, except when discussing Iyasa speakers living abroad (e.g., diaspora speakers living in London shifting to English)\textsuperscript{41}. As discussed in §3.2.1-3.2.3, there are many overlapping factors which speakers identified as driving language shift towards French: the economic and educational value of French, the utility of French as a neutral code of interethnic communication (particularly in urban settings), and the growing prevalence of parents (especially in ethnically mixed marriages) choosing to use French as the primary language of the home.

However, French has been present as the colonial/administrative language of the Campo Sub-Division since 1916, and as a trade and contact language since the late 19th century. Iyasa has thus been maintained in Cameroon during more than a century of intensive pressure from French. Is a stable community multilingualism which includes Iyasa and French, as has apparently been maintained for generations, now changing? As ~Justine (54, Beyɔ) describes, there has in fact been a shift in the domains occupied by French and Iyasa during her lifetime. While French used to be acquired in school settings and used primarily at school, and Iyasa was mostly or exclusively used in the home domain, that has changed since Justine was young:

Excerpt (26)

\textit{~JUSTINE; C’est maintenant que la #fait de français est venu. Chez nous ici les—on parlait le patois. C’est l’école que tu vas parler le fra—tu apprends le français. Mais maintenant tout a changé. Français la maison français la maison, les enfants ne comprennent plus le yasa. Beaucoup ne comprennent pas ils ne parlent même pas.}

\textit{It’s now that the #fact of French has come. Here with us there the—we spoke the patois. It’s at school that you’re going to speak Fre—you learn French. But now everything has changed. French in the home French in the home, the children don’t understand Yasa anymore. A lot don’t understand they don’t even speak.}

\textit{(AKB1-035.00:13:37)}

\textsuperscript{41} A few speakers (e.g., Paul, who identified Spanish as his primary language) referred to Spanish as a target of shift for Equatoguinean Iyasa speakers. However, my data on the status of Iyasa in E.G. is extremely limited, and this discussion focuses only on Iyasa speakers in Cameroon.
While ~Justine simply describes the changes in the roles of French and Iyasa in terms of “now” versus “with us” (her own generation), Adolphe (40, Campo Ville) gives a more precise estimate of when this transition took place:

**Excerpt (27)**

ADOLPHE; Je crois que, cette mutation date beaucoup plus uh, des années, (0.6) c'est beaucoup plus des années 90 eh? (0.5) Je crois. (1.0) Parce que uh:, j'ai encore, (0.7) un souvenir, (1.0) les gens qui appartiennent au génération 80, les enfants qui appartiennent au génération 80 chez nous, parlent encore la langue maternelle. (0.8) Mm. Mais ce phénomène est récent. Il est beaucoup plus récent. (0.6) Les années 90, 2000 encore c'est grave.

_I think that, this mutation dates much more, uh, from the years, (0.6) it's much more from the 90s eh? (0.5) I think. (1.0) Because uh:, I still have, (0.7) a memory, (1.0) the people who belong to the 80s generation around here, still speak the mother tongue. (0.8) Mm. But this phenomenon is recent. It’s much more recent. (0.6) The 90s, 2000s still it’s serious._

ANNA; Les millennials? @@

The millennials? @@

ADOLPHE; Oui #voil . @@@

Yes #exactly. @@@

(ABK1-010:01:38:39)

Similarly, ~Gabriel (35, Campo Beach) described the shift to French as a home language as having begun with his generation—he was born in 1981 and describes himself as a good speaker who primarily spoke Iyasa in the home growing up, while his children were born in the 2000s, as Adolphe described above:

**Excerpt (28)**

~GABRIEL; C'est notre génération d'aujourd'hui, c'est nous qui:, qui amenaient les enfants, parler, ah, parler français. (0.5) Parce que moi avec mes enfants, c'est le français.

It’s our generation of today, it’s us who:, who brought the kids, to speak, ah, to speak French. (0.5) Because me with my kids, it’s French.

HAWAOU; Donc c'est v—vous pensez que c'est cette génération, c'est [vous-même @@]—
So it’s y—you think that it’s this generation it’s [you yourselves @@]—

~GABRIEL; [Ah non mais] puisque—

Puisque déjà moi peux le dire parce que, (0.3) eh, avant, il est—il est bien vrai, avant, ça s’est pass, (0.4) tu comprends un peu? Mais la majorité, des parents, (0.6) parlaient, les patois, — leurs enfants.

[Ah no but] since—
Since already me I can say it because, (0.3) eh, before, it’s—it’s really true, before, that did happen, (0.4) you understand a bit? But the majority, of parents, (0.6) spoke, the patois, to—to their kids.

(AKB1-005:00:08:17)

As ~Gabriel explains to Hawaou, it’s not that no parents spoke French to their children “before” (i.e., prior to his own generation); however, he stresses that the majority of parents “before” spoke the “patois.” Interestingly, he uses the plural “les patois,” expanding his statement not only to use of Iyasa in the past, but to “patois” in general; he seems to perceive the shift to French as a recent occurrence in other Cameroonian language communities, not only Iyasa.

In addition to perceptions of recent changes in French’s role among Iyasa speakers, its longstanding position as the co-official language of Cameroon was also reflected in interviewees’ reports. Ideologies which equate nationality and use of a national language (in this case, French) surfaced in several speakers’ accounts of language choice. For example, ~Marc (26, Ebodje), when responding to the question “if you could choose only one language in the world for your son to speak, which would you choose?”, replied:

Excerpt (29)

~MARC; Si moi je dis que #j’ai choisi—(0.6) telle langue et puis après-demain lui ((mon fils)) il va changer, bon. Si c’est moi, même le français c’est bon.

If me I say that I’ve chosen—(0.6) a certain language and then the day after tomorrow he ((my son)) is going to change, well. If it’s me, even French is good.

ANNA; Mm? (0.3)
~MARC; Mm. (0.4)
ANNA; Et pourquoi le français?

And why French?
Again illustrating that no community is a monolith in its perceptions, ~Marc did not express the view that speaking primarily French would align his son with a “white,” “French,” or “European” identity, as did Thierry and Sammy (see §3.1). Instead, it would reflect that his son is a Cameroonian, and he positions the language of Cameroon as being French.

The role of French in Iyasa speakers’ lives, according to interviewees, is both growing and a cause for concern with regard to Iyasa’s continued use. As French seems to be the primary (if not only) target of language shift among Iyasa speakers in Cameroon, and is reported to be encroaching on key domains formerly occupied by Iyasa (such as the home), any efforts in language maintenance or revitalization should be grounded in an understanding of the roles of French in speakers’ repertoires, the changes in these roles, and the range of identity functions served by French (e.g., national identity).

3.3. Speaker perceptions of factors supporting language maintenance

While speakers reported a number of factors they perceived as contributing to (or symptomatic of) language shift, they also identified certain factors as supporting the maintenance of Iyasa. These speaker-identified maintenance factors should be of interest to linguists as a possible window into individuals’ motives for language maintenance, and could provide crucial insights into locally effective language revitalization and conservation strategies.

3.3.1. Ethnic identity

A frequent theme in interviewees’ talk about their relationship to the Iyasa language was its role in their ethnic identity. I first want to acknowledge that in most contexts, the relationships between linguistic and ethnic identity can be extremely complicated, and positing a simple one-to-one correlation between ethnicity and language use has been critiqued as essentialist (per Lüpke 2016), Eurocentric, and often inapplicable to African contexts. Contemporary work in African sociolinguistics has challenged the notion that languages serve as simple indexes of personal characteristics like ethnicity or class (see, e.g., Lüpke 2016; Di Carlo 2012); much of this work has suggested a more holistic approach to understanding how languages serve multiple,
overlapping identities and group affiliations, rather than assuming that individual languages must correspond directly to fixed social categories. As Childs et al. (2014:180) note,

Though it is rarely explicitly discussed, most documentary work has been embedded in essentialist ideologies equating language loss with culture loss and assuming an isomorphism between language and culture, a viewpoint originating in nineteenth century European nationalism. Sub-Saharan African contexts do not map neatly onto this model; notions like ‘mother tongue’ or ‘ethnic identity’ do not immediately translate nor do they even apply in many cases.

Although the concept of isomorphism between ethnic identity and language in Africa is being fruitfully questioned by scholars, Iyasa speakers’ accounts of their own language choices and attitudes seem to draw heavily on essentialist notions like “ethnic identity” and “mother tongue” (and this type of linguistic essentialism has also been attested in other African contexts, e.g., McIntosh 2005 on a Giriama community in Kenya). To what degree these ideologies are “imported,” or the result of nearly two centuries of contact with European colonial and missionary language ideologies (see Belew 2018), is difficult to say. However, what is clear is that these ideologies play some role in the maintenance of Iyasa, particularly when participants were asked about the value of the Iyasa language. One sentiment expressed by many participants was that speaking Iyasa was a way to express their ethnic identity:

Excerpt (30)

CLAUDE; Il y a d'abord le fait de dire que “je suis Yasa, je parle d'abord yasa.”

There’s first of all the fact of saying that “I am Yasa, I speak Yasa first of all.”

CHRISTELLE; Mm-hm.

(1.1)

CLAUDE; Quand tu es #n'im— même si tu es #quoi, (1.5) même si tu es #quoi.

When you’re wh—even if you’re #that, even if you’re #that.

CHRISTELLE; Mm.

(0.6)

CLAUDE; Si tu t’engages dire que “je suis Yasa.” (1.0) Tu dois parler yasa.

If you commit to saying that “I am Yasa.” You should speak Yasa.

(AKB1-046:00:28:06)42

42 This audio file is not accessible to the public per the speaker’s wishes, but he gave permission to publish written excerpts from the interview. The file name and time code are included here for consistency with other examples.
Indeed, the link between ethnic identity and linguistic identity seemed so obvious to some interviewees that they seemed surprised to need to articulate it. When asked how she feels when she speaks Iyasa, Rose Colette (66, Campo Beach) simply laughed, and after a moment’s thought, replied, “Bon, je me sens—je me sens Iyasa!” (“Well, I feel—I feel Iyasa!”)43

In addition to the Iyasa language being strongly associated with Iyasa ethnic identity, there appears to be a widely shared discourse in the Iyasa speech community which equates the use of French (or English) with a “white” or “European” identity, in opposition to an “Iyasa” or “Cameroonian” identity. Thierry (47, Campo Ville) described the exclusive use of the Iyasa language at association meetings: he positioned it as an important tool to help young people who had grown up in Yaoundé and “don’t yet know [Iyasa] very well” (as discussed in §2.1.4) to improve their proficiency in the language, but also to prevent these young people from becoming “little whites” who only speak French:

Excerpt (31)

ANNA; Et quand on fait les réunions d'associations là-bas Yaoundé, (0.6) c’est en quelle langue?

And when one does these association meetings there in Yaoundé, (0.6), it’s in what language?

THIERRY; En yasa.

In Yasa.

ANNA; Uniquement?

Exclusively?

THIERRY; Uniquement yasa.

Exclusively Yasa.

ANNA; Ah okay. (0.9)

THIERRY; C’est un peu une manière de #vouloir, de permettre ceux qui ne connaissent pas encore très bien, d’apprendre certains mots.

It’s kind of a way of #wanting, of permitting those who don’t yet know very well, to learn certain words.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

43 Unfortunately, this interesting statement lacks a timecode because it was made when my recorder’s memory card had just filled up, and I had yet to notice and switch to a new one—a rookie mistake which all fieldworkers should take care to avoid.
Parce qu’il y a des jeunes filles, (0.2) des jeunes garçons aussi, (0.3) qui ont grandi l'bas, bon, qui s'y mêlent dans les groupes, mais il faut qu'ils apprennent aussi des petits mots, il faudra pas qu'ils viennent ici deviennent comme des, des petits blancs, comme on leur dit souvent. @@@

Because there are some young girls, (0.2) some young boys too, (0.3) who have grown up there, well, who are involved in the groups, but they have to also learn also some little words, they mustn’t come here to become like some, some little whites, as we often tell them. @@@

(AKB1-096:00:05:24)

Other speakers also referred to French and English as “the language(s) of whites”:

~Victor (71, Campo Ville) used this phrase three times during his interview (AKB1-037:00:05:06, AKB1-037:00:05:42, AKB1-037:00:38:33), and ~Louise (67, Campo Beach) referred disparagingly to the “snobbishness” of parents placing too much importance on their children speaking “la langue des blancs” (“the language of whites”) (AKB1-007:00:26:24). Also linking snobbishness and French, when Rose Colette (66, Campo Beach) was discussing language use in the Iyasa women’s association meetings in Douala, and described them as being conducted in Iyasa (like Thierry described in Yaoundé), I posed a question about a hypothetical woman who came to the meeting speaking French, and asked what people would think of her. “On va croire qu’elle est—qu’elle se sent supérieure aux autres” (“We’ll think that she’s—that she feels superior to others,”) Rose Colette replied (AKB1-069:00:08:13). Several other Iyasa speakers, during conversations outside the interview context, also made reference to those who spoke French too often as “whites.” Several people, like ~Gabriel, also posed rhetorical questions along the lines of “we aren’t white/European/French, so why should we speak French?:”

Excerpt (32)

~GABRIEL; C’est très très important ((de parler la langue maternelle aux enfants)).

It’s very very important ((to speak the mother tongue to children)).

ANNA; Pourquoi? (0.8)

Why?

~GABRIEL; <HIGH>Ah!<</HIGH> Parce que @c’est—c’est—ça #—#ils #sont pas des français.

@C’est des—des Yasa. Eh? Les camerounais Yasa. (0.3) Parce que tu vas—tu vas t’exprimer en français, tu n’es pas français.
Ah! Because it’s—it’s—that #— #they #aren’t French. @They’re—Yasa. Eh?

Cameroonian Yasa. (0.3) Because you’re going—you’re going to express yourself in French, you’re not French.

ANNA; Mm:.

~GABRIEL; Est-ce que les français parlent le yasa. @@ Voil.

@Do the French speak Yasa. @@ There you go.

(AKB1-005:00:47:23)

Sammy (35, Yaoundé) also described how his father, now a member of the Iyasa language committee, forbade French in the home when the family was living in Yaoundé. If any of the children spoke French at home, their father would scold them, saying “ici l’, on n’est pas des français, on est Yasa” (“here, we’re not French, we’re Yasa”) (AKB1-071:00:14:21).

As illustrated in these excerpts, the use of Iyasa was positioned as an important marker of Iyasa ethnic identity, and the use of French as a marker of a “white” or “French” identity. Additionally, several speakers’ interviews drew a link between “snobbishness,” as Louise put it, echoed by Rose Colette, and the use of French (or “the language of the whites”) in contexts which are more appropriate for expressing an Iyasa identity. It seems that the ability to convey an Iyasa identity, and not to be seen as a “little white,” may be an important factor supporting language maintenance in the Iyasa context, as well as among speakers in urban and diaspora contexts. Drawing upon the concept of language as a marker of Iyasa identity, and valorizing Iyasa identity overall, could be a successful tool for Iyasa language maintenance and revitalization programs, since so many interviewees framed ethnic identity and language proficiency as closely related.

3.3.2. Local (geographic) identity

As has been described in other Cameroonian contexts (e.g., Di Carlo 2012 on Lower Fungom), some speakers’ accounts provided a window into apparently localist language ideologies (in the sense of Hill 1996, as drawn upon by Good 2012; Di Carlo & Good 2014; 44 It was implied that this scolding was delivered in Iyasa, but relayed to me in French because that was the language of the interview. 45 This is not to imply a neat dichotomy between “Iyasa” and “white”/“French” identities here, as there are sure to be multiple other, and overlapping, identities held by members of the Iyasa community. However, the opposition between “Iyasa” and “white”/“French” identity as reflected in language use was what arose most frequently in these interviews.)
Esene Agwara 2013): languages are described as being strongly associated with villages or bounded geographic areas. In order to legitimize one’s status as being from a certain place, one ought to be able to speak the code associated with that place. This is also reminiscent of the “compact languages” described in Golla (2000:60): “language communities whose constituent dialect communities are closely adjacent and share a common interaction sphere (connected by trade, internmarriage, ritual, and inter-group alliances, and hostilities).” Most relevant to the discussion here is the “close adjacency” of Iyasa communities; Iyasa villages are in relatively close proximity to one another, easily traveled between by beach or boat, and in heavy contact with one another via family, marriage, religious, and fishing networks. Many participants framed the Iyasa language as important for constructing a local identity, one which identified them as truly being from the area—it is an important marker of Localness, to borrow a concept from the literature on Hawai’i Pidgin (Drager 2013) and Martha’s Vineyard English (Labov 1963), particularly at a time when more and more “outsiders” or “foreigners” are migrating to the Campo area. Related to how mobility away from the Campo Sub-Division towards larger cities was positioned as a cause of language shift and poor proficiency in §3.2.1.3, the inverse was also expressed by many participants: spending time in the geographic areas associated with Iyasa is seen as strengthening proficiency, and proficiency in Iyasa is seen as signaling a local identity.

For example, Paul (22, Bata, Equatorial Guinea), in discussing two hypothetical young Iyasa men, one of whom didn’t speak Iyasa well and the other did, provided the following scenario which drew heavily on the idea of geographic localness:

**Excerpt (33)**

PAUL; Celui qui:, (1.0) qui parle— qui s'exprime beaucoup en français que— que en yasa, mm?
(1.2) Un étranger peut dire qu'il n'est pas Yasa, que il a trouv d'ici. Parce qu'il
s'emplace— il s'emplace— il s'exprime pas bien en, (0.5) en yasa. Par contre, l'étranger
entend bien comment l'autre parle bien # il va dire que non, toi tu es, (0.5) ici. Tu causes
bien yasa. #S'exprime comme ça personne du village. Si peut-être un papa du village
vous parle yasa toi qui ne parles pas bien. Si tu essaies de dire que "je ne comprends
pas le mot " le papa va te dire que "tu es même d'ici?" (CLAP)

The one who:, (1.0) who speaks—who expresses himself a lot ((more)) in French than—
than in Yasa, mm? (1.2) A foreigner can say that he isn't Yasa, that he's found from here.
Because he doesn't express—express—express himself well in, (0.5) in Yasa. On the
contrary, the foreigner hears how the other speaks well he's going to say no, you you're,
(0.5) here. You speak Yasa well. #Express himself like a person from the village. If maybe a papa from the village speaks Yasa to you who doesn’t speak well. If you try to say that “I don’t understand the word there” the papa is going to say to you “are you even from here?” (CLAP)

Paul here draws explicit links between Iyasa places (“here,” “the village”), proficiency in Iyasa, and the perception of a person as being authentically Iyasa. A person who speaks well is seen as local: “you’re, here. You speak Yasa well.” If a person has shifted away from Iyasa to a degree that their proficiency is low, others—whether they be “foreigners” or Iyasa elders—are likely to perceive them as not being from the area. ~Marc (26, Ebodje) made a similar statement regarding the links between the Iyasa language and the village of Ebodje:

Excerpt (34)

ANNA; Est-ce que le plupart de tes amis ici Ebodje sont Yasa?
Are most of your friends here in Ebodje Yasa?
~MARC; Eh—tous—tous mes amis sont—
Eh—all—all my friends are—
ANNA; Forcément eh? [1@]
Necessarily eh? @
~MARC; [1@][2@@] Tous mes amis ici sont les— sont les Yasa TOUS. Les [2@tous].
@@@ All my friends here are—are Yasa ALL. All of them.
ANNA; [2@Okay].
~MARC; Parce que je suis au village ici c'est le yasa qu'on cause.
Because I'm in the village here it's Yasa that we speak.
ANNA; @Voil c'est seulement yasa ici.
@Exactly it's only Yasa here.
~MARC; C'est seulement yasa.
It's only Yasa.
ANNA; Ah:
~MARC; Parce que s’il y a une personne #cause—une—une langue, (0.5) le français ou bamileke #on #sait que lui n'est, celui n'est pas du village.
Because if there’s a person speak—a—a language, (0.5) French or Bamileke one knows that him he isn’t, this one isn’t from the village.

ANNA; Mm:

~MARC; Oui ce n’est que—il n’est pas du village. Ils sont ailleurs. C’est un étranger au village. Yes it’s nothing but—he’s not from the village. They’re elsewhere. It’s a foreigner in the village.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

~MARC; Mm-hm. (0.4) C’est par—c’est par l qu’on remarque les étrangers. Mm-hm. (0.4) It’s by—it’s by that that one notices foreigners.

~Marc reinforces the idea that only those who aren’t “from the village” (in this case, Ebodje) could lack proficiency in Iyasa, or would use a code other than Iyasa while in Ebodje. While speaking a Bamileke variety (Bamileke varieties are primarily spoken in the western parts of Cameroon, far from Campo Sub-Division) is expected to be a strong signal that the person is not from the area, ~Marc describes even the use of French in Ebodje as a mark of a “foreigner.” Indeed, by the time I conducted the interview with Marc (after 42 other interviews), I had apparently absorbed enough discourses of the isomorphism between Ebodje and Iyasa to jokingly interrupt ~Marc when he states that all of his friends in Ebodje are Iyasa—“Necessarily eh?” He agrees, laughing, and reinforces the equivalence between place and language, even positioning location as causative of language choice: “because I’m in the village here it’s Yasa that we speak.”

3.3.3. Secrecy and safety

Another factor which many speakers reported as a factor in language maintenance was the need for secrecy or subtlety in certain situations. The role of secrecy in fostering multilingualism and language maintenance is well-described in African contexts, both in the linguistic and anthropological literature (see Di Carlo 2018; Di Carlo 2012; Storch 2011; Lüpke & Storch 2013, inter alia) and in the self-reports of Iyasa speakers. Several speakers cited the need for a secret (or at least in-group) code for purposes of politeness or safety—this was often cited as one of the primary ways in which Iyasa was useful, and one of the reasons participants felt it was important to maintain the language, as Marie-Claire (33, Campo Beach) described.
This excerpt occurred immediately after I asked whether she thought Iyasa would be spoken in Campo Beach in 50 or 100 years, and she said she thought it would be, for the following reason:

**Excerpt (35)**

MARIE-CLAIRE; Maintenant il y a beaucoup de personnes surtout nos parents; nous-mêmes les parents, nous sommes déjà en train de forcer, nos enfants parler le yasa, beaucoup d'enfants voient déjà que non, quand l'enfant vient déjà te dire "maman pourquoi tu ne veux pas me parler yasa",  
Now there are a lot of people especially our parents, ourselves the parents, we’re already in the process of forcing, our children to speak Yasa, a lot of kids see already that no, when the kid comes already to tell you "mom why don’t you want to speak Yasa to me,"

ANNA; Oui? Yeah?

