

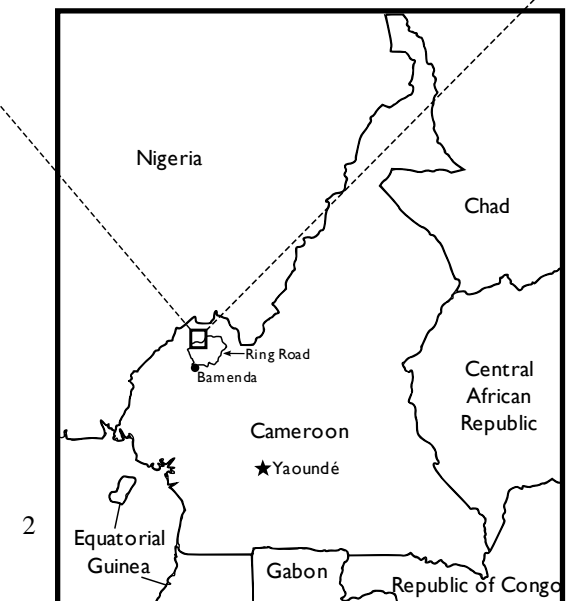
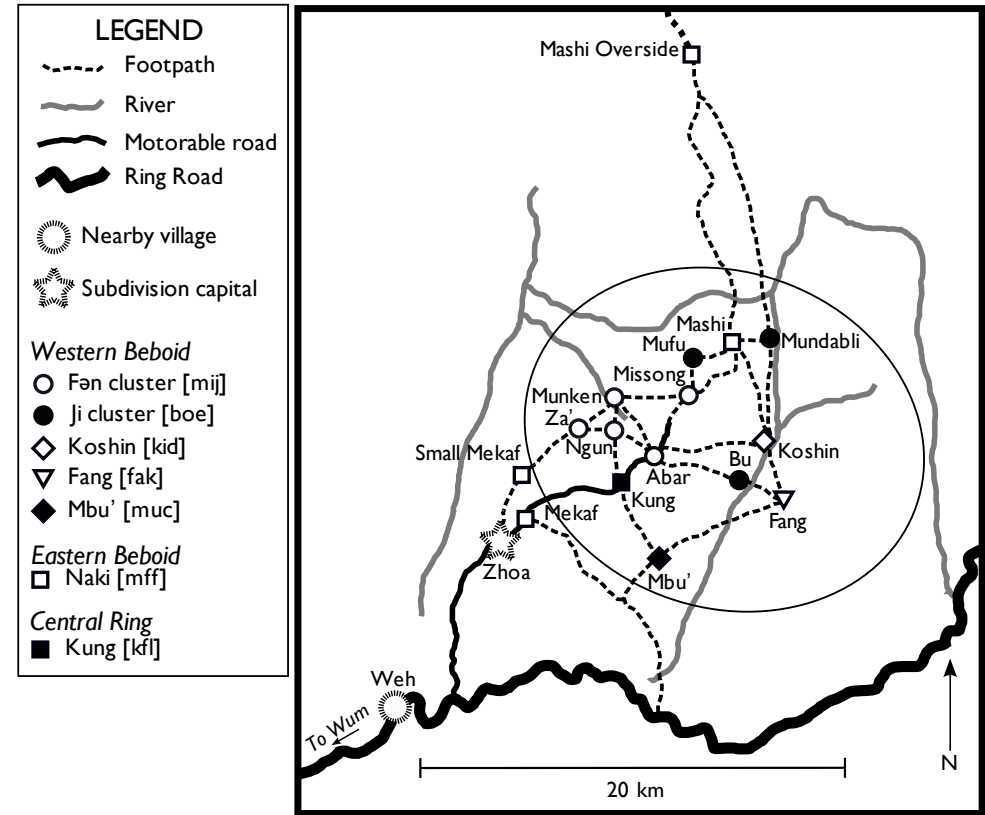
Reassessing Western Beboid*

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1 Background

- [1] The Western Beboid area, also known as Lower Fungom, is given on right (map based on (Hombert 1980:84), with minor updates)
- [2] Western Beboid languages are currently classified within Southern Bantoid, giving them a pivotal position within Benue-Congo.
- [3] Beboid (adapted from the Ethnologue)
 - [a] Eastern: Bebe [bzv], Cung [cug], Kemezong [dmo], Naki [mff], Ncane [ncr], Noni [nhu], Nsari [asj] (see Brye and Brye (2002))
 - [b] Western: Abar [mij], Fang [fak], Koshin [kid], Mbu' [muc], Mundabli [boe]
- [4] The branches pattern geographically following their names, except that Naki is at the western fringe of the group.
- [5] The name *Beboid* initially appears in Hombert (1980), the first published survey of the entire group of languages.
- [6] Despite its widespread adoption as a classificatory label for a dozen or so languages, no publication has ever presented evidence for the group in terms of shared innovations.
- [7] Existing work on the languages of the region includes Chilver and Kaberry (1974:37–40), Hombert (1980), and Hamm et al. (2002). (One also finds references to language names in earlier literature.)
- [8] Naki has seen the most detailed study, especially in recent years (Kum (2002), Kum (2007), Good (forthcoming))
- [9] Most of the data found here derives from field work by various individuals since 2004, representing the first time the varieties of all Western Beboid villages were surveyed.

