

# Disappearing Cultural Practices and its Implications on the Language: the case of the Bafaw people in Cameroon

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# **Disappearing Cultural Practices and its Implications on the Language: the case of the Bafaw people in Cameroon**

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## **Abstract:**

*This paper showcases some of the slowly overlooked cultural practices in the Bafaw speech community in the South West Region of Cameroon and how such unrestrained practices affects the register of the language and ongoing language development process. It targets the threats the Lifɔ language faces as a consequence of the continuing departure of some cultural practices within the community. The need of this paper was heightened by the risk of endangerment that this language faces (Ethnologue 2016, Chia, Tanda and Neba 2010, Nkwame 2016) and the unbridled increase in the disappearance of cultural morals among the Bafaw people. The paper closely examines some cultural practices in the Bafaw community voiced through folk songs and proverbs, effects such disappearance has on the language development initiative and proposed recommendations to enhance language growth strategies. This is to enable the community, language stake holders and the Bafaw language Development Association (BAFLADEAS) facilitate the communication of new knowledge and the revitalisation of these cultural practices to serve as a useful resource for the Bafaw language development. The paper seeks to satisfy the needs of both anthropologists and linguists to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.*

## **Introduction**

It is completely difficult to sometimes make a distinction between language and culture. Culture is the natural vehicle of language and a loss of a cultural practice carries with it a significant part of that languages index. This is to say language and culture are interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of the other. This is because both language and cultural practices are mediums through which the traditions, beliefs, aspirations and history of the people are preserved. According to Hantrais (1989), culture is the belief and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. This implies that the manner in which cultural issues are handled determines the lifespan of a language. To Moran (2001:25-26), “culture is a cultural phenomenon.” Looking at cultural phenomenon, emphasis is placed on those tangible forms of a structure (products), that individual members of the culture (person) use in various interactions (practices) in specific social circumstances and groups (communities) in ways that reflect their values, attitudes and beliefs (perspectives). Amidst a cultural practice, language is expressed either verbally or non-verbally. The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted as language is used to (either) maintain and/or convey culture and cultural ties. According to Linton (1945), “The culture of a society is the way of life

of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.” Indeed, culture is a design for living held by members of a particular society. Xu (1997) on his part relates culture to an individual from birth because that individual’s life, opinions and even language is shaped by what the person comes in contact with, otherwise referred to as the culture. On the basis of culture, it is certain that the existence of a particular cultural tie either fosters or deters language growth. The idea behind this effect stems from the fact that an expression of culture through language enhances the vocabulary of that language. This brings us to reconcile with Allwright and Bailey (1991) who say learning a new culture involves learning a new language. Characteristics such as common code, distance between interlocutors, level of noise, beliefs, values, attitudes, sex, class, and even educational level are common in every discourse (which is language based). A people’s culture often carries traces of their ideologies, commerce, institutions, customs, history and even geography which are often expressed through language. Consequently, to be able to understand a language, it entails understanding the target culture. The implication of this in-depth relationship between language and culture can be viewed in the light of language teaching/learning, language policy making, language usage, and culturally based linguistic differences. This entanglement between language and culture considers cultural overtones on languages which is sometimes difficult to pick up a particular cultural aspect void of the language.

### **1. The Bafaw people**

According to Chia, Tanda and Neba (2010), the Bafaw people constitute a minority language group found in the South West Region of Cameroon. They speak a coastal Bantu language known as Lífɔ̃ and they originated from the Mbo plains in an area known as Mashui. The Lífɔ̃ language is spoken in the Meme Division, specifically in the Konye and Mbonge sub divisions in across ten villages. The Bafaw people are predominantly a farming population with a high rate of intermarriage with the Oroko people. Due to the search of greener pastures, many of them have moved to urban areas where they are faced with threats of endangerment because of language contact due to their minority population. The Bafaw people have as a belief the existence of witchcraft and the need for procreation, a belief which cuts across many African communities. To them when children are brought forth, the size of the population increases and as such, the community becomes strengthen. This explains why the people use to carryout fertility rituals so as to encourage women to procreate (Prof. Elango Lovert – personal communication). Due to this

