

Mündü language and culture: the current state of research

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1. Introduction

The Mündü are a little known ethnic group living in several non-contiguous areas in the border triangle of Sudan, DR Congo and Uganda. Data on the history and the culture of the Mündü are scant and scattered in small pieces in the reports of the early European travellers in the region, in ethnographic descriptions of the neighbouring peoples, in particular on the Zande, in ethnographic surveys of Africa and ethnographic handbooks. All pieces of information on the cultural, economic and political situation of the Mündü from the latter second half the 20th century until now are published online on the websites of various organisations. Data on the current situation of the Mündü result partly from my own observations in Arua/Uganda.¹

The present article outlines the ethnography and the socio-linguistic situation of the Mündü with focus on the sociolinguistic situation and on the endangerment of their language. The aim is to present a compendium of the ethnographical data on the Mündü. The basic information about their territories and the numbers of speakers are discussed in chapter 2, followed by information on the history and culture. Chapter 3 deals with the genealogical classification of the Mündü language and the sociolinguistic situation of the speakers which – in combination with the geographical situation – is not favorable for the maintenance of the language. Conclusions are drawn in chapter 4.

2. Ethnography of the Mündü

Like many other numerically weak and little known groups of the Bahr-el-Ghazal, the Mündü have never been subject of a special ethnographic investigation as were carried out for their numerically stronger neighbours, in particular the Zande. As a consequence there is only little ethnographic and anthropological information on the Mündü available beyond that concerning their numbers and their territory. Santandrea, most probably the scholar best acquainted with the ethnic situation in southern Sudan, states briefly: “no literature available worth quoting. Only numbers of tax-payers are given by Tucker” (Santandrea 1950). Ivanov (2000:493) observes that the history of the Mündü is not only hardly known, but that the Mündü are often confused with the Bangba.²

Almost all pieces of information that we have about the history and the culture of the Mündü originate from two major types of sources. The first is the travelogues of people who wanted to discover the "dark heart" of Africa for the learned societies of

Europe and the emerging colonial powers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among these are e.g. Schweinfurth (1918), Junker (1889), Frobenius 1898 and Czekanowski (1924). Their publications constitute the major part of direct observations. The second type is the ethnographic descriptions of the numerically more important ethnic groups like the Zande, (e.g. de Calonne-Beaufaict 1921, Seligman & Seligman 1965, Evans-Pritchard 1937, 1971 Baxter & Butt 1953 and Ivanov 2000), the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1940) and the Mangbetu (Paul 1916).

These authors refer occasionally to specific cultural features and historical events of the minority groups for the purpose of comparison when discussing the respective items with regard to the target group. In fact, the interrelatedness of political, social and economic life of the ethnic groups in this area is such that an ethnographic description of any group cannot be made without taking also their neighbours into consideration. Often enough the authors refer in their comparisons to several small groups at the same time, which makes it difficult to be sure about the ethnography of any specific ethnic group. Czekanowski is the only one of the early explorers who treats the Mündü on a relatively equal level with the numerically stronger neighbouring groups. His data on their history and culture, which covers almost four full pages (Czekanowski 1924:22-25) is the most comprehensive description available.³

The ethnographic handbooks and ethnographic surveys of Africa dedicate only short chapters, if any at all, to the Mündü. Maes & Boone (1935:293f) quote only a number of sources on the geographical situation, and Hutereau (1926:261) presents the myth of origin with few steps of the migration history, to mention only two examples. Putting each and all of the single pieces of information together is the only way of getting a comprehensive picture.

Recent information on the Mündü, likewise scant, is only found on the websites of few missionary societies (Joshua Project, Friends of Sudan, Windsor Baptist), the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) and the Gurtong Project (2005a, b). The bulk of information on these websites is, however, based on the above-mentioned print publications.

The earliest documents on Mündü language are a text and wordlists of Mündü collected by Czekanowski (1924:686-711), Junker (1888-89:35-108) and H. H. Johnston (1908:836-840). Only after several decades the first analyses of the grammatical structures followed: a short comparative grammar by Santandrea (1950) and a chapter in the *Linguistic Analyses* (Tucker & Bryan 1966:85-107) with results from the Northern Bantu Borderland Survey (NBBS).

2.1 The territory

The commonly accepted description of the Mündü territory is the one established in the Northern Bantu borderland Survey (NBBS) which speaks of two discrete territories. The first is situated in the north-east of Belgian Congo near Faradje between the rivers Dungu and Garamba (Tucker & Bryan 1956:108). Formerly the Mündü living here had occupied both sides of the Garamba, but after the Institution of the Garamba National Park they were united on the left bank of the Garamba-River (Van Bulck & Hackett 1956:108). In Sudan, Mündü are found in two areas, one north-west of Yei and the other south of Maridi. Today the main settlements and towns in Sudan are Yei, Maridi, Ras Wullu and Ibba (Gurtong Project 2005a), those in DR Congo are Aba and Faradje, and in Uganda it is Arua, where Mündü refugee live partly in the refugee camps and partly in the town itself.