MARIE-CLAIRE; "il faut essayer de me parler yasa parce que j—"(0.2) "chaque fois je veux pas venir te parler en français; devant les gens si j’ai besoin de te dire quelque chose,”  
"you have to try to speak Yasa to me because I—" (0.2) "every time I don’t want to come talk to you in French; in front of people if I need to tell you something—"

YVONNE; Mm-[hm].

MARIE-CLAIRE; "on est coinc :; #suppose donc un bandit entre dans la maison pour venir;,” (0.5)  
“faire n’importe quoi nous tuer ou # voler,“  
“we’re cornered; #suppose like a bandit enters the house to come;,” (0.5) "do whatever kill us or # steal,“

YVONNE; Mm-hm.

MARIE-CLAIRE; “nous nous sommes dans le chambre toi tu es au salon le temps de crier,” (0.6) “pour vouloir crier ‘oh les enfants fuyez il y a les bandits’, (0.8) “nous on ne comprend pas Iyasa [tu vas crier en français.], et les bandits ils vont comprendre donc,”  
“us we’re in the bedroom you’re in the living room when it’s time to yell,” (0.6) “to want to yell ‘oh kids run away there are bandits’, (0.8) “us we don’t understand Iyasa you’re going to yell in French and the bandits they’ll understand so,”

ANNA;  
[Mm: .1]  
[Mm-[hm].2]

MARIE-CLAIRE; [z"ilz)vaut:, vaut #mieux commence nous apprendre p— parler yasa maintenant.” Donc comme beaucoup de parents parlent—nos parents nous parlent

46 Yvonne is a non-Iyasa friend who accompanied me to a handful of interviews.
nous, et nous aussi nous parents—nous parlons nos enfants, #maintenant, apprenez parler, yasa donc, maintenant beaucoup de parents essaient de parler yasa leurs enfants pour qu'ils comprennent. (0.2) Donc #d'ici cinquante ans beaucoup de personnes vont, parler yasa.

“it's worth, worth more start to teach us—to speak Yasa now.” So like a lot of parents speak—our parents speak to us, and us also we parents—we speak to our kids, #now, y'all learn to speak, Yasa so, now a lot of parents try to speak Yasa to their kids so they'll understand. (0.2) So fifty years #from now a lot of people will, speak Yasa.

~Pierre (48, Campo Beach) also cited the usefulness of Iyasa for speaking secretly or subtly among family members, both for safety purposes (~Remy, 24, of Ebodje described the same scenario of being warned in Iyasa to evade arrest: AKB1-023:00:22:50) and for communicating politely in front of a non-Iyasa visitor (as did ~Mireille, 18, of Campo Ville: AKB1-045:00:11:53; Ma Tekila described “deep” Iyasa as serving the same function with strangers who speak a little bit of Iyasa: AKB1-054:00:18:49). However, in keeping with the theme that opinions will vary within every community, ~Pierre did not talk about this function as something which is being reclaimed. Instead, he framed the use of Iyasa for secrecy as a phenomenon which was prevalent when he was a child, but is now disappearing (with dangerous results):

Excerpt (36)

~PIERRE; Mais avant, les parents imposaient.

But before, parents imposed.

ANNA; Oui:?

Yeah:?

~PIERRE; Imposaient. (0.7) Avant, (0.3) non, (1.4) je pouvais pas parler le français.

Imposed. Before, no, I couldn't speak French.

(0.3)

ANNA; Mm.

(0.5)

~PIERRE; Puisque, la stratégie était quoi. (1.7) Vous qui êtes étrangers chez nous,

Since, the strategy was what. Y'all who are foreigners at our place,

RACHEL; Mm-hm.
PIERRE; Je veux parler, de toi.
I want to talk about you.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

PIERRE; Que tu ne comprennes pas.
So that you don’t understand.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

PIERRE; Vous allez remarquer que bon, (0.5) je parle aux enfants. (0.5) Les enfants commencent à rire en vous regardant.
You’re going to notice that well, I’m talking to the kids. The kids start to laugh while looking at you.

RACHEL; Mm!

PIERRE; Eh?

RACHEL; Mm-hm.

PIERRE; C’est où vous sentez quelque chose que mais—peut-être qu’on parle de vous.
That’s where you’ll feel something that but—maybe we’re talking about you.

ANNA; Mm-@hm.

PIERRE; Et s— vous voyez un peu. Et c’était ça.
And s— you see a bit. And that was it.

RACHEL; [Mm.]

ANNA; [Mm.] @@

PIERRE; Tu pouvais parler l’enfant que vraiment eh, (0.4) eh:, (2.2) la dame elle a soif.
You could talk to the child that really eh, eh:; the lady she’s thirsty.

RACHEL; Mm-hm.

(0.6)

PIERRE; Va lui prendre de l’eau.
Go get her some water.

RACHEL; [Mm-hm.]

ANNA; [Mm-hm.]

(0.7)

PIERRE; Ou alors elle est fatiguée, de rester debout, il faut lui prendre [1une] [2chaise].
Or she’s tired, of staying standing, you need to get her a chair.

RACHEL; [1Mm.1]

ANNA; [2Mm-hm.2]
PIERRE: Vous voyez seulement, l’enfant venir avec la chaise. C’est là que vous imaginez ce que je parlais,

Y’all only see, the child coming with the chair. That’s where you imagine what I was saying,

PIERRE: mbol ni!

PASSERBY: Yes hello ((plural addressee reply))!

PASSERBY: Mb lo!

Hello! ((singular addressee))

ANNA: Ámbol ni!

Hello! ((plural addressee reply))

RACHEL: [#Ámbolo.]

#Hello ((singular addressee reply)).

PIERRE: Donc c’est là que vous imaginez que donc c’est peut-être ça que je disais l’enfant

So that’s where y’all imagine that therefore maybe that’s what I said to the child.

RACHEL: [Mm-hm.]

PIERRE: Donc c’était la stratégie de: mm-hm c’est ça. Qui pouvait voir peut-être un ennemie entrer, tu dis subitement aux enfants ou alors peut-être quelqu’un qu’on vient arrêter, on ne connait pas—on demande qui est la personne,

So that was the strategy of, mm-hm that’s it. Who could see maybe, an enemy come in, you say suddenly to the children or maybe someone who they’ve come to arrest, they don’t know—they ask who the person is,

ANNA: Mm.

PIERRE: je lui dis en patois que “bon, comme tu es là c’est toi qu’on est venu chercher, passes par la port de derrière” et tu pars.

I tell him in patois that “well, since you’re here it’s you they came looking for, go out the back door” and you leave.

ANNA: Mm-hm.

PIERRE: Lui il est là il ne comprend pas je l’ai déjà dit qu’il n’est pas là. Et quand il revient maintenant il dit “mais, on m’a dit qu’il @est là ,” toi tu es déjà parti,

Him he’s there he doesn’t understand but I’ve already told him that he’s not there. And when he comes back now he says, “but, they told me that he @is there,” you you’re already gone.
~PIERRE; C'est ça. (0.5) C'est donc ça aujourd'hui, (1.7) les enfants, (0.7) en dehors du français, certains enfants ne causent pas le patois c'est très dangereux. (0.6) C'est vraiment très dangereux.

That's it. So that's it today, the children, outside of French, certain children don't speak the patois it's very dangerous. It's really very dangerous.

(AKB1-058:01:36:07)

~Pierre here touches on a common discourse in the Campo Sub-Division regarding language, which is the potentially life-saving power of using the right code with the right people at the right time (see Di Carlo 2011; Di Carlo 2016 for discussion of Cameroonian linguistic repertoires in terms of group alliances and political/military protection). In November 2017, a story was relayed to me about a forest ranger in the Campo-Ma’an Park, who had been ambushed by Mvae poachers who threatened to kill her; as the story went, it was only by pleading with them in Mvae, and forcing the poachers to reckon with the idea of killing a Mvae “sister,” that the ranger escaped with her life. Similarly, ~Georges (73, Ebodje) related the story of why the Motanga clan of Iyasa are forbidden to eat parrots—because parrots’ use of the correct language once saved a Motanga woman’s life:

Excerpt (37)

~GEORGES; Une femme Motanga, pendant la guerre, elle est partie en brousse. (1.1) Elle # au champ. (1.9) Bon, (0.8) parce que nous avons dans notre famille un tradition de manger des perroquets. (4.3) Une femme Motanga est partie en brousse. (1.1) Pendant qu’elle travaillait, (1.1) elle voit #subitement entourée avec les gens de longues couteaux, ## ils venaient, elle ne connait pas l o #les venaient les gens l . ait les—le temps o il y avait les ma—les gaspillages les gens tuaient les gens comme ça. (1.1) La femme était seule. (0.9) Il n’y avait personne pour la sauver. (2.3) Aussitôt, (1.0) un gen demandait que “tu es en brousse si seule ?” (0.9) Elle dit “Non. Je suis pas, seule. (0.4) J’ai l beaucoup de gens qui,” après les perroquets commencent parler notre patois. (0.6) Les perroquets. (1.0) Oh oh ## — elle dit que “vous entendez comment les gens parlent ?”

A Motanga woman, during the war, she went into the bush. She # to the farm. Well, because we had in our family a tradition of eating parrots. A Motanga woman went into the bush. While she was working, she suddenly saw ((she was)) surrounded by people with long knives, ## they came, she doesn't know where those people came from. It was
the— the time where there was ma— wastefulness people killed people like that. The woman was alone. There was no one to save her. Immediately, a person asked that “you’re in the bush so alone?” She says “no. I’m not, alone. I have a lot of people there who,” then the parrots started speaking our patois. The parrots. Oh oh ## — she said “you hear how the people are talking?”

HAWAOU; “Je ne suis pas seule.”

“I’m not alone.”

~GEORGES; “Je suis pas seule.” (CLAP) Aussitôt (CLAP) les gens (CLAP) ils ont pris la fuite et partis.

“I’m not alone.” (CLAP) Immediately (CLAP) the people (CLAP) they took flight and left. (AKB1-015:00:18:44)

Secrecy for ritual and spiritual purposes, as discussed in much African linguistic and anthropological literature (see Storch 2011 for a comprehensive overview), was also included in many speakers’ accounts of why Iyasa is important and useful. The need to speak Iyasa in order to participate in cultural and spiritual events appears to play an important role in the maintenance of the language. ~Louise (67, Campo Beach), in response to a question about whether youth in Campo Beach like to speak Iyasa, reframes the discussion in terms of the necessity of speaking Iyasa in certain circumstances, like ritual:

Excerpt (38)

~LOUISE; Ils sont obligés de parler en yasa parce que, il y a certains, (0.6) danses, pour d— certaines choses qu’ils font culturellement, (0.2) on ne peut— il faut— il faut pas parler en français. (0.5) Parce que s’ils util— si on parle en français, d’autres personnes vont comprendre, les secrets.

They’re obliged to speak Yasa because, there are certain, dances, for d— certain things they do culturally, one can’t— one must— one mustn’t speak in French. Because if they use— if they speak in French, other people will understand, the secrets.

ANNA; Mm:

~LOUISE; Donc il faut parler yasa.

So it’s necessary to speak Yasa.

(AKB1-007:00:33:22)
These three factors—ethnic identity, local identity, and secrecy/safety—were the most commonly identified by speakers as factors which motivate the continued use of Iyasa, and which might therefore be considered factors driving language maintenance. Language maintenance or revitalization efforts for Iyasa might consider drawing upon these points, to maximize their chances of success and adoption by the community.

3.4. Predicting Iyasa’s future: Speaker perceptions of Iyasa’s prospects for continued use

Having outlined speakers’ reports of the factors they identify as contributing to language shift and maintenance, I now turn to speakers’ perceptions of Iyasa’s overall vitality and prospects for future use.

One of the questions included in the interview template used for these interviews was roughly “If nothing changes, and things continue on the same path as today, do you think Iyasa will be spoken in [speaker’s village] in 20 years, 50 years, 100 years?” Unsurprisingly, in keeping with the fact that no community’s language attitudes are homogenous, speakers expressed a wide a range of opinions. On the whole, older speakers gave more pessimistic responses regarding the future prospects of the Iyasa language, while younger speakers were often more optimistic, and middle-aged speakers were somewhere in the middle. Some older speakers, beyond concern for the continuation of the language, expressed concern for the future of the Iyasa people in catastrophic terms, as for example ~Serge (70+, Campo Ville) did in excerpt (8): “the Iyasa are finished.” The language itself was frequently described by older speakers as likely to disappear, as by ~Alain (71, Ebodje):

Excerpt (39)

~ALAIN; La langue iyasa va disparaître. À moment, ça disparaît– ça disparaît déjà. À plus forte raison, demain ou après-demain. J'ai des doutes que ça va encore exister. J'ai des doutes.

The Iyasa language is going to disappear. At the moment, it's disappearing— it's already disappearing. Even more so, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I have doubts that it will still exist. I have doubts.
Colette Rose (66, Campo Beach) also felt that the Iyasa language, along with other Cameroonian languages, “risked disappearance” due to the changes in intergenerational transmission and the role of French in the Iyasa community described in §3.2.2 and §3.2.4. When asked if she believed Iyasa would be spoken in Campo Beach in the future, she replied in the negative:

**Excerpt (40)**

ANNA;  
Est-ce que vous pensez qui—qu'on va parler encore yasa, ici en cinquante ans ou cent ans? (1.4)  
*Do you think who—that people will still speak Yasa, here in fifty years or a hundred years?* (1.4)

COLETTE ROSE;  
(TSK) Umm:::, (3.1) je ne pense pas. (0.8)  
(TSK) Umm :::, (3.1) *I don't think so.* (0.8)

ANNA;  
Mm.

COLETTE ROSE;  
Je ne pense pas parce que, (1.1) les enfants, maintenant, ne—les parents d'abord. Les parents ne veulent pas apprendre la langue aux enfants. (1.2) Quand l'enfant naisse d'abord le français, (0.7) qu'ils parlent aux enfants. (1.8) Par contre si on commençait par parler la langue à l'enfant. Ça veut dire que l'enfant plus tard va parler la langue. Mais quand on commence par parler français parce que beaucoup d'enfants ici l', ils ne causent que français. (1.7) Nous on a grandi, on nous parlait iyasa et français. (0.7) La même chose que j'ai fait avec mes enfants. (0.4) Je parlais français et je parlais yasa. (0.3) Voilà pourquoi ils comprenaient les deux langues. (0.4) Bon maintenant, (0.8) eux—il reste savoir si eux ils vont continuer avec cet allure. (0.9) Parce que la génération actuelle, (0.5) c'est une génération androïde comme notre président a dit donc vraiment @@@@, je pense pas que vraiment—les langues vont disparaître. Mm. (0.7) Les langues risquent disparaître.

*I don't think so because, (1.1) children, now, don't—the parents firstly. The parents don't want to teach the language to children. (1.2) When the child is born first French, (0.7) that they speak to the children. (1.8) On the other hand if you started by speaking the language to the child. That means that the child will speak the language later. But when you start to speak French because a lot of children here, they speak nothing but French. (1.7) Us we grew up, they spoke Iyasa and French to us. (0.7) The same thing that I did with my children. (0.4) I spoke French and I spoke Yasa. (0.3) That's why they understood both languages. (0.4) Well now, (0.8) them—it remains to be seen if them they'll*
continue with this pace. (0.9) Because the current generation, (0.5) it’s an android generation like our president said so really @@@@. I don’t really think—the languages are going to disappear. Mm. (0.7) The languages risk disappearing.

(AKB1-069:00:11:00)

Colette Rose’s assessment of Iyasa’s future drew heavily on her recognition of the disruption of intergenerational transmission, as did many other older interviewees; they expressed concern that the language would cease to be spoken as a result of today’s parents not choosing Iyasa as the home language and primary language to impart to children. Her description of the “android generation” choosing to use exclusively French at home echoes Celine (22, Campo Beach)’s description of herself, in which Celine laughingly relayed how she rejects older speakers’ corrections of her “android Iyasa.” The practice of young parents choosing exclusively French for their children may also be closely linked to ideologies of subtractive multilingualism, as Celine describes in Excerpt (23); on the whole, Colette Rose’s perceptions of young parents’ motives for intergenerational (non)transmission of Iyasa seem to align with those expressed by some young parents themselves, lending credence to her concerns that Iyasa will stop being spoken.

Many middle-aged speakers were optimistic that Iyasa would continue being spoken, although they believed it would survive in a changed form. While a full examination of linguistic purism and language change (shift-induced or otherwise) is outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that linguistic purism was a common theme in speakers’ discussions of Iyasa (see Belew 2018). There was a high level of awareness among many interviewees that the Iyasa language was changing in some fashion, and that this change was linked in some way to language shift. ~Justine (54, Beyɔ) elaborated on the link between parents’ choice of Iyasa vs. French, and the possibility of a changed (for the worse: “it won’t be spoken WELL”) Iyasa in the future:

47 The word androïde in Cameroonian French has a variety of meanings, but refers in general to things which are posh, au courant, expensive, high-maintenance, artificial (especially when used to describe women), or futuristic, as well as a general youthful “cool.”
Younger speakers took an overall more optimistic view of Iyasa’s prospects for survival, although they often described themselves as French-dominant or speaking “faulty” Iyasa.

~Martin (21, Ebodje), for example, provided an unqualified “yes” to whether Iyasa would be spoken in the future:

Excerpt (42)

ANNA; Et, (0.5) selon toi, si rien ne change, si on continue au même chemin, (0.6) est-ce que le yasa sera parlé à Campo en vingt ans, en cinquante ans, en cent ans?

And, (0.5) in your opinion, if nothing changes, if we continue on the same path, will Yasa be spoken in Campo in 20 years, in 50 years, in 100 years?

~MARTIN; Oui.

Yes.

ANNA; Oui? Toujours?

Yeah? Always?

~MARTIN; Mm-hm.

HAWAOU; Et ce sera toujours un bon yasa ou bien un mauvais yasa?

And it will always be a good Yasa or a bad Yasa?

~MARTIN; Un bon yasa.

A good Yasa.

(AKB1-012:00:31:35)
However, he had previously described himself as not being a particularly good speaker; when Hawaou presses this line of questioning further, immediately after the above excerpt, ~Martin states that he (at age 20) still has plenty of time to learn “good” Iyasa:

Excerpt (43)

HAWAOU; Puisque toi tu dis que tu ne parles pas bien. Tes parents ### et que tu mélanges avec le français. Est-ce que tu penses que toi quand tu vas apprendre ta langue # un enfant, elle sera bien ou bien #le mélanger ?

*Since you you say that you don’t speak well. Your parents ### and that you mix with French. Do you think that you when you’re going to teach your language to a child, it will be good or maybe the mixed one?*

~MARTIN; Elle sera bien après.

*It will be good afterwards.*

HAWAOU; Bon tu penses qu’après tu vas parler mieux.

*Well you think that afterwards you’ll speak better.*

~MARTIN; Oui.

*Yes.*

HAWAOU; Maintenant tu ne parles pas bien mais après. Qu’est-ce qui va se passer pour qu’après ta langue soit meilleur qu’aujourd’hui ?

*Now you don’t speak well but afterwards. What’s going to happen so that afterwards your language will be better than today?*

~MARTIN; Après ce que #je #veux #dire que bon, je peux encore bien apprendre encore parler avec les: grands, oui.

*Afterwards what #I #want #to say that well, I can still learn to still speak well with the: elders/great ones, yeah.*

This perception that Iyasa is relatively easy to develop fluency in, and that therefore the language would survive or even expand, arose in several interviews. ~Robert (19, Ebodje), for example, when asked if Iyasa would still be spoken in 20, 50, or 100 years, replied:

Excerpt (44)

~ROBERT; Mmm:::, (0.4) bon, (0.6), s’il arrive que tout le monde vraiment veut parler le yasa, (0.9) même en cinq ans, tout le monde va pouvoir parler le yasa. Même les étrangers aussi.
Mmm :::, (0.4) well, (0.6) if it happens that everyone wants to speak Yasa, (0.9) even in 5 years, everyone will be able to speak Yasa. Even foreigners too.

ANNA; Mm.

~ROBERT; Pourront parler le yasa. (0.5) Puisque c'est pas un—un patois tellement difficile, (0.7) bon il suffit d'être attentif, et écouter comment ça se prononce.

Will be able to speak Yasa. (0.5) Since it's not a—such a difficult language, (0.7) well it’s enough to be attentive, and listen to how it’s pronounced.

(ACK1-021:00:25:06)

However, ~Robert did not offer any opinion on whether he thought it was likely that people would want to speak Iyasa, as in the hypothetical scenario he proposed. Rather, he seemed to believe, like ~Martin, that any risk to the language’s survival was mitigated by its relative ease of acquisition.

Some speakers in their 30s and 40s also expressed a similar optimism: that there would be a growth in the number of young people learning Iyasa (whether by their own volition, or by parents imposing the language in the home), and that therefore the language would be spoken widely in the future. Marie-Claire (33, Campo Beach), who described her children’s desire to learn Iyasa for safety purposes in Excerpt (35), stated:

**Excerpt (45)**

ANNA; Est-ce que tu penses qu'en cinquante ans, ou cent ans même, est-ce que yasa sera bien parlé Beach et aussi Campo Ville?

Do you think that in 50 years, or even 100 years, will Yasa be spoken well in Beach and also in Campo Ville?

MARIE-CLAIRE; Mm-hm.

ANNA; Mm-hm?

MARIE-CLAIRE; Mm-hm. Je pense oui.

Mm-hm. I think yes.

ANNA; D'accord. (2.3) Bon, est-ce que ça finit mes questions?