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2 Geographic and sociohistorical setting

- [10] The Western Beoid languages lie in what has been termed the “Sub-Saharan Fragmentation Belt” (Dalby 1970:163) at the northern edge of the Cameroonian Grassfields.
- [11] Stallcup (1980:44) points out that the Grassfields area lies within the most fragmented part of this belt.
- [12] Eastern Beoid speakers generally appear to view their languages as related to each other (see Brye and Brye (2002)), and Naki speakers’ oral history unambiguously portrays their present distribution as being the result of recent movements.
- [13] Therefore, while it is not proven that all the languages currently classified as Eastern Beoid are a genealogical unit, it seems a reasonable hypothesis, especially given the lexicostatistical results of Brye and Brye (2002).
- [14] The Western Beoid situation is quite different:
- Speakers do not recognize any Western Beoid unity in linguistic terms.
 - Speakers do not recognize any Western Beoid in historical terms.
 - Speakers do not recognize any linguistic or historical connection with the one Eastern Beoid language they are in close contact with: Naki (and the Naki have similar attitudes).
- [15] These facts must be placed against a sociolinguistic backdrop of a general *lack* of antagonism and frequent intermarriage among these groups.
- [16] Two additional issues:
- Standard mutual intelligibility questions are not good diagnostics for relatedness in this area.
 - The oral history of many of the groups in the area quite explicitly treats them as being intrusive in recent times (though we must treat such claims with caution (Nkwi and Warner (1982:24–29), Fowler and Zeitlyn (1996))).
- ### 3 Languages overview
- [17] The languages of the region are all quite small, but not immediately threatened, though the spread of Cameroonian Pidgin as a lingua franca may change this.

[18] Western Beoid villages with classification and population

SUBGROUP	LANGUAGE	VILLAGE	POPULATION	
Western Beoid	Fən [mij]	Abar	606 (1987)	
		Missong	310 (1987)	
		Munken	320 (1987)	
		Ngun	76 (1987)	
		Za’	92 (1987)	
	Ji [boe]	Mundabli	313 (1987)	
		Mufu	114 (1987)	
		Bu	200	
	Eastern Beoid	Fang [fak]	Fang	1,592 (1987)
		Koshin [kid]	Koshin	932 (1987)
Mbu’ [muc]		Mbu’	623	
Central Ring	Naki [mff]	Mashi	173 (1987)	
	Kung [kfl]	Kung	1,750	

Population figures are taken from Hamm et al. (2002:6), except for Kung, which is from the Ethnologue and is based on a 2001 figure. Figures taken from the 1987 census are indicated. Other figures were self-reported during the survey reported on by Hamm et al. The population figures for Naki refer only to the population of the village of Mashi. The entire Naki language has 3,000 speakers according to the Ethnologue. The name of the village Bù is not usually written with a low tone. This is done here in order to avoid confusion with the nearby village named Bú, which speaks a Ring (Grassfields) language.

- [19] The label *Fən* is mnemonic the fact that these speech varieties, currently called Abar in the Ethnologue, all share a root like *fən* for ‘mouth’, apparently not otherwise found in Western Beoid.
- [20] The label *Ji* is mnemonic for the fact that these speech varieties, currently called Mundabli in the Ethnologue, all share a root like *ji* for ‘dog’, apparently not otherwise found in Western Beoid.
- [21] Kung’s status as Central Ring (Grassfields) is not secure, but plausible (Roland Kießling, personal communication, July 2008) (see also Troyer and Huey (1995)).
- [22] There are other settled areas in the region, including an emerging community around the Yemgeh market found between Mekaf and Kung and various detached settlements, but they have not been systematically surveyed.

4 Grammatical points

4.1 Noun class systems

[23] See Hombert (1980) for earlier data on Bù, Koshin, and Missong.

[24] Data here on Fang, Mbu', and Bù should be considered fairly tentative. Not yet clarified is which segmentally homophonous concords may be tonally distinct.

[25] Class numbering conventions are intended to suggest Proto-Bantu cognates, though they should not be considered definitive reconstructions.

[26] Føn languages

[a] Føn is conservative in retention of vowel prefixes, though there is otherwise considerable dialect variation.