This division of the Mündü territory is already described by Schweinfurth (1918:426f), and it is the best known fact about the Mündü. It reflects the ethnic dispersal prevailing in the entire region, which results from the expansion of the Zande Empire during the 18th and 19th century. Junker (1891:198f, cit. in Evans-Pritchard 1971:22) describes the empire as a "motley mixture of broken tribes and scattered populations". Czekanowski (1924:198) confirms this observation and states: "In view of the entirety of territories inhabited by the tribes of this group, the first thing to catch the eye is the enormous dispersal of the whole area. Map 1 outlines the present settlements of the Mündü.

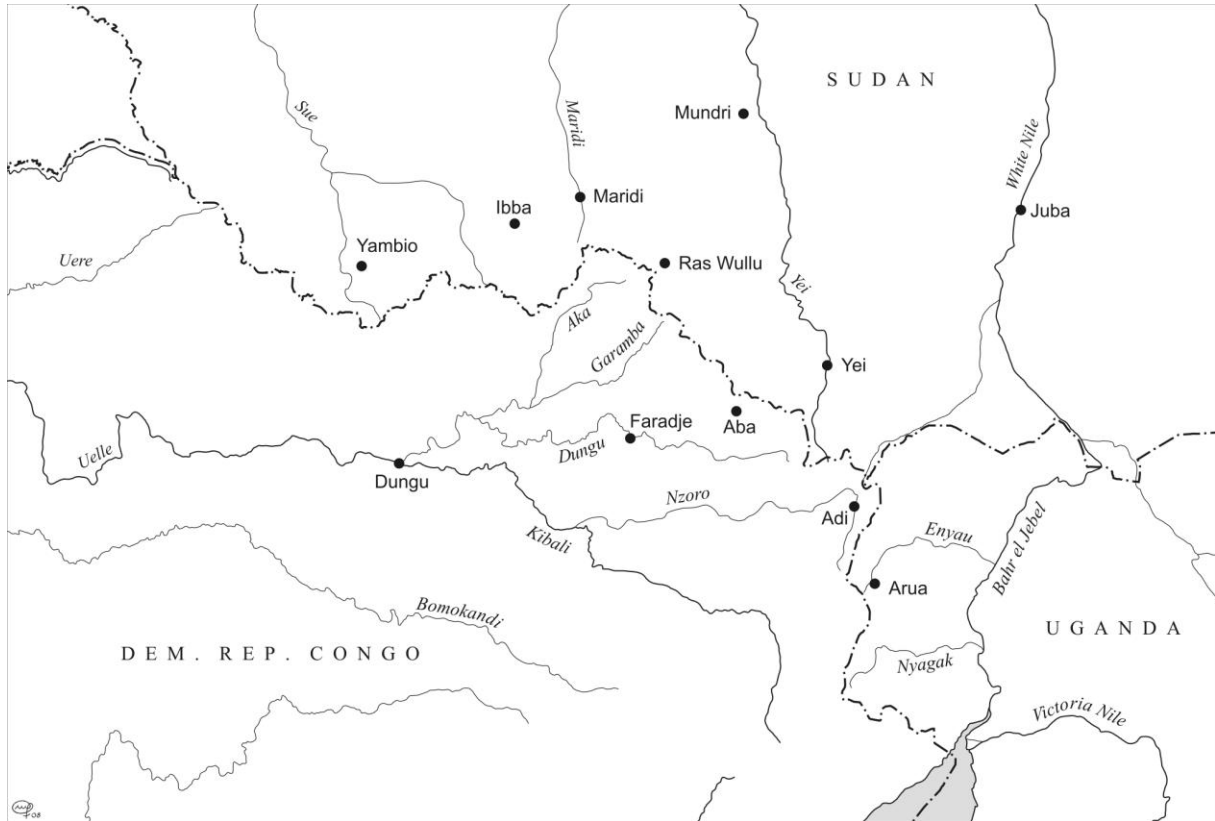
It is important to know that the different Mündü territories are not ethnically exclusive, but that they are also inhabited by members of other ethnic groups, a situation typical for the African "fragmentation belt of languages" in which these territories are located. The fragmentation belt is a zone stretching from Senegal to Ethiopia which is characterized by an extremely high degree of multilingualism (Dalby 1977:6) and multilinguality⁴ and by a high degree of ethnic complexity.

The Mündü explain the split by their migration history in their myth of origin of which two versions have been published. The first one is documented by Huterau (1926:261) and the second by Joshua Project (1993).

1. One day two brothers, Torokito and Kundu, went with their families to see some relatives. At Garamba, Torokito was tired and wanted to take a rest before proceeding the way. Kundu, however, asked not to stay in that solitude and as Torokito refused to go with him he took off alone. All of a sudden a heavy storm came up: the wind tore off the leaves of the trees and dispersed them in the air, it pressed all herbs down to the ground, and violent rain ground everything with soil. When Torokito finally wanted to continue his way he did not find a single trace of his brother. He called him, screaming his name, but Kundu there was no answer.