Okay. (2.3) Well, does that finish my questions?

MARIE-CLAIRE; Je pense oui parce que, (0.4) maintenant il y a beaucoup de personnes surtout nos parents:, nous-même les parents, nous sommes déjà en train de forcer, nos enfants parler le yasa.
I think yes because, (0.4) now there are a lot of people especially our parents, us ourselves the parents, we’re already in the process of forcing, our children to speak Yasa.

While Marie-Claire was one of relatively few younger interviewees who described “forcing” or “imposing” Iyasa on her children, and most younger interviewees reported using mostly or exclusively French with their children, some other middle-aged speakers shared Marie-Claire’s view that the language would not only survive, but expand. For example, Thierry (47, Campo Ville), stated that the language would certainly be spoken in the future because the Iyasa people would continue to grow in number:

**Excerpt (46)**

ANNA; Bon en cinquante ans, disons, (0.3) est-ce que vous pensez que je vais trouver un bon yasa parl ici Campo? (0.4)

So in 50 years, let’s say, (0.3) do you think that I’ll find a good Yasa spoken here in Campo?

THIERRY; Dans cinquante ans? (0.7) Si jusqu’ présent il y a encore les yasa qui parlent ça veut dire que dans cinquante ans, ça sera encore plus que ça.

In 50 years? (0.7) If up until the present there are still Yasa who speak that means that in 50 years, it will be even more than that.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

THIERRY; Ça sera plus que ça. Puisque si moi j’ai quatre, cinq enfants maintenant, automatiquement, lui il aura peut-être quatre,

It will be more than that. Since me I have four, five children now, automatically, him he’ll have maybe four,

ANNA; Mm-hm.

THIERRY; l’autre ainsi de suite, ce qui est sur; (0.8) il y aura certainement #un mélange entre nous qui va rester et, (1.3) on ne sera—on est jaloux aussi de notre langue.

the other so on and so forth, what’s sure, (0.8) there will certainly be a mix between us who’ll remain and, (1.3) we won’t be—we’re also jealous of our language.

ANNA; Mm-hm.

THIERRY; Il y aura. (0.5) Il y aura.

There will be. (0.5) There will be.
Interestingly, Thierry drew upon the idea that because Iyasa has survived until the present time, it would necessarily continue surviving into the future: “If up until the present there are still Yasa who speak that means that in 50 years, it will be even more than that.” This concept was not directly brought up during other language interviews (far more interviewees felt it was possible or even likely that the language would cease being spoken), but ties in to discourses of “it’s always been this way, therefore will always be this way” that arose during conversations on other issues. For example, one Iyasa woman in her 30s, when discussing conservation issues with me during an informal visit, said that she didn’t believe sea turtles could or would go extinct, because they had existed continuously up until the current moment; if they hadn’t disappeared during the time of her parents or grandparents, why would they disappear now? A similar discourse of permanence and immutability may be prevalent around the issue of language endangerment among some members of the Iyasa community, in contrast to many linguists’ views of African language ecologies as especially fluid and changeable (e.g., Nettle 1996; Di Carlo, Good & Diba 2019; Lüpke 2018; Lüpke 2015, *inter alia*).

These views of the Iyasa language as safe, due to its perceived permanence in the community or its perceived ease of acquisition and ease of developing new speakers, could lead to overconfidence in language planning, or underestimation of the degree of threat to the language. While optimism is generally helpful for language maintenance, unfounded optimism can be risky—any language maintenance or revitalization program undertaken in the Iyasa context should incorporate ways to address these views appropriately (see Chapter 5).

On the whole, however, many speakers were to some degree aware that Iyasa faced the risk of disappearance, although the degree of perceived threat differed from speaker to speaker. Older speakers generally perceived a greater threat, while younger speakers were more optimistic about the language’s prospects, and middle-aged people were somewhere in between.

### 3.5. Comparing views of vitality: Iyasa within linguistic vitality frameworks

The sections above have presented an overview of Iyasa’s vitality as reported by speakers themselves, and outlined the factors which speakers report to be driving language shift or supporting language maintenance. In this section, I examine Iyasa’s vitality within three of the most widely used linguistic frameworks for assessing language endangerment—the Expanded

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48 See Gao (2015) for a similar overview of the vitality of Miqie Yi within these three frameworks.
Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), the UNESCO nine-factor scale, and the Language Endangerment Index (LEI)—and compare these etic views of Iyasa’s vitality with the emic views expressed by Iyasa speakers.

### 3.5.1 The Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS)

The EGIDS (Lewis & Simons 2010) builds on Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), one of the first and most influential frameworks designed to quantify language shift. The eight-level GIDS scale focuses on intergenerational transmission as the key factor in determining a language’s prospects for survival, as well as taking into account domains of use (as likely motivators for transmitting, or not transmitting, a language). The EGIDS expands on this by elaborating the “cusp” levels of vitality (GIDS level 6, EGIDS 6a and 6b) at which a language may move either towards expansion or language shift. In addition, the EGIDS expands on the levels of vitality and development for more robust languages, while the GIDS is more applicable to shifting and endangered languages. The EGIDS scale has 13 main levels\(^49\), as shown in Table 3.1 (adapted from Simons & Fennig 2018):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Provincial</td>
<td>The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wider Communication</td>
<td>The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Developing</td>
<td>The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Shifting</td>
<td>The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{49}\) There are alternate labels for levels 5 and 9, used in pertinent cases: level 5 may also be labeled “Dispersed” when referring to a large diaspora speaker base of a national language. Level 9 may also be labeled “Reawakening,” for formerly dormant languages being revived, or “Second Language Only,” for former vehicular languages which no longer serve that function, but have no associated population for whom it was formerly a primary or heritage language.
The EGIDS focuses heavily on literacy and domains of use in elaborating the scale at the more vital end, and on intergenerational transmission at the more endangered end. This can create difficulties in assessing specific language situations. For example, written languages which occupy broad domains of use, but are facing disruption in intergenerational transmission, may be “under-endangered” on the EGIDS scale. Conversely, languages which are quite vital in terms of transmission and stable domains of use, but which are not written, may be “over-endangered” within the EGIDS. In addition, the EGIDS does not factor overall number of speakers into its vitality assessments; while speaker population is not a direct predictor of language vitality, the disruption of transmission or domains of use in a language with a very small speaker base may result in more rapid and dramatic shift than in a larger-population language.

Iyasa is listed at EGIDS level 5, “Developing,” in the 21st edition of the Ethnologue (Simons & Fennig 2018). The assessment of level 5 for Iyasa is somewhat perplexing, based on my own observations and the community perspectives explored above. The EGIDS is a hierarchical scale, and each ascending level implies that the language is in a more secure position than the level below it. Therefore, the assessment of Iyasa as level 5 implies that it is “used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable” (as described for level 6a). While not all Iyasa interviewees agreed that intergenerational transmission is currently disrupted, the majority did, and observation corroborates that many children, especially in Campo Ville, have limited or only passive competence in Iyasa (see §2.2).

Even speakers like ~Nina, who claimed that young people “speak well,” agreed that youth had some lexical gaps as compared to older people. In contexts where most children do still have strong Iyasa proficiency, such as in Ebodje, the situation cannot confidently be called “stable” due to speaker-identified factors such as rural exodus and migration, intermarriage, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Moribund</td>
<td>The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8b</td>
<td>Nearly Extinct</td>
<td>The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Dormant</td>
<td>The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Extinct</td>
<td>The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: EGIDS Scale (adapted from Simons & Fennig 2018)
the growing use of French in the home and family domains. In addition, the description of Iyasa as having “literature in a standardized form” (EGIDS level 5) is premature. While the Comité de l’étude de la Langue Iyasa (CELI) has finalized a new standard orthography, and is working to make alphabet primers available to the Iyasa community, very few people have access to these materials. The number of people proficient in the new Iyasa alphabet does not extend far into the double digits, at the time of writing. The 2018 Iyasa workshop (see Chapter 5) trained 16 young people to produce written documentation of Iyasa language and culture, and will result in an Iyasa-language magazine which will be distributed throughout the Iyasa area of Cameroon, but there are few written materials currently available in Iyasa.

While the nuances of intergenerational transmission are difficult to elaborate on the EGIDS scale, a more realistic assessment of Iyasa’s status would be somewhere between levels 6b (Threatened) and 7 (Shifting). Iyasa is not universally “used for face-to-face communication within all generations” (level 6b), as many parents report that their children use it minimally, if at all. Nor is it quite accurate to say that Iyasa is “not being transmitted to children” (level 7), as there are children in some villages and families who have strong proficiency in Iyasa. It is thus difficult to assign a single EGIDS level to the language as a whole—the situation in Ebodje might be accurately described as 6b, while Iyasa in Campo Ville and Campo Beach is closer to level 7. Level 6b’s description of a language which is spoken across generations but “losing users” is the closest to capturing the situation of Iyasa as a whole in Cameroon, and “Threatened” is likely the best choice among the EGIDS levels.

3.5.2. The UNESCO nine-factor scale

The UNESCO (2003) metric for assessing language endangerment takes a more fine-grained approach than the EGIDS, independently evaluating nine separate vitality factors. This has the advantage of not conflating factors such as intergenerational transmission and literacy, and acknowledging that the relationships between endangerment factors vary across contexts (e.g., small speaker numbers do not necessarily entail disrupted transmission, broad domains of use do not entail positive attitudes, etc.). It is also more elaborated on the endangered end of the scale, as opposed to the more vital end, as it is primarily intended to assess endangered languages (rather than all languages, as Ethnologue’s EGIDS aims to do). The UNESCO factors for assessing language vitality are presented in Table 3.2 (adapted from UNESCO 2003):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Factor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Description</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>Intergenerational language transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>Absolute number of speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td>Proportion of speakers within the total population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4</td>
<td>Trends in existing language domains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5</td>
<td>Response to new domains and media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 6</td>
<td>Materials for language education and literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 7</td>
<td>Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 8</td>
<td>Community members’ attitudes towards their own language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 9</td>
<td>Amount and quality of documentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2: UNESCO's nine factors for assessing language vitality.*

Each of these nine factors is to be scored on a scale from 0-5, and the UNESCO scale provides descriptive text at each level. Below, I apply the UNESCO scale to Iyasa’s current status in Cameroon.

For Factor 1, intergenerational language transmission, the most appropriate rating is 4, “unsafe.” The UNESCO scale describes this as “Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak their language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home where children interact with their parents and grandparents),” and this is a fairly apt description of Iyasa’s situation. It is difficult to say firmly that “most” children in the Iyasa area speak Iyasa as their “first” (depending on how this is defined) language, but there are certainly *many* children who speak it relatively well, and the next most severe level, “definitely endangered,” does not apply (“the youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation”).

For Factor 2, absolute number of speakers, there is no 0-5 scale suggested by UNESCO. As discussed in §3.2.1.1, it is difficult to provide a definitive number of Iyasa speakers. The most plausible estimates fall between 1,300 and 3,000 speakers worldwide; this is not a large population, but in the context of a linguistically hyper-diverse country like Cameroon, where most speaker populations are necessarily relatively small, it might be considered a small-to-medium language.

For Factor 3, proportion of speakers within the total population, the “definitely endangered” level 3 assessment fits best: “a majority [of the population] speak the language.” While this raises the question of how to define the Iyasa “population” (UNESCO suggests “ethnic, religious, regional, or national group[s],” 2003:9), I follow the general opinion of Iyasa speakers by defining this along ethnic lines. It would not be quite correct to say that “nearly all”
Iyasa people speak Iyasa (level 4), as there are too many self-reported and other-reported Iyasa people who do not speak the language, particularly among the younger generations.

For Factor 4, trends in existing language domains, the most accurate rating would be level 3, “dwindling domains.” While some of the description for level 4 applies to the Iyasa context in Cameroon, particularly the continued use of the minority language in socializing and traditional religion, the situation cannot be viewed as the “multilingual parity” described at level 4. Instead, Iyasa is “los[ing] ground and, at home, parents begin to use the dominant language in their everyday interactions with their children” as described for level 3. While not all Iyasa parents interviewed reported speaking primarily French with their children, nearly all of the younger (under-35) parents reported doing so, and this is a crucial step towards the loss of Iyasa in the home domain. In addition, the use of Iyasa for socializing among children is reported to be declining—today’s adults report having used mostly Iyasa with other children (for play, at school, etc.) when they were young, but today’s children were reported and observed to use mostly French among themselves. Iyasa has never occupied official domains beyond the local level, and these remain French-dominated, but even in local government, such as at the chefferie (chiefdom) level, the use of French is beginning to creep into formerly Iyasa-dominated meetings and events.

Factor 5, response to new domains and media, is difficult to assess for Iyasa. The non-use of Iyasa in new media may have more to do with the economic barriers to media creation than the vitality of the language itself: there are no television or radio programs in Iyasa in Cameroon\(^5\), as this requires funding to produce and disseminate content, but the language is sometimes used on free-to-use social media sites like Facebook. Figure 3.1 shows comments on a photo posted to the Et mba a Iyasa (‘Iyasa nation’) Facebook group, which at the time of writing has 948 members. Most of the activity in this Facebook group is in French, and discusses local politics and news rather than language issues, but members do sometimes engage in discussions about Iyasa vocabulary and grammar, or make comments in Iyasa. However, it is only a few core members of the group who regularly post more than one or two words in Iyasa (most engagement in Iyasa is more like the final comment, which simply says ‘dolphin’).

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\(^5\) I have been told that there used to be a radio show in Kribi which included content in Iyasa, and that there is a radio station in Equatorial Guinea which airs Iyasa-language programming, but have not been able to find any details about these programs.
Similarly, very few interviewees reported ever sending text messages in Iyasa, or using it on WhatsApp or other chat services. Many expressed a desire to do so, but said they did not know how to write in Iyasa. It is possible that if literacy in the new Iyasa alphabet becomes more widespread (see Chapter 5), Iyasa will expand its use in new media domains.

Figure 3.2: Facebook comments in Iyasa

For Factor 6, materials for language education and literacy, Iyasa falls between the ratings 0 (“No orthography available to the community”) and 1 (“A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written”). The new CELI alphabet was officially launched in 2017, with an accompanying literacy brochure and workbook published that year. However, these literacy brochures are sold for 2,000XAF (about $4 USD), which is a large expenditure for many people in the Campo area. There are currently no classes for adults to
learn the orthography, although a workshop was held in August 2018 to teach the orthography to youth (see Chapter 5). Perhaps as a result of the limited availability of materials or instruction in Iyasa literacy, few people are currently able to read and write in this orthography. Older materials in a variety of ad-hoc orthographies do exist, however. Some speakers, mostly in their 50s and 60s or older, are still able to write in non-standardized orthographies which seem to date back to the early missionary period of the 1880s; a few major documents, such as handwritten translations of Catholic catechisms and hymnbooks, have been developed by individual speakers, but are not available to the community as a whole. However, with the recent launch of the new CELI orthography, and the Iyasa youth language program (see Chapter 5), it is possible that Iyasa’s rating on Factor 6 will improve in the coming years.

Factor 7, governmental and institutional support, is fairly stable for all Cameroonian languages. Iyasa, like other “national” languages of Cameroon, can be rated UNESCO’s level 4, “differentiated support”:

Differentiated support (4): Non-dominant languages are explicitly protected by the government, but there are clear differences in the contexts in which the dominant/official language(s) and non-dominant (protected) language(s) are used. The government encourages ethnolinguistic groups to maintain and use their languages, most often in private domains (as the home language), rather than in public domains (e.g. in schools). Some of the domains of non-dominant language use enjoy high prestige (e.g. at ceremonial occasions).

Specifically, all languages of Cameroon other than French and English are designated as “national languages.” Cameroon’s constitution acknowledges these languages in very loose terms:

The Official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavor to protect and promote national languages.

(Constitution of Cameroon, 1972)

However, “endeavor to protect and promote (emphasis mine)” makes no explicit commitment to any specific actions or support for national languages. Government-affiliated bodies like the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (ANACLAC) promote the use and
maintenance of national languages, and mother-tongue educational programs in some of Cameroon’s major languages (e.g., Beti, Fulfulde, Basaa, etc.) have been implemented in the relevant areas (see Kouega 2013 on language planning in Cameroon). However, compared to the degree of governmental support and funding available to minority languages in, e.g., Europe, Cameroonian languages are not particularly well-supported by the government in anything but policy. Iyasa, as a demographically small language, has not received any governmental support for maintenance or language development activities, and it receives less “differentiated support” than other “national” languages. For that reason, it may be more accurate to rate Iyasa at level 3 in UNESCO’s matrix, “passive assimilation”:

Passive assimilation (3): The dominant group is indifferent as to whether or not minority languages are spoken, as long as the dominant group’s language is the language of interaction. Though this is not an explicit language policy, the dominant group’s language is the de facto official language. Most domains of non-dominant language use do not enjoy high prestige.

Factor 8, “community members’ attitudes towards their own language,” is difficult to quantify; it rates vitality by assessing whether “all,” “most,” “many,” “some,” “few,” or “no” community members support language maintenance. In the absence of a large-scale survey on this topic, the best that can be done is to tentatively assign Iyasa to level 3, “Many members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss,” based on the perspectives which interviewees expressed during my own research. The majority of people I spoke to seemed to be distinctly in favor of maintaining Iyasa, although a general attitude of “yes, that would be good” does not necessarily translate into action on language issues. There were also a small number of individuals who expressed neutral or negative attitudes towards language maintenance (see ~Mary’s stance in Excerpt 25). However, it seems implausible that there would be communities which are homogenous in their attitudes towards language, as in the “all” or “none” ends of the UNESCO rankings—it seems more likely that all language communities fall somewhere between “most” and “some,” on the scale of “how many people care about language maintenance.”

UNESCO’s final vitality assessment factor 9, “amount and quality of documentation,” must also be rated with a caveat. First, this is not presented as a vitality indicator per se, but a “guide for assessing the urgency for documenting a language” (UNESCO 2003:16). Second,
there is a notable difference in the amount and quality of documentation of Iyasa depending on whether only published and accessible materials are counted, or also those which have been produced and kept by individuals. Cyrille Bothe, an Iyasa speaker and cultural activist, has produced a substantial 200-page grammar of the language. However, this grammar is not publicly available, and was not produced through formal academic channels (Mr. Bothe is an autodidact with a keen intuition for linguistic analysis, but no formal training in linguistics). A number of short sketches of specific aspects of Iyasa grammar and phonology have been published (Bothe 2011a; Bothe 2011b; Bouh Ma Sitna 2004; Lonfo 2009), and a dictionary is being compiled by CELI, but there is no published dictionary or grammar. However, beginning in 2018, Braden Brown, a PhD student at SUNY Buffalo, is conducting dissertation research on Iyasa morphology, and will likely produce additional published materials on Iyasa’s structure, in addition to annotated audio files. Finally, my own work has compiled several hours of Iyasa-language texts and conversational/everyday use, but these are not fully annotated, and the scope of my dissertation is unlikely to permit for full annotation and transcriptions of the recordings in Iyasa. Overall, Iyasa’s existing documentation may be rated between level 2 (“fragmentary: There are some grammatical sketches, word-lists, and texts useful for limited linguistic research but with inadequate coverage. Audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality, with or without any annotation.”) and level 3 (“fair: There may be an adequate grammar or sufficient amount of grammars, dictionaries, and texts, but no everyday media; audio and video recordings may exist in varying quality or degree of annotation.”)

UNESCO’s framework provides no mechanism for bringing these 9 factors together to create a single vitality rating; its overall endangerment levels seem to be based mostly on the degree of intergenerational transmission. In addition, the wording on the overall endangerment levels as presented in their online Atlas (Moseley 2010) is slightly different from the framework laid out in UNESCO (2003): “vulnerable” is described as “most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home),” while the next level, “definitely endangered,” is described as “children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.” There is no category such as of “some, but not most or all, children speak the language, depending on the village or town,” as discussed above with regard to Iyasa. Since there are still children learning Iyasa, and the “definitely endangered” criteria do not apply, “vulnerable” is the closest fit for Iyasa in UNESCO’s vitality framework.
3.5.3. The Language Endangerment Index (LEI)

The Language Endangerment Index (LEI) framework, developed for assessing language endangerment levels within the Catalogue of Endangered Languages, combines UNESCO’s multi-factor approach with a more concrete method for quantifying overall vitality. It involves assigning numerical ratings between 0 (least endangered) and 5 (most endangered) to four aspects of a language’s current situation: absolute number of speakers, degree of intergenerational transmission, trends in speaker numbers, and domains of use. These ratings are then plugged into an algorithm which assigns an overall endangerment rating, as well as a degree of certainty for the rating, based on the amount of information used to calculate vitality (Lee & Van Way 2016). Below, I outline Iyasa’s status within the LEI framework.

Iyasa’s Factor 1, absolute number of speakers, is between 1,300 and 3,000 as discussed above. Within the LEI, this would be rated level 2, “threatened,” which covers all speaker numbers between 1,000 and 9,999.

Factor 2, intergenerational transmission, is weighted twice as heavily as the other factors within the LEI framework, reflecting the central importance of transmission to language vitality. Iyasa’s situation most closely matches the description of LEI rating 1, “vulnerable”: “Most adults and some children are speakers.” The meaning of “some” is relatively flexible, and so it applies to most Iyasa-speaking communities, from Ebodje (where the majority of children reportedly speak Iyasa) to Campo Ville (where a minority of Iyasa children are reported to speak and use Iyasa). LEI level 2, “threatened,” might apply to Campo Ville (“most adults in the community are speakers, but children generally are not”), except for the fact that many children in Campo Ville are reported to have passive competence in Iyasa; it is unclear where this would factor into the LEI. Overall, level 1 (“vulnerable”) seems to be the best match.

