

Perception of Time among the Lugbara

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This article considers the way time is traditionally measured and linguistically expressed among the Lugbara people and how such conventional method of dealing with time bears on the present way of life.

The Lugbara live on the watershed between the Nile and the Congo rivers in northwest Uganda and northeast Congo. They are classified as belonging to the Madi-Moru group, an eastern Sudanic people. Their language is monosyllabic and tonal. The Lugbara traditional society is described as acephalous with a constant reorganisation of more or less independent groups within it.

1 The Expressions for Measuring Time

The traditional system for measuring time among the Lugbara is effected by means of events used as terms of reference. Such practice has given rise to many temporal expressions used to reckon time in the Lugbara language. I have collected several of them in a research that lasted several years. The collection of these expressions has highlighted their essential elements, namely their references are to be, first, to events that are fixed or that occur regularly and, second, to events that are to be known by all interested interlocutors. It is not necessary for a temporal expression to be established as a recognized idiomatic expression. Interlocutors can refer to any regular event known to them and use it as an instrument for indicating time.

One notices, however, that some temporal expressions are habitually and widely used in speaking, namely, that they are established in the language. They are convenient instruments facilitating communication and understanding. Established expressions, however, do not curtail the freedom and ability of the people to use fresh expressions devised for a particular occasion, provided the new expressions have the essential elements mentioned above, namely they are regular in occurrence and known by interlocutors.

I have collected 220 established expressions referring to the day, the month, the year, and the period beyond the year. The established expressions highlight the common elements in the mind and life of the people as a whole, reflecting what has settled in their culture vis-à-vis their

understanding and management of time. The difficulty in this exercise was mainly in assessing which expressions could be legitimately considered as established. Some of them were clearly widespread and accepted while others appeared to be used by few people and in restricted areas. The challenge was deciding the divide between the two. The method adopted to establish the popularity (the synchronic foundation) and the stability (the diachronic basis) of the expressions was to ascertain whether the expression was known by at least half of the population, it was framed in a homogeneous language though admitting dialectical differences, and it was promptly understood in its temporal meaning even when simply hinted at.¹

The analysis of the collected expressions regarding their content gave the following results. Of the 65 expressions that mark the various parts of the day and of the night, 39 (60%) refer in one way or another to the sun, 12 (19%) refer to animals like the cock, the goat, the buffalo, the termites, and the flies, 6 (9%) relate to human behaviour, mainly eating, 6 (9%) use specific temporal terms, namely, *obuti*, “morning,” and *ondre*, “evening,” and 2 (3%) refer to the planet Venus (Table 1).

Table 1

Topics	Number	Percentage
Sun	39	60%
Animals	12	19%
Human behaviour	6	9%
Temporal terms	6	9%
Venus	2	3%
Total	65	100%

The prevailing attention to the sun for measuring daytime is reflected in the questions used to inquire about such time. The questions are, *etu ca si ya?*, “how far has the sun arrived?,” *etu ca ngopi ya?*, “which position has the sun reached?,” *etu atu ngopi ya?*, “how far has the sun ascended?,” and *etu aga ngopi ya?* “how far has the sun gone?” The

¹ This methodological approach was suggested by the characteristic diversification of Lugbara culture. Its cohesion allows internal differences echoed in the language, in the life style, and in the history of the people.

verbs *ca* “to arrive,” *atu*, “to ascend,” and *aga* “to pass” are often implied and the questions become simply, *etu si ya?* or *etu ngopi ya?*, namely, “how much sun?” These questions are also used today but the answer to them in most cases is not given by using the traditional expressions but by referring to the numbers on the watch dial. The term *etu* “sun” has acquired today also the meaning of “hour.”

The temporal expressions used to mark the period of a month are 24 and they all refer to the moon. Among the 82 expressions that refer to the year, 75 (91%) refer directly or indirectly (agricultural activities) to the rain and 7 (9%) to events characteristic of the dry season like the heat, the ashes of the plain fires, and some stars.