[b]

MUNKEN					
SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	u-	w-	2	bə-	b-
3	u-	w-			
5	i-	y-			
9	i-	y-	10	í-	y-
12	a-	k-			
19	shi-	sh-	26	mu-	mw-
			4	i-	y-
			6	a-	n-
			7(a)	ki-(...-lə)	ky-
			8	bi-	by-
6a	N-	m-			

[c] Class fluctuation

- [i] Singular: *āyǝhǝ kénkǝ* '12.jaw 12.this'
- [ii] Plural: *kīyǝhǝ kyénkǝ* '7.jaw 7.this', *bīyǝhǝ byénbǝ* '8.jaw 8.this'
- [iii] Singular: *īzéhé* '5.eye'
- [iv] Plural: *āzéhé* '6.eye', *kīzéhé* '7.eye'
- [v] Singular: *m̄nyì* '5.bee'
- [vi] Plural: *kīnyì* '7.bee', *kīnyilǝ* '7a.bee'
- [vii] Singular: *īp̄î* '5.death'
- [viii] Plural: *kīpilǝ* '7a.death', **kīp̄î*

[d] Prefix fluctuation like this seems to be a general characteristic of the group, though similarities/differences among villages have not been explored.

[27] Ji languages

[a]

MUNDABLI					
SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	Ø-	w-	2	bə-	b-
3	w-	w-	4	y-	y-
5	Ø-	w-	7	Ø-	k-
7	Ø-	k-	8	Ø-	b-
9	`-	y-	10	´-	y-
19	fə-	f-	26	mə-	m-
6a	N-	m-	—		

[b] Mundabli examples

[c] Class 3/4: *gbǝ wén* '3.house 3.this' / *dzǝ yén* '4.house 4.this' (< PB *-jù?)
kpán wén '3.wood 3.this' / *tswán yén* '4.wood 4.this' (< PB *-kúni?)
 (see Kießling (2009+))

[d] Class 5/7: *yí wámǝ* '5.eye 5.one' / *yí kǝfǝ* '7.eye 7.two'

[e] Class 7/8: *nəm kén* '7.belt 7.this' / *nəm bén* '8.belt 8.this'

[f] Class 9/10: *nyám^o yén* '9.animal 9.this' / *nyám yén* '10.animal 10.this'

[a] Mufu appears to be essentially same as Mundabli

[b] Bù is more divergent

[c] In elicitation contexts some prefixes that are lost in Mundabli and Mufu are retained in Bù, for example class 7 shows a *kə-* prefix.

[d] These prefixes can be lost constructionally. For example, if a class 7 noun is followed by demonstrative or possessive, the prefix can be dropped, reminiscent of phenomena seen in nearby languages like Aghem (Hyman 1979:57).

[e] Bù also shows a plural circumfixal class comparable to other classes referred to here as 7a with form *kə...-tə* not (yet?) found in Mundabli or Mufu. (This is the class 27 of Hombert (1980:93).)

[28]

MBU' [muc]					
SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	Ø-	w-	2	a-	b-
5	Ø-	y-	6	a-	y-
5	Ø-	y-	7a	kə...-lə	k-
7	kə-	k-	8	bə-	b-
9	`-	y-	10	´-	y-
19	fə-	f-	26	N-	m-
6a	N-	m-	—		

[29] FANG [fak]					
SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	N-	w-	2	bə-	b-
3	w-	w-	4	y-	y-
3	w-	w-	13	tə-	t-
5	Ø-	w-	13	tə-	t-
7	Ø/kə-	k-	8	bə-	b-
9	`-	y-	10	`-	y-
19	fə-	f-	26	mə-	m-
6a	N-	m-	—		

[30] KOSHIN [kid]					
SINGULAR			PLURAL		
1	Ø-	w-	2	bə-	b-
3	w-	w-	4	y-	y-
5	Ø-	w-	13	tə-	t-
7	kə-	k-	8	bə-	b-
9	`-	y-	10	`-	y-
19	fə-	f-	26	N-	m-
6a	N-	m-	—		

[a] Koshin Examples

- [i] Class 5/13: *tā* ‘5.leg’ / *tētā* ‘13.leg’
- [ii] Class 7/8: *kākà* ‘7.fingernail’ / *bākà* ‘8.fingernail’
- [iii] Class 3/4: *kpî* ‘3.firewood’ / *tsî* ‘4.firewood’
wí ‘3.eyé’ / *jí* ‘4.eyé’
bī wé ‘3.foot 3.this’ / *bī yé* ‘4.foot 4.this’
- [iv] Class 9/10: *nyà yè* ‘9.animal’ / *nyā yé* ‘10.animal’
shēm yī ‘9.heart 9.3sPOSS’ / *shēm yí* ‘10.heart 10.3sPOSS’

- [b] Prefixes bear mid tone; contour tones found on nouns with zero- or non-segmental prefixes.

4.2 Verb stem alternations

- [31] As in other languages of the area, some (all?) Western Beboid languages show stem alternations across something like perfective/imperfective lines.
- [32] There are varying degrees of productivity, with Ji languages seeming to show the most stems exhibiting the alternation, at least upon initial inspection.

- [33] Naki (Eastern Beboid) shows these alternations as well, as does nearby Aghem (Ring; Grassfields) (Anderson 1979:78) and Noni (Eastern Beboid) (Hyman 1980:41).

[34] Munken

- [a] *bé fàn* ‘search here’ ‘Look here!’
- [b] *m̄b̄s̄s̄ nyé* ‘1s.search.PROG water’ ‘I want water.’
- [c] *n̄tá nyīlī fàn* ‘1s.grow ascend here’ ‘I grew up here.’
- [d] *n̄tá nyōlō fàn* ‘1s.grow ascend.PROG here’ ‘I am growing up here.’

[35] Koshin

- [a] *wá:* ‘breathe.IMP’ ‘Breathe!’
- [b] *wú wābà lə* ‘3s breathe.PROG PART’ ‘He is breathing.’

[36] Mundabli

- [a] *mf̄s̄ mù* ‘1s.AUX1 drink’ ‘I have drunk.’
- [b] *mf̄ā m̄* ‘1s.AUX2 drink.PROG’ ‘I am drinking.’
- [c] *mf̄s̄ yì* ‘1s.AUX1 drink’ ‘I have eaten.’
- [d] *mf̄ā yè* ‘1s.AUX2 eat.PROG’ ‘I am eating.’

- [37] Could these alternations be useful in subgrouping?

5 Comparative assessment

- [a] The retention of the *b-* in class 2 and class 8 concord is noteworthy in the region since neighboring Ring (Grassfields) languages show different concord patterns in these classes (e.g., *gh-* in class 2 and *w-* in class 8 in Aghem (Hyman 1979:19)).
- [b] Fən varieties all share the noteworthy feature that they retain the vowels in the prefixes for classes 3/4 and 9/10.
- [c] Mundabli and Mufu are much closer to each other than Bù (see also Hamm et al. (2002:12))—it seems likely that Bù should be considered a separate language.
- [d] Circumfixal class 7a crosscuts apparent genealogical boundaries.
- [e] The presence of class 13 in both Fang and Koshin is noteworthy since it is not found elsewhere in Western Beboid.
- [f] Mbu’ appears to be the most divergent within Western Beboid.
- [g] **The noun class systems do not obviously point to the existence of a Western Beboid genealogical unit.**

[38] The Proto-Eastern Grassfields and Proto-Western Grassfields noun class and concord systems as reconstructed by Hyman (1980:182)

CLASS	PROTO-EASTERN GRASSFIELDS		PROTO-WESTERN GRASSFIELDS	
	PREFIX	CONCORD	PREFIX	CONCORD
1	Ñ-	ù-	ù(n)-	ù
1a	Ø-	(=1)	—	—
2	bə̀-	bó-	bó-	bó-
3	Ñ-	ú-	ú-	ú-
3a	ì-	(=3)	—	—
4	—	—	í-	í-
5	lí-	lí-	í-	í-
6	(=6a)	(=6a)	á-	gá-
6a	mə̀-	mó-	mə̀-	mə̀-
7	à-	í-	kí-	kí-
8	bì-	bí-	bí-	bí-
9	Ñ-	ì-	ì(n)-	ì
10	Ñ-	í-	í(n)-	Cí-
13	—	—	tí-	tí-
19	fə̀-	fó-	fí-	fí-

[39] Some links between Western Beoid languages and Grassfields languages

- [a] They generally pattern with Proto–Western Grassfields for classes 3/4.
- [b] Fang and Koshin share with Proto–Western Grassfields class 13.
- [c] At least some Fə̀n varieties, along with Mbu’, show distinct class 6/6a forms similar to what is found in Proto–Western Grassfields.
- [d] Consonant mutations of the sort seen in the Ji group, Fang, and Koshin are attested in some contemporary Ring (Grassfields) languages—for example, Mmen, Kom, and, apparently incipiently, in Aghem. (See Kießling (2009+).)
- [e] Overall, Western Beoid seems to pattern more with geographically adjacent Western Grassfields than more distant Eastern Grassfields.

6 Lower Fungom as an areal unit?

- [40] The Western Beoid data collected so far seems more consistent with a non-genealogical interpretation of the group than a genealogical one.
- [41] Its area—Lower Fungom—bears resemblances to Nichols’ 1992 notion of a residual/accretion zone.
- [42] At this point, Western Beoid is probably best understood as a set of unclassified Bantoid languages which have found refuge in a “backwater” region.
- [43] Are there other groups in the Bantu homeland area like this?

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