Factor 3, trends in the number of speakers, combines two factors: the number of speakers in relation to the total population of the ethnic community, as well as the changes in speaker numbers over time. Despite the difficulty of determining what constitutes the “ethnic community” in many cases, most Iyasa speakers expressed a fairly strong tie between Iyasa ethnicity and Iyasa language use (see §3.3.1), and so it seems possible to assign Iyasa to level 2, “threatened”: “A majority of community members speak the language. Speaker numbers are gradually decreasing.” However, it is not entirely clear how this differs from level 1, “vulnerable,” described as “most members of the community speak the language. Speaker
numbers may be decreasing, but very slowly.” I interpret “most” as indicating a solid majority of the community, in the 80% range, whereas “a majority” seems to imply something like “more than half.” Again, without large-scale surveys, it is difficult to say with certainty what percentage of people who would consider themselves ethnically Iyasa speak Iyasa (and depending on what is meant by “speak”). However, the reports of speakers interviewed for this work, and my own observations, seem to be closer to the “more than half” and “gradually decreasing” (level 2) interpretation.

For the LEI’s fourth factor, domains of use, Iyasa’s situation is likely closest to the description provided for level 3, “endangered”: “Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, but remains the primary language of these domains for many community members.” With the caveat that Iyasa may not be the primary home language of many children in towns like Campo Ville, most adult interviewees reported using primarily Iyasa (or a mixture of Iyasa and French) at home. However, given that French is now reported to be the primary home language for some adult speakers as well as many children, Iyasa could also be rated level 4, “severely endangered”: “Used mainly just in the home and/or with family, and may not be the primary language even in these domains for many community members.” A more comprehensive survey of home language use across villages would clarify whether level 3 or 4 is a more accurate assessment; for the purposes of this chapter, I will assign Iyasa a rating between the two, at 3.5.

The LEI assigns an overall vitality rating based on the following algorithm (adapted from Lee & Van Way 2016:285):

\[
\text{Level of endangerment} = \frac{\left( \text{intergenerational transmission score} \times 2 \right) + \text{absolute number of speakers score} + \text{speaker number trends score} + \text{domains of use score} }{\text{total possible score based on number of factors used}} \times 100
\]

In the case of Iyasa, this would be:

\[
\text{Level of endangerment} = \frac{\left( 1 \times 2 \right) + 2 + 2 + 3.5 }{25} \times 100 = 38
\]

A LEI score of 38% places Iyasa in the “Threatened” category, the second-least severe endangerment level, which aligns with the level assigned by the EGIDS, but is more severe than the UNESCO rating of “vulnerable” (the level of least endangerment).
3.5.4. Comparing insider and outsider perceptions of Iyasa’s vitality

While the Iyasa speakers interviewed expressed a range of perceptions regarding Iyasa’s vitality, most seemed to agree that the language faced some degree of risk—if not of disappearance, then of change (as described by ~Justine). However, the level of risk described by speakers varied from minimal—as in ~Robert’s prediction that a “good” Iyasa will always be spoken—to critical, as in ~Alain’s prediction that “it’s going to disappear... it’s already disappearing.” While the three linguistic vitality assessment frameworks employed above do not claim to predict the future of a language, and thus are not directly comparable to speakers’ predictions, the rating of Iyasa as either “threatened” (EGIDS, LEI) or “vulnerable” (UNESCO) seem to place its situation closer to younger speakers’ assessments of lower threat levels. (The more dire predictions of speakers like ~Alain might align more closely with an endangerment rating like “severely endangered,” depending on the factors which these speakers see as driving the risk.) However, as discussed above, it is possible that some of the motives behind these lower-threat assessments (perception of the language as easy to acquire, isomorphism of language and ethnicity) could be seen as overconfidence in the language’s resilience. While optimism is generally a positive in language maintenance, unfounded optimism can be risky—and based on the speaker-reported threats to Iyasa described in this chapter, there are indeed reasons to be concerned about the language’s future.
Chapter 4: Experimental approaches to language shift: Variation in noun class production

4.1. Background: Speaker-identified variation in Iyasa noun class production

In situations of language shift, a variety of structural effects may be observed in the speech of those who have imperfectly acquired the language being shifted away from (Palosaari & Campbell 2010; Campbell & Muntzel 1989). This may sometimes surface as variation across speakers in the realization of certain linguistic structures, individual variability in the speech of semi-speakers, or widespread changes to certain linguistic features, such as overgeneralization of irregular features or loss of phonological contrasts. These structural effects are often quite different from “normal” processes of language change observed in “healthy” (non-shifting) languages. However, in situations of both shift-induced change and “normal” language change, some type of variation across the speech community is expected to be observable in the linguistic feature which is believed to be undergoing change. This chapter examines a specific pattern of structural variation in Iyasa—the production of noun class markers—through the lens of language shift.

The motivation for this chapter, in keeping with the aim of this dissertation, is to work from speakers’ experiences and perceptions in order to better understand Iyasa language shift. It has often been noted that conducting variationist research in endangered and underdocumented languages poses the particular challenge of how to identify potentially relevant variants to investigate, especially to researchers from outside the language community and those who don’t speak the language. For that reason, variation which has risen to the level of speaker consciousness (or “stereotypes,” as they are termed in Labov 1971), and which is pointed out to the researcher, is often a good starting point. During sociolinguistic interviews in 2015-2016, several speakers drew attention to a specific set of variants in the language: namely, variation in noun class markers and plural marking on nouns. Childs (2011) examines the differences between “normal” change in noun class structures, and changes which are indicative of language shift (or “death”) in progress; among the speech features which were noted as indicative of language death were errors in pluralization and agreement. One feature of what may be termed “shifting” Iyasa (or “new” Iyasa, depending upon whether this is regarded as “normal” language
change instead of changes due to imperfect or partial learning in a language-shift situation
identified by two speakers (~Justine, a 54-year-old woman from Beyo, and ~Thomas, a 76-year-old man from Mbendji), was “errors” in noun class marking on plurals:

~JUSTINE: le jeunes avec le yasa l (TSK) ce n'est pas, très bon. [...] bon par exemple, comme les motos par exemple, chez nous, on appelle, t t t beaucoup ou une moto c'est t t t . il n’y a pas de pluriel, dans notre patois. mais quand ces sont les enfants— les enfants disent bet t t . @@ @quand— ils #voient que c'est beaucoup ils disent bet t t . tu vois non? alors que la moto n'a pas de pluriel chez nous. par exemple le matin il y a des # qui disent que, bemyaku on ne dit pas bemyaku on dit, mwaku quand c'est un matin, si tu veux faire beaucoup de matins tu dis myaku. # c'est— quand c'est un c'est mwaku. alors que certains— certains jeunes disent que bemyaku donc je vois c'est:. @ @ces erreurs sont— donc, il y a beaucoup des erreurs.

the youth with Yasa there (TSK) it’s not, very good. [...] well for example, like motorcycles for example, with us, we call it, t t t many or one motorcycle it’s t t t . there’s no plural. in our patois. but when it’s the kids—the kids say bet t t . (laughter) when—they #see that it’s a lot they say bet t t . you see, no? while the motorcycle has no plural with us. for example the morning. there are some # who say bemyaku, one doesn’t say bemyaku, one says mwaku when it’s one morning, if you want to make a lot of mornings you say myaku, # it’s—when it’s one it’s mwaku. while certain—certain youths say bemyaku so I see it’s.; (laughter) these errors are—so, there are a lot of errors.

(AKB1-035:00:20:11)

~THOMAS; je n'aime pas ça. je n'aime pas ça. parce que uh, les fourchettes. si on appelle—nous appelons, mel ma. mel ma. les fourchettes. en yasa. chez eux [[les jeunes]], ils appellent autrement. beme—bemel ma. que veut dire bemeluma? c'est leur yasa alors."bemeluma" alors c'est— nous c'est, m— me— "meluma" tout court. [...] quand c'est une seule, muluma. [...] les jeunes disent "bemeluma." BAH, c'est, ça fait mal l’oreille. @@@@@ I don't like it. I don't like it. because, uh, forks. if one calls—we call, mel ma. mel ma, forks. in Yasa. with them [[the youth]], they call it otherwise. beme—bemel ma. what does bemel ma mean? it’s their Yasa then. bemel ma then it’s—us it’s, m—me— mel ma just short. [...] when it’s only one, mul ma. [...] the youth say bemel ma. BAH, it’s, that hurts the ear. (laughter)

(AKB1-029:00:07:22)

Speakers presented these plural forms as symptomatic of language shift, or evidence of youth losing competence in Iyasa. In addition, they positioned these variants as “wrong” or “bad” Iyasa, “deformed” Iyasa, etc. While prescriptivist and purist discourses in endangered languages are common (including in Iyasa communities; see Belew 2018), and may target “normal”/non-shift-related forms of variation or change, I wanted to investigate whether these
variants, referred to henceforth as the “novel plural” forms, were measurably tied to language shift or not.

The variants identified during the speaker interviews were the words for ‘motorcycles’, ‘forks’, and ‘mornings’. All involved the over-application of the class 8 plural marker be- and the use of this marker on lexical items which, in “traditional” Iyasa, would result in ungrammatical forms. It should be noted that one of the lexical items, bet t t ‘motorcycles’, may be more susceptible to change or irregular marking than other nouns, since it is both an onomatopoeia and a relatively new word (having been coined with the introduction of motorcycles in the past century); however, the other two items are more “typical” nouns. Since the variants involving the use of be- (bemyaku ‘mornings’, bet t t ‘motorcycles’, and bemel ma ‘forks’) were reported to be examples of “bad” Iyasa, used by those who spoke the language less well, especially younger people, I wanted to examine whether the production of these variants actually correlates to age, proficiency in Iyasa, or any other identifiable speaker characteristics. Therefore, I devised an experiment to attempt to investigate the correlations between these innovative variants, and speaker age and proficiency in Iyasa. The purpose of this experiment was threefold:

1. To identify the variants used for plural marking on the selected lexical items.
2. To confirm whether this variation is conditioned by speakers’ age.
3. To explore whether other factors, including speakers’ language proficiency and place of upbringing, are also related to this variation.

4.2. Methods

4.2.1. Task design

The first component of the experiment was a pair of production tasks. The first two tasks were designed to elicit plural markers, including plural markers for two of the three lexical items identified by the speakers (motorcycles and forks - I tried and failed to find a recognizable way to depict the concept ‘mornings’ visually; although one of the stimuli in the picture naming task [see Appendix C] was meant to depict ‘mornings’, almost all participants simply named the rooster depicted in the sunrise image, and no one said anything like ‘morning’ or ‘mornings’).

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The first production task (Task 1) was a film narration task. Narration tasks are meant to elicit relatively natural, un-self-conscious speech compared to, say, wordlist readings or picture naming. Thus, the aim of the film narration task was to elicit the production of the variables ‘forks’ and ‘motorcycles’ with lower levels of speaker attentiveness. I filmed a short (4.5 minute) silent film in the Paris-Soir neighborhood of Campo at the beginning of my 2017 research trip, with help from (and starring) Arnauld Djowe and Romain Henri “Petit” Eboukou. The film depicted two of the targeted lexical items, ‘motorcycles’ and ‘forks’, in the framework of a silent story about two motorcycle drivers going about their morning routine – much of the action was improvised or added by the actors, following the general storyline of “motorcyclists go to a restaurant one morning, and are given forks.”

The film depicts the following series of events: there is a sunrise over the trees in Campo. The camera cuts to two men asleep in a bed inside a house. An alarm goes off on one man’s cell phone, and the two men awaken, sit up, say a prayer, and get out of bed. They put on their gumboots and motorcycle helmets, and exit the house. The next shot shows the exterior of the house, where the two men are riding motorcycles away from the house and onto a road. In the following shot, the two men are riding their motorcycles down the road; they pull up and park in front of a small restaurant, remove their helmets, and enter the restaurant. The next shot shows the men coming inside the restaurant, where a waitress greets them and seats them at a table. One man gestures that he would like something to drink, and the waitress leaves and returns with two bottles of Coca-Cola. The men then gesture that they would like something to eat; the waitress indicates that there is nothing to eat, and the men, disappointed, make some gestures which could be interpreted as “just fix something up and bring it.” The waitress, in the back room of the restaurant, gathers the ingredients for cold-water gari and brings them to the table, where she assembles the gari and gives each man a bowl. After pouring the ingredients into a pot, she exits the shot and returns with two forks – this shot is zoomed in on the waitress’ hands with the forks, and one actor’s face as he looks at the forks, shakes his finger “no,” and

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51 The film is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkxypFlaAYs.
52 I initially repeated the shot of the sunrise, and the initial shot of the men waking up, several times in an attempt to elicit the word ‘mornings’. However, in the test screenings of the film I conducted, participants were confused by this, and I cut the attempt at eliciting the word ‘mornings’.
53 It is common for same-sex adults to share a bed in Campo, and participants seemed to find nothing remarkable or distracting about this sequence.
54 This is a kind of thin porridge eaten as a quick breakfast by people who don’t have time to cook, consisting of ground cassava flour, water, sugar, and (sometimes) peanuts.
gestures that the men need spoons in order to eat the runny *gari*. The waitress returns with spoons, and mixes and serves the *gari*. The men eat, give a thumbs-up while patting their stomachs, and exit the restaurant. They then get onto their motorcycles and drive away down the road.

The second experimental task was a picture-naming task, meant to elicit the targeted lexical items in a context with slightly higher speaker attention to the task. A set of 20 stimuli were assembled, consisting of photographs of objects on a blank white background. A blank background was used to reduce the likelihood of complex descriptions of the setting and background objects; see Appendix C for the photo stimuli. In addition to the target words ‘motorcycles’ and ‘forks’, there were three other distractor items featured in the film (bowls, a pot, and ‘mornings’, i.e., sunrises with roosters in front of them) and fifteen objects not featured in the film, but common in everyday life in Campo: a dog, a banana, a canoe, limes, a sardine, grey parrots, a truck, leather shoes, an elephant, a hoe, a leatherback turtle, baseball hats, palm trees, a jacket, and *batons de manioc*. Ten of the stimulus images contained plural items, while ten contained singular items. Four copies of the stimulus images were printed and laminated, and arranged on binder rings in 4 separate configurations. The use of 4 configurations meant that there were 4 possible stimulus orders, rather than a truly randomized order. This was done in order to remove interference related to the order of stimuli, i.e., images of the target items would not consistently appear before or after another given image.

After the two production tasks, participants completed a translation task meant to assess their proficiency in Iyasa. While I acknowledge that translation tasks are an imprecise and flawed way to assess language proficiency, they are one of the most feasible ways for a non-speaker linguist to assess proficiency in a little-documented language. Given my level of knowledge regarding Iyasa, the constraints on time and resources to undertake this research, and the paucity of existing documentation and grammatical description, more sophisticated measures of language proficiency were not possible. The translation task was based on the task described in Yang, O’Grady & Yang (2017). First, speakers were asked to rate their proficiency in Iyasa; I included some stimuli featuring specific species of plants/animals (white coconut palms, a sardine of the type called *elolo*, African Grey parrots, and a leatherback turtle) out of a personal curiosity as to whether there would be any interspeaker variation in using the name of the specific species, or a more generic lexical item (such as ‘tree’, ‘fish’, ‘bird’, or ‘turtle’), along the lines of the study of ethnobotanical knowledge and language shift in Todd (2011). This was not a main focus of the study, and no systematic analysis of the results have yet been carried out.

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55 I included some stimuli featuring specific species of plants/animals (white coconut palms, a sardine of the type called *elolo*, African Grey parrots, and a leatherback turtle) out of a personal curiosity as to whether there would be any interspeaker variation in using the name of the specific species, or a more generic lexical item (such as ‘tree’, ‘fish’, ‘bird’, or ‘turtle’), along the lines of the study of ethnobotanical knowledge and language shift in Todd (2011). This was not a main focus of the study, and no systematic analysis of the results have yet been carried out.

56 A cooked staple food made from ground cassava root.
explained this task in the terms, “You know how teachers grade students at school? What grade would you give yourself in Iyasa language ability, on a scale of 1 (‘I don’t speak at all’) to 10 (‘I speak perfectly’)?” Next, participants were asked to translate recordings of five sentences in Iyasa, as spoken by Sammy Mbipite, a linguist, member of the Iyasa language committee, and self-described fluent speaker of Iyasa, into French. The sentences were designed to contain a mix of fairly common lexical items and less-common ones (including lexical items which speakers had previously reported to be falling out of use, such as *mb k*, a directional meaning roughly ‘southwards along the coast towards the river valley’, *bevala*, a traditional dance, and *séngé*, a less-common word for ‘basin’), as well as some more-commonly used grammatical constructions (such as the simple past) and some less-commonly used ones (such as the future perfect). One of the recorded Iyasa sentences (sentence 2) was judged by many speakers to be ungrammatical, and so was eliminated from the analysis of this task, for a total of four sentence translations that were included in the analysis. The Iyasa sentences used were:

1) Wat d w wad w p wabé w t mw ka ecendo ebota
   CL3.adult ART CL3.women all 3PL.be.PST 3PL.walk.PST PREP INF.depart PREP meeting
   ké w j yénée ngw ba. CONJ 3PL.eat guavas

   ‘All the mature/old women walked to go to the meeting and/while they ate guavas.’

2) J mu j wato na nlóombi w viy ebapécé séngé l ten ART CL3.person CONJ eight 3PL.come.PST INF.carry basin PREP
   ecendo ek l mb k. INF.depart PREP direction PREP south/valley-wards

   ‘18 people carried the bowl/basin to go towards the valley/southward.’

3) Koolo nabé nacapiaka mab sa ké p yi k dw tindilaka.
   yesterday 1SG.be.PST 1SG.clear.PST grass/brush CONJ viper CL7.come.out.PST INF.slide

   ‘Yesterday I was chopping grass when a viper came slithering out.’

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57 Since all Iyasa speakers in the Campo area, to my knowledge, are either highly proficient in French or French-dominant, I did not anticipate any interference from gaps in participants’ French proficiency.
Participants’ French translations of the Iyasa sentences were coded for “correctness,” as in the Jejueo-to-Korean translation task outlined in Yang, O’Grady, & Yang (2017); however, because Iyasa and French are not closely related, as Jejueo and Korean are, these sentences were scored only for the correct translation of lexical items and verb tense/number/person. Immediately after translating the Iyasa sentences into French, participants were asked to translate four French sentences into Iyasa; however, upon entering the analysis phase, I found that I was unable to consistently score the translations into Iyasa without a better understanding of Iyasa grammar and what variants could be considered grammatical, so the Iyasa translations were eliminated from the analysis. Finally, after completing both translation tasks, participants were asked once again to rate their proficiency in Iyasa (as in Yang et al. 2017), and invited to explain why their self-rating had changed (if it had); the logic behind this was that participants’ perception of their own language abilities might change based on how difficult or easy they found the translation tasks.

4.2.2. Procedure

I conducted the full set of experimental tasks (film narration, picture naming, self-rating and translation tasks) with a total of 20 participants during visits to Campo in 2017 and 2018. While such a small participant pool is not optimal in experimental variationist work, the challenges of conducting experimental tasks like this in a context of language shift, particularly by an outside researcher with limited time in the community, have been explored in volumes like Stanford & Preston (2009). My hope is that this study may lay the groundwork for further research, and provide preliminary insight into whether variation in the production of noun class markers might correlate with language shift in Iyasa. While the number of participants was small, it was balanced for gender (10 men and 10 women) and represents a variety of age groups; it was not possible to obtain a perfectly balanced age range across participants for various reasons, such as
working-age men often being too busy with work to participate in the experiment. The participants in the experimental task are listed below\textsuperscript{58}:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age at time of participation</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Spent 5+ years of childhood\textsuperscript{59} outside Iyasa area?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Bata, Equatorial Guinea</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Campo Ville</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Ebodje</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Campo Beach</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1: Demographics of experiment participants.*

With participants who had not yet completed the linguistic biography and attitudes interview described in Chapter 3 (see Appendix A for the interview template), I first conducted an interview before beginning the film narration task. After this, they provided the first self-

\textsuperscript{58} Age, gender, self-rating of proficiency, length of time spent outside Iyasa-speaking areas in childhood, and place of residence are insufficient to account for the complex linguistic biographies of most Iyasa speakers – these variables are presented here as the factors most relevant to the analysis of the experimental tasks. In addition, each of the participants also gave an in-depth interview about their language backgrounds, repertoires, and attitudes, and further analysis might examine other aspects of participants’ linguistic biographies to see if they correlate to the production of the novel plural variant.

\textsuperscript{59} Based on participants’ descriptions of their mobility history, and with the “Iyasa-speaking area” counted as the towns of Edjabe (Equatorial Guinea), Campo Beach, Campo Ville, Ipenyenje, Bouandjo, Itonde Mer, Beyo, Mbendji, Ebodje, and Lolabe, where Iyasa speakers are concentrated (see Chapter 1). This variable indicates whether the participant spent 5 or more of their childhood years under the age of 12 outside of the above-mentioned towns.
rating of their Iyasa proficiency. Following the interview and self-rating, I informed the participant that I would like to show them a 4-minute movie with no words. I explained that I would first like them to simply watch the film, and then I would like them to watch it again while narrating in Iyasa the events of the film in as much detail as possible, as if they were watching the film with a blind person and describing to them what was happening on screen. In the analysis, each utterance of the target items (forks, motorcycles) in the film narrations was coded for whether the “novel plural” form was used or not, and this served as the dependent variable. Independent variables to be tested were speaker age, gender, residence, and proficiency in Iyasa (as measured in the final task, described below).

Following the film narration task, each participant completed the picture naming task with one of the four ordered sets (randomly selected) of photo stimuli described in §4.2.1. The responses to the picture naming task were recorded, along with which photo set was used, and coded for the use of the novel plural.