Desperately Torokito went on and reached the lower Dunggu-River where he settled and founded the Bere tribe. Kundu, however, had advanced to the Aba highlands where he founded the Mündü tribe.

Map 1: Mündü settlements in Sudan, DR Congo and Uganda



2. The Mündü believe they originated in West Africa and they migrated eastward during the dry seasons, in groups. As the first groups journeyed, the leaves of the mahogany trees around them fell and covered over their tracks so that the people behind them lost the route. In this way, some Mündü traveled only as far as Zaire while the leaders reached Sudan and settled there.⁵

2.2 The speakers

The general information on the number of speakers of Mündü is that there are 23.000 in Sudan and 2.800 in DR Congo. These numbers have appeared in the Ethnologue by the latest since 1982 and since then been copied in almost all print publications where mention is made on the size of the Mündü group. They are based on van Bulck & Hackett (1956:32)⁶ who number 2.798 Mündü in Congo and 1.857 Mündü tax-payers in Sudan. Of these latter 930 were counted in Yei and 927 in Maridi. Tucker (1940:18) refers two these subgroups as "remnants" which indicates that he considers the Mündü,

at least the northern subgroups, as obsolescent. Strikingly higher numbers are given in two online sources, however, without any indication on how they were collected: the Joshua Project (online) gives 43.000 for Sudan and 4.800 for DR Congo, and the Gurtong Project (2005a) gives about 50.000 to 60.000 for Sudan.

The numerical discrepancy might be explained by the fact that these latter numbers refer to the Mündü ethnic group while those by van Bulck & Hackett is based entirely on linguistic criteria, i.e. the mother tongues of the inhabitants (Guthrie & Tucker 1956:13). Another possible explanation for the strikingly high numbers of ethnic Mündü in the online sources is that the situation of smaller ethnic groups became more favourable after the foundation of New Sudan motivating people to reverse earlier ethnic shifts. Given that several missionary societies are working with the Mündü and make efforts to preserve the group's culture and integrity – the Windsor Baptists also on the development of the language – a reintegration into the Mündü community may have become attractive.

Dorothea Jeffrey assumes – more realistically – that today a total of some 10.000 Mündü are scattered over southwest Sudan between Maridi and Yei and northeastern Zaire around Aba and Faradje (Boyd 1989:195). The imprecision about the number reflects the uncertainty about population numbers in a zone where for reasons of political insecurity people flee at one moment from one country to the other, and at another moment in the opposite direction. The low number indicates that the size of the group is decreasing.

In the ethnically and linguistically fragmented area where the Mündü live it is not easy to identify specific groups and decide whether certain groups belong together or not, a problem which was discovered quite early. The difficulty results to a great deal from confusion about designations. At one time a group is referred to by their endonym at other times by a xenonym, and ethnonyms are usually used without distinction as glossonyms and as occasionally also as geonyms.⁷ The confusion is increased by the fact the certain ethnonyms are used with reference to distinct ethnic groups. The discussion about the designation "Nyam-Nyam" in old travelogues as an insecure reference to the Zande (e.g., Schweinfurth 1981:288, Evans-Pritchard 1971:70, Ivanov 2000:29-36) is probably the best known example. With regard to the Mündü three quotations from Schweinfurth (1918:288, 404, 427) irradiate the problem:

- 1) Those in the North are the Bongo, by whom the Niamniam are called 'Mundo' now and then 'Manjanja.'
- 2) Petherick's 'Mundo',⁸ south of the Bongo territory is the name of the dispersed 'Babuckur' group.

- 3) ... the complete identity of the two subgroups is confirmed by the Zande designation 'Babuckur' for both of them ... The Bongo call the western subgroup of the Babuckur 'Mundo.'

Schweinfurth (1918:404) and Struck (1908:76) report that Petherick (1858:471, 473), the very first European traveller in the area, had called a certain mountainous region (Mbia Silei) 'Mundo', and that he objected in vain against the erroneous identification by some geographers of this 'Mundo' with the one south of the Bongo.

It is likely that the difficulties to identify ethnic groups does not only result from unequivocal use of terms, but also from total or partial shift of ethnicity. Various groups lost their ethnic identity under Zande imperialism to different degrees. The above mentioned broken groups described by Junker have been completely absorbed into the Zande society while other groups are not completely zandéised. Some among these latter lost their political, cultural and linguistic identity, but somehow managed to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness and political independence. Others, among which are the Mündü, have lost their political independence but not their cultural and/or linguistic identity (Evans-Pritchard 1971:22-43).

2.3 History

With regard to the Mündü group Czekanowski (1924:199) is convinced that they belong to the autochthonous groups in the eastern part of the Uelle-River basin. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Mündü were repeatedly badly affected by Zande imperialism. According to Schweinfurth (1918:426) the Babuckur (the northern and north-eastern subgroups of the Mündü) have either immigrated from the South or they are the remnants of a people which was ousted by the advancing Zande to the North and the North-East. The alternative, Schweinfurth's wording is "entweder ... oder", refers to the motive of motion, either unsolicited or driven by force, not to the direction.