belief in the strength that results from large population size, the Bafaw people also believe in welcoming good strangers (Akwo Eyoh – personal communication). To them, these strangers will help develop and defend their community. This idea probably originated from their history when they went about acquiring lands, and strangers helped them cultivate and guard these lands. They also believe in the productivity of nature. To them, agriculture is the key to success. Since one of their beliefs is a large population size, they work towards making high farm produce so as to feed this large population size (Prof. Elango Lovert – personal communication). With regards to agriculture, the Bafaw people believe that traditional education is vital for sustenance. This explains why mothers teach their daughters how to work with a hoe for farming and also to carry the traditional basket while fathers teach their sons how to handle the cutlass so as to be able to provide for their families. This is one of the reasons why during marriage ceremonies, cutlasses and hoes are some of the most common gifts to see (Dibo Peter and Akwo Eyoh – personal communication). They also believe in dividing the society into age groups as a medium to instill certain values such as discipline, ethics, responsibility, and fostering the development of the community. Since their society is mostly divided into age groups, it is common to see members of the same age group improving on one another's attitude and behaviour and also working towards the growth of the community so as to make their presence felt (Elango – personal communication). Another common belief of the the Bafaw people was the need to promote tribal marriage as this will promote the community to forge ahead and also preserve their cultural heritage as against inter-tribal marriage which is very prevailing today in most Bafaw villages (Elango – personal communication). An interesting part of the Bafaw people's beliefs and thoughts is easily denoted from their proverbs, riddles, stories and songs which can be seen in most of their gatherings. This is because they have an understanding that these aspects of their life help in expressing their experiences which is what makes up their culture.

## **2. Some disappearing cultural practices within the Bafaw speech community**

This section discusses some cultural practices of the Bafaw people which are rarely practiced in recent times. This section looks at some folk songs and proverbs which were commonly used as main aspects to be examined. In carrying out this discussion, these two main aspects would be discussed in two sub sections. During the discussion, a particular proverb/song would be revealed in the language and a gloss provided in the English language. Thereafter the complete meaning

provided then possible discussion on the cultural aspect and the cultural implication. In this light, the discussion opens up with songs and follows with proverbs.

## 2.1. Culture in folk songs

Songs are most often directed towards culturally familiar traditions from infancy to adulthood. They are composed within the framework of language since it is the main tool used for singing. Below are presentation of some culturally driven folk songs which help share the Bafaw people's lifestyle, experiences, aspirations and others.

### *Song 1:Ndón*

<b>Bafaw</b>	<b>Gloss in English</b>
éyà yà ndón	(lengthy cane)
ndón é ndón	(cane oh cane)
éyà yà ndón	(lengthy cane)
ndón élúngán bishó	(cane which builds fishing waste baskets)
éyà yà ndón	(lengthy cane)
ndón élúngán bidún	(cane which builds baskets)
éyà yà ndón	(lengthy cane)
ndón élúngán linyán	(cane which builds hanging bridge)
éyà yà ndón	(lengthy cane)

### **Meaning**

Cane is a central part of the life of the Bafaw people. It has various uses and serves as a medium of sustenance because from it fishing baskets are made, farming baskets are made and even bridges are constructed.

### **Cultural Aspect**

The song brings to light a common culture practiced by the Bafaw women which is fishing. Throughout the song, one realizes that emphasis is laid on how fishing baskets are made (through the use of lengthy canes). This song expresses the Bafaw peoples' emotions towards the fishing culture. In the past, fishing as a means of sustaining the family was the occupation of Bafaw women. Usually, their fishing was done solely for family consumption. Beside family consumption, the women carried out fishing during cultural events. During such events, Bafaw women did fishing on bare ground while chanting certain songs and not in water as it is the common practice with those who fish. In doing so, the women catch life fishes and the fishes

caught are thrown on sand and natives are authorized to collect as many as possible for their families. During such exercises, only women of a particular group such as ‘*wúlúwà*’ are involved. This group is restricted only to Bafaw women and is opened to all women from child bearing age.

***Disappearing aspect***

Nowadays, such practices and events are rarely seen. This is because most of the people who carried out such exercises have died without passing on the cultural edification of carrying out such exercise to the young ones, others have diverted to Christianity and others shy away as well as the influence of colonialism and Western education. The reason for such shift is because culture nowadays is often labeled a negative connotation, and as such anyone seen involving in cultural practices is easily labeled a ‘witch or wizard’. Also, the people have diverted more towards agriculture because it is money-spinning than fishing. Again, such cultural exercises cease to be practiced because of the mix population of the community (immigrants). As a result, great skills and knowledge is being lost.

***Song 2: Líbí Nzòm***

Líbí nzòm é	(kola nut decision eh)
é wángú líbí, wángú líbí	(you shoot kola nut, you shoot kola nut)
líbí nzòm é	(kola nut decision)
kpú	(exclamation)
Wâ è é é é	(exclamation)
Á lálá	

***Meaning***

The kola nut lobe that provides the answer, when one shoots kola nut lobes that which provides the answer must emerge to show the sense of direction of events.

***Cultural aspect***

In the Bafaw community, breaking of kola nut and throwing of its lobes is the best form of hospitality. Naturally, when one receives a guest, the owner of the house throws kola nut lobes to indicate that he has heartily welcomed the guest. Besides welcoming a guest, the Bafaw people throw kola nut lobes in cases of settling disputes. Usually, when there is a dispute in the land or between people, when they come together to settle the matter, the first thing they do is to throw kola nut lobes. In doing this, a kola nut is taken and broken into four lobes by the eldest person among those present. When this is done, he throws these four lobes on the ground. To prove that

everyone present is in one accord, one of the lobes opens while the others remained close. If otherwise, it means all parties present are not heartily available. Also, in case of crisis in the land, the higher the number of kola nut lobes that open, the more hidden problems are there which the land is suffering from. This act of one kola nut lobe opening which indicates progress or continuation is known as ‘*nzəm è libí*’. It is worth noting that, kola nut lobes respect hierarchy. As such, if another person who is not the eldest present has been asked to break and throw these lobes that one has to obtain permission from the eldest present. If that does not happen, then the lobes will continue to remain open. Also, kola nut breaking and throwing of its lobes is done in all gatherings within the Bafaw community except at funerals. This is because the act is considered a way opener, and since it is not the peoples' wish to lose natives, throwing of kola nut lobes is never done at funerals.

### **Disappearing aspect**

Nowadays, although this cultural aspect of the Bafaw people is not completely lost, it is common to see such practices only in remote villages. Even in those villages, the practice is done only by the elderly people. This is because first and foremost, the younger generation does not know the tactics used in preserving kola nuts. As such, kola nut which is a necessity in the house of Bafaw people is hardly present. Therefore, the practice of such cultural activity is limited especially as they need to buy these kola nuts if need arises. In the past, the people engaged in kola nut planting, but today they have abandoned the cultivation of that for other crops due to their capitalism and the need to cultivate crops that can generate more revenue. In villages where this is practiced, it is difficult to see this carried out when it is not yet kola nut season. This implies that, the cultural aspect of breaking and throwing kola nut lobes has been restricted to the kola nut season. Also, the inability to preserve kola nut is causing a gradual disappearance of this practice.

*Song 3: mǎ yǔm é myè* (response: Mm mm)

Mǎ yǔm mí myè	(little thing of mine)
Mm mm	(exclamation)
Mǎ sísó mí myè	(little father of mine)
Mm mm	(exclamation)
Míníkí náná à sí pùlà	(I thought he would not able)
Mm mm	(exclamation)
Tíkí à púlíkà	(indeed he is able)
Mm mm	(exclamation)

Mm mm mm mm (the musical rhythm)  
Mm mm (exclamation)  
Á lálá

### ***Meaning***

My little thing, my little father/mother, I thought he/she would not be able to carry out the task, but was able to do so gracefully.

### ***Cultural aspect***

This song is sung during an achievement, especially one that is considered tedious. During a risky venture such as an initiation ceremony, fulfillment of the requirements and a successful end often leads to this song being sung. In the past, initiation in the Bafaw community was done at the level of the family. Usually, if it is with the case of males, the father selects among his male children one child who is to take over from him upon death. He does this by carrying the selected child along with him to perform certain cultural rites. When he sees that this child has grown to maturity [ability to understand and display in cultural activities], the child becomes fully initiated. If it is the case of a secret cult, different tasks are assigned to the child to undertake. One of such tasks is the ability to get a grip of **'ESAPA'**, which is invisible because it is both mortal and immortal. One's ability to get a firm grip of this being proves that he is man enough to dine with other men. All other males who have not gone through this exercise are not considered men. This exercise does not place restriction on age. Upon death of the father of this child, the child takes the place of his father. This ritual also goes the same way for the female secret society. Entrance is restricted solely to sons and daughters of the soil, and most often one's introduction into this group is done through an elderly person. This guarantees that the 'selected child' would be properly followed up and taught thoroughly. An example of such group is **'wútàm'** for males and is headed by ESAPA.

### ***Disappearing aspect***

Today, such practices have become limited in existence. This is partly because many of those who practice this refuse to own up to this practice and also because of the influence of Western education and civilization. As a result, the young ones are left un-introduced to this cultural practice. The few youths who are interested do this on their own and as a result, are often not successful. The reason for such drawback is associated to evolution. Most people embrace modernization and as a result see such practices as archaic. Also, the influence of the presence of

people from different linguistic backgrounds, welcoming of new ideas, inter-twinning of cultures and many deaths of those who upheld such cultural virtues have caused its gradual disappearance. This implies that, initiation rites within the Bafaw community though still in existence, have been earmarked negatively and this negative impression has made the practice and involvement of this activity to dwindle; hence, a gradual disappearance of this cultural practice.

*Song 4:*

é má bóŋ é )3x (eh mother fear eh)  
é má bóŋ é bóŋ é (eh mother fear eh)  
é má bóŋ é bóŋ é (eh mother fear eh)  
é má bóŋ é bóŋ é (eh mother fear eh)  
é má bóŋ é bóŋ é (eh mother fear eh)

***Meaning***

Do not joke with the river deeps of Bafaw, for lives can be easily lost. These river deeps are to be scared of and keep away from.

***Cultural aspect***

This song expresses the fact that particular families within the Bafaw community as a whole have their own secrets. Understanding of these secrets by strangers is difficult and an attempt to do so without appropriate measures put in place might lead to destruction. Also, the Bafaw community is made up of natural flow of water, i.e. the Mungo river flows down to this community and cuts across the villages. For any activity to be carried out in these natural bodies, one has to seek permission from the beings that live underneath the water. For instance, in case of fishing, when permission is sought, this leads to a fruitful catch but if not sought, the exercise leads to the wrong catch [mystical fishes] which causes death. In swimming, when one gets drowned, an exclamation in the Bafaw language might lead to such a person's life being spared while that of a stranger is being lost as they are used for sacrifice. Usually, in case of an exclamation in the language which indicates that it is a native, information is sent across to the beings that live in water in the next village. This is to ensure that such a person is rescued and even upon death, the corpse is preserved and sent back on top of the water to be seen by the family. This exercise of sending information across was done through the use of traditional telephones and this act was commonly known as '*diplomatic relations*'. By diplomatic relations, reference is made to the act of negotiation between these water beings in case one is supposed to step across his own boundaries. Without such negotiations, the result of such an act strains relationship amongst

themselves. The reason for using this traditional telephone is to preserve the lives of natives and the sacrifices [strangers who die] are meant to cleanse the land and foster its growth.

### **Disappearing aspect**

Today, this no longer holds because of the aspect of revenge that emerged among those who practiced this. This resulted in the collapse of groups. Also, those who practiced such activity did not lay it down to the next generation. With their deaths, this practice is no longer in existence. The few who are still alive have embraced more of Christianity at the detriment of their culture. As a result, such a culture that was practiced for the good and benefit of all natives has now been looked at as one that is meant for destruction. The cultural implication of this is the fact that great knowledge, register and virtue of the people are being lost and their values are being abandoned in preference for that of another. Although in some remote villages traces of such practices are heard and believed, the practice is becoming almost impossible.

### Song 5: **mbúmà**

é mbúmà é	(eh grass bird eh)
mbúmà á kú líkú, á nánzí ashí	(grass bird he hold Bahamas grass, lays it down)
é mbúmà é	(eh grass bird eh)
mbúmà á kú líkú, á nánzí ashí	(grass bird he hold Bahamas grass, lays it down)
Á lélá	

### **Meaning**

The grass birds come together, hold a bahamas grass stem and push it to the ground

### **Cultural aspect**

One of the major beliefs of the Bafaw people is the strength that comes from being united. For instance, in the past, when there was a common cry, the people came together as one to solve the cry. Usually, this was done following an order from the chief through the town crier who conveys the message to the people. At the sound of this cry, everybody came out as one wholeheartedly to see into this problem. In case of inter-tribal wars, the old and the young joined forces to see how to defeat their opponent. During land disputes, everyone converged and brought in different ideas and strategies to come to a compromise. This act of coming together to effortlessly do something always brought forth progress. An example is the cultural match that was carried out in Kumba (economic capital of the South West Region of Cameroon) in 1994 by the Bafaw natives to cleanse the land and open up doors for progress. This match was done heartily by the Bafaw natives who live in Kumba and even some from the other villages. At the end, everyone who

participated in the tour was to match to the main gate of the Kumba central market which was the stopping point. As they drew closer to this gate, about 200 crows from nowhere appeared in the sky and were crowing and dancing in a circle while the natives danced on the ground in a circular manner as well. The presence of these crows and their dance indicated that the people's heart desires were met and their tour was a success. This to them was as a result of the fact that they came out as one people with a similar cry which led to the growth of the land. In instances where a child was seen as brilliant and promising educationally, the whole community came together and supported in seeing the child through school. This was because such a child was seen as a child of the community and not belonging to a particular person (African socialism). This was done in other that the child involved would bring development through the knowledge acquired back to the community and would also contribute in supporting others. Such a gathering is known as '*ngwà*' and is mostly convened by the paramount chief.

### ***Disappearing aspect***

As a result of the influx of many strangers into this community and the development of the community, self-aggrandizement has stepped in at the detriment of socialism and unity. Also, the lukewarm attitude of many people towards culture and the busy nature of their jobs have caused this practice of coming together for the growth of the community to gradually disappear. This therefore implies that the strength which comes from unity as a cultural phenomenon is almost absent and this is causing a gradual disappearance of the culture of the people.

## **2.2. Culture in proverbs**

This sub section looks at some proverbs in the Bafaw language that expresses particular cultures.

*Proverb 1:*

Ètùb é ékpà é sǎ bó á ndǎ tín

### ***Meaning***

An old bag is never useless inside the house

### ***Cultural aspect***

Naturally, within the Bafaw community, every cultural item is kept in the traditional bag. This bag is not meant for children. During cultural events, items from the bag are used to perform one cultural task or the other. The bag is small and brownish in colour. The idea of using this particular type of bag as a reservoir for cultural items is because, it serves as a maker of tradition and secondly, it is often handed to a person only after the completion of certain cultural rites.

Thus, whatever pertains to culture and its execution must be kept in this bag. Hence, the proverb implies that no matter how simple a cultural element [bag] may look, it is still given the same importance like the others.

### ***Disappearing aspect***

Today, in typical cultural events, it is common to still see people carrying those bags. At home, while in the past the bag was kept out of the reach of children, today, it is not the case. In some instances, children use these items to play and joke with while at home. This implies that, the value attached to this edifice of culture is gradually losing. Hence, there is a disappearance in that particular aspect of culture.

*Proverb 2:*

Wě̀tì è míní kfú màkwì è sǐ dyá yò

### ***Meaning***

If you were opportune to know so many things in advance, you may not want to get into them.

### ***Cultural aspect***

The proverb above illustrates the Bafaw peoples' habit of consulting fortune tellers in the past to direct them on the right path of life and on which steps to take. In the near past, a common fortune teller within the Bafaw community existed and was commonly known as '*Mami five francs*'. To get your future told and directives on what to do required just five francs to be given. Nothing more nor less was required from the inquirer. This was a normal belief among the people that such acts spare you from [unforeseen] troubles and leads you to the path of success. Even at the level of initiation rites, the person to be initiated was schooled by an elder and fore warned on the "do's" and "and don'ts" within and without the secret society.

### ***Cultural implication***

Today, the idea of visiting fortune tellers is almost absent. The death of this prominent figure in this domain has caused a breakdown in the practice of such cultures. Notions and restraints which were often considered standard for effective way of living are at the verge of collapsing. Today, such mentality has been erased as many people see such practice as mystical and ungodly. Hence, many people get into ventures without due considerations and consultations.

### **2.3. Suggested reasons for such cultural disappearance**

- *Cultural globalization:* This is the transmission of cultural ideas, values and meanings across borders. It includes aspects such as media, technology and others. Due to globalization, many

people have embraced other cultures which they deem suitable for societal standards and have abandoned important elements of their culture.

- *Natural disaster* such as death of many natives/speakers also contribute to why these cultural practices disappear
- *Lack of cultural education*: Limited knowledge or education about cultural practices, ancestral histories and folklore which was a pivotal ingredient of African culture has now become a story of the past with the trickledown effect being the inability of most children to speak their mother tongue. This has eventually led to traditional skills and legends missing

### **3. Impact on language**

This sub section discusses the implication that these disappearing cultures within the Bafaw community have on the Bafaw language. It looks at the impact cultural disappearance has on language in relation to different aspects of language.

#### **3.1. On language Identity**

Language maintains the strength of a person's culture and identity. When a person has a strong connection to their own culture and language, it provides an additional channel for communication with that person and their community about issues pertaining to his identity. Patterns of language identity are most often driven by both social and cultural factors (Dorian 1989). Minority languages do not serve only as a means of communication, but they are also important tools for expressing cultural heritage, group and ethnic identity (Auer 1998, Crystal 2000). As Fishman (1989:6) put it 'at every stage, ethnicity is linked to language, whether indexical, implementational or symbolically.' Language is the primary index of identity (Crystal 2000:39). This symbolic value attached to culture is a powerful source of motivation for the retention of most languages. Smolicz's (1999) theory of core values further supports the idea that those minority groups which attach a stronger value to their language as a core cultural value are more likely to maintain their language over generations within a supportive social space. When this supportive social space is absent due to factors such as culture mix, culture disappearance, cultural shift and abandonment, language identity becomes threatened and verbal forms diminish. A disappearance in the practice of a cultural aspect causes a loss in many other aspects of its language. Therefore, it is worth noting that a result of the disappearance of certain cultural aspects has a significant impact on both the individual and collective identities of a community leading to great loss of language register.

### **3.2. On promoting linguistic diversity**

Since linguists are interested in promoting linguistic diversity, a disappearance in the practice of some cultural aspects in a language delimits the various ways of using and understanding that language. This is because diversity exposes the different unique perspectives of people's minds, especially as it reveals many creative ways in which humans categorise their experiences (Nettle and Romaine 2000:11). Culture may also be seen as a repertoire of valuable information to many people. Most of these cultural practices expose specialised knowledge of various domains within the environment. A disappearance of these practices may cause a forgetfulness or even death of the language. This is because language is used in explaining these concepts, and when such practices stop being practiced, the language used during these practices ceases to be used, and consequently a forgetfulness/abandonment of that particular aspect of language. Hence, specialised knowledge is lost and the language used in that domain is at the verge of dying.

### **3.3. On language teaching/learning**

Considering the fact that language and culture are intertwined with each other, learning a language cannot therefore be separated from learning its culture. Only through learning the culture, can second language learners better understand that language and use it in communication as native speakers do. Teachers now believe that it is important to help the second language learners to achieve the communicative competence as well as the linguistic competence. In language teaching, there is a method of language teaching called communicative language teaching (CLT), and the goal of CLT is to develop students' communicative competence, which includes both the knowledge about the language and knowledge about how to use the language appropriately in communicative situation. In CLT, cultural teachings play an important role. This is because language is a major component and supporter of culture as well as a primary tool for transferring message which is intimately bound with culture. Learning a second language involves learning a second culture to varying degrees. Since language is influenced and shaped by culture, it reflects culture. As such cultural differences are the most serious areas that cause mix-up and clash in cross-cultural communication. So both language learners and teachers need to pay more attention to cultural communication information, as this would make language learning/teaching easier and exciting. When it comes to teaching and learning, as Gao (2006) presents it, the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and consequently, language teaching is

cultural teaching (Gao 2006:59). Gao further states that foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies in foreign language classroom and attempt to enhance students' cultural awareness and improve their communication competence. According to Tomalin (2008), culture and globalisation are the fifth language skill in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. Tomalin (2008) explains that the fifth language skill teaches you the mindset and technique to adapt your use of the target language so as to learn, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept differences, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things which might be different to yours. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language in that culture provides an insight about the language and eases the understanding of the language. When certain cultural practices stop being practiced, teachers of the language have a limited scope in understanding that language and as such, teaching the language becomes a herculean task especially as it will fail to expose the needs of the community at large.

#### **3.4. On language structure**

A language is made up of several parts of speech which include grammatical words such as prepositions, articles, tenses, moods, plurals, etc. and lexical words entailing nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Upon hearing a word, one can easily associate it with a concept. Unfortunately, the former categories of words do not create concepts, but rather indicate how we should relate the concepts between them. In other words, they give us instructions on how to manipulate concepts. Language structure primarily concerns conceptual terms and such terms most often originate from cultural practices. The mere fact that some cultures are disappearing is an indication that the language is negatively affected due to vocabulary loss. Naturally, in practicing such cultures, certain registers are used which is restricted and understood only to those involved in the task. As such, the disappearance of such practices would automatically lead to the disappearance of these registers. Hence, the language usage domain becomes limited.

#### **3.5. On language maintenance**

The influence of education practiced in other languages alongside its culture has eroded the Bafaw language and its culture. Taking into consideration the prestige associated with a language of instruction as the best, the youthful population and some parents have turned to accept another language and its culture more at the detriment of theirs. As such, the younger generations shy

away from using their language and subsequently practicing their culture alongside these parents for another desired language. Hence, the language is not maintained but rather abandoned with its culture in preference for another. Besides language, the maintenance of cultural practices is another challenge nowadays. Cultural viability which refers to the possibility of maintaining core cultural practices and values in the community is of importance in language maintenance. Domains that are related to values of intimacy and solidarity with the mother tongue are necessary for language maintenance (Landry & Allard, 1994). It is the community that plays a peculiar bond with language and language activities (cultural practices in the form of stories, conversations, verbal play) that is fostered, shared and fashioned into personal and social identity that members hold strongly to. If communication across generations cannot be successfully carried out in the ancestral language in different domains, the chance of the ethnic language surviving is much less. Generally, the fewer domains the community language is used in, the less likely the language will be maintained and consequently, the greater the likelihood that the community language is lost. Since language is a vehicle through which culture is expressed, it is needful expressing the importance of culture in language maintenance.

### **3.6. On language death**

Language death is an important issue when discussing how language is related to culture. Naturally, loss of cultural diversity could also be a loss of linguistic diversity. The issue touches on culture, as specific languages would have specific expressions during cultural practices and with the loss of such specific expressions, language too is lost. This means that there will also be a loss of knowledge and very few people would be able to relate to cultural knowledge or transfer certain cultural idioms and expressions to the next generation. These cultural expressions would gradually diminish as the culture itself diminishes, hence the language. Since this is the common trend nowadays, it would be necessary to preserve both culture and language. Without such preservations of cultural expressions/practices, language death is eminent. Dixon (1997) has suggested that smaller societies and even tribes dealing with minority cultures and languages have complex hierarchies and are associated with complex structures which may not be completely grasped or interpreted with a majority modern language. Thus, there is always that feeling of loss of valuable cultural components and information through several processes such as colonization and globalization when a culture disappears. Language and culture are related as cultures and cultural identities are expressed with language. Cultural expressions that are

peculiar to a language would be difficult to pass to the future generations as certain expressions are unique to certain cultural patterns. Language does not exist separate from culture but is an integral aspect of culture and when a cultural practice dies, a part of a language also dies. This death adversely affects the culture as a whole, because the culture which is based on the language is suddenly usurped by some other language and this would mean that the cultural basis or roots are lost as well as the language. Thus, it is important to preserve culture in order to preserve language.

### **3.7. On language growth/development**

One theory that explains the impact of environment and culture on language development is the behaviorist theory. One of the main proponents of this theory, B.F. Skinner, proposed that language is acquired in the same way as any other behaviour, through operant conditioning. In **operant conditioning**, learning is defined as changes in behaviour as a result of experiences that occur after a response. Skinner explained that operant conditioning occurs in language development when sounds are reinforced by people's reactions. This operant conditioning combines with imitation to allow rapid language development to occur. Some people make sense of complex language through inborn cognitive talents combined with their environmental experiences (culture). Social interaction allows social skills and language experiences as essential tools for language development. Culture is not just a set of facts to be acquired, but something actively created through interactions that focus on developing a language. Facilitating an environment that supports language growth is the only way to ensure that culture can be learned as a process of enhancing language use. If learners for instance are educated on different cultural languages at an early age, they will be able to understand that the meanings have knowledge of their own or on other's background. This can be done by introducing sign language, counting numbers or sharing different kinds of stories. If going beyond simple counting and a learner for instance is fluent in that language, it is obvious that culture plays a role in language acquisition development (Baruca & Bialystok, 2012). Reaction time (how fast a learner may take to acquire a language) can be important in language development especially in verbal development. Due to the nature of cultural variation and the potential for culture bias, new assessment tools need to be developed as the foundation for effective and valid programs for language growth. The importance of early socialization efforts geared towards language growth,

and known strategies to develop curricula for early intervention programs for children is a huge step towards ensuring the growth of a language.

### **Proposed recommendations for cultural and linguistic development**

#### *1. To the government*

- The government should revive traditional and popular forms of a people's expression through cultural carnivals and reawakening programs
- Government should incorporate effective implementation of programmes related to traditional cultures/language; heritage and folklore education in the curricular at all levels
- Government should provide training in the use of ICT for documentation, digitization and preservation of cultural/linguistic heritage
- Government should develop legislative protection for traditional culture/language heritage museum, archives and libraries.
- The government should identify innovative technologies and solutions to help preserve language/culture and encourage users to cooperate with others and for our local languages to be taught in schools so that children will not see it as a taboo to speak their mother

#### *2. To the community and stake holders for culture and language preservation*

- The community should create awareness on the importance of maintaining cultural/linguistic diversity
- Many scholars should delve into cultural/linguistic studies and the values their existence add to the country
- Parents should learn to speak their local languages to the children as a stepping stone to make them learn their mother tongue and therefore their culture which is their identity.
- The community should increase funding to the preservation of their language especially as it is a minority language/culture as it plays a role in the cultural/linguistic heritage of the country.

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This paper showcases some of the slowly overlooked cultural practices in the Bafaw speech community in the South West Region of Cameroon and how such unrestrained practices affects the register of the language and ongoing language development process. It targets the threats the Lífó language faces as a consequence of the continuing departure of some cultural practices within the community. The need of this paper was heightened by the risk of endangerment that this language faces (Ethnologue 2016, Chia, Tanda and Neba 2010, Nkwame 2016) and the unbridled increase in the disappearance of cultural morals among the Bafaw people. The paper closely examines some cultural practices in the Bafaw community voiced through folk songs and proverbs, effects such disappearance has on the language development initiative and proposed recommendations to enhance language growth strategies. This is to enable the community, language stake holders and the Bafaw language Development Association (BAFLADEAS) facilitate the communication of new knowledge and the revitalisation of these cultural practices to serve as a useful resource for the Bafaw language development. The paper seeks to satisfy the needs of both anthropologists and linguists to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.



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