After the picture naming task, each participant completed the translation task, first from Iyasa into French, and then from French into Iyasa. Participants were able to request that the sentence recordings be re-played as many times as they needed to provide a translation; the number of plays for each sentence was also recorded. For participants who delivered multiple translations of a given sentence, the first translation was the one scored. Each sentence was scored for accuracy using the rubric in Table 4.2; participants received one point for each correct lexical item which they included in their translation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 1:</th>
<th>6 points total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘all’ (tous, toutes)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘old women’ (vielles femmes, grand-m res, femmes ag es)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘went’ (allaient, sont all es, marchaient)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘meeting’ (tontine, rencontre, r union)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘ate’ (mangeaient, en mangeant, ont mang )</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘guavas’ (goyaves)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 360:</th>
<th>5 points total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘18 people’ (dix-huit personnes)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘carry’ (portaient, ont port )</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘basker’/‘basin’ (pannier, basine, cuvette)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘go’ (aller, partir)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>directional of some kind (en bas, vers Lolabe, en valle, au nord)</td>
<td>1 point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60 As noted in §4.2.1, Sentence 2 was discarded from the analysis.
Sentence 4: 5 points total

- ‘yesterday’ (hier) 1 point
- ‘cutting grass’/‘weeding’/‘clearing brush’ (d broussailler, d fricher, sarcler, racler le broussaille, travailler les herbes) 1 point
- ‘viper’/‘snake’ (viper, serpent, cuvette) 1 point
- ‘slithering’/‘crawling’/‘sliding’/manner of motion (en rampant, en bougeant, en glissant, en train de s’enrouler) 1 point

Sentence 5: 4 points total

- ‘at the time’/‘by the time’/‘when’/some expression of simultaneity or future perfect tense (l’heure que, quand, au moment que, le moment que) 1 point
- ‘we will arrive’/‘we will have arrived’/‘our arrival’ (nous arriverons, nous serons arrivés, notre arrivée) 1 point
- ‘will have already begun’/‘will have begun’/some expression of the future perfect 1 point
- ‘bevala dance’/‘traditional dance’ (danse bevala, danse traditionnelle) 1 point

Total points possible: 20 points

Table 4.2: Scoring rubric for sentence translation task.

Translations which were semantically related closely enough to the target translation to be synonyms or near-synonyms were scored as correct (e.g., ‘grandmothers’ and ‘old women’, or ‘clearing undergrowth’ or ‘weeding’). Grammatical errors (such as incorrect gender) in French were not scored as incorrect (e.g., *tous les vieilles femmes* ‘all (masc.) the old women’ instead of *toutes les vieilles femmes* ‘all (fem.) the old women’ was still awarded full points). Minor differences in French tense/modality, the expression of which in Iyasa remains to be clarified, were not scored as incorrect – for example, the distinction between the imperfect and the simple past (if there is one) has not been well-described in Iyasa, so, e.g., for Sentence 1, translating *wabé w t mw ka* as either the imperfective *allaient* (3PL.go.IPFV) and the simple past *sont all es* (3PL.be 3PL.F.go.PST) were coded as correct. Scoring was designed to be generous, meaning that something close to the correct meaning would be awarded points – the only responses which were not awarded points were those which were completely unrelated to a lexical item, such as translating Iyasa *p yi ‘viper’ as French *soleil ‘sun’, or a failure to translate a lexical item (or entire sentence) at all.

After the Iyasa-to-French translation task, participants completed the French-to-Iyasa translation task. As described in §4.2.1, the French-to-Iyasa translation task was not included in
the analysis. Each respondent’s score on each sentence was recorded along with their total score on all 4 sentences.

After completing all of the tasks, participants were asked to re-assess their proficiency in Iyasa on the same scale of 1 to 10. Not all participants were willing to assess their own proficiency; this seemed to be, for some people, a task which required a certain degree of authority as an Iyasa speaker (see Belew 2018 for more on authority and authenticity regarding the status of being an “Iyasa speaker”), and some participants did not perceive themselves as having the necessary authority to assess their own language skills, although most participants eventually did provide a self-rating. “Maybe if my great-grandparents were alive, they could rate me,” said a 31-year-old man from Campo Ville. Two participants only gave a serious answer for one of the self-rating questions, and deflected the other with jokes, or deferred to me: “what grade do you want me to give myself?”, asked a 62-year-old woman from Campo Beach. However, 17 of the 20 participants did provide self-ratings for both the first and the second self-assessment.

4.3 Results

After data collection was complete, each utterance of a target item (‘motorcycles’, ‘forks’) was coded for whether the novel plural was used or not, and this binary variable was treated as the dependent variable during analysis. The number of variables was too small to perform a logistic regression task, so analysis was performed with simple chi square tests. The independent variables to be tested were speaker age, whether or not the speaker spent more than 5 years of their childhood outside the Iyasa-speaking area, and their percentage score on the translation task.

There were no instances of the novel plural being used for ‘forks’ – i.e., there were zero tokens of bemel ma. The novel plural was only produced for bet t t , ‘motorcycles’. The distribution of novel plural tokens across tasks is shown in Table 4.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>number of novel plurals</th>
<th>film</th>
<th>picture naming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total tokens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 (13%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
<td>507</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.3: The number of tokens in each task realized with the novel plural.*
Table 4.3 shows the number of tokens in each task which were realized with the novel plural form. Immediately evident is the low number of total tokens realized with the novel plural. Also evident is that the novel plural is more common in the film task (13% of the total tokens) than the picture naming task (1% of the total tokens). This is as expected: I anticipated that the novel plural would occur more in less self-conscious speech, such as a film narration task, than a picture naming task where speakers might be more self-conscious of their speech (particularly for stereotyped variants like the novel plural). A chi square test reveals that the difference in use of the novel plural in the film narration vs. picture naming tasks is not significant ($X^2 (8, N = 26) = 5.1358, p = .74$), but if more data were gathered from younger speakers, the difference might rise to significant levels.

Regarding speaker age and production of the novel plural, the negative correlation between speaker age and percent of the novel plural produced is significant ($r(24) = -.43, p = .026$). This is also as expected: whether the novel plural is a change in progress indicative of language shift, or simply a “normal” change in the language, younger speakers tend to be “early adopters” of innovative forms. In addition, as discussed in §4.1, speakers identified the novel plural as a variant which is used by young people. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of novel plural tokens across age groups, as well as indicating the percentage use of novel plurals by speakers who had spent >5 years of their childhood outside the Iyasa-speaking area. There is no relationship between a speaker’s use of the novel plural and that speaker having spent more than 5 years of their childhood outside the Iyasa-speaking area.
Figure 4.1: By-speaker percent of tokens that were produced using the novel plural, shown by speaker age. The open ohs represent speakers who spent more than five years of their childhood away from the area where Iyasa is spoken, whereas the exes represent speakers who did not.

Figure 4.2 shows the relationship between each speaker’s use of the novel plural as a percentage of total target tokens, and the speaker’s fluency, as measured by percentage score on the translation task. (A preliminary analysis was done to see if there was any relationship between number of times a speaker requested to re-play the stimulus sentences, as an indicator of their listening proficiency in Iyasa, and their use of the novel plural. However, there was not enough variation in the number of sentence replays to draw any results.) As is evident in Figure 4.2, there is no relationship between the fluency score and the percent of tokens produced as a novel plural.
Discussion and conclusions

Unsurprisingly, the strongest predictor of the use of the novel plural was speaker age: younger speakers were significantly more likely to produce the novel plural. As discussed in §4.1, the novel plural was identified by speakers as indicative of the speech of young people; the results of this experiment support that claim. However, use of the novel plural was not exclusive to younger speakers; a 45-year-old speaker and a 66-year-old speaker also produced two novel plural tokens each. In addition, use of the novel plural was fairly uncommon among all speakers; out of a total of 618 tokens of the target items produced, only 21 (3.4%) were realized with the novel plural. Among speakers who did produce the novel plural, none of them produced it exclusively; all speakers who produced the novel plural also produced the “traditional” variant at some point.
It is also worth noting that the novel plural was only produced for ‘motorcycles’, and not for ‘forks’. Instances of the novel plural bemel ma might arise if the experiment is conducted with a larger number of speakers and tokens. It is also possible that the reports of the use of bemel ma were drawing upon a single instance, or single person, encountered by ~Thomas and described in AKB1-029, and bemel ma is not widely used. Again, it is also conceivable that t t t is more susceptible to structural change as a newer word (having been coined with the introduction of motorcycles within the last century), or an onomatopoetic word. However, it is evident that t t t and bet t t are both variants currently in use for ‘motorcycles’, and confirms the speaker reports of the novel plural being used in bet t t. In addition, the fact that this novel plural marking is confined to only one attested lexical item, and is realized as only two variants (rather than a much less systematic, more widely varying production of noun classes), seems to align with Childs (2011)’s assessment of “normal” change in noun class marking, rather than changes indicative of language shift or death.

There was no relationship between speakers’ use of the novel plural and their proficiency in Iyasa as measured by the sentence translation task. While a simple translation task is by no means an ideal method for assessing language proficiency, it serves as a rough method of checking language proficiency – anecdotally, speakers who scored the lowest on the sentence translation task also seemed to struggle more with the film narration task, with more disfluencies and a slower rate of speech. For future research, it would be useful to conduct this experiment with a more sophisticated measurement of language proficiency to confirm whether use of the novel plural shows any relationship to fluency.

Overall, the results of this experiment are a useful window into a specific pattern of variation in Iyasa noun class marking: there is variation in the realization of ‘motorcycles’ as either t t t (the “traditional” variant) or bet t t (the novel plural, which is an innovative variant). The novel plural is more frequently used by younger speakers, which confirms speaker reports about the novel plural; however, its use does not appear to be related to language proficiency, which contradicts speaker reports that it is related to poor proficiency in Iyasa. Thus, this experiment also serves as a useful reminder about the benefits and challenges of investigating speaker-reported variation in a language. Speakers’ reports of variation which rises to the level of consciousness, or “stereotypes” in the terms of Labov (1971), can provide invaluable clues as to where variation can be found, and what social factors it might correlate to.
However, speaker reports on variation patterns might not be borne out by data – in this case, perceptions that *bet t t* is used by younger, less-proficient speakers may have more to do with a widespread conflation of “young” and “bad speaker” among Iyasa speakers, as discussed in Belew (2018), than actual patterns in language use.
Chapter 5:

Iyasa bo: Towards a youth-driven model for language revitalization

In the previous chapters, I outlined Iyasa’s current context of language shift, speakers’ perceptions of language shift and maintenance, and an experimental assessment of variation and language shift. In this final chapter, I present an initiative launched in 2018, Iyasa bo (‘Iyasa Forward’), which was informed by the findings discussed in the previous chapters, and which was designed to address some of the obstacles to language maintenance in the Iyasa community of Campo. First, in §5.1, I provide a brief overview of language revitalization in sub-Saharan Africa. In §5.2, I outline some of the key issues in language shift (and outside of language shift) which the Iyasa bo initiative aimed to address. In §5.3, I discuss the formation of the project, and the models which were drawn upon in designing it. I then present in §5.4 the activities of Iyasa bo from August 2018 through the time of writing, with a discussion of how the project addressed (or was not able to address) the aforementioned factors of language shift. I conclude with §5.5, a discussion of lessons learned from the Iyasa bo project which may be useful to other communities who want to engage in youth-driven language revitalization efforts.

5.1. Language revitalization in Africa

An overview of language revitalization in Africa will necessarily be much briefer than a similar overview focused on other regions. As Childs (2017:145) notes, “Africanists have not been terribly interested in the whole enterprise of revitalization.” Africa may be among the global regions with the fewest existing language revitalization initiatives; Sands (2018:613) notes that “Compared to efforts on other continents, language revitalization in Africa lags behind.” This is due in part to a scarcity of funding and other resources for language revitalization in Africa – there is little to no dedication of resources to language work by most African governments (as compared to, e.g., Australia, where governmental funding for language revitalization exceeded $15 million in 2018-2019). Dimmendaal (2015:37) hypothesizes that the lack of revitalization projects in Africa could also be due in part to differing attitudes towards

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61 There are also no formerly dormant languages being awakened in Africa, to my knowledge; language revival, in the sense of creating new speakers of a language without any native speakers, is as yet not taking place in Africa (Belew & Simpson 2018:60-61; Pérez Báez, Vogel & Patolo 2019).

language shift and loss, and less urgent interest in language maintenance or reclamation on the part of speakers of endangered African languages: “many people in Africa […] have a more utilitarian attitude towards the obsolescence of specific languages, also because primary language and ethnicity are not necessarily linked to each other.” In addition, severe language shift in many African languages is more recent than in contexts like North America (Sands 2018), meaning that discourses of language endangerment and revitalization may not have had time to circulate as widely in African speaker communities. Most African language revitalization initiatives have been launched in what Pérez Báez, Vogel & Patolo (2019:449) refer to as the “third segment” of programs in their global survey of revitalization initiatives – programs begun since roughly 2013. The scarcity of revitalization programs in Africa may also be due in part to the lack of interest among linguists working in Africa, some of whom, like Dimmendaal (2015) and Newman (2003), view language revitalization as a hopeless cause. These factors – lack of resources, lower buy-in from linguists, and (allegedly) less interest among speaker communities – have resulted in a fairly small number of language revitalization initiatives in Africa, as compared to other regions of the world.

However, there are a number of known revitalization initiatives in Africa for languages which have not yet become dormant, largely at the missionary and grassroots levels. As Sands (2018:617) notes, “Missionaries have been at the forefront of African language description and development and have also increasingly played a role in language revitalization.” Many of the existing projects to maintain or strengthen small but non-moribund African languages piggyback on, or largely function through, SIL International or other missionary groups; SIL’s stated mission includes “serv[ing] language communities worldwide, building their capacity for sustainable language development, by means of research, translation, training and materials development.” While SIL’s projects are not geared towards revitalization of critically endangered languages (generally because Bible translations in such languages would not have a substantial audience; see Dobrin & Good 2009), SIL has generated many language development and maintenance projects for threatened-but-viable languages like Iyasa. Aside from missionary projects, the lack of major governmental or institutional resources means that a great many revitalization projects in Africa occur at the individual or grassroots level. Sands (2018) provides an overview of community language revitalization initiatives in Africa, and notes that Cameroon

63 http://www.sil.org
is among the countries which have seen the most grassroots language revitalization work (along with Nigeria, Kenya, and Botswana). She notes that “the majority of efforts are focused on the development of literacy and language materials” (ibid.:617), as was (in part) the focus of Iyasa bo; see discussion of potential problems with literacy as a focus of language revitalization in §2 below.

This project followed, in many ways, the revitalization frameworks described by Childs (2017) as “busy intersections,” a term borrowed from the literature on adult literacy education: “busy intersection” (or “African market,” as Childs localizes the term) programs are centered on learners and their specific needs. The programs focus on bringing literacy into everyday activities rather than stand-alone programs to develop literacy for its own sake. Within this framework, revitalization programs are based in achievable goals, decided upon in collaboration with the language community in question – they are localized and tailored to the specific needs of the language situation. These are opposed to “parking lot” models, focused on centralized educational programs which generally follow Western models and goals, and are often delivered by NGOs or governments. Childs notes that language development and research initiatives in Africa have created plenty of traditional documentation and description output; “What has been missing, however, is an evaluation of community-based goals and creating activities based on those goals; the focus has been on traditional program-based practices rather than learner-centric frameworks” (ibid.: 146). In his attempt to develop a youth-focused language revitalization program for Mani, a critically endangered language of Sierra Leone and Guinea, which incorporated both traditional literacy and computer/technology literacy, Childs found that program elements corresponding to the “busy intersection” model – based in learners’ expressed needs – were the only elements which met with any success. Program features which followed the “parking lot” model, imposing externally decided goals and non-locally relevant learning methods, were largely a failure. “The goal, then, would be to adopt an approach that begins by better assessing what a community wants; the next step is to focus our linguistic talents and adapt them to those goals, to the extent that it is feasible” (ibid: 157).

In the section below, I outline some of the observed and expressed needs of the Iyasa community with regards to language revitalization, and outline the ways the Iyasa bo project was designed to meet those needs using what resources and personnel were available.
5.2. Issues in Iyasa language shift: what can we address through youth work?

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the Iyasa community in Cameroon currently faces a number of pressing issues contributing to language shift. The Iyasa bo project was designed by Sammy Mbipite and myself to address some of these issues, specifically the issues most relevant to young people – who, in a situation of generational language shift like Iyasa’s, are likely to be the most direct determiners of the language’s future.

The first factor which drove the design of Iyasa bo was the current situation of intergenerational transmission. As described in Chapter 3, the “tipping point” for language transmission, where Iyasa language proficiency begins to break down and varies most between individuals, is among youth (here referring to people in their teens through early 30s, in keeping with the general perception of “youth” in the Iyasa context). Older people, in their 40s and above, generally have good proficiency in Iyasa; children (pre-teens) are generally French-dominant, with limited active competence in Iyasa (and some children having only passive competence, or none at all)\(^6\). As Adolphe Idjabe noted, “I think this mutation [of shift to French] dates much more from... the 90s [generation]” (AKB1-010:01:38:39). Most Iyasa youth in the Campo area have some degree of active competence in Iyasa, but are largely French-dominant, and speak mostly French in their daily lives; they may not have command of certain registers, vocabulary, or grammatical structures, but can generally understand conversational Iyasa.

Language proficiency varies quite a lot between individuals, depending on their biographies, histories, and families. However, the fact that most Iyasa youth have at least passive competence in Iyasa, and most have some degree of active competence, means that language revitalization efforts can start from a point of assuming basic language ability. Unlike revitalization contexts where youth are starting from zero, and would need to engage in significant language learning before engaging in other language work, a revitalization project in Campo could focus on strengthening youths’ existing foundation in the language. And, importantly, it could also serve to create a predominantly Iyasa-language space for youth to socialize and converse, unlike the mostly French-dominant spaces which are available to youth in Campo.

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\(^6\) But recall from Chapter 3 that children’s Iyasa proficiency differs by town; in smaller villages like Ebodje, many children do still have good active competence. However, this pattern seems to hold for Campo, where the Iyasa bo project is based, and the neighboring town of Campo Beach.
Another issue which Iyasa bo aimed to address is closely related to disrupted intergenerational transmission: a growing linguistic and cultural disconnect between elders and youth in the Iyasa community of Campo. While this dissertation focuses on language issues, and does not claim to speak to wider social conflicts between generations, many speakers spoke during interviews and casual conversation about a decrease in the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices, and a change in how much time young people spent with their elders (previously, said many older people, youth spent much more time with people of their parents’ and grandparents’ generations; now, youth keep more to themselves). This disconnect is also exacerbated by the economic changes in Campo described in Chapter 2, with fewer youth continuing in their parents’ and grandparents’ livelihood of fishing and farming, and instead seeking work as e.g., drivers, porters, hairdressers, construction contractors, merchants, or other work which rarely brings them into contact with Iyasa elders. These extra-linguistic factors which reduce contact between youth and elders combine with, or perhaps drive, the prevalence of linguistic purism among elders and linguistic insecurity among youth.

As discussed in Belew (2018) and Chapters 3 and 4, elders frequently correct youth’s speech in Iyasa, chastise them for using “incorrect” innovative variants, and bemoan their lack of language proficiency. As Abtahian & Quinn (2017) remind us, this type of purism can lead to increased linguistic insecurity among imperfect speakers or semi-speakers, which can in turn accelerate language shift. Iyasa youth may sometimes reject or resist elders’ linguistic reprimands, or they may simply retreat into the language in which they feel more confident (French) and disengage from language work. This was especially true with regard to the work of the Comité d’Etude de la Langue Iyasa (CELI), the SIL-initiated language committee in Campo, whose members were all male elders. Youth had not been involved in CELI’s work, aside from Sammy Mbipite (whose father is a CELI officer), and many young people reported being intimidated by CELI prior to the Iyasa bo workshop presented herein. They described feeling excluded from language initiatives, or even actively unwelcome, due to their age and status as non-expert speakers of the language. Conversely, CELI and other elders involved in language and culture work seemed to view the youth as frivolous and not serious about language and culture, and at times during the interviews conducted for this dissertation, some elders even seemed to blame the youth for language shift. The result of these unfavorable perceptions of youth was a relationship between elders and youth which was uneasy, or even antagonistic, with
regard to the Iyasa language. However, many Iyasa youth with whom I spoke for the interviews, or in casual conversation, did express a desire to improve their language proficiency in Iyasa, as well as to know more about Iyasa culture – they simply had no clear path by which to learn, especially in the absence of close relationships with elder generations, since spending time with elders was how many interviewees described this learning as occurring in the past. With the Iyasa bo project, we hoped to provide a potential avenue for youth and elders to reconnect on the topic of language and cultural knowledge, as well as to empower youth to engage in their own language work to complement CELI’s, driven by the concerns, interests, and skills of younger people.

A third issue which the project aimed to address was the community desire for access to literacy and reading materials in Iyasa. During the interviews conducted for this dissertation, many participants expressed a desire (for themselves, for their children, or both) to be able to read and write in Iyasa. Many even said they would be happy to pay a small fee for an Iyasa literacy class, if one were offered. However, although CELI had published an Iyasa alphabet primer booklet in the new orthography in 2016, very few people were aware of this primer, and few efforts had been made to publicize or sell it. No literacy courses had been made available to the general public, aside from a few workshops for invited CELI members and elders. In addition to an absence of learning opportunities, many people expressed a sentiment along the lines of, “I’d like to learn to read Iyasa, but why bother, when there’s nothing to read?” A lack of Iyasa reading materials seemed to be demotivational for many people’s interest in Iyasa literacy.

Originally, the Iyasa bo project was not explicitly conceived as a literacy project. As Lüpke (2011; 2015), Blommaert (2004), and others rightly point out, graphocentric language ideologies (or the idea that a language needs to be reduced to writing in order to be valid or real) can be wrongheaded and harmful in African contexts. A focus on literacy was an essential part of the missionary and colonial project in Africa; as Lüpke puts it, “Africa was imagined as the ‘oral continent’, and literacy prescribed as a remedy for this deficit, following a Western monolingual model of the relationship between spoken and written repertoires” (2015:65). However, in accordance with the learner-centric “busy intersections” framework described in Childs (2017), the Iyasa bo project incorporated a focus on literacy in response to many individual speakers’
stated *desire* for it\(^\text{65}\). Many interviewees said they wanted to learn to read and write, and wanted materials to read in Iyasa, and so the project aimed to help meet this expressed need.