The events that refer to the time beyond a year are traditionally either the stages of human life (like childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age) or important people (their names are mentioned), typical customs (like a characteristic dress), and significant fortunes or misfortunes (like successful battles or prolonged famines). All these events beyond the year have ultimately a personal reference either directly as in the stages of human life and in the names of important people, or indirectly as in customs and in fortunes or misfortunes.

2 The Personal and Communal Significance of Time

As already said, the temporal expressions need to be known in their content and in their context. But this requirement is not enough. One needs to know also the manner in which a person perceives and uses the event and related expressions. Namely besides the intrinsic, the objective, or the natural significance of an event and its expression, there is the extrinsic, the subjective, or the personal significance derived from the manner in which the events and expressions are perceived by the people. The full meaning of an event and its temporal expression is thus derived both from the nature of the event and from the person referring to it.

The reference to the person is easily understood when one considers, for instance, that the sunrise or sunset, the phases of the moon, the fall of the rains, and the agricultural activities are not taking place always and everywhere at the same time. Consequently they cannot be perceived by everybody in the same manner. Harvesting is not an objective exercise in the sense that weather con-

ditions and agricultural traditions vary from place to place. Hence, one has to know the person and his/her place and traditions in order to understand the temporal expression that such a person is using. This personal knowledge is particularly essential when a temporal expression is not established but newly constructed by the interlocutor at the moment it is used.

This variety of perceptions can be illustrated by considering the number of persons who agree vis-à-vis those who disagree over the exact significance of an expression. A survey on this ratio gives the following results (Table 2).

Table 2

	Day		Month		Year		Total	
Agree	25	38%	16	67%	19	23%	60	35%
Doubt	40	62%	8	33%	63	77%	111	65%
Total	65	100%	24	100%	82	100%	171	100%

The table indicates that only 35% of the expressions are generally agreed upon on their precise significance. The rest, namely 65%, draw different opinions, namely disagreement, concerning their precise significance. Hence the doubtful expressions are about two thirds, namely the majority.

The expressions pertaining to the month are the exception giving opposite results, namely a two-thirds agreement. This result should be assessed against the little interest that the time measures of the month drew vis-à-vis the other time measures. The various phases of the moon as measures of the month were given rather unenthusiastically. There actually seemed to be a pervasive sense of vagueness as to their exact meaning and the specific inquiry on their exactness tended to be dismissive rather than committing to one precise sense or the other.

It can generally be said then that the person is central in the traditional management of time and that the temporal expression needs to be kept referred to the perception and the understanding of the person using it. Mbiti remarks that the African ontology “is extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in the terms of its relation to man” and this applies perfectly well to the Lugbara (1969: 15 f.). The traditional management of time pivots on the person, then, but a person who has to be understood not as an isolated individual but as a social being. The management of time is traditionally sociocentric in

the sense that it is prompted not only by relations with changing events but also by relations with human beings. This explains the importance attributed traditionally to personal communications. Such communications imply a kind of knowledge that is not merely mutual among persons but that extends into a comprehensive net of relations constituting the connective tissue of the community. Traditional time among the Lugbara is thus essentially personal and communal. It is a time that requires attention to the person and to the community for it to be understood and managed. The loss of this personal and communal dimension vis-à-vis the impact of “modern” time is the main cause of the uneasiness felt by Lugbara in their present management of time.

3 The Eventful Perception of Time

A comparative analysis of the temporal expressions among themselves reveals that they are not uniformly spread during the day, the month, and the year. Namely, one finds that a greater number of expressions is used for a particular period of the day, of the month, or of the year than for the remaining part of these periods.

Thus, for instance, a considerable number of expressions marking daytime is concentrated at the beginning and at the end of the day, namely at sunset and at sunrise: 28% of them are found between 5.00 and 8.00 a.m. and 23% between 5.00 and 8.00 p.m. This indicates that 51% of the expressions are condensed within six hours while the other 49% are spread along the remaining 18 hours. Namely, over half of the expressions concern only one third of the day (Table 3).