The Bere, living between the Bomokandi and Uelle rivers, shifted already in the 19th century to Mangbetu language (Czekanowski 1924:198). The Babuckur in the Yei-Basin, however, managed to maintain their ethnic and linguistic identity, despite repeated attacks and raids by the Zande, even though they could not prevent their territory from being split by raids and wars they

As a consequence they did not contribute to the Zande-complex (Evans-Pritchard 1971:38). The Zande did not reach this area very often and were not politically strong. However, when it was not the Zande it was Nubian traders from Khartoum who carried out raids and attacks. Like the Zande they considered the area as a repository where they could fetch food, animals, goods and slaves at will. According to

Schweinfurth (1899:426) the Babuckur out of this situation united and gained strength and proved to be terrible fighters who put their attackers to flight. And from a certain time on they made some counter-attacks the traders' zeribas.

Schweinfurth is however, the only source who ascribes the Müdü mentionable military strength. Since there is no indication that they were ever politically or culturally influential we may doubt Schweinfurth's description and assume that the Müdü were militarily weak, not strong enough to fight the attackers back effectively. Ivanov (2000:488-495) agrees with Tucker (1940:18) in that until the early colonial area the Müdü occupied a larger territory than they do today. It is likely that the Zande and the Khartoum traders not only took goods and slaves away, but that they took possession of part of the Müdü territories. We may conclude that the Müdü were apparently neither politically nor culturally influential, but have always been a weak group in a politically and military highly unbalanced social situation. Therefore they remained relatively unnoticed by the early travelers and later by the anthropologists.

While the Khartoum traders lost their power with the establishment of the colonial rule the process of zandéisation has not come to an end, despite the loss of political and military power of the Zande. It continues not in a bellicose way, and it is observable primarily by the use of the language, Pazande. Its use as a second language is decreasing, other vehiculars prevailing, but it is spreading as a first language for speakers shifting from minority languages such as Müdü. The Zande are well aware of this process which they appreciate,⁹ and occasionally they state that the Müdü, as well as other linguistic minorities (all speakers of Ubangi and Central Sudanic languages), do belong to the Zande group anyway. They explain the expansion process as resulting from their friendly characters and by the fact that "they all want to marry us."

2.4 Culture

Among the little information that we have about their economy there is the fact that by the end of the 19th century they were agriculturalists who kept goats (Schweinfurth 1898:426) but not cattle, they did not know the culture of the African oil palm (*eleais*) and, like other ethnic groups living under strong influence by their Nilotic neighbours they did not know cassava (Calonne-Beaufaict 1921:210, 215).¹⁰ It is also likely that they did not grow bananas in those days, of which the limits of distribution were in the north-eastern part of the Zande area (Evans-Pritchard 1971:77). At present the economy is still based on subsistence agriculture with millet, sweet potatoes, yams, maize, rice as the major crops, but now also with palm oil, cassava and bananas. The area is rich in forest products: timber, honey, and in small game (Gurtong Project 2005a), which allows for supplementary gathering economy. Cultivate the soil is what

my informants in Arua intended to do after their return back to Yei which the first of them began in April 2007

The Mündü are known as skilful wood carvers and craftsmen. Basketwork plays a significant role in their handicraft production, and they produce strainers to filter beer, baskets for carrying things, basket-pots for fishing, basket-work walls of huts and beehives. Formerly the Mündü made tomb totems of good quality from hard wood, as did the Baka and Bongo. They were also advanced in the smelting of iron and produced axes, spears and hoes which they traded with their neighbours. Their interaction with national and international economy has weakened the market for these goods and also the traditional knowledge about their production (Gurtong Project 2005a).

The Mündü have never been politically or culturally influential, but they borrowed a number of cultural features from other groups. One feature – no longer practised today – is to remove the four lower incisors, a habit which they adopted from their eastern neighbours, the Madi (Czekanowski 1924:201). Another former type of body decoration is the insertion of quartz-cones into the lower lips of women (Junker 1889:365) what Schweinfurth (1889:156) describes with regard to the Bongo women. With the Mündü he observed that married women make about twenty piercings along their ear conchas and their lips in which to insert blades of grass of 1 inch (Schweinfurth 1898:427). Unlike their neighbours they did not tattoo their bodies nor have elaborate hairstyles (Junker 1889:366).

No material cultural item or technical competence of Mündü origine is known, which was adopted by their neighbours. In Evans-Pritchard's discussion of cultural features borrowed from one group within the realm of the Zande to the next, witchcraft is the only item of Mündü origin that the Zande have borrowed. The Mündü always had the reputation of practising powerful magic very much feared by their neighbours (Evans-Pritchard 1937:210). The Zande became interested in the power of the witch-doctors of the Mündü during the expansion to the East under King Gbudwe's reign. Evans-Pritchard (1937:201, 417, 482) states that for several decades a great number of medicines had been introduced into Zandeland of which the people were afraid, because they did not know anything about them. Allegedly the old Zande medicines were culturally indicated as good or bad without ambiguity, but the quality of the new foreign medicines could not be determined.

Today, basically all Mündü are Christians (Friends of Sudan,¹¹ online) belonging to several congregations, among which are the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and several Baptist churches (Joshua Project 1993).¹² There is, however, general agreement that the Mündü also subscribe to the authority of magicians, fortune tellers, oracles and charms which control their spiritual life.

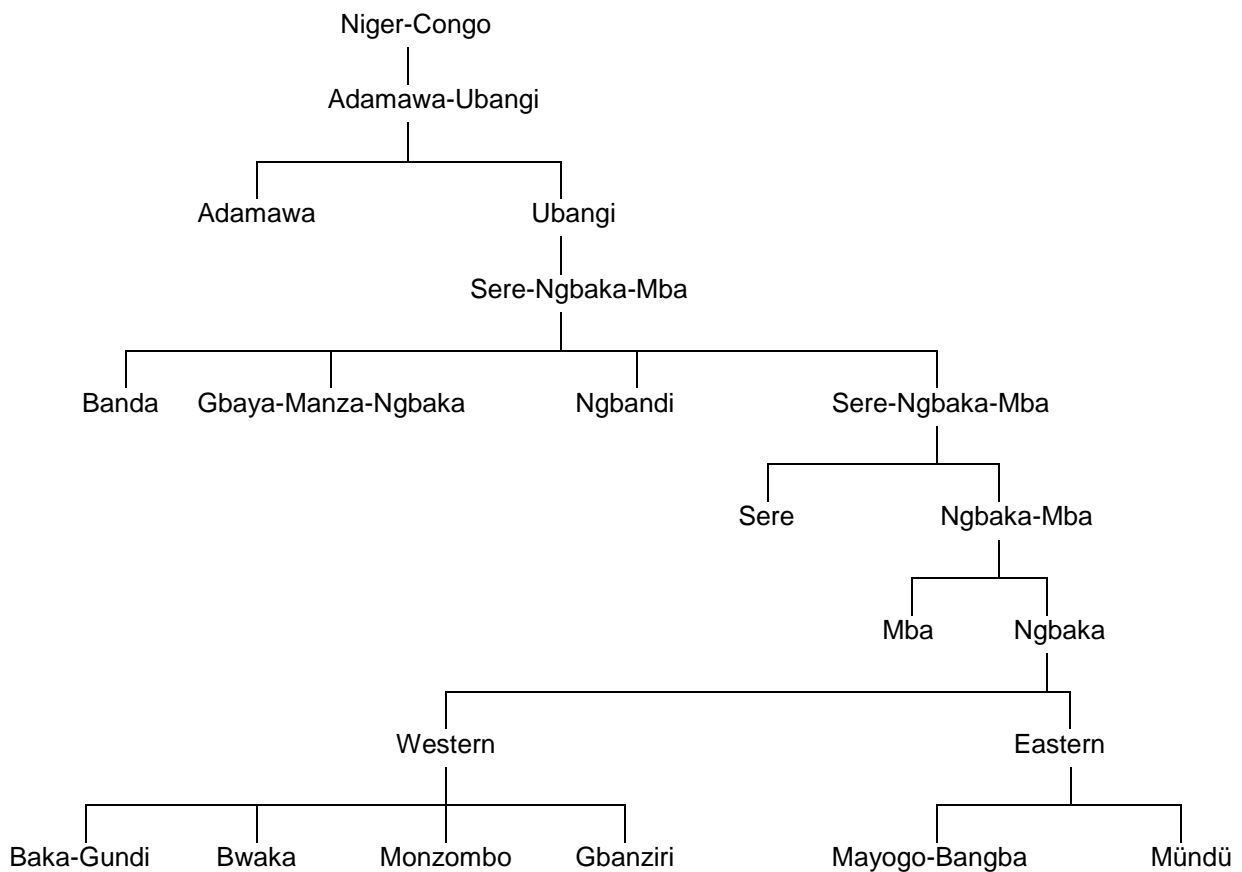
3. The Mündü language

This chapter deals with the genealogical classification of Mündü and the sociolinguistic situation of the speakers and the history of Mündü linguistic. A description of the linguistic structure is beyond the scope of this paper and is the topic of a future publication.

3.1 Genealogic classification

Mündü is an Ubangi language which belongs to the Niger-Congo phylum. Fig. 1 shows the genealogical classification of Mündü according to Boyd (1989:194).

Fig. 1: Genetic classification of Mündü



In “Les Recherches Linguistiques au Congo Belge” Van Bulck (1948:174-182) classifies Mündü as belonging to the “old nigritic” section of Sudanic languages and he summarises the attempts of early explorers to classify Mündü and other languages in the area of the Nile-Ubangi watershed. According to Hutereau (1926:261) the Mündü language is spoken by the Mündü, living near the source of the Dunggu-River, and the Bere, a group living upriver of the municipality of Dunggu at the Bengu-River.

H. H. Johnston (1908:838-839) who recorded one of the first Mündü vocabularies in the Ituri discovers that it appears to be strangely close to that of the Mpombo¹³ language (spoken further west) and he groups both languages together as Banza. Czekanowski (1924:198) recognises that Mayogo and Bere are very closely related to Mündü and that the Ngbaka-group (Ngbaka, Mpombo, Monzombo, Gbanziri) is intermediate between the Banda-group (Banda-Banza-Gobu) and the Mündü-group. The evaluation of vocabularies from Bangba, Mündü and Mayogo collected by himself in 1932 van Bulck shows the close relationship of these languages confirmed. In a comparative study of languages of the western Bahr-el-Ghazal, Santandrea (1950) investigates the Feroge group (Feroge, Mangaya, Indri, Togoyo), the Ndogo group (Ndogo, Sere, Bai, Bviri¹⁴) and Mündü. He includes the latter language in the study because of its relationship to the Feroge and Ndogo groups which are particularly close in vocabulary (Santandrea 1950:7).

On the basis of the above mentioned sources Greenberg (1955) groups Mündü, Mayogo and Bangba together with the languages of the following groups: Gbaya-Manja, Bwaka-Gbanziri-Monjombo, Sango-Yakoma-Ngbandi, Banda, Zande, Ndogo-Sere-Bviri-Golo into the larger unit 'Eastern' which together with the unit 'Adamawa' constitutes the sixth branch of the Niger-Congo languages.

A number of more recent publications which deal exclusively with grammatical problems or which contain Mündü texts have been hardly noticed. A study on the use of quotations in narrative discourse by Jeffrey (1984) and one on the phonology and morphology by Jeffrey & Polley (1981) appeared in the *Occasional Papers in the Study of Sudanese Languages*. It is likely that these two authors, who conducted the translation of the New Testament of the Bible,¹ are also responsible for the production of 16 small readers in Mündü which appeared between 1984 and 2000 (Gordon 2005a). The Mündü grammar by Vallaeys (1991) which is based on material collected in 1960 in Faradje (DR Congo) focuses on phonology and basic morphology.

3.2 The sociolinguistic situation

As already mentioned, the Mündü and other population groups have been seriously affected by the expansion of the Zande which caused displacement, division of the territories and strong cultural influence. While some other groups have become completely zandéised losing their political independence and their own language as a result of the well organized, but not aggressive, language policy of the Zande (Evans-Pritchard 1971:122), the Mündü managed to maintain their linguistic identity and use

¹ The Mündü translation of the Bible appeared in 2006.

Zande as a second language. This means that the language contact situation was sufficiently balanced¹⁵ to allow for keeping alive their language.

It appears that even the raids and slave hunts by the Arabic speaking Khartoum traders,¹⁶ which alternated with those by the Zande, could not seriously affect their linguistic identity. The extreme economic and political power of these traders, however, caused a higher degree of imbalance of the contact situation. As a consequence Arabic became the language of the highest socio-economic prestige and soon it was learned as a vehicular by the population groups in the area (Miller & Abu Manga 1992, Ushari 1983). It kept this function after the Khartoum traders had been replaced by officials from the colonial government and later the national Sudanese government. Today it is the common vehicular in South Sudan and has even become a widely used language of Christian liturgy which is not restricted to interethnic services.

A significant aggravation of the socio-linguistic situation which caused a clear sociolinguistic imbalance has resulted from the recent wars in Southern Sudan. It had a more devastating effect on the Mündü community than the Zande expansion and the raids by the Khartoum traders. The present situation of the Mündü language is no longer what van Bulck & Hackett (1956), Tucker & Bryan (1956) and Evans-Pritchard observed in the first half of the 20th century: a dispersed group with a pronounced ethnic and linguistic identity. These authors do not mention language shift with regard to the Mündü. Since it is hardly conceivable that they should have completely overlooked the phenomenon, we may conclude that it started in the second half of the 20th century and that it is proceeding in big steps. The settlement conditions favour the shift: The Mündü are now distributed over three countries scattered in small subgroups who live in highly multilingual locations where it is very difficult to keep the language alive.

The low socio-economic status of the Mündü language is conducive to language shift. To begin with it reflects the fact that that all ethnic Mündü are bi- or multilingual. Inter-marriage is one factor promoting multilingualism and it endangers the Mündü language. Not only is there inter-marriage with the Zande, but also with the Avokaya and Baka and there is bilingualism in these languages (Gordon Project 2005b) which have a higher socio-economic prestige than Mündü. It is a one-way bilingualism since Mündü is usually not learned as a second language. The prestige languages are used in the workplace, on the market and in shops, in the radio and also in school, i.e. in significantly wider circumstances than Mündü. The contexts where Mündü is used are getting less, a situation characterized by the criteria of involuntary language switching described by Dixon (1997:110). The children growing up in these bilingual

families acquire the non-Mündü idiom as their first language and they learn Mündü only to a low degree or not at all.

Only one single exception is reported: the Adio or Makaraka, the most easterly section of the Zande, who live along the Yei-Maridi road with the Mündü. They do not have a separate language, but speak Mündü as well as Pazande (Gurtong Project 2005b)¹⁷ and perhaps other languages. This group must have become bilingual after Evans-Pritchard carried out fieldwork among the Zande by (between 1926 and 1930) for he states that these Adio are culturally in all important respects like other Azande and speak only Pazande (Evans-Pritchard 1971:28).

There is no precise information on how many Mündü have given up their ethnic language for another language as the first medium of communication. But it is certain that language shift has taken place and that it is still going on. Most of the target languages are vehiculars, but a few ethnic languages also serve as target languages. Joshua Project (online) lists Arabic, Sudanese Creole Arabic, Avokaya, Baka (in Sudan), Bangala, Avokaya and Logo (in DR Congo) as mother tongues of ethnic Mündü.

It is true that many Mündü are proud of their language, an attitude which I could observe among the Mündü in Arua. Like speakers of other southern Sudanese minority languages, the speakers of Mündü express their wish to maintain their language. At least those who were engaged in the Bible translation and in the literacy projects make big efforts in teaching the language to their children. One of them, Seme, even taught his daughter to write Mündü. They also make efforts, at least in my presence, to keep their language "pure" and avoid using loanwords. With regard to loanwords from Arabic they manage to do so to a certain degree, but with regard to English and Zande they do not. They are aware of the language rights of the New Sudan which they appreciate as a chance to give their language more standing and develop it as a medium for school instruction. But the only domain, where these rights can be materialized is that of Christian religion. Mündü is used as a language of liturgy in Anglican services, albeit only in parishes with a sufficiently numerous Mündü speaking community and where there is a Mündü-speaking reverend. This condition which held true in Arua for a couple of years until at least 2007 is not often found.

But since Mündü is not a widely used language, it is not considered a priority by the young generation, in particular with regard to written communication.

European languages are given clear preference over vernaculars for school education, local vehicular languages being the second choice. These are the languages which have a long tradition of school education. have been used for education in both Zaire

and Sudan ever since the first missionaries who came to the Mündü in the 1920s. They learned and used the vehiculars Lingala, Swahili and French in DR Congo and Arabic and English in Sudan. Only in the last decades of the 20th century have missionaries begun to show an interest in the language and develop it (Joshua Project, online). Missionaries from the Windsor Baptist Church have graphized Mündü in the last decades of the 20th century. They developed a standard orthography of Mündü, published 16 readers (cf. Gordon 2005) in that language and translated the New Testament. They also founded a Literacy Centre in Maridi and formed a Mündü Language Committee. The appreciation of instruction in English and the good quality of Ugandan schools became evident, when in 2007 it was declared that the Mündü could go back home to Sudan. Some of them decided to prolong their sojourn in Arua in order to finish their own school education or vocational training or to enable their children to do so. After the publication of the Bible they had to leave and the Mündü literacy project stopped.

When I met the members of the translation team in Arua, they expressed their hope that some linguist would come and continue the work and the Mündü language. They do not have the capacity to continue the literacy work and the production of literature on their own for lack of linguistic training and writing competence and for lack written input. Appropriate dictionaries and grammars which they could use as references do not exist. The grammatical descriptions by Santandrea (1950, 1969¹⁸) and Tucker & Bryan (1966) are not available. Even if the Mündü Bible was more easily accessible, they might find it more cumbersome to read it in Mündü than in the vehiculars Arabic or English, languages in which their reading competence is better developed (cf. Dixon 1997:113).

Like the banners presented to the Mündü people at the dedication of their New Testament, in March 2006, the Mündü Bible serves more as an object of linguistic identification than as reading material.

Fig. 1 Mündü banner



The banner for Aba

In English it reads:

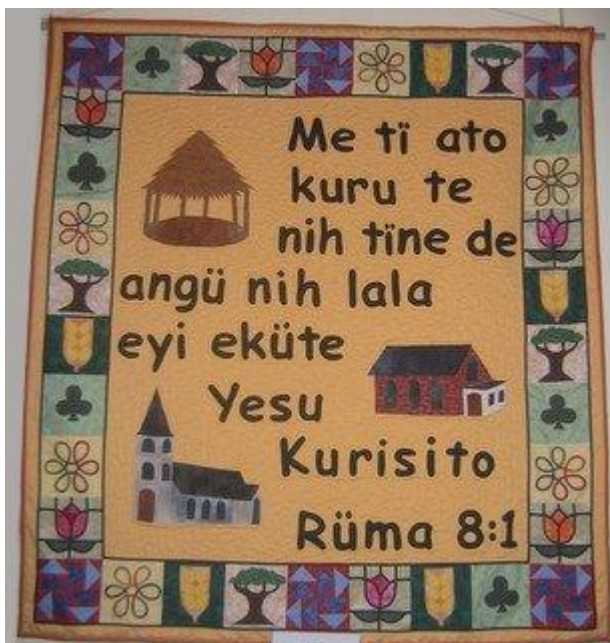
Let us think about the great love which our Father God loves us with, for he has said about us, that we are his children. (1 John 3:1)



The banner for Gali

In English it reads:

Jesus Christ died to untie us from the rope of Satan. (Colossians 1:14)



The banner for Maridi

In English it reads:

God will no longer punish us because we have stuck to the body of Jesus Christ. (Romans 8:1)

Source: <http://www.windsorbaptist.org/journey/banner.shtml> (1.5.2008)

4. Conclusion

The Mündü are a little known ethnic group in the Sudan, Uganda DR Congo border triangle. All ethnographic information on them is scattered in early travel reports and in ethnographies on their numerically stronger neighbours, in particular the Zande. The Mündü are a politically and militarily weak group whose territories was continually attacked, raided and divided over centuries by their bellicose neighbours. Nevertheless they managed over centuries to maintain their linguistic identity despite. They could do so as long as the language contact was to some degree balanced. With the ongoing dispersal of the group, loss of their territories and an increasing influence of the vehicular language Arabic the situation has become so imbalanced that the Mündü have great difficulties to maintain their language.

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- ¹ From February to April 2007 I spent eight weeks in Arua in the West-Nile Province of Uganda to do fieldwork on Zande. The latter half of my stay I also got the chance of carrying out research on Mündü. The fieldtrip was conducted in the frame of the research project "Flussläufe als Korridore der Transmission typologischer Merkmale" sponsored by the German Research Foundation to whom I express my deeply felt gratitude. I am grateful to Yvonne Treis and Anne Storch for many useful comments on this paper, all weaknesses are, however, mine. I also thank Kathrin Kolossa for editing my English.
- ² The languages of the two groups are very closely related, cf. ch. 3.1.
- ³ The major part of Czekanowski's investigations deals with physical anthropology, i.e. head and body indices, which are not relevant for this article.
- ⁴ 'Multilinguality' is defined here as the coexistence of many languages. This definition is in agreement with the use of the term in language technology and international politics, when availability of information in different languages is the issue. It differs from the use in psycholinguistics and language education science (cf. Aronin & Ó Laoire 2004. 'Multilingualism' is defined as the knowledge and use of several languages by the same individuals or groups of speakers.
- ⁵ It is not easily conceivable why the Mündü should claim their origin in West Africa. It is more likely that they see their origin in the West of their present location, i.e. in the territory of the present DR Congo. Mündü's alleged close relationship to some West African languages, which would harden the evidence that they originate there is most probably a misinterpretation of Westermann's (1935) term "Sudansprachen" which encompasses Mündü. A concept of Sudanic languages, though very vague, is far spread in the northern Bantu border area as I could observe during a seven-months fieldwork on the Mba-languages in 1980-81.
- ⁶ These data were collected during the Northern Bantu Borderland Survey. Demographic material for the NBBS were obtained from various publications, and from official and private statements by different informants. (Guthrie & Tucker 1956:13).
- ⁷ Glossonym = name of a language, endonym = name used by a of people to refer to themselves or their language, xenonym = name for a people or a language which is not used by the people themselves, geonym = name of a geographical feature.
- ⁸ Schweinfurth (1918:404) and Struck (1908:76) report that Petherick (1858:471, 473) who calls a certain mountainous region (Mbia Silei) Mundo objects in vain against the erroneous identification by some geographers of this "Mundo" with the one south of the Bongo.
- ⁹ There is an organization of Sudanese Zande who are establishing cooperation with their brothers in DR Congo and Central African Republic in order to promote Pazande language. They are preparing a survey of the speakers of Zande in the three countries, with particular interest on the number of speakers who have shifted to Zande (Daniel Badagbu, p.c., March 2007).

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- ¹⁰ Schweinfurth (1872:527) states that in 1870 cassava as well as the sweet potato and colocasia were unknown to the Bongo and other peoples bordering the Azande to the North. Evans-Pritchard (1971:76) agrees with Schweinfurth that it reached the Azande from Angola via Congo and he assumes that they did not know it before the nineteenth century. It is likely that the Mündü got it from the Zande.
- ¹¹ ‘Friends of Sudan’ is a registered Scottish charity – no. SCO38824 (Friends of Sudan, online)
- ¹² The Mündü I met in Arua were members of the Anglican Church.
- ¹³ This comparison is based on two sources for Mpombo: Grenfell’s vocabulary of Mpombo recorded in 1885 published by H.H. Johnston in 1908, and Stapleton’s (1903) data collected in 1897.
- ¹⁴ Only later he discovered the Tagbu language and added it to the Ndogo group.
- ¹⁵ The situation did not meet the criteria of a balanced language contact according to Aikhenvald (2006:42). She defines a linguistic situation as balanced when there is stable multilingualism without any dominance relationship.
- ¹⁶ These traders were already well established in their zeribas in the Bahr-al-Ghazal before Schweinfurth came there
- ¹⁷ Those Adio who do not live with the Mündü but with the Kakwa speak Kakwa (Gurtong Project, online).
- ¹⁸ Santandrea (1969) is furthermore written in Italian, a language which nobody among the Mündü masters.^

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