Another issue the project aimed to address, though one not directly contributing to language shift, was the relative paucity of documentation of Iyasa. The language is fairly under-documented, as described in Chapter 2; of the materials which have been published, most are not available to the majority of Iyasa speakers, who lack institutional access to journals and academic publications. In addition, academic and technical linguistic papers are rarely useful to laypeople, and any materials written in English would be inaccessible to most Iyasa speakers. For this reason, we hoped the project would create documentation of the language which could be easily accessed, understood, and disseminated between Iyasa speakers – both audio/video materials and written publications\(^\text{66}\). Importantly, this documentation would be generated by youth within the community: recent work in linguistics has moved towards a focus on capacity-building, and empowerment of language communities themselves, in documentation and revitalization activities. Speakers are uniquely positioned to determine priorities in language documentation, to navigate and document their own cultural contexts, and to sustain the momentum and buy-in needed for language work in the long term. In addition to the possibilities of this youth-generated documentation for language learning and maintenance/revitalization, many people in Campo expressed pride and excitement at the idea of seeing Iyasa represented in print or recordings. We hoped that an Iyasa-language publication, and the dissemination of audio and video recordings in the language, could be a source of pride and language valorization in the Iyasa community, particularly among youth.

Finally, the project aimed to fill a few extra-linguistic needs of young people in Campo, as best it could with limited resources and personnel: free access to technology training; a safe space for young people to learn and socialize; hearty daily meals during the dry season; and a sense of their own abilities, talents, and knowledge which may not be recognized in schools. While Newman (2003:6) may dismiss “linguistic social work” as a lost cause, providing some material assistance to youth in Campo as part of this project felt like a necessary and reasonable component of collaboration, in keeping with the community-centered goals of the research as a

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\(^{65}\) Similarly, I am not claiming that Iyasa speakers’ desire for literacy is not also influenced by graphocentric ideologies, whether imported or “local,” recent or older – see Belew (2018:267–268).

\(^{66}\) The materials generated during the workshop will be archived with the Endangered Language Fund, as required for all ELF-funded projects, as well as in Kaipuleohone.
whole. As Dobrin & Schwartz (2016:256) describe collaboration, in response to Newman’s dismissal of “linguistic social work,” it is essentially a way to integrate positive social relationships into research practices – and more than that, it speaks to the motives that many linguists have for engaging in work with endangered languages:

the process of conducting research on endangered languages has drawn linguists into relationships with people who are at various points along the road to language shift because they are experiencing the larger pressures that are well known to lead there: relative poverty, social marginalization, encompassment by dominant political structures, and misrecognition. Since the forces that drive language shift are fundamentally political, economic, and cultural, rather than linguistic, **linguists who care about language vitality have begun involving themselves in activities that seek to address the root of the problem**, even to the point of focusing their efforts on reducing socioeconomic inequalities or disparities in access to healthcare, rather than on linguistics (Henderson et al. 2014). Dwyer (2010:212) calls collaboration “implicitly activist,” and we agree with this characterization.

(ibid.:259, emphasis mine)

Good (2012) also rightly notes, in another Cameroonian context, that for linguists, collaboration and “giving back” to a community may not always take the form of linguistic products (dictionaries, alphabet books, audio files, etc.). Instead, the desired contributions from the linguist may be more material or financial; in the case Good describes, collaboration takes the form of infrastructure development for roads and medical centers, which may in the long run lead to better odds for language maintenance. It was our hope that the Iyasa bo project, by addressing (albeit in a severely limited way) some of these non-linguistic needs, could support language maintenance by directly supporting the young people who will carry the language forward.

5.3. **Designing Iyasa bo: Inspirations and history**

In developing the concept for what eventually became Iyasa bo, Sammy and I drew on ideas and practices from three other programs with which I have a personal connection, all of which use innovative approaches to developing language and literacy skills in young people: Foxfire, 826National, and the Language Documentation Training Center (LDTC). Below, I briefly outline the features of each program which we incorporated into the Iyasa project.
5.3.1. Foxfire

Foxfire is a cultural heritage organization based in Rabun County, Georgia, US. It is “a nationally-recognized heritage preservation organization and a model for how learner-centered education enriches students and their communities and builds connections across generations.”67 The organization began in 1966 at Rabun County High School; an English teacher was frustrated with the lack of engagement among his pupils, and asked them to design an activity of their own choosing. They elected to produce a magazine about the pioneer era of Southern Appalachia, and the Appalachian traditions still being practiced, based on interviews with their family members and neighbors. They named the project Foxfire, after a type of bioluminescent lichen found on rotting logs in the Appalachian Mountains. The resulting Foxfire magazine, authored by students at Rabun County High School, has been in continuous publication since 1967. The Foxfire organization has since expanded to include a museum and Appalachian heritage center, as well as a publishing house for Appalachian cultural materials. The Foxfire approach is now a widely used educational model (see Glickman 2016) which focuses on student choice and shared responsibility in literacy education – “the first Foxfire classrooms were less about the magazine than they were about choosing to produce one.”68

I had been aware of Foxfire since childhood, since my uncle was one of the early participants in the project. Differences between Rabun County in the 1960s and Campo in the 2010s abound: Rabun County is part of a wealthy nation in the Global North, Iyasa is not a settler language (it is uncertain when the Iyasa arrived at this part of the coast, which was likely already inhabited by Bagyele “pygmies,” as discussed in Chapter 2, but the colonial context is quite different), Appalachian Euro-Americans have not undergone a recent history of colonization, and Appalachian English is not generally considered a discrete language. However, the parallels between the situation in Rabun County in the 1960s and Campo in the 2010s nevertheless struck me during research interviews. Both are places where local culture, speech, and tradition are fairly distinctive, as compared to the rest of the nation, and often stigmatized by people from outside the region (see Chapter 2); both were experiencing a cultural disconnect between elders and youth; both had less-than-optimal formal education options available to young people; and both places were at a “tipping point” where youth still had some connection

67 http://www.foxfire.org
68 http://www.foxfire.org/education
with/proficiency in their language/dialect and culture, but were increasingly disengaged with it, although interested in reconnecting. I suspected the Foxfire model of learner choice and youth publishing might be applicable in Campo, and pursued the concept of publishing a youth-authored magazine based on interviews with people in the Iyasa community. During the first workshop session (see §5.4), I explained the origins of Foxfire in my own father’s village, and distributed some copies of Foxfire from the 1990s. The students were interested in the fact that the youth in an American village had faced similar challenges with regard to preserving their own culture\(^{69}\), and found the example magazines (featuring photos of cultural practices, hand-drawn illustrations and maps, and interview transcripts) useful for conceptualizing their own eventual output. During the workshop’s closing ceremony, Iyasa notable (noble) and language committee member Albert Ndomi explained the history of Foxfire to the assembled family members and community leaders, and emphasized that since the challenges of culture and language maintenance are found the world over, lessons could be learned from what people were doing in other contexts, such as Foxfire in my father’s village.

\[\text{Figure 5.3: Albert Ndomi shows a copy of Foxfire magazine at Iyasa Closing Ceremony, August 22, 2018; a student’s Iyasa writing demonstration is visible on blackboard behind him.}\]

\(^{69}\) Although they, like most people in Campo, were astonished to learn that my father’s village language was English, albeit a rather special kind of English; the idea that this variety of English was also endangered did seem to resonate with students, though.
5.3.2. 826National

826National\textsuperscript{70} is a US-based nonprofit organization with the mission to improve students’ skills in written expression and help them become stronger, more confident writers in English and Spanish. Their eight nationwide chapters offer free after-school tutoring, writing workshops, and in-school programs which guide students aged 6-18 in producing written publications. I interned and volunteered with the 826Michigan chapter in Ann Arbor from 2010-2013, and was struck by the enthusiasm for language which even the most reluctant student writers developed when they had the support and assistance of non-judgmental, non-parent, non-teacher adults; when they chose their own topics of writing (much like the Foxfire model), and engaged with them in a spirit of creativity and fun rather than obligation or fear; and when they were faced with the prospect of becoming real, published authors, and seeing their work valued in recognizable ways (such being featured in a professionally designed hardcover book).

The enthusiasm which 826Michigan students showed for the idea of becoming published authors seemed like a potential motivator for youth in Campo. 826Michigan donated a number of their student publications to the Iyasa book project; though most were written in English, one was an English-Spanish bilingual book, which was popular with the few students who spoke some Spanish (i.e., those with family on the Equatorial Guinea side of the border). Most importantly, I explained the authorship of the books, and showed photos of the American students who had produced them. The workshop students were surprised and impressed to see examples of professional-looking publications written by young people. One student, in conversation with me during the workshop, made a statement to the effect of, “when I saw those American kids with their published books, I was so surprised! I always thought you had to be a big person to publish a book. The idea of seeing my name in print pleases me very much.” The 826National model of encouraging writing as a fun, expressive activity for young people, rather than one taught in prescriptive, rigid ways, translated well to Iyasa book—some of the students reported that for the first time, they were \textit{enjoying} writing.

\textsuperscript{70} http://www.826national.org
5.3.3. The Language Documentation Training Center (LDTC)

The Language Documentation Training Center (LDTC) is a student-run initiative at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa’s Department of Linguistics. For over a decade, it has brought together graduate students in linguistics with speakers of under-documented, endangered, or otherwise non-majority languages on the UHM campus. The LDTC model involves weekly workshops, held for eight-week periods each semester; each week’s workshop teaches a different set of skills in basic language documentation and description (e.g., introductory phonology, morphology, audio/video recording, etc.; for a current LDTC curriculum, see https://www.ldtc.org/workshops). Each workshop session begins with a learning component, usually a presentation by a workshop leader, and is then followed by hands-on practice and group work. Each speaker is paired with one or more linguist “mentors,” who guide them in documenting the aspects of their own languages which they are most interested in, and assist them in producing a small website about their language and culture.

I had served as a workshop leader and linguist mentor for LDTC during my time at UHM, and was struck by how quickly most participants were able to master the basics of language documentation with only a few hours’ worth of instruction, as well as one-on-one guidance from a mentor (much like the 826National model). In addition, the workshops included a session about the global phenomenon of language endangerment and causes thereof; this awareness-raising component was always popular with participants, and caused them to reflect in much more depth about their own community’s experiences of language shift and maintenance. Many go on to participate in the advanced LDTC workshops, as well as becoming more engaged in language and culture maintenance (Locke & Anip 2013). The LDTC model of language documentation training was a direct influence on the structure of the Iyasa bo workshop. While there were only three “mentors” available to work with all 16 students (Sammy, myself, and Braden Brown), the structure of the workshop sessions (a learning component followed by hands-on practice, working towards a cumulative language-related project) followed the LDTC model.

71 http://www.ldtc.org
5.4. Iyasa bo: Activities, challenges, and successes

Below, I outline the activities of Iyasa bo, beginning with the structure of the initial two-week training workshop in August 2018, and concluding with the association’s activities between the workshop and time of writing (September 2019). I conclude this section with a discussion of whether and how the project addressed the language shift issues outlined in §5.2.

5.4.1. Initial workshop

The Iyasa bo project began with a two-week workshop, August 9–22, 2018. The workshop was funded in part by a grant from the Endangered Language Fund’s Language Legacies program, which was awarded in May 2018. On-the-ground preparations for the workshop were ongoing for six to eight weeks prior to the event itself: Sammy Mbipite and Arnauld Djowe, with the assistance of Romain Henri “Petit” Eboukou, traveled around Campo and Campo Beach, informing young people about the workshop, and recruiting participants whom they knew to be trustworthy, reliable, and interested in issues of language and culture. The importance of involving local youth leaders for recruitment and awareness-raising for this project cannot be overstated. Sammy is a lifelong resident of Campo Sub-Division, and his father is deeply involved in both Iyasa language work through CELI, and church activities; Sammy is a well-known and well-respected member of the Iyasa community, and was able to use his influence in the community to bring aboard youth who were not initially interested in the workshop. Similarly, Arnauld is the president of Campo’s youth chapter of the RDPC, Cameroon’s ruling political party, and is experienced in organizing and mobilizing youth for political and civic purposes; he is also well-known as a trustworthy member of the community. Petit is a close friend of Arnauld, and is similarly well-known and connected with Campo’s youth. Sammy reported that some young people were initially reluctant to do something they perceived as “school” during the summers, but because the workshop was being promoted by Sammy and Arnauld, who spoke to parents (many of whom had not transmitted very much Iyasa to their children) about the importance of language and culture maintenance, parents began to champion the workshop and insist that their children attend. Thanks to their broad network of ties and reputation in the community, the initial workshop was populated by students who were genuinely interested in learning, motivated and able to engage in language and culture work, and
who consistently attended workshop sessions. These pre-workshop preparations by local youth leaders were crucial to the success of the project.

In addition to recruiting participants, the help of Sammy and Arnauld was also indispensable in securing the buy-in of CELI, the Iyasa language committee, who were initially unsure about the workshop. As discussed in §5.2, many of the elder members of CELI were dubious about youth involvement in language work. Sammy’s role as a bridge between CELI (of which his father is an officer) and the youth of Campo was crucial to securing CELI’s good opinion of Iyasa. CELI’s permission to hold the workshop in their office space was also an enormous asset to the project, since there are few other public indoor spaces in Campo with electricity, tables and chairs, and enough room to accommodate 20+ people. CELI’s approval also meant that we were able to buy copies of their alphabet primer to distribute to the students, rather than creating our own literacy training materials from scratch.

16 students aged 13-40\(^{72}\) participated in the August 2018 workshop; all except one student (whose professional obligations necessitated that they drop out after three sessions) attended consistently throughout the workshop. The workshop was originally envisioned to run Monday-Wednesday-Friday for two and a half weeks (roughly eight sessions, much like the LDTC curriculum). However, after the first session, students requested that the workshop take place every day, so that they would have more time to learn, practice with recorders and computers, and work on their articles. In addition, we had originally planned an hour-long lunch break during the workshop sessions, which left only three hours of instruction and practice per day (we were limited by the daytime hours during which the power is on in Campo – usually 10am–2pm). After the first session, the students requested that we push lunch back to 2:00, so they could have four hours of uninterrupted time to learn and work. We were surprised and pleased at the level of enthusiasm which students immediately showed in asking for additional workshop hours.

Each workshop began with a brief warm-up discussion of a topic related to Iyasa language and culture, held almost entirely in Iyasa. These were generally led by Sammy Mbipite or Adolphe Idjabe III (a high school teacher and Iyasa language champion); topics discussed

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\(^{72}\) The age of the youngest student is approximate, as they were not sure of their precise age. The oldest student, while 40 may seem odd for a youth-oriented workshop, was still considered a “youth” in the Iyasa cultural context, since they were unmarried and not in a stable career. Most participants were in their teens or early-to-mid 20s.
included marine plants and corals, traditions of courtship and marriage in the Iyasa community (a spirited discussion!), and Iyasa cultural history, among others. In addition, each workshop concluded at 2:00 pm with lunch, prepared by the wife of one of the older students and paid for out of the workshop funds supplied by ELF. The majority of the students generally hung around for 30 to 90 minutes after each workshop, eating, talking, and joking; as the workshops went on, students tended to stay longer after the sessions concluded. It is also worth noting that this lunchtime socializing took place almost entirely in Iyasa, and that as the workshops went on, younger students began participating more and more in these conversations (see §5.4.2 for further discussion of how this helped meet the workshop’s goals).

The first workshop provided an overview of global linguistic diversity, language endangerment, and language documentation & revitalization; I taught this workshop, since these are my topics of specialization. The overview presented the rates of global language endangerment, which seemed interesting to the students; while many of them were aware that languages were disappearing in the South Region or in Cameroon more broadly, some expressed surprise that the same phenomenon was found all around the world, including in Europe and North America. We then discussed causes and processes of language endangerment, and the group discussed whether Iyasa was endangered (and whether they agreed with the LEI rating of “Threatened”73), and why language shift might be taking place among Iyasa speakers. The general consensus was that young people were indeed speaking less Iyasa than in times past, and some young people described their (or their peers’) Iyasa as being incorrect or bad (see Belew 2018 and Chapter 3 for further discussion of language ideologies in the Iyasa context). After discussing language shift in Iyasa, I outlined the concepts of language documentation and revitalization, as well as a few of the most common methods in these fields (production of dictionaries and grammars, books of stories or narratives, language nests, mentor-apprentice programs, and so on). Finally, to give a sense of the workshop’s goals and possible outputs, I discussed the work of Foxfire Magazine and 826Michigan (see §5.3.1–5.3.2). To conclude, Sammy and I laid out our overall goals for the workshop: to help boost pride and interest in the Iyasa language among young people; to create additional documentation of Iyasa; to teach participants to create, edit, and share good audio recordings; to teach participants to read, write, and type in Iyasa; and to create an Iyasa-language publication which could be interesting to the

73 http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/yko
whole community. We also invited participants to share their own goals for the workshop, which included learning to use computers, improving their own Iyasa language skills, and deepening their knowledge of Iyasa culture. There was some discussion of whether the resulting publication should cover multiple topics in Iyasa culture, or whether it should focus on a single topic; the students arrived at a consensus that it would be better for each issue of the publication to focus on a single topic, but did not decide on the subject matter of the initial publication during the first workshop.

The second workshop was co-taught by myself and Sammy, and provided an introduction to audio recording. During this workshop, we briefly explained how to use the Zoom H1 recorders purchased for the group; this model was chosen for its simplicity of use (few buttons or settings to adjust), low barrier to learning, and good recording quality for its price point. We first went over the operation of the recorders (turning on and off, beginning and ending recording, reviewing and deleting files, physical care of the recorders) and then discussed how to ensure good audio quality: recording in quiet locations (away from traffic, ocean waves, wind, babies and roosters, etc.), placing the recorder at a good distance from the speaker, checking input levels while recording, and so on. We also discussed ways to make speakers comfortable while recording so that they felt at ease and spoke naturally\textsuperscript{74}, and the extreme importance of obtaining clear and informed consent to record anyone. We also discussed the fact that the recordings made during the initial workshop would be taken back to the United States by me, to be put in an archive (as required by ELF funding), and discussed what an archive was and what role it served.

After the presentation on best practices for recording, the students split up into three groups (one for each Zoom H1 available) and took their recorders to different locations around the CELI office to practice making audio recordings under various conditions (indoors near a fan, indoors in a quiet room, outdoors in the wind, etc.). The students then reconvened and we played back each audio recording, discussing the technical quality of each file: is there a lot of background noise? Can the speaker(s) be heard clearly? Do they seem at ease? The students

\textsuperscript{74} Obviously, a brief two-week workshop cannot cover the full range of interview methods, interpersonal skills, ethical concerns, and other complex issues involved in making “good” recordings (to say nothing of an interrogation of the concept of “naturalness” or “authenticity” of speech!). However, our aim was to impress the key ideas of free and informed consent for recording, and the importance of making the recording experience comfortable and stress-free for the people involved. This component of the workshop was largely led by Sammy Mbipite and Adolphe Idiabe II, since only people with a deep knowledge of the community and culture of Campo could provide useful advice on good behavior in this context.
reported that they enjoyed making the practice recordings and fine-tuning the audio quality, and the first round of recordings they produced were mostly of very good quality right off the bat – as with most components of the workshop, the students absorbed and applied the material more quickly than anticipated. At the end of this session, we began signing out recorders, for one evening at a time, to students who were ready to begin making their own recordings.

The third workshop presented the basics of using computers. Students came to this workshop with widely differing levels of experience with computers; some had never used a personal computer, some had limited experience working on a computer, and others were fairly proficient in their use. Our goal was to ensure that all students had the skills needed to copy, edit, and share their audio recordings, as well as transcribe them (and generally create written digital documents in Iyasa). Before this workshop, we distributed an 8GB USB key to each student, pre-loaded with the first three workshops’ training slides; the goal was to ensure that each student had an easy way to share and keep copies of their work. The first day of computer training covered the topics of basic computer use: turning laptops on and off; using the mouse and keyboard; opening and closing program windows; copying files between the audio recorders, the laptops, and students’ USB keys; and creating, editing, and saving documents in Microsoft Word. We were initially concerned that students who already had these skills would be bored or disengaged. However, during this session, students who were already proficient in computer use were patient and supportive of other students who were just beginning; peer learning took place at every table, with students giving one another encouragement and advice on how best to manipulate a mouse, how to find program icons on the desktop, and so on.

The fourth workshop was one which the students showed great enthusiasm for: learning to read and write in the new Iyasa orthography created by CELI in 2015. (Sammy was the sole instructor for this workshop, as I am barely literate in Iyasa.) None of the students were able to read or write Iyasa at all at the beginning of the workshop. However, all the students were literate in French to varying degrees, and could read and write the Roman alphabet; this was a useful head start, since the Iyasa orthography is Roman-based and designed with French-literate speakers in mind. To begin this session, we distributed the CELI alphabet workbooks we had purchased for the students. These workbooks included an alphabet primer, example words and sentences written in Iyasa and French, and practice reading/writing exercises organized around each grapheme. The students were very enthusiastic about receiving these workbooks – one
student, upon receiving their copy, actually kissed it jokingly, while exclaiming “I’ve wanted to
learn this for so long!” Sammy began by highlighting the differences between French and Iyasa
orthography: the special characters <ŋ>, <ɔ>, and <ɛ> in Iyasa, the use of <c> to represent /tʃ/
rather than /s/ or /k/, and the use of diacritics to mark tone in Iyasa, rather than change vowel
quality, as in French. This included helping students recognize and articulate the differences
between various kinds of minimal pairs, such as tone minimal pairs or e/ɛ minimal pairs –
Sammy, who holds a BA in linguistics and was involved with the committee to design the CELI
orthography, was able to help the students grasp these concepts very quickly. After presenting
the alphabet chart and fielding questions about it, he asked students to come practice writing
specific words on the board. After a student wrote a word, he would ask the class to discuss
whether they thought it was spelled correctly, and why or why not. If the word had been spelled
incorrectly, another student would volunteer to try again, and group discussion of why this
spelling was or wasn’t correct would repeat until the word had successfully been written
according to the CELI spelling norms. The final hour of this session was spent with the students
working on exercises in the CELI alphabet workbooks, and Sammy circulating around the room
to answer questions and correct completed practice exercises.