Table 3

Hours from	Hours to	Number of hours	Number of expressions	Percentage of expressions
5.00	8.00	3	18	28%
8.00	17.00	9	16	24.5%
17.00	20.00	3	15	23%
20.00	5.00	9	16	24.5%
Total		24	65	100%

The third part of the day that has over half of the time expressions is the period when human activity

is very intense. It is actually so concentrated that some of the temporal expressions relating to this period are compressed and overlapping, making it difficult to differentiate them among themselves.

Similarly for the temporal expressions related to the year, the greater number of them relate to the month of March which marks the beginning of the rainy season, the month of August when the rainy season resumes after a brief lull, and the months of November and December marking the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry season (Table 4).

Table 4

Months	Expressions	Percentage
January	12	6.5 %
February	4	2 %
March	18	10 %
April	13	7%
May	13	7 %
June	16	9 %
July	15	8 %
August	21	12 %
September	10	5.5 %
October	9	5 %
November	25	14 %
December	25	14 %
Total	181	100%

As in the case of the day, the periods of the year having more temporal expressions are those characterized by intense activity. The lesser number of expressions occurs in April and May, when the work in the fields is coming to an end but harvest time is still ahead. This is a period marked sometimes by hunger. The months of September and October repeat the situation of May but without the threat of hunger. Also the months of January and February have a low number of temporal expressions. These two months are the climax of the dry season, when human activities diminish as they do in April–May and September–October.

The above findings indicate that the periods having more temporal expressions coincide with

those characterized by greater activity. Hence, a greater human activity generates more temporal expressions. Human activity influences the sense of time. An increase of work needs more time to accomplish it, implying that time needs to be subdivided into more parts. Time is thus measured and managed in terms of action.²

4 The Mathematical Measurement of Time

The use of expressions traditionally related to time is decreasing. Several of them were recalled by informants, but after some mnemonic effort. The expressions were identified and explained, but admittedly not often used. The phenomena used traditionally for marking time are gradually being left for the new measuring tools like watches and calendars, leaving traditional expressions to elderly people and to rural areas.

The change from the phenomenal to the mathematical approach to time is not as radical or as substantial a change as it may appear to some persons. In fact, the phenomenon continues to remain the ultimate term of reference for measuring time. The problem is not so much passing from the phenomenal to the mathematical approach to time. In fact, the present mathematical management of time has simply reduced the various events to just one or two (the sun and the earth) applying to them a mathematical measure by means of watches and calendars. The change has simply meant that now new techniques to measure time have been adopted, reducing reference to just a couple of them and scattering mathematical divisions on an abstract temporal matrix. Watches and calendars are simpler tools as they use basically one event linked to the movement of the sun translating it into precise mathematical divisions on the dial of a watch or on the page of a calendar. This event has been "mathematized," namely, measured out precisely and minutely. The cyclical movements of the sun and the earth have been "abstracted" on a watch dial or on a calendar page.

The present manner to mark time has simplified the exercise, making the measurement objectively precise. But this objective and simple dimension of the modern system vis-à-vis the traditional way has also turned the management of time

into an impersonal affair. Traditionally, time could be handled with greater flexibility. Time could be used or "manipulated" in favour of human interests and considerations. Now time seems to be indisputably and ruthlessly precise in its flow. Human beings are at its mercy. The person appears to be at times enslaved by a modern time that is impersonal and alienating.

The past and the present approaches to time are taken as typical instances of tradition meeting modernity, namely two time systems confronting each other and causing a deep crisis. "Africa is today experiencing an overlapping of times, and its entire psychological impetus is directed towards the frantic quest for ways of bringing its various notions of time back into harmony . . . We are no longer very sure which culture we are in, where traditional culture ends and where modern culture begins" (N'Sougan Agblemagnon 1979: 165, 167).

The mathematical approach to time has been accepted as a means to manage the social novelty enacted by modern change. A watch and a calendar are desired in order to control change rather than simply to adapt to it. However, in passing to the new mathematical measurement of time, people discover that there is no more need to know each other in order to communicate time, as it had previously been the case with the phenomenal approach when the understanding of time events needed knowledge of the persons who used them.

Furthermore, the mathematical measurement of time has not only dispensed from the dependency on persons but it has actually inverted such dependency in the sense that persons find themselves depending on time. A mathematical approach to time has been accepted, not, however, the loss of its personal dimension, and much less the inversion of dependency. This sentiment may be felt by every person urged by the modern pressure of time, but in the case of a Lugbara this predicament is felt much more deeply as it touches the essentials of his/her culture.

5 The Dual Vision of Time

The Lugbara language has no proper grammatical time with which to express the verb in the past, or in the present, or in the future. The verb as such does not express the time, the mood, or the person. Such verbal specifications are rendered in other ways, namely by changing the construction of the sentence. The verb itself remains unchanged, what

² This does not imply that time is made of action, as Mbiti (1969: 19) suggests, but simply that it is perceived through it, namely that action conditions time.

changes is its position in the sentence. Together with this positional change of the verb, there are some variations in the subject of the verb. These changes of the verb and its subject happen only in two ways that can be concisely expressed either in the order Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) or in the order Subject-Object-Verb (SOV). In the first order the verb is in what grammarians call the past, while in the second order the verb is in the present. There is also no specific way to express the future.

The Lugbara sentence has thus two fundamental ways for expressing the state of an action. The Lugbara grammar explains that one way expresses the present tense and the other the past, while the future needs to use the present form with some auxiliary verbs or adverbs of time that indicate the future. But some further consideration of this point suggests that the two fundamental constructions of the sentence do not actually describe a past or a present condition, as commonly explained by grammarians. They indicate rather the state and stage of existence of an event namely whether an event exists or not and whether it is accomplished or not in its development. The two forms do not so much refer to the past or to the present, but rather to a complete or to an incomplete action, the complete action corresponding to the grammatical past and the incomplete one to the present. Several linguistic expressions, otherwise difficult to understand, become logical within this framework of complete or developed and incomplete or developing action.³

Hence, when an event is fully accomplished, be it in the past or in the present, it is rendered with the sentence construction that, grammatically speaking, is called past (i.e., SVO). When instead an event does not yet exist or it has not yet been fully realized or complete, be it past or present, the phrase is constructed in what is the grammatical present (i.e., SOV).

Hence, the terms “past” and “present” used to describe the two fundamental ways of framing the Lugbara sentence do not seem to indicate the Lugbara concept of time. Instead of the term “present” it would seem more appropriate to use terms such as incomplete, imperfect, becoming, developing, evolving, and happening. Instead of the term “past” one should rather use complete, perfect, developed, evolved, or happened.

³ For instance, actions expressed by verbs of perception and willing like *to see*, *to know*, *to want*, and *to refuse* have a “past” construction because these verbs imply completeness of the action they describe. Negative sentences are also in the “past” as they are fully accomplished.

The most problematic outcome of this analysis concerns the future dimension of the Lugbara concept of time. Both the linguistic structure expressing time and the phenomenal way of measuring it through events seem to deny the future dimension of time. This problem is moreover compounded by what has been written concerning the future in the African concept of time in general.

As the grammatical structure of the Lugbara language appears to associate the future and the present in the one reality that is evolving, the conclusion appears to be that the Lugbara have no distinct concept of future time. The absence of this future dimension seems to be confirmed by the fact that time appears to be identified with events; and as the future has no events to be identified with, it cannot exist as a distinct category.

These two considerations, from the linguistic structure and from the phenomenal dimension pertaining to time, are actually the arguments of Mbiti denying the future dimension of time in African traditional thought (1969: 15–28; 1971: 24–32). His theory has been so influential as to become a necessary reference in dealing with the African concept of time.

Concerning the phenomenal nature, Mbiti explains that for Africans “time is simply a composition of events.” This does not allow for the future as the events put in it have not yet happened and, therefore, they cannot constitute time. Even if events were imagined to happen with certainty, such time would be potential not actual time.

In his linguistic analysis, Mbiti refers to some languages in Eastern Africa in which he found no terms to express the distant future. The future expressed by these languages extends for a maximum of two years and it can be considered an extension of the present (1969: 17–19, 22).⁴

The above considerations on the grammatical structure of the Lugbara sentence, suggesting a dual vision of being and becoming and also on the phenomenal measurement of time in Lugbara tradition, could be regarded as a proof of Mbiti’s theory. However, a wider analysis of Lugbara reality comprising the entire language, the oral literature, the traditional beliefs, and the general way of life provides ample evidence of the existence of the future in Lugbara thinking and culture.

⁴ Mbiti’s theory caused extensive reactions and reservations from African scholars like Ayoade (1977); Gyekye (1987); Kato (1975); Ocaya (1978); and Wiredu (1996).

6 The Linguistic Expressions

The language has various expressions like adverbs, postpositions, and propositions referring to the future, including the distant one. Although the form to express the future is grammatically that of the present aided by appropriate auxiliary words, the future can nevertheless be expressed through such auxiliaries.

Of the 110 Lugbara adverbs analyzed, 23 (21%) relate to the future. The very term “future” can be expressed (or translated) by two sets of adverbs, the first (*dru* and *dru**si*, literally “tomorrow,” and *dru**zi*, literally “the day after tomorrow”) indicates a near and definite future; the second (*drile* and *drile**a*, literally “ahead,” and *ndo*, literally “after”) refers to a distant and indefinite future, the latter *ndo* being the preferred one to express the future. I listed six prepositions and seven postpositions (the Lugbara language has also postpositions) referring to time, six of which express the “after,” namely the future which can be very remote, depending on the context.

Among the 220 temporal expressions I collected as mentioned above, those indicating time beyond the period of one year are definitely implying the future. Of these, those referring to the future stages of human life are particularly indicative of the distant future, like, for instance, “when you will have children” or “when I am old.” The distant future can also be expressed by referring to the growth of domestic animals or of a particular tree. An interesting way of indicating the distant future is by referring to the change or the abandonment of one’s house. Such an abandoned house is called *andru*. The cause for such abandonment is the deterioration of the house itself, mainly through the work of termites, and also because of the decreasing fertility of the surrounding soil. Hence, the expression “when I shall have abandoned the house three times” could mean some fifteen years ahead. The Lugbara language has thus ways to express the future, including the distant one.

7 The Oral Literature

Proverbs are the outcome of the collective experience of a people and the qualified instruments for transmitting their cultural heritage. I collected 936 Lugbara proverbs, and their analysis reveals immediately how most of them are framed within a future vision of life (Dalfovo 1994, 1997). Also the proverbs that encourage a realistic attention

to the present do so envisaging future problems for those who disregard the present. For instance, some proverbs stress the need to cultivate one’s field in the present so as to guarantee one’s sustenance in the future: *’aapi kuri nya ku*, “one who does not dig does not eat,” *e’bu ako abiri ma ayiko ni*, “the absence of the hoe is the happiness of hunger,” *anya faa ’i ceni ku*, “millet does not sow itself.” Other proverbs relate to the future consequences of misbehaviour, like *ali ndandari abe ose* “looking for problems is a big stick,” namely, the one who creates problems ends up been beaten. Some proverbs relate clearly to a distant future like the one indicating that a bad person appearing to have good luck today will eventually get his/her retribution in the person of his/her son: *ondraka ni omvo li ru ku*, “the orphan of malice does not survive.” Another proverb encourages to consider the distant future in educating the young. Bad inclinations not corrected on time will not be remedied in future. They will “protrude like the teeth of the warthog” that, the proverb assumes, have grown out of the mouth not having been controlled in their early stage: *e’yo amale ku ri si, ozoo ma si fu kala*, “for not having corrected them, the teeth of the warthog have grown out sideways.”

Another example of oral literature similar to the one of the proverbs is that of riddles which are widely used among the Lugbara not only for recreational purposes but also for educative ones (Dalfovo 1983). Riddles are difficult questions vested in allegorical language demanding an answer that reveals the allegory. For example, a riddle asks: “Do you know the name of the fat rat in the house finishing our groundnuts?” The answer is the name of the boy who has stolen some food. Another riddle refers to a mushroom and asks for its name, which is that of some fearful boy. Another may ask for the name of a cat unable to catch rats or of a dog unable to chase anything, the name being that of a lazy boy. The objective of riddles is ultimately that of shaping the future conduct of those whom the riddle is addressed to, who are generally boys and girls. This future change in their conduct may be quite remote.

Lugbara culture has a good number of stories or fables. I have collected and analyzed 117. The protagonist in most of them is the rabbit Otoa or Anira, a resourceful and mischievous character. Otoa is always engaged in some arduous undertaking in which he generally has an initial success. If the action of Otoa is good, the initial success continues until the end of the story. But if Otoa’s resourcefulness becomes insidious

or malicious, his negative behaviour is discovered and he has to pay for it by having usually to run away humiliated. The message of the fables is always teleological. It considers the result of the action. A good action will have good result. A bad action, even when it seems to be advantageous, will eventually generate problems for its performer. The stories underline that the conduct of people is not limited to the present but it extends into the future, which may sometimes be fairly distant.

The words “song” and “dance” are expressed in Lugbara with the same term *ongo*. Hence, songs and dances refer to the same reality in the sense that a song is danced and a dance is sung, endowing the *ongo* with a unique power of expressing the deepest sentiments of the person and of the community. Their performance occurs traditionally on the occasion of funerals and their anniversaries. From my analysis of 700 of them, it emerges that the idea of the future underlies most of them. As songs are generally composed for funeral dances, the reality of death is expressly mentioned or clearly implied in most of them. Songs are intended to celebrate the death that has just occurred and they are, at the same time, an overt or covert reminder of one’s death in the future, a future that is obviously expected to be very distant. For example, a past and a future death meet in a song in which the composer, who lost his mother, addresses his bereaved wife telling her that he cannot believe his mother’s death. She must have simply gone on a visit to Aliba, her clan of origin. If his mother were really dead, who would start the lamentations on the day of his own death? The song then celebrates both the past death of the composer’s mother and the future death of the composer himself. It says: *Okula! Mindre ni ‘dii enjo li. A’di ni ma owuu edo ri ya? Mindre ni ‘dii enjo li.* “Woman! Tears lie. Mother is at Aliba. Who will start lamenting for me? Tears lie.” Similarly, past and future deaths converge in another song by an elderly composer from the Oluvu clan who addresses Omiadako, lamenting the death of his son Babua, who should have instead continued to narrate the history of the composer’s family when the latter died. The song says: *Omiadako la! Mi adri Oluvu ma aa ‘de cika. Adro ‘du ma ni Babua ni aroro driale ka. ‘Ba ma a ‘bi nzepe yo. ‘Ba ogupi ma si de dra nde ma ra.* “Oh Omiadako! You are here among the people of Oluvu. The Spirit has taken Babua prematurely. There is no one to narrate the ancestral history. The people laugh at me, death overcomes me.”

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8 Some Traditional Aspects of Life

Various traditional beliefs related to the fear of some misfortune postulate a future vision of reality. The possibility of incurring some future misfortune is so conditioning, though subconsciously at times, as to influence quite forcibly individual and social behaviour. It is generally admitted that the fear of misfortunes constitutes traditionally a powerful incentive to correct behaviour. Typical examples of such misfortunes are the *adra*, *nyoka*, and *enyata*.

Adra is a power that protects its owner from thieves and enemies by striking them with some serious illness. The fear of such possibility protects the owner of the *adra* and his/her property from ill-intentioned persons.

Nyoka manifests itself in a series of unrelenting misfortunes that end in total disaster. It strikes individuals but especially families and clans leading to their extinction. *Nyoka* is caused by very serious misconduct but it does not strike the author of such misconduct. It strikes his/her descendants and this future perspective makes *nyoka* one of the most dreaded misfortunes.

Enyata is generally translated as “poison” and it causes sickness, though not always death. It is the misfortune most talked about and present in the life of the people. The reason for the permanent fear of *enyata* is that a person can be “poisoned” though innocent. While *adra* and *nyoka* strike as a result of misconduct, the victim of *enyata* could be the innocent target of a “poisoner.” Hence, the possible accusation of being a “poisoner” is, in a way, feared more than being actually “poisoned.” The “poisoner” is equated to the *oleo*, namely a person who is irresistibly and necessarily evil. The suspicion and the accusation of being a “poisoner” mature gradually in the community around the person who continues to behave in a strange manner and contrary to the ethical expectations of the community. People avoid such behaviour having in mind the possibility of being one day accused of being “poisoners.” This possibility spans across one’s entire life and it thus postulates the idea of a very distant future.

Besides the future possibilities envisaged by the cases of *adra*, *nyoka*, and *enyata*, there are those linked with good or bad luck, in Lugbara *drile moke* or *drile onzi*. Luck is a future event which is partly unpredictable and partly depending on actions performed in the present. In both cases, luck presupposes the perception of the future which can be very remote.

Related to luck is the omen, in Lugbara *o'du*, like seeing a particular snake, hitting a foot against a stone, yawning at a particular time, seeing a dove resting on a house. The sight of such omens takes one's thought into the future, where a certain event indicated by the omen, usually unfavourable, is going to befall.

The traditional attitude to disease (*azo*) and the relative cure (*aro*) postulates the future. A disease and its cure were not traditionally perceived as the modern medicine does, namely they were not considered to be merely physical events. A disease and its cure had also a moral dimension, implying that one's moral behaviour could cause a disease or bring about its cure, namely have a future effect on health.

The making of promises is widely practised and it may be done in two ways. One of them called *ecara ba* is in the form of a simple assurance, without anything major at stake, except perhaps one's good name. The other form of promise termed *oyo so* is a solemn pledge sanctioned by the threat of a misfortune in case it was not honoured. In both kinds of promises a person has in mind a future action and in the second case also the possibility of a future sanction. Hence, the making of promises entails the idea of the future.

An explicit vision of the future is implied in the traditional belief in life after death. According to such belief, the *orindi*, "soul," survives the *rua*, "body."⁵ Later, some *orindi* could gradually become an *ori*, "ancestral spirit." By acquiring the status of ancestral spirits, the memory of a person lasts far longer than that of others. Living persons, especially influential ones like the elders, relish the future ideal of becoming ancestral spirits, the attainment of which requires of them a wise and prudent behaviour in the present.

9 Ordinary Life

A survey of the general way of life and of the ordinary activities of the people highlights the future perspective that explains such life and activities. The Lugbara are an agricultural people. The agricultural activity entails various stages, such as preparing the site of fields by clearing it of vegetation, digging the field, cleaning the soil of weeds, stones, and other unwanted material, sowing the seeds, looking after the various stages

of their growth, harvesting the crops, and finally the storing of food which envisages also the storing of some of the seeds for the next sowing season. Each of these stages demands planning in view of the next one up to the final outcome and also in view of perpetuating this exercise in the future seasons. The agricultural life demands a constant planning for the future.

Another common activity demanding careful forethought is the one related to house building and maintenance. Traditional houses need regular maintenance and in some areas a relatively frequent total replacement by a new building. All this cannot be improvised. The special *yabi* grass for roofing can only be gathered at the time of its full ripening. The assembling of the house's wooden frame and the plastering of its walls also have their time. A proper house needs its spaced periods for preparing, erecting, and completing it. A proverb confirms, *aria o'be jo tizo coti ko*, namely, "birds do not build all of a sudden a nest to lay their eggs in it." A similar saying goes, *'ba a'a amvu ditti de coti ko*, "people do not dig a field and finish it at once." Both proverbs imply that a proper work takes time and foresight to complete.

A whole series of activities aiming at the future are those related to marriage. Preparations for marriage start very early in the life of boys and girls. Home education of the young is mainly education for married life and the motivation for correct behaviour is often the future vision of a proper marriage. When marriage is contracted, the vision of future goals continues. Future expectations arise for the birth of children, their growth, and their eventual marriage. Hence the family cycle continues, crowned by offsprings, wealth, and respect, for which one works throughout one's life.

Finally, a typical instance implying a future dimension of life is the naming of persons (Dalfovo 1982). Personal names are traditionally suggested by the social and psychological context in which a child is born. A personal name is intended to reflect and perpetuate a situation existing at the time the child is born. For instance, a death, a tragedy, an embarrassing situation, a tension in the family are fixed in the name given to a child and they are thus externalized, publicized, and perpetuated. A name can thus serve as a psychological outlet, a public punishment, a social challenge, or a moral prevention. Other names may reflect a positive context and meaning, perpetuating happy memories, gratifying praises, and remunerative references. Hence, the idea underlying the naming of a person is that of perpetuating a present situation into the future for as long as the life and the

⁵ "Soul" and "body" may not be the exact translations of *orindi* and *rua*; they are nevertheless the nearest terms to the meaning of the two Lugbara words.

memory of the bearer of that name will last, which is expected to be very distant.

10 Conclusion

Concluding, I recall two challenges that emerged from my research on Lugbara time. The first refers to the “traditional” and “modern” measurements of time. These measurements do not so much contrast the phenomenal and the mathematical visions of time but rather the personal and the impersonal visions of it. The second challenge is that although the analysis of linguistic sentences is essential to the understanding of time, this alone is not enough. A full understanding of time requires a wider approach, encompassing the entire language, literature, traditions, and life of the people. The future dimension of time considered above offers a small example of what a comprehensive approach to the study of time may eventually yield.

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Language, Diet, and Ethnicity in Mayo-Darlé, Adamaoua, Cameroon

Anne Elise Keen and David Zeitlyn

Introduction

Mayo-Darlé, is located near the escarpment of the Adamaoua Plateau (it is also near the international border with Nigeria). The escarpment is a natural boundary of several different kinds: between working languages (English or French vs. Fulfulde as lingua franca), religion (Christian vs. Muslim), ecology, and social/political geography (north vs. south). Located in the Mayo-Banyo district of Cameroon’s Adamaoua Province, Mayo-Darlé is the largest town between Banyo and Bankim with a population of approximately 10,680 in 1,335 compounds.¹

The town contains many ethnic groups speaking a variety of languages. As well as the numerous indigenous languages² spoken, Pidgin English³ and/or French⁴ are widely used. However, the language which dominates Mayo-Darlé and the surrounding areas is Fulfulde,⁵ spoken originally by the Mbororo and Fulbe people and now the standard lingua franca.

Unusually for the area, the population of Mayo-Darlé is ethnically extremely heterogeneous. (The heterogeneity is also religious: the population of Mayo-Darlé is largely Muslim with a significant Christian minority.) This diversity is largely attributable to the Mayo-Darlé tin mine, which be-

1 Mayo-Darlé had 846 compounds in 1987 when the last national census was completed.

2 The different languages documented in the field are Fulfulde, Gbaya, Mambila, Kondja, Mbembe, Bamoum, Tikar, Lamso, Wimum, Musgoum, Boute, Hausa, Wawa, Kanuri, and Bamileke.

3 Cameroon Pidgin English (C.P.E.), explains Echu, is the lingua franca of western Cameroon (2004: 2). A number of residents, primarily of Bansa ethnicity, are originally from the Northwest Province and continue to speak Pidgin English after moving to Mayo-Darlé.

4 Officially bilingual, Cameroon is divided into ten provinces (C.I.A. 2004: 5); two of which are Anglophone (Northwest and Southwest Provinces). The remaining eight (which includes Adamaoua Province) are Francophone (Echu 2004: 1).

5 Schultz refers to Fulfulde as the lingua franca of the northern provinces, which include Adamaoua, North and Extreme North Provinces (Schultz 1979: 221). Burnham suggests that various forms of Fulfulde are spoken throughout the northern provinces. He concludes that most individuals, regardless of ethnic affiliation, “speak at least ‘market’ Fulfulde as a vehicular language” (1996: 51).