Again, the students’ enthusiasm for learning Iyasa literacy was overwhelming. During
this workshop, the time for our usual lunch break (2:00) came, and the power went out; lunch
arrived and was set up at the lunch table outside, but the students remained in the classroom and
continued to practice writing on the board for another half hour, rather than going to eat. Sammy
and I had originally allocated three workshop sessions for teaching the orthography; we
anticipated the students needing at least this much time to become comfortable with basic Iyasa
literacy. Instead, by the end of this session, all the students were able to write and read basic
sentences in Iyasa, and seemed very comfortable with the alphabet. One student commented,
after correctly writing a word on the chalkboard on their first attempt, “I thought this [writing in
Iyasa] would be so hard! But it’s easy, so much easier than in French.” This was yet another
point in the workshop when the students picked up skills and knowledge much faster than
anticipated, which underlines the importance of flexibility and being prepared to adjust the pace
of this type of workshop to meet students’ needs.
The fifth workshop session thus moved along to the next module we’d planned: typing in Iyasa. We had pre-installed the PolyglotKeyboard\(^{75}\) app, a free IPA keyboard program, on all the laptops used in the workshop. During this session, we demonstrated how to use PolyglotKeyboard to insert the special characters \(\varepsilon\), \(\vartheta\), and \(\eta\), as well as to add tone diacritics to vowels. The majority of this session was used for hands-on practice, with students taking turns typing basic sentences and words, and continuing to practice writing on the board and in their workbooks. By the end of this day, all students were able to type in Iyasa, although some students still struggled a bit with using the IPA keyboard. For the second half of this session, the group took the time to discuss the subject matter of the publication they planned to produce. After some discussion of possible topics including recipes/cooking, proverbs, and marine knowledge, the group voted to make the topic of first publication maj ka, or traditional games. There is a rich Iyasa cultural tradition of games, many of them played on the beach or in the ocean, which are increasingly unknown to younger generations. The students noted that games are a topic of interest to the entire Iyasa community, and a particularly appropriate topic for a young people’s group to document and write about. During this session, the students also discussed forming an association to carry on the work begun in the workshop, and voted on a name for their newly-formed association: Iyasa bo, or ‘Iyasa Forward,’ which represents the language being carried forward into the future by the youth.

The sixth workshop session taught the final component needed for students to be able to record and transcribe audio files: how to use Audacity to play back audio files on the laptops, and how to select certain parts of the files for repeat playback. Since the goal was not for students to edit or analyze audio files, we did not cover any features beyond playback. Similarly, since the goal was not for students to undertake detailed linguistic transcription or analysis of their audio files, and because Word is a more generally useful technology tool for young people today to be proficient in, we decided not to teach ELAN or other more specialized tools for audio transcription. This workshop largely focused on transcribing audio with a reasonable level of detail – we did not prescribe strictly verbatim transcription to the level that, e.g., morphological or discourse analysis would require. Instead, we encouraged students to write as close as possible to what the person had actually said, and left the level of detail to their discretion (especially

\(^{75}\) http://dominicweb.eu/en/dictionaries/polyglot-keyboard/
since reduction of speech to written form is not an ideologically neutral activity, as discussed in Bucholtz 2007; we aimed to give students the agency to transcribe as they saw most fit). Students learned to use Audacity for playback fairly quickly, though it presented more difficulty than most other components of the workshop due to having a somewhat complicated and not highly user-friendly interface.

At this point, students had learned the skills needed to make good-quality audio recordings; write and read in the new Iyasa orthography; type in Iyasa in Microsoft word; and play back and transcribe their audio files. Many students had already had the opportunity to borrow audio recorders and make recordings (most students, in addition to recording on the topic of traditional games, also recorded other topics of interest to them: songs sung by themselves or family members, stories and proverbs, and traditional medicinal knowledge). A total of 48 audio files were recorded by the students during the workshop period. The remaining four workshop sessions were devoted to letting students work independently to transcribe their recordings, write brief articles in Iyasa about traditional games, and generally apply the skills they had learned as they saw fit. During this phase of the workshop, students requested that we make the CELI office available for them to work with the laptops in the evening, after the power came back on at 6 pm. Sammy, Braden, and/or I thus opened the CELI office each evening for the next week, and remained there for the evening to answer questions or help with the computers. A few of the older students came fairly consistently in the evenings (the younger students generally did not have access to transport at night). While the first issue of the publication was not completed in the initial workshop period, we had not anticipated that this would be possible in such a short time; overall, the students were able to accomplish much more than expected in the brief two-week window we had.

One of these independent-work sessions took place on a Monday, after a weekend break. Unbeknownst to me and Sammy, the students and Adolphe Idjabe II had decided to challenge each other to learn how to make one traditional craft item each over the weekend. That Monday morning, students had a show-and-tell with the objects they’d learned to make, which included small carved boats, raffia skirts for traditional dances, and clay pots. They presented these
objects to the instructors as thank-you gifts for leading the workshops. During this session, students also formalized the formation of the Iyasa bo association, and democratically elected a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and censeur (roughly, someone whose role was to ensure that the rules of the organization were followed).

The workshop concluded with an important event: a closing celebration at the CELI office with students’ families, the members of CELI, and a few community leaders. The students felt that it was extremely important to show the community what they had accomplished, and to demonstrate the group’s seriousness about working with Iyasa language and culture. We were constrained by our budget and the space of the CELI office in how many people could come to the celebration; after CELI members and community leaders such as notables (nobles) were accounted for, each student was asked to invite at most two people from their family.

The program of the closing celebration was determined by the students themselves; the organization of the celebration was, once more, largely thanks to the event-planning work of Arnauld Djowe and Romain “Petit” Eboukou. As the invitees arrived at the CELI office, the students welcomed them with a song they had learned and practiced in Iyasa, led by one student who was particularly passionate about music. The laptops, recorders, and publications (Foxfire issues and 826michigan publications) donated to the project were displayed prominently on a table at the front of the room, making clear that material resources had gone into the workshop. It was deemed important that the people who had led the workshop speak, so I gave a brief opening statement (mostly in French) about the goals of the workshop, and the work that had inspired Sammy and myself to launch this project. Albert Ndomi, an Iyasa notable and member of CELI, also gave a speech in Iyasa about the Foxfire model, language shift, and the importance of youth involvement in language work (see Figure 5.1 above). Sammy served as emcee, introducing each speaker and student who had volunteered to present what they had learned, and speaking at some length (mostly in Iyasa) about what the participants had accomplished. The participants wanted to show the technical skills they had learned, so one student demonstrated how to turn a laptop on and off, as well as create and save a Microsoft Word document, and another student demonstrated how to use the Zoom H1 to make good audio recordings. The students found it

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76 This is perhaps not strictly relevant to the language revitalization work of Iyasa bo, but highlights the incredible enthusiasm for Iyasa culture and learning the students showed during the workshop, and the initiative they took above and beyond the workshop content.
particularly important to show that they had learned to read and write well in Iyasa, so two students gave reading demonstrations (reading aloud a series of fictional letters between family members, which were included in the CELI workbook), and two students demonstrated writing short passages in Iyasa on the chalkboard. As an intermission, the students performed an Iyasa song, along with a dance that they had learned and practiced. Finally, the president of CELI, who had initially been wary about the project and dubious of youth involvement in language work, gave a speech in Iyasa congratulating these young people on their work, praising what they had accomplished (and expressing surprise that they had learned to read and write so well, so quickly), and encouraging them to keep up the important work. To conclude, each student was presented with a certificate of accomplishment on heavy cardstock, handed to them by a community elder or someone important to them (e.g., a parent or a spouse). It was quite moving to see the president of CELI present a certificate to his own grandchild with enormous pride. As most good celebrations do, the ceremony concluded with food, drink, and socializing. Group photos were taken, everyone in their Sunday best, and the mood was festive and proud of these young people.

On the whole, the workshop was very well received, and the participants seemed extremely enthusiastic about carrying the work forward. I was concerned that momentum might dissipate after the initial workshop had concluded, especially since there would no longer be access to the office space provided by CELI. However, after my return to the United States shortly after the closing celebration, the group has continued meeting at least once a month. Arnauld Djowe, who had been elected president of the association, began hosting meetings in his own home, and providing transport (at his own expense) to the younger members of the group who could not safely travel to and from meetings after dark. In addition to continuing their work to record, read, and write in Iyasa, they have also incorporated other cultural activities. One of the most popular of these is periodic “game days” at the beach, where Iyasa bo members come together to learn traditional games and play them. The group also participated in the annual Joba ja Iyasa (Iyasa Day) festival held in Campo in July 2019, presenting an overview of their activities and raising awareness in the Iyasa community of these youths’ mobilization around language and culture work. Not all members of the original workshop group continued attending every meeting, but as a handful of participants drifted out of the association, word of mouth spread and others took their place. As of August 2019, Iyasa bo had grown from 16 members
to over 35. Some of the older officers are currently paying rent and electricity for a room in Campo to hold the group’s meetings in; more stable funding for the project is still being sought.

The first issue of the magazine has not yet been printed due to financial difficulties, and some decisions regarding the final written version remain to be made (it is not an easy thing to get all community leaders to agree upon, and sign off on, a final written product). It seems that the students are now working on filming videos and audio of traditional games, and writing some accounts of these games in French, and a number of elders and members of CELI are doing the bulk of the final writing/editing of the publication in Iyasa. I have removed myself from any decision-making regarding Iyasa bo’s activities, as the goal was for the association to be fully sovereign in its own activities, and to empower the youth of Campo to carry out their own language work as they see fit; my involvement after the workshop has been limited to some (minor) financial contributions and sending messages of encouragement to the group via Arnauld Djowe, who has access to a smartphone. However, I am still in regular contact with many of the members, and I am happy to continue assisting with any questions related to my expertise, to the extent possible given the geographic distance.

5.4.2. What did we succeed in addressing? What did we fail to address?

The goals of the workshop which became Iyasa bo, as outlined in §5.2, were addressed with varying degrees of success by this project. Below, I return to each goal and discuss how we succeeded (or did not succeed) in addressing these goals.

I believe the first goal, to provide a vector for young Iyasa (heritage) speakers in Campo to improve their language skills, was addressed fairly successfully through this model. Students, particularly the younger students (in their early-to-mid teens), commented towards the end of the workshop that they felt much more confident in speaking Iyasa than they had before the workshop, and that they had picked up many new words and phrases by listening to the Iyasa-language discussions of their older peers. It is worth reiterating that the discussion in the classroom (even of materials that had been presented in French) was often in Iyasa; while some students did discuss topics like “where do I click to open a new file?” in French, others instructed each other in Iyasa while accomplishing tasks on French-interface computers. During the warm-up discussions and at lunch, conversation was almost exclusively in Iyasa. I observed younger students, and those who identified their own spoken Iyasa skills as weaker, staying quiet more
than older students during the early workshop sessions. However, as the workshop progressed, these younger/less-proficient students began participating more and more in these conversations in Iyasa. I noticed a small bit of language correction between participants, along the lines of “no, you pronounce it this way,” but the corrected party did not shut down or stop talking, as some young people had previously reported doing when their language is corrected by elders. In early sessions, some students also tried to join discussions in French, or make comments in French, when the dominant language of the conversation was Iyasa; they were often met with comments from other students along the lines of “is this a French class, or an Iyasa class? We’re here to do Iyasa!” This type of “peer pressure” seems, anecdotally at least, to have nudged these students towards trying more often to join in in Iyasa. As discussed in Lüpke & Storch (2013), this aligns with one of the primary modes of language learning in many African contexts: peer-to-peer learning, as opposed to the more commonly held academic model of predominantly intergenerational language transmission. Students commented, especially during the workshop session on reading and writing in Iyasa (and the accompanying discussion of Iyasa phonology and tone by Sammy), that they now understood the differences between homonyms that they hadn’t quite grasped before. In the videos which have been posted to Facebook and WhatsApp since the conclusion of the workshop, all the participants of “game days” at the beach are speaking almost exclusively in Iyasa; this is quite different than other interactions between young people I had observed in Campo, where the dominant code was French. No formal assessments have been conducted, nor have any effective assessments of Iyasa proficiency even been developed, as discussed in Chapter 4, so it is not possible to quantify the effect that this workshop may have had on young people’s proficiency in Iyasa without a substantial amount of further work that is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, it appears that at the very least, young people now have a new domain in which to speak Iyasa (the meetings of Iyasa bo), a new cohort of peer-age people to speak with, and a new sense of “peer pressure” which results in actual use of the language on an ongoing basis. If nothing else, this type of dedicated space and community of practice (in the sense of Wenger 1998) for the use of the language is potentially a major asset for the maintenance of Iyasa among this group of young people.

The second goal of the project, the growing disconnect between elders and youth in the Campo area, seems to have been addressed with some success as well. While no single initiative can change the relationship between generations in any broad sense, and a two-week workshop is
necessarily very limited in its broader social impact, there was certainly an increased level of contact between the elders of CELI, and some of the elders in students’ families and neighborhoods, and the students who recorded them. Nearly half of the recordings made by the students (19 of 48) were of elders, generally their own grandparents, but sometimes neighbors. More specifically, the gap between the members of CELI and the members of Iyasa seems to have been significantly bridged by this project. One student commented after the closing celebration that they had previously been quite afraid of the elder members of CELI, fearing rebukes and dismissal if they showed interest in language work; after seeing the CELI president’s highly encouraging speech at the closing celebration, however, the student commented that they would not be afraid to come by the CELI office in the future with questions about the language.

The third goal of the project, providing access to literacy education and reading materials for the Iyasa-speaking community of Campo, was met in part. While the students certainly succeeded in learning to read and write in Iyasa—and, through word of mouth, attracted other young people to come learn the same skills—the goal of producing Iyasa-language reading materials for the community has not yet been met. This is largely due to a lack of material resources (printing is expensive and hard to access in Campo; even in the nearby city of Kribi, roughly 5 hours’ travel away, it is quite expensive to print materials), and the difficulty of getting final approval for the written publication from CELI. If there were more funds available, not only to print the publication, but to compensate the busy people who need to finalize the translations and spelling, this goal is more likely to have been accomplished within the time frame.

The fourth goal of the project, the creation of documentation for the under-documented Iyasa language, is also only a partial success. It is not clear how many audio recordings the group has made since the initial workshop, and the prohibitively high costs of cellular/internet data in Campo make it difficult to put those recordings online or send them to someone else for archiving. They have, however, video-recorded some of the “game days” held at the beach on their cell phones, which contained a great deal of spoken Iyasa. However, transcription of the audio files which the students recorded was not the most popular part of the workshop, and
students seemed to enjoy rote transcription much less than other types of writing and recording\textsuperscript{77}. Most students ended up doing something like a summary or paraphrasing of the interviews they recorded; this is highly useful in documenting traditional games themselves, but the lack of more detailed transcriptions and translations limits the utility of these materials for future linguistic analysis by non-Iyasa speakers. However, since the primary focus of this workshop was revitalization or maintenance over pure documentation, we did not devote a great deal of time to ensuring that students produced materials which would serve as good documentation. In future workshops, it would be worth devoting an additional day to teaching very basic techniques for making these recordings more useful from a documentary perspective, such as teaching students a re-speaking method like BOLD (Boerger 2011), and ideally, having funding available to compensate anyone willing/able to transcribe these materials to make them more accessible for future use.

The fifth and final goal of the workshop, to serve some of the students’ non-linguistic needs, was perhaps the most successful. It can be stated with confidence that the participants got two hearty meals every day of the workshop, and that they were safe, comfortable, and (largely) enjoying themselves during the workshops. This may seem unremarkable to readers in the Global North, or those in situations a bit more stable than many students’ home lives in Campo. However, it is unfortunately true that not all of the workshop students were food-secure or that their home lives were comfortable.\textsuperscript{78} Similarly, the goal to provide free literacy and technology training, which might have a positive impact on students’ future employment or academic prospects, was met. All students were able to perform basic tasks on a computer, such as writing a Word document and copying files, at the end of the workshop; this is likely to be a major benefit when seeking employment or schooling in an increasingly technology-focused world, and the students often commented on how excited they were to finally be “androïd\textsuperscript{79}” computer users. Finally, the goal to help students become more confident in their own skills, knowledge,\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{77} This is certainly understandable, as even professional linguists often must reluctantly force themselves to do rote transcription, even when their careers depend on it; a group of young people over summer vacation can hardly be blamed for not champing at the bit to transcribe audio files.

\textsuperscript{78} Following some thoughtful comments from the audience at the 6th International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation, I should note that food insecurity is not as sensitive a topic in Campo as in some other contexts – some participants in fact asked me to fundraise for the group by mentioning how difficult life is in Campo, including the fact of food insecurity. I mean no disrespect to the community or any individuals by mentioning this aspect of life in Campo.

\textsuperscript{79} As discussed in Chapter 3, this is a word used in Cameroonian French to describe things that are high-tech, luxe, trendy, or otherwise desirable and cool.
and ability as Iyasa language and culture keepers, and as holders of talents they weren’t fully aware of within themselves, was also met for at least some of the students (while not all students directly said anything to this effect, I observed them relaxing and behaving with much more self-confidence as the workshop went on). One student did, however, make a comment during a lunch break about halfway through the workshop, which I find important to paraphrase here (none of the workshop sessions were recorded, so this is based on notes made after the fact). This comment was made by one of the younger students, with one of the less stable home lives, as they and others in the community described it:

I never used to think I was very smart. Mom couldn’t always afford to send me to school, so whenever I did go, there was always a lot I didn’t know. The teachers made me feel so stupid, and I really thought I was stupid. I didn’t think I would ever be very good academically. But since this workshop started, I noticed that I do know more than I thought. I know more about Iyasa culture than I thought, even if there is a lot left to learn, and I know my language better than I thought. And I noticed that I learned things really fast! The writing came so quickly, and so did the computers. I think maybe I am clever. I think maybe I might go to university someday. Maybe I’ll be a linguist and do something for my language.

If this one student’s experience is the only positive thing to come from this workshop, I will say with conviction that this project succeeded. However, on the whole, I believe many of the students came away from it with a greater confidence in their language abilities, a new group of people with whom to speak Iyasa and a new, judgment-free setting in which to speak it, a new ability to read and write their language, new skills in useful technologies, and a renewed sense of community with the other members of Iyasa.

5.5. Lessons for other revitalization programs

While every situation of language shift and maintenance is unique, and what works well in one context may be entirely unsuitable in another, I would like to highlight what seemed most effective in this project, and what might be useful to consider in other revitalization programs for language contexts which bear similarities to Iyasa in Campo.

One of the most effective aspects of this project, as discussed above, was letting the youth participants determine much of the work and focus of the project. While Sammy and I had a predetermined set of skills we aimed to impart (audio recording, literacy, computer use and transcription), and a final product in mind (an Iyasa-language publication), the participants...
largely determined the pace of the workshops (e.g., running for four hours at a time, having the workshops on more days, and opening the office in the evenings), chose the topic of the publication, and made the decision on their own to form an association to carry the work forward. As discussed in §5.3.1, “the first Foxfire classrooms were less about the magazine than they were about choosing to produce one” – I believe a major part of the success of the Iyasa project, and its continued growth since the original workshop, was the youth-led nature of the project. Their ownership over their own work seems to have resulted in much more sustained engagement than something handed to them in a top-down fashion.

Similarly, I believe it was very effective for the workshop to be limited to youth (or people culturally categorized as youth). As discussed in Chapter 3, Abtahian & Quinn (2017), and Belew (2018), there is often some shame, nervousness, or fear of judgment when younger or less-than-perfectly-proficient speakers speak their language in front of elders; they may anticipate criticism or rebukes, and this insecurity may lead them to speak their language less, thus accelerating language shift. In this model, youth have a relatively socially “safe” space to speak, even imperfectly, thus helping them re-acclimate to speaking their language. The access to peer learning of the language in casual conversation seems to have helped participants become more confident speakers, and improve their vocabulary and pronunciation (according to their casual commentary during the workshop). In addition, the “peer pressure” of having a largely Iyasa-language space, with gentle corrections from peers if one relied on French to communicate, seemed quite effective in encouraging youth to try to speak only (or mostly) Iyasa. Finally, the youth makeup of the group seemed to make the experience fun – there was a great deal of laughing and joking, not only at lunch breaks, but while doing the work itself. Language activities which are not only effective, but enjoyable, stand a much better chance of sustained participation.

Furthermore, the Foxfire model, where students not only go seek new knowledge themselves from other members of the community (e.g., the names and rules of traditional games), but are also encouraged to draw on their own areas of expertise that may not be rewarded or acknowledged in traditional schooling (e.g., their knowledge of Iyasa culture and language), seemed a good fit for a youth-oriented program. Empowering youth to choose the ways in which they want to learn, and empowering them to decide what they want to do with that knowledge, resulted in a much more engaged group than they likely would have been if they
were simply told what to do. In addition, the prospect of producing a publication to share with the whole community – thus being publicly acknowledged for their work and engagement with language and culture, and doing a concrete service to their community at the same time.

Finally, providing a path for youth to engage with elders towards a specific purpose which would draw them together (the seeking and sharing of cultural knowledge), and having older and more “elder-competent” participants model respectful ways to approach elders for interviews, seemed to make participants more comfortable and less intimidated to go talk to elders. One student commented that it was the first time he’d felt like he really had much to talk about with his grandfather; this model could be immensely useful in beginning to re-build connections between generations, and to let youth and elders spend time together around the topics of culture and language.

On the whole, this type of youth-led “language club” or “language publication association” model, with a focus on youth leadership, peer-to-peer learning, a “safe linguistic space,” and, ultimately, fun, may yield positive results in other communities, particularly those where young people still have a fair degree of competence in the shifting language.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

In the preceding chapters, I have provided a brief background of the study of language shift, endangerment, maintenance, and revitalization, as well as a description of the context in which this dissertation came to be—both the concrete specifics of the research, and an autoethnographic description of the subjectivities and goals of the researcher. I have outlined the historical, geographic, economic, social, and linguistic context in which Iyasa is spoken, and the ways in which this context interacts with Iyasa language shift and maintenance—both through my own observations and interpretations, and those of Iyasa speakers themselves. The area in which Iyasa is spoken is a site of intense language contact and (reportedly) fairly stable multilingualism dating back many centuries, but this context is undergoing rapid change due to urbanization of Campo Ville, changing mobility patterns, and demographic fluctuations in Campo Sub-Division. The differences in Iyasa’s vitality status between villages and towns is noted as well; language shift appears to be occurring more in the relatively urban (and linguistically heterogenous) Campo Ville, whereas there is evidence of greater language maintenance in the smaller and almost entirely Iyasa-populated village of Ebodje.

I have also presented speakers’ perceptions of Iyasa’s vitality, and the factors leading to language shift and maintenance, in their own words—when seeking to understand (or intervene in) social processes such as language shift and maintenance, I argue, one needs a nuanced understanding of how those processes are perceived and discussed within the community in question. Drawing on in-depth interviews with speakers about their linguistic biographies, attitudes, language use, and perceptions of Iyasa’s vitality, I presented an overview of the issues which speakers saw as most relevant to language shift and maintenance. These issues include changes in multilingual repertoires and practices among Iyasa speakers, including an increasing tendency towards the use of French in the home domain; economic pressures which accelerate shift towards French, the economically dominant language of Cameroon; disruption of intergenerational transmission in many families, exacerbated by ideologies of subtractive multilingualism; and demographic issues, including an increasing prevalence of linguistically heterogenous marriages, as well as the “rural exodus” taking Iyasa speakers away from the areas where speakers of the language are concentrated, towards cities where language attrition often
occurs. I described how younger speakers tended to have more optimistic perceptions of Iyasa’s vitality and sustainability, whereas older people tended to have a more pessimistic or even catastrophic view of the language’s prospects for survival, and outlined how linguistic purism among older speakers, and their correction or disparagement of young people’s Iyasa, may accelerate language shift (or impede young people from becoming involved in language revitalization). I have also examined Iyasa’s linguistic vitality through several existing academic frameworks, and compared these views of vitality to those expressed by Iyasa speakers.

I have presented the results of a variationist experiment designed, in response to speaker-identified patterns of variation, to test whether a pattern of variation which I call the “novel plural” may be a symptom of language shift, and to examine what social factors this variation was correlated with. This experiment aimed to see whether this variation might potentially serve as a diagnostic tool for the social patterning of language shift. One variant identified by speakers as being used by younger and less proficient speakers (the use of the innovative form betütütu ‘motorcycles’ in place of the traditional form tütütu ‘motorcycle(s)’) was indeed attested in the experimental data. However, the other two variants identified by speakers (bemel ma ‘forks’ instead of mel ma ‘forks’ and bemy ku ‘mornings’ instead of my ku ‘mornings’) were not attested in either of the production tasks in the experiment. Production of the innovative betütütu variant did in fact show a significant inverse correlation to speaker age – younger speakers tended to use this innovative variant more. However, use of the innovative variant did not correlate to Iyasa language proficiency as measured by the experimental tasks. This experiment served as a useful reminder that while speaker perceptions are invaluable guideposts in investigating patterns of language shift, they may express ideologies as much or more than concrete patterns of language use – in this case, reports of betütütu as being “bad Iyasa,” and symptomatic of language attrition, may have more to do with language ideologies which conflate of “young” and “bad speaker” than actual patterns of variation.

In the last chapter, I described the development and launch of a youth-led language revitalization program, designed in response to the understanding of Iyasa language shift gained from the research described in the previous chapters. The program was inspired by youth publishing and literacy programs in the US, as well as the model of language documentation training used by the Language Documentation Training Center. It aimed to address some of the needs identified among the youth in the Iyasa community by Iyasa speakers themselves,
including a desire for literacy in Iyasa; a desire among youth to deepen their knowledge of Iyasa language and culture, but an absence of clear avenues to do so; a cultural disconnect between youth and elders which impeded the transmission of linguistic and cultural knowledge; youth’s fear of being corrected or reprimanded by elders if they made language mistakes in their presence; and a desire for training in technology. The project aimed to facilitate and empower Iyasa youth to create a sustainable, self-governing program to produce youth-authored publications in the Iyasa language, while deepening their knowledge of Iyasa language and culture, and facilitating re-connection between youth and elders in the community through youth-led language and culture documentation. The program was largely a success, in no small part because it was grounded in sociolinguistically informed understandings of language shift in the Iyasa community; it successfully created conditions which may support language revitalization and maintenance among Iyasa youth, and help valorize and promote the language in the Campo area.

Overall, this dissertation demonstrates that by expanding the concept of “language documentation” to include patterns and contexts of language shift and maintenance, rather than a lexico-grammatical code alone; by listening carefully to speakers’ own perspectives and experiences with their language; and by designing creative, locally culturally grounded, sociolinguistically sound programs to address community needs, the processes of language shift can be understood far more thoroughly—and community goals for language maintenance and revitalization can be much more effectively reached.
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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview template

I. English translation

Biography and knowledge of language(s)

1. Name(s)
2. Year of birth
3. Place of residence
4. Place of birth
   a. Did you grow up there/here?
5. Have you left your village before? Have you traveled a lot? Where? How long?
   a. And nowadays, do you travel a lot, or do you stay in one place?
   b. Do you go to Guinea often?
6. Have you studied/gone to school a lot?
   a. What was the language of education?
   b. Do you know how to read or write a mother tongue?
7. (What is your religious affiliation?)
   a. What language(s) are used in your church?
8. Do you speak a lot of languages? / Apart from Iyasa, do you speak other languages?
   a. (For each language): Do you speak it well?
   b. How did you learn it? At what age?
   c. How frequently do you speak these languages?
   d. What language do you use most often? And why/in what situations?
9. Apart from the languages that you speak, are there any languages you understand but don’t speak?
   a. (For each language) Do you speak it well?
10. Do you consider Iyasa your mother tongue?
   a. Does your mother speak Iyasa? And your father? Apart from Iyasa, what languages do they speak?
   b. Are they still living? Does your mother/father only speak Iyasa with you, or other languages as well?
11. According to you, in what language do you express yourself the best?
12. Are you married? To an Iyasa person like you?
13. Do you have children?
   a. What language(s) do they speak?
   b. What language(s) do you speak with your children?
14. Do you have brothers or sisters? (Half-siblings?) What language(s) do you speak with them?
   a. And when you were little, what language did you speak with them at home?
15. With friends, what language(s) do you speak?
16. At work, what language(s) do you speak?
17. We’re going to play a little game: I’m going to name some activities. What language(s) do you use in each activity?
   a. Reading?
   b. Listening to music?
   c. Singing?
   d. Listening to the radio?
   e. Watching TV?
   f. Using the internet or Facebook?
   g. Sending messages by phone (SMS [text] or WhatsApp)?
18. (Sorry if this is a strange question, but) when you count in your head, what language(s) do you use?
   a. And in dreams?
   b. And to pray?
   c. And when you hurt yourself?
   d. And when you’re really angry?
   e. And when you’re really happy?

19. When you speak French, do you often have to search for the words? And in Iyasa? And in (other languages)?

20. If you forget a word in Iyasa, what language(s) can you use to replace it?

21. Is there a language that, when you speak it, you feel most comfortable/at ease?

22. Are there markets in this village? What are the markets called?

23. In this(these) market(s), what language do you usually use?
   a. Do all the vendors speak Iyasa like you, or are there foreigners? (For example, Duala, or Fang, or Bamileke?)

**Perceptions of linguistic ecology**

24. What are all the languages spoken in Campo?

25. What language is spoken the most in Campo?
   a. And in the Campo market, what’s the most-spoken language?

26. Is there a language which everyone in Campo speaks?

27. Do people speak Iyasa in Kribi?
   a. And where? In the market? In the bar? Etc.
   b. What are the languages spoken in Kribi? (And according to you, do they influence the Iyasa in Kribi?)
   c. What language(s) are most useful for you in Kribi?

28. What language is spoken the most in your village?

29. Do you think about leaving your village one day?
   a. Why?

30. According to you, what languages are the closest or most similar to Iyasa? What languages are the furthest or most different?

31. According to you, what languages are expanding (being spoken more and more) the most rapidly in this area?

32. In your opinion, what languages are getting smaller or being extinguished in this area?

**Perceptions of Iyasa**

33. Is it possible to delimit the zone of Iyasa speakers?

34. In what location does one speak Iyasa most?

35. Are there foreigners who speak Iyasa?
   a. Do they speak well?

36. You’re Iyasa, right? Present your language. What do you think of it? How would you describe it to someone who had never heard of Iyasa?

37. What is the usefulness of Iyasa?

38. According to you, how many speakers of Iyasa could be estimated?

39. Do the youth speak Iyasa?
   a. Do they speak well?
   b. Do they like speaking Iyasa?
   c. If not: What language(s) do they prefer? In your opinion, why?

40. Do children today speak Iyasa well?
a. If not: Why don’t they speak well? How do they speak? (Errors, mixing, etc.)
b. Do they like to speak Iyasa?
c. If not: What language(s) do they prefer? In your opinion, why?
41. If you have children, what language would you want them to speak? If you could choose one language from all the languages in the world for them to speak, what language would you choose?
42. Today, do people speak Iyasa more or less than in the past?
43. If everything continues along the same path, do you think Iyasa will always be spoken in Campo? In twenty years? Fifty years? A hundred years?

II. Original French (used for interviews)

Biographie et connaissance(s) linguistique(s)

1. Nom(s)
2. Année de naissance
3. Lieu de résidence
4. Lieu de naissance
   a. Vous êtes grand(e) l’ici?
5. Est-ce que vous êtes déjà sorti de votre village? Est-ce que vous avez voyagé (e)? Où? La durée?
   a. Et maintenant, est-ce que vous voyagez beaucoup, ou vous restez en place?
   b. Allez-vous fréquemment en Guinée?
6. Est-ce que vous avez beaucoup étudié ?
   a. La langue de scolarisation était quoi?
   b. Est-ce que vous savez écrire ou lire une langue maternelle?
7. (Vous êtes de quelle obédience religieuse?)
   a. Quelle(s) langue(s) sont utilisée(s) dans votre église ?
8. Est-ce que vous parlez beaucoup de langues?/ Part le Iyasa, vous parlez des autres langues?
   a. (Pour chaque langue): Vous la parlez bien?
   b. Comment l’avez-vous appris? quel âge?
   c. quelle fréquence parlez-vous ces langues?
   d. Quelle langue est-ce que vous utilisez le plus souvent? Et pourquoi/dans quelles situations?
9. Part des langues que vous parlez, est-ce qu’il y a des langues que vous comprenez, mais ne parlez pas?
   a. (Pour chaque langue) Vous la comprenez bien?
10. Est-ce que vous considérez le Iyasa votre langue maternelle?
   a. Et votre mère parle Iyasa? Et votre père? part de Iyasa, ils parlent des autres langues?
   b. Est-ce qu’ils vivent encore? Est-ce que votre mama/papa parle seulement le Iyasa avec vous, ou des autres langues aussi?
11. Selon vous, en quelle langue est-ce que vous vous exprimez le mieux?
12. Est-ce que vous êtes marié (e)? un(e) Iyasa comme vous?
13. Vous avez des enfants?
   a. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlent-ils?
   b. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous avec vos enfants?
14. Vous avez des frères ou des sœurs? (Consanguins?) Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous avec eux ?
   a. Et quand vous étiez petits, quelle langue avez-vous parlé à la maison ?
15. Entre amis, quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous ?
16. Au travail, quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous ?
17. On va faire un petit jeu : je vais vous citer quelques activités, quelle(s) langue(s) utilisez-vous pour chaque activité ?
a. Lire ?
b. Écouter la musique ?
c. Chanter ?
d. Écouter la radio ?
e. Voir la tv ?
f. Utiliser l’internet ou Facebook ?
g. Envoyer les messages par téléphone (SMS, WhatsApp) ?

18. Quand vous totalisez dans la tête, quelle(s) langue(s) utilisez-vous ?
   a. Et les rêves ?
   b. Et pour prier ?
   c. Et quand tu te fais mal ?
   d. Et quand tu es très fâché ?
   e. Et quand tu es vraiment en joie ?

19. Quand tu parles français, est-ce que tu cherches souvent les mots ? Et en iyasa ? Et en (autres langues) ?

20. Si vous oubliez un mot en iyasa, quelle(s) langue(s) est-ce que vous pouvez utiliser pour le remplacer ?

21. Est-ce qu’il y a une langue que, quand vous la parlez, vous vous sentez plus à l’aise ?

22. Est-ce que dans ce village il y a des marchés ? Comment est-ce qu’on appelle ce(s) marché(s) ?

23. Dans ce(s) marché(s), quelle(s) langue(s) est-ce que vous utilisez d’habitude ?
   a. Est-ce que tous les vendeurs parlent iyasa comme vous, ou est-ce qu’il y a des étranger(e)s ? (Par exemple, Duala, ou Fang, ou Bamileke ?)

Perceptions d’écologie linguistique

24. Quelles sont tous les langues parlées Campo ?
25. Quelle est la langue la plus parlée Campo ?
   a. Et au marché de Campo, quelle est la langue la plus parlée ?
26. Est-ce qu’il y a une langue que tout le monde parle Campo ?
27. Est-ce qu’on parle iyasa Kribi ?
   b. Quelles sont les autres langues parlées Kribi ? (Est-ce qu’ils influencent le iyasa du Kribi, selon vous ?)
   c. Quelle(s) langue(s) sont pour vous les plus utiles Kribi ?
28. Quelle langue est la plus parlée dans votre village ?
29. Est-ce que vous pensez partir de votre village un jour ?
   a. Pourquoi ?
30. Selon vous, quelles sont les langues les plus proches/similaires iyasa ? Et les langues plus éloignées ou différentes ?
31. Selon vous, quelles sont les langues qui se répandent (sont plus en plus parlées) les plus rapidement dans cette région ?
32. À votre avis, quelles sont les langues qui se réduisent ou s’éteignent dans cette région ?

Perceptions du Iyasa

33. Est-ce qu’on peut délimiter la zone des locuteurs de iyasa ?
34. Dans quelle localité est-ce qu’on parle le plus le iyasa ? Et le meilleur iyasa ?
35. Est-ce qu’il y a des étranger(e)s qui parlent le iyasa ?
   a. Est-ce qu’ils parlent bien ?
36. Vous êtes Iyasa, non ? Pr sentez votre langue. Qu’est-ce que vous pensez d’elle ? Comment est-ce que vous la décririez quelqu’un qui n’a jamais entendu parler de Iyasa ?
37. Quelle est l’utilité de Iyasa ?
38. Selon vous, combien peut-on estimer le nombre de locuteurs du Iyasa ?
39. Est-ce que les jeunes parlent le Iyasa ?
   a. Est-ce qu’ils aiment parler le Iyasa ?
   b. Si non : quelle(s) langue(s) préfèrent-ils ? Et pourquoi, selon vous ?
   c. Est-ce qu’ils parlent bien ?
40. Est-ce que les enfants d’aujourd’hui parlent bien Iyasa ?
   a. Si non : Pourquoi ils ne parlent pas bien ? Ils parlent comment ? (Erreurs, mixage, etc.)
   b. Est-ce qu’ils aiment parler le Iyasa ?
   c. Si non : quelle(s) langue(s) préfèrent-ils ? Et pourquoi, selon vous ?
41. Si vous avez des enfants, quelle(s) langue(s) préférez-vous qu’ils parlent ? Si vous pouviez choisir une seule langue de tous les langues du monde que vos enfants parlent, quelle langue choisiriez-vous ?
42. Aujourd’hui, est-ce que les gens parlent le Iyasa plus ou moins qu’au passé ?
43. Si tout continue au même chemin, est-ce que vous pensez que le Iyasa sera toujours parlé Campo ? Dans vingt ans ? Cinquante ans ? Cent ans ?

AKEEEEEEVEA ! (Merci !)
Voudriez-vous partager la langue et le culture **Iyasa** avec le monde entier, et avec des générations à venir ?

Vous êtes invités à contribuer à l’archive Iyasa !

Je m’appelle Anna BELEW, et je suis étudiante doctorale de linguistique à l’Université de Hawaii, aux États-Unis. Je suis en train de créer une archive des matériaux Iyasa. Vous êtes invités à nous aider à construire l’archive, et de contribuer tout ce que vous voudriez partager avec le monde au sujet de la langue et le culture Iyasa !

**Qu’est-ce que c’est que l’archive ?** Une archive est une espace pour conserver les enregistrements, les écrits, et les vidéos à long terme. C’est comme une bibliothèque ou un musée – on peut déposer les matériaux là, et les gens pourront les accéder maintenant, ou au futur lointain. Les gens partout dans le monde pourront apprendre à propos de la langue et culture Iyasa. En plus, des générations futures des Iyasa pourront voir ces matériaux, et apprendre à propos du culture et langue Iyasa de nos jours.


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80 The wording and contents of this flyer were developed with significant input from Sammy Mbipite, to whom I am grateful for his assistance and insight.
Que puis-je contribuer ? N’importe quoi—si vous le trouvez important, intéressant, ou significatif à propos du culture et langue iyasa, vous pouvez le contribuer ! Les histoires, les contes, les proverbes, les chansons, les généalogies, les instructions (pour cuisiner, fabriquer des objets, faire la pêche, etc.), ou tous que vous voudriez. Je vous enregistrerai avec un enregistreur audio, ou vous filmer avec un camera, si vous voulez. Vous pouvez également écrire ce que vous voudrez mettre dans l’archive, et je l’y mettrai pour vous.

Il n’y a pas de limite sur combien de fiches vous pouvez contribuer. Si vous voulez partager beaucoup de choses, ou une seule, ça va ! C’est à votre choix.

Qui pourra voir ce que je contribue ? Généralement, une archive est ouverte à la publique. Ça veut dire que tout le monde peut voir les matériaux dedans. Toutefois, si vous voudriez contribuer quelque chose de plus privée, c’est possible. Par exemple, si vous préfériez que seulement les autres iyasa puissent voir vos matériaux, on peut faire ça—il suffit de me le dire. Je respecterai et obéirai toujours vos préférences à propos de vos contributions.

Comment contribuer ? Si vous vous intéressez de contribuer à l’archive, ou si vous avez des questions au sujet de l’archive, soyez libre de m’appeler :

680 799 718

Je serai à Campo Beach jusqu’à le 15 Décembre. J’ai des enregistreurs si vous voudriez être enregistrée professionnellement.

Quand je reviens aux États-Unis, vous pouvez me contacter par WhatsApp à : [redacted]

Vous pouvez également m’envoyer un mail à belew@hawaii.edu.

AKÉVA !
Do you want to make Iyasa culture and language known to the entire world, and would you like to pass this rich heritage down to the children of your children?

You are invited to contribute to the Iyasa archive!

My name is Anna Belew, and I am a doctoral student in linguistics at the University of Hawaii, in the United States. I would like to create a digital archive for the preservation of linguistic and cultural resources related to Iyasa.

You are invited to help me build this archive by contributing anything you would like to share with the world about Iyasa language and culture!

What is a digital archive? Digital archives are a place for the long-term conservation of audio recordings, writings, videos, and photos. Digital archives are a bit like a library or a museum—you can deposit resources there, and people can consult them today, tomorrow, or in the far future, no matter where in the world they are.

All over the world, people will be able to learn about Iyasa language and culture, and perhaps be interested in learning the language, or even visiting the Iyasa community. In addition, future generations, meaning the children of your children, will be able to benefit from these resources. They will be able to discover elements of Iyasa language and culture which are practiced nowadays. Conserving elements of the language and culture will give future generations the chance to continue or even revive these practices.

The Iyasa digital archive will be hosted at two archival institutions in Cameroon and the United States. In the United States they will be hosted at an archive called Kaipuleohone at the University of Hawaii. In Cameroon, it will be hosted at the Archive of Languages and Oral Resources of Africa (ALORA), which is part of
CERDOTOLA located in Yaoundé. You can visit Kaipuleohone at the following link: http://ling.hawaii.edu/kaipuleohone-language-archive/; and ALORA at: https://alora.cerdotola.com

What can I contribute?
You can contribute anything which you find important, interesting, or meaningful about Iyasa language or culture. You could, for example, contribute:
• Stories you’d like to tell about past events which were important to you, or which were passed down to you by your predecessors;
• fables;
• proverbs;
• songs;
• oral family histories or genealogies;
• instructions (for cooking, making things, fishing, etc.);
• or many other things.

If you would like to contribute, I will record your contribution with an audio recorder or a video camera. You can also write down what you’d like to deposit in the archive, and I will deposit it for you.

There’s no limit on the number of contributions you can make. If you want to share lots of things, they’ll be welcome; if you want to share just one thing, it will be equally welcome. It’s entirely up to you.

Who will have access to my recordings? Generally, digital archives are open to the public. That means that anyone will be able to consult the resources which are deposited there. However, if you’d like to make a contribution which you don’t want to be accessible to everyone, I assure you that your wishes will be followed; only people who are authorized and identified beforehand will have access to these types of materials. For example, if you would like only members of the Iyasa community to be able to access your materials, I pledge to respect your wishes – just let me know when you give me your recording. I will always respect your preferences regarding your contributions.

How can I contribute? If you are interested in contributing to the Iyasa archive, or if you have questions about the archive, please feel free to call me any time at the following number:
I will be in Campo Beach until December 15, 2017. If you would like to be professionally recorded while I am there, I have everything necessary to do that.

When I return to the United States, you can contact me on WhatsApp at the following number: [redacted].

You can also send me an email at belew@hawaii.edu.

AKÉVA!
Appendix C: Experimental stimulus images and orders

Stimulus orders:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
<th>Set 3</th>
<th>Set 4</th>
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<td>palms</td>
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<td>canoe</td>
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<td>bowls</td>
<td>hoe</td>
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<tr>
<td>parrots</td>
<td>forks</td>
<td>mornings</td>
<td>motorcycles</td>
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<tr>
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<td>truck</td>
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<td>bowls</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>hats</td>
<td>jacket</td>
<td>parrots</td>
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<td>jacket</td>
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<td>bowls</td>
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<td>hoe</td>
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Stimulus images: