



Article

Ignored, yet important: An ecolinguistic analysis of oral narratives in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon

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Abstract

Contemporary ecological challenges have resulted in an upsurge in research geared towards providing solutions to the crisis. According to previous research in the area, there is an urgent need for a conscious and contentious reaction to the ecological crisis which threatens human existence. The aim of this paper is to unearth the solutions to the global ecological crisis, through an ecolinguistic analysis of indigenous oral narratives. Using Stibbe's (2015) *Ecolinguistics* as a framework of analysis, we investigated the language used by various indigenous groups in talking about the environment. The data consisted of six indigenous oral narratives on topics related to the environment. The results reveal that despite the realisation that these narratives and the languages through which they are expressed are apparently ignored, they remain very important, especially in contemporary society. An analysis of the narratives reveals various ecological philosophies which are important in resolving the ecological crisis. They also show various worldviews which are necessary in the fight against environmental crises. It is realised that through the use of oral narratives, indigenous people, consciously or unconsciously, engage in fighting against ecological catastrophes like climate change, depletion of species, pollution, destruction of farmlands through the use of chemicals, and extinction of protected species.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, ecosophy, indigenous oral narratives, eco-critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Ecolinguistics is a relatively young discipline which seeks to redress environmental issues through a critique of the language used to represent or talk about the world beyond the

human ecology. The field of ecolinguistics gained prominence in the 1990s with the publication of Michael Halliday's seminal work "New Ways of Meaning: The Challenge to Applied Linguistics". Despite the realisation that ecolinguistics only saw the limelight in the 1990s through Halliday (1990), the discipline of ecolinguistics had existed since, at least, the 1970s when Einar Haugen (1972) proposed a theoretical conceptual framework with a number of linguists, compiled in *The Ecology of Language*. According to Haugen (in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001, p. 57), language ecology is the study of existing inter-language interactions with the environment. The use of the term "environment", in Sapir's understanding, covers both the physical and social aspects. The physical environment, therefore, constitutes the physical geography, that is, the topography of a country (coastal, valley, land, highland, mountain), climate, and intensity of rainfall, and the economic basis of human life comprising fauna, flora and mineral resources. On the flip side, the social environment consists of the various forces of society that make up the minds and lives of every individual among them: religion, ethics, forms of political organisation, and art.

According to Stibbe (2015, p. 1), "when first encountered, ecolinguistics is sometimes met with bafflement. It is about ecology, and it is about language, but these two initially appear to be entirely separate areas of life. A cursory explanation is that language influences how we think about the world". Fill and Mühlhäusler (2001, p. 11) argue that ecolinguistics is applied linguistics that is interdisciplinary. Alexander and Stibbe (2014) define ecolinguistics as the study of the impact of language use on survival that bridges relationships between humans, other organisms, and the physical environment that is normatively oriented towards the preservation of sustainable relationships and life. Stibbe (2010, p. 407) opines that the discipline evolved as a result of developments in human ecology associated with various systems (including economic, social, religious, cultural, linguistic, and ecosystem) that are interdependent and related to one another.

According to Stibbe (2015, pp. 6-7), as seen below, there has been an ecological turn in the humanities which has helped in ascertaining the goals and directions of ecolinguistics:

The story of human distinctiveness has been central to humanities subjects in the past. These areas of scholarly inquiry have traditionally studied and celebrated rationality, language, a sense of history, religion, culture and literature as aspects which distinguish us from, and, implicitly, make us better than, animals... However, as awareness of the ecological embedding of humans and human societies has risen to the level of urgent and immediate concern there has been an "ecological turn" in humanities and social science subjects. No longer is the object of study — whether the mind, the human, society, culture or religion — seen in isolation, but as an inextricable and integral part of a larger physical and living world. This has helped these subjects become more accurate in their inquiry, since undoubtedly human minds, cultures and society are shaped by the natural world that they arose from and are part of. But more practically, it has helped give a role to humanities and social science in addressing some of the overarching ecological challenges that

humanity is facing in the twenty-first century: biodiversity loss, food security, climate change, water depletion, energy security, chemical contamination, alienation from nature and the social justice questions that both contribute to and arise from these issues.

Ecolinguistics provides, therefore, a proper linguistic platform through which the role of language in enabling and resolving ecological problems (climate change, extinction of species, deforestation, pollution, etc.) can be mirrored and evaluated.

2. The cognitive embeddedness of indigenous oral narratives

The importance of oral narratives on the lifestyle of indigenous people cannot be underestimated. More so, the language ecology of contemporary society has made it more urgent for oral narratives, especially those told in indigenous undocumented languages, to be considered and preserved. Language has been defined as a carrier of cultures and beliefs. Indigenous cultures are generally transmitted through oral narratives, as is the case with the narratives considered in this paper. It is observed that with the advent of globalisation and the promotion of international languages, there is a tendency towards the degeneration of indigenous cultures, as people tend to lose track of their indigenous languages.

Rosenfeld (2019), citing Kuletz (1998), states that stories, in this case oral tales or oral narratives, are articulations of our perceptions and serve to both legitimate and instigate our actions. She follows, quoting Stibbe (2015), that the stories that get (re)told and the language that we use to shape our view of the world, become the stories-we-live-by. Lakoff (2010) maintains that stories establish our frames of reference or cognitive rule systems. According to Lakoff, an individual's frame is typically unconscious constructions through which the individual makes sense of the roles, structures, and relationships in the world. Stibbe (2015) argues that a frame can be thought of as "a story about an area of life that is brought to mind by particular trigger words". For example, when climate change is framed as an environmental issue, it activates images of trees, polar bears, and things out there; when it is framed as a national security issue, it activates images of personal safety, the military, and things over here (Stibbe, 2015). In the words of Lakoff (2010), all knowledge makes use of frames, and every word activates frames that then characterise the word.

In the present study, the use of the phrase "oral tales" refers to stories told by ancestors and handed down through generations about the lives of the people and their environment. These stories highlight the cognitive systems of the people revealing various worldviews and setting standards for living. It refers to the oral rendition of belief systems from one generation to the other in indigenous communities.

3. The language ecology and indigenous oral narratives

The linguistic ecology of Cameroon can be understood as one of the most complicated in

the world. Officially a bilingual ecology, it is a de jure multilingual ecology. It can be observed as a three-tier ecology made up of official national bilingualism, with English and French as official languages, the de jure multilingual ecology with around 280 local languages (Eberhard et al., 2020; Kouega, 2007; Kouega & Aseh, 2019; Epoge, 2013; Awung, 2013; Ubanako, 2015; Ekanjume-Ilongo, 2016; etc.), and a third element defined by the lingua francas reported in the country. At this level, around four languages have been ascribed the label “lingua franca”. Identifying a language to a specific tier is generally dependent on the function of the language. Many studies on the language situation have focused on the number of languages as seen above.

How we manage the languages in this multiplex will determine how useful a specific language can be. In the Cameroonian situation, the language ecology has greatly favoured foreign languages at the expense of local indigenous languages. In the complex three-tier multilingual ecology of Cameroon, two foreign languages are favoured, leaving the rest, especially the undocumented languages, at the mercy of extinction. The fear that comes with this realisation is that these indigenous languages are carriers of important cultural and ecological heritage. In the face of a global ecological crisis, these bits of important information can become very useful. Unfortunately, as time goes on, we realise that indigenous people may be gradually losing the mastery of their oral history thanks to the advancement of globalisation.

With these realisations, we are left to ponder the role of indigenous oral narratives and the minority languages which remain undocumented but are rich in cultural and ecological knowledge. We wonder what we will lose if the oral narratives and the minority languages become extinct because of the contemporary ecology of language. In our analysis, we attempt to unveil what we may be losing by ignoring indigenous languages and the oral ecological knowledge laid down through generations.

4. Theoretical framework

The current paper uses *Ecolinguistics* (Stibbe, 2015) as a framework of analysis. Ecolinguistics analyses the discourses which underpin our daily lives, judges them against an ecological perspective and looks for alternative ways of framing the same discourses. It follows from Halliday (1990, as cited in Stibbe, 2015, p. 184) who describes how certain aspects of grammar “conspire ... to construe reality in a certain way ... that is no longer good for our health as a species”. Still quoting from Halliday (*ibid*), Stibbe (2015) highlights three ways through which the misuse of language is causing damage. These include:

- 1) The use of mass nouns like “soil” and “water” are unbounded, giving a story of abundance rather than a limitation of supply.
- 2) That opposites have a positive (unmarked) pole, with “bigger” and “growth” being more positive than “smaller” or “shrinkage”, making economic growth appear attractive.

- 3) That the use of the pronouns “who” vs “what” divides the world falsely into conscious beings (humans and, to some extent, their pets) and non-conscious beings (other species).

The focus of ecolinguistics is, therefore, the analysis of language use with particular emphasis placed on those linguistic elements which reveal the power dynamics in human-nature relationships. The use of particular linguistic items and structures reveal certain ideological peculiarities of a people. As such, the analysis of the narratives will reveal the importance of these indigenous oral narratives as they have a particular bearing on the cognitive upbringing of indigenous people.

5. Methodology

The data for the present paper consists of six indigenous oral narratives obtained through oral interviews, document review and researcher recollection. The data features ecologically related themes like the killing of animals, use of water bodies, reverence to the earth, etc. The following are the narratives that were considered for analyses. The full texts are provided in the Appendix section.

Table 1: The six indigenous oral narratives

N°	Narrative	Method of Collection	Source
1.	A Man in Nature	Document Review	Awing
2.	A Man and a Partridge	Document Review	Pinyin
3.	Forbidden Forest	Oral Interview	Nkob
4.	A Spring	Oral Interview	Kom
5.	The Fig Tree	Researcher Recollection	Mundum
6.	Grass Cutting	Researcher Recollection	Mundum

For analytical purposes and to meet the goal of this paper, I take the narratives in turn and analyse them for specific issues. Following Stibbe (2015), I examine how the various stories unearth the different worldviews which govern the lifestyle of indigenous people. Equally, the researcher judges the narratives against his ecosophy to determine their usefulness in tackling the ecological issues raised. Another thing that the researcher does is to determine the type of stories, i.e., whether they are salience, erasure, framings, metaphors, etc. The analysis also gives room for determining whether the discourses are positive, negative or ambivalent. The analysis also zooms in on the different ecological philosophies expressed through the narratives. The representation of different elements of the ecology also interests the analyst as these elements determine the types of power relations which exist in the ecological web.

6. Findings

After analysing the indigenous oral narratives (IONs), certain conclusions were reached which were considered pertinent. The results are hereafter presented, beginning with a summary analysis of the six narratives. The analysis identifies the narrative, the ecological issue raised through the narrative, the ecological philosophy, the type and the category of discourse.

Table 2: Summary ecolinguistic analysis of the six indigenous oral narratives

Narrative	Ecological Issue(s)	Ecosophies	Type	Category
A Man in Nature	Extinction of species, deforestation, climate change	Ecological or social justice, valuing living, preservation	Saliency	Ambivalent discourse
A Man and a Partridge	Extinction of species	Ecological justice, equality	Saliency	Positive or beneficial discourse
Forbidden Forest	Deforestation, climate change, extinction of species	Preservation, valuing living	Saliency	Positive or beneficial discourse
A Spring	Pollution, extinction of species	Valuing living, preservation	Saliency	Positive or beneficial discourse
The Fig Tree	Deforestation, climate change, extinction of species	Ecological or social justice, valuing living, preservation	Saliency	Positive or beneficial discourse
Grass Cutting	Climate change, extinction of species	Ecological or social justice, equality, valuing living, preservation	Saliency, Framings	Ambivalent discourse

The table above shows the six IONs and the different ecological issues which are discussed therein. As seen in the table, pressing ecological issues like climate change, extinction of species, deforestation and pollution are considered and thus have solutions in indigenous ecological knowledge. The table also indicates the different ecological philosophies which are construed and transmitted through indigenous oral narratives. The narratives can be classified, following Stibbe (2015), as saliency and framings, and as positive and ambivalent discourses. Overall, the table shows that indigenous oral ecological narratives can provide solutions to some of the arching existential environmental problems.

6.1. Ecosophies

In the various indigenous oral narratives, it is realised that there are some ecological philosophies. It appears that the indigenous people consciously or unconsciously construct the discourses with the aim of transmitting various ecological philosophies to the various generations of people in these communities. In the six IONs, we came across the following

ecosophies:

Table 3: Ecosophies in the six indigenous oral narratives

↕Ecosophy ↔ Narrative	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	%
Preservation	+	+	+	+	+	+	100
Equality	+	+	-	-	+	+	66.6
Ecological justice	+	+	-	-	+	+	66.6
Environmental limits	-	-	+	+	+	+	66.6
Valuing living	+	+	+	+	+	+	100

As the table above indicates, the indigenous oral narratives promote various ecosophies. We identified five ecological philosophies: preservation/conservation, equality, ecological justice, environmental limits, and valuing living. Some of the ecosophies are promoted in all the IONs. The most pervasive of the ecosophies are preservation/conservation and valuing living. These ecological philosophies are promoted in all narratives. The rest of the philosophies are all promoted in four of the six narratives. Two of the above ecosophies are presented below and explained with examples from the narratives.

6.1.1. Environmental limits

According to the ecosophy adopted, if human consumption exceeds the ability of natural resources to replenish themselves, then this damages the ability of ecological systems to support life (and living) into the future. It follows that if consumption leads to more waste than can be absorbed by ecosystems, the excess waste will prevent beings from living or living with high wellbeing. For man to have and live with high wellbeing, man has to respect environmental limits. A disregard for such limits generally results in adverse reactions from nature. We understand that to keep within the limits of environmental production and sustainability, man is supposed to act and use the resources with moderation. In the narratives analysed, I realised that indigenous people have looked for a way to transmit this ecosophy to generations through oral renditions.

From the indigenous oral narratives, I realise that indigenous people hold the belief that the environment or nature tends to behave in adverse ways when it is pushed to the limits. The ecosophy helps in curbing excessive human behaviours, which can exacerbate the ecological crisis. In the indigenous communities where this ecosophy is prevalent, people tend to respect nature and treat it in friendlier ways. For instance, in the narrative about water bodies, the ecosophy of environmental limits is clearly articulated.

There is a spring in Kom and the only thing one can use to carry water from it is the calabash. One cannot use a cup or a pan because it will raise a lot of dirt in that spring. Anytime one goes there and uses a cup or a pan, on reaching the house, his

bucket or container will be empty.

In this narrative, man is warned not to use certain utensils to carry water from the water bodies. Equally, it is clearly stated that if man does not adhere to such traditions, he will face dire consequences. This threat curbs excessive human exploitation or pollution of the water body thereby, giving marine organisms a chance to live.

6.1.2. Valuing living

There is an inherent understanding of the value of living when you read the indigenous oral narratives. At a broader level, the society enacts norms which foster the continued living of the various members of the ecosphere. In the oral narrative about the fig tree, for instance, the value of continued living is highly propagated. See excerpt below.

It is said and believed that if any organism, be it a bird, a snake, a monkey, etc., stands on the tree, no one is supposed to kill it. The people are prohibited from throwing anything at the tree. It is believed that if you go against the norm and throw a stone at the tree or kill an animal standing on it, you will face dire consequences.

In this narrative, the indigenous people are instructed not to kill any animal standing on the tree. This particular rule gives the organisms the possibility to live and enjoy their lives. Equally, it gives all animals who feel threatened the possibility of living, as long as they can at any opportune moment seek refuge in the tree. Therefore, this narrative, together with a couple of other narratives which are prevalent in the community, help in propagating the ecosophy of living.

6.2. Worldview

In the analysis, we realise the preponderance of one worldview. The way the indigenous people perceive the world around them is well articulated through this worldview. In the data, we realise that the most dominant worldview in indigenous communities is the ecocentric worldview. The people seem to place nature at the centre of everything they do. The ecocentricity of the belief systems, the nature of activities and various practices by indigenous people make their discourses fundamental in today's society. As we notice in the data, notions of birth, marriage, farming, etc., are governed by the dictates of nature. The people believe that if nature agrees to something, then it is right. We realise, therefore, that if we promote discourses which emphasise the centrality of nature, like the ones under study, there is a high possibility of reducing the destruction various ecosystems are undergoing.

6.3. Power dynamics

From our analysis, we realise that there is a significant shift in power dynamics in favour of the natural world. Contrary to modern models wherein man is seen as superior to all other beings, in the narratives analysed, we realised that the opposite is true. It is common to see that man goes to nature for guidance, counselling and judgement. These attributes which demonstrate superiority are not expressed by man towards nature; they are rather expressed by nature towards man. This superiority is seen through the various ideologies which surround the topics of discussion. Examples can be seen below:

It is believed that if you go against the norm and throw a stone at the tree or kill an animal standing on it, you will face dire consequences. The consequences could involve mysterious death, mysterious illnesses, the swelling of the body, etc. Once anybody goes against this, the person must undergo a certain procedure to appease the gods in order to receive their clemency, without which the person will gradually become sick and die.

In the above example, the tree is the centre of the activities in the community. Man's life is governed by the dictates of the tree. Accordingly, man cannot do anything to any entity on the tree without the consent of the tree. This shows how much power the tree wields in the community and therefore raises it above man. The power dynamic, therefore, shifts towards the tree, which is in contrast to the way trees are represented in contemporary western economic discourses.

6.4. Salience

For many reasons, the future of humanity is intricately linked to the future of the natural world. How we feel about the natural world, and, ultimately, how we treat it, is influenced by the ways the elements of nature are represented in the discourses and images which surround us. Salience is a kind of discourse which represents a particular area of life as important and worthy of consideration. In the narratives analysed in this paper, nature has been made salient through the foregrounding of particular elements. In the narratives, salience is seen through the use of language in representing elements of nature as the subject as an agent or sensor. That is to say, they are represented as doing, seeing and feeling things, rather than having things done to them. They are treated specifically, rather than abstractly represented as collective wholes. Equally, they are represented as unique individuals, rather than as indistinguishable members of a group, or as a being with a name.

When he arrived he told the chief: "Here is Mbee, a large royal animal which I caught and killed for the chief with my hands, without wounding it". The chief replied: "If what you're saying is true then I'll give you part of my village to rule as

one of my powerful subjects”. The chief sent for people to examine the leopard. It was discovered that the leopard wasn’t shot with a bullet; it was killed just with bare hands. The report was given to the chief. He asked for the leopard to be shown to him again. The chief discovered that it was true. He honoured his subject by giving him one of the village quarters to rule and to collect taxes from. He was given the title of Nkem, which means village notable. The chief recognised him as a powerful subject... (narrator and audience say together) who needed some territorial area on which to wield his power. After all, among the leopard pelts in the palace his own will figure among them.

In the above narrative, it is observed that the people of Awing hold the leopard in high regard. Even though this aspect of the narrative is destructive as it encourages the hunting of leopards, it can be observed that the leopard is considered primordial in power stratification in the community. In wanting to become a notable, it is important for the interested candidate to kill one of the royal animals. This category of animals, represented in the narrative by the leopard, is salient in power dynamics in indigenous communities. This means, therefore, that animals are important to the people, not just as food but as a source of power. This kind of discourse, according to the ecosophy adopted, is supposed to be resisted or reframed to align completely with the ecosophy of the researcher.

Still in the same narrative, other elements of nature are given salience. We recognise the role of the tree in housing the man, the cock and the lion. In the excerpt, particular importance is given to the tree. The tree serves as a hub in which many things happen. We see various activities happening in the tree. For instance, in the tree, the man and the cock had refuge, the lion also rested. At a point, the elements of nature conspire in the tree to serve as a buffer or protection to man. The first thing that serves as a protection to man is the height of the tree. Later on, the lion, who got tired while climbing the tree, served as protection by killing the leopard. Finally, the moon scared the lion away and saved the man’s life. In all, the salience of the tree is noticed in the fact that the tree serves as the meeting point for all members of the ecological web. If discourses which promote the protection of trees are made more prominent in society, many people will learn to respect nature by protecting trees to grow to a certain height and serve humanity in one way or another. The importance of trees will not be underestimated, and people will valorise and protect them.

6.5. Ecological issues raised

As a paper aimed at throwing light onto the solutions that indigenous oral narratives can provide for ecological problems, we were intent on identifying the different ecological problems which can be resolved with the aid of the discourses. In the course of the analysis, we observed that the narratives addressed issues such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, and the extinction of species. In the narratives, though not overtly stated,

the issue of climate change is raised through the protection of forests and trees. As science has revealed, carbon dioxide is the leading contributor to climate change, and trees generally absorb the gas. As such, through the oral narratives, indigenous people promote the reduction of the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere by protecting forests and trees, which will in turn absorb any carbon dioxide emitted into the atmosphere. This particular issue is treated in N1, N3, N5, and N6. The first three promote positive values, while the last one is a kind of negative discourse. This is because the discourse promotes the cutting of vegetation which implies the destruction of the natural environment. The fact that the discourse promotes environmental destruction means that it is against the ecosphere adopted for this paper.

7. Conclusion

The degeneration of the ecosystems on which life depends has become a central issue in contemporary discourses. This has resulted in an upsurge in the literature which seeks to identify various solutions to life-threatening ecological challenges. In the current paper, we investigated the role of six indigenous oral narratives from the Northwest Region of Cameroon in fighting contemporary ecological crisis. We noticed with amazement that the narratives are replete with various eco-friendly ideologies. These, if spread and popularised, we noted, will go a long way to curb the life-threatening challenges we face today. We realise that the narratives can provide solutions to ecological challenges like the extinction of species, deforestation, pollution, and climate change. We also realised that indigenous people revere nature, making it even more salient than humans.

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Appendix: Transcription of oral narratives

Narrative 1

One day a man left his home to visit another country. He took a cock with him. When he came to a certain place, night met him. There was a tall, tall tree standing on the road. The tree was so tall that it almost touched the sky. The man climbed the tree with his cock. He climbed, climbed, up. He finally reached the top of the tree where they could sleep. Then came a lion. He tried to climb the tree. He reached the middle of the tree. He was tired. He decided to rest and sleep there, in the middle of the tree. A leopard arrived, started climbing the tree and reached the middle where the lion was sleeping. When the lion saw him he landed a slap pang on the head of the leopard. The leopard fell down the tree and died.

The man at the top of the tree knew from the smell around him that there was a lion nearby, somewhere on the tree. He decided to prevent his cock from crowing since he was afraid that the cock would reveal his presence. When it was crowing-time for the cock, i.e. around the time women cook atchu, the cock tried to crow but didn't crow, it crowed kukuku'u inside its stomach, indistinctly and barely heard. All the same, the lion below them heard the noise. He thought that it was a noise from the moon, for the moon was shining like burnt grass on the hill. The lion roared and rushed down the tree with the speed of an aeroplane. The lion feared that the moon was about to hold him so he ran, ran, ran a distance like from Awing to Akum without resting.

The following day the man from the top of the tree climbed down. As he reached the bottom, he saw the dead leopard lying on the ground. He decided to discontinue the journey. He carried the leopard to the palace of the chief of his village. When he arrived he told the chief: "Here is Mbee, a large royal animal which I caught and killed for the chief with my hands, without wounding it." The chief replied: "If what you're saying is true then I'll give you part of my village to rule as one of my powerful subjects."

The chief sent for people to examine the leopard. It was discovered that the leopard wasn't shot with a bullet; it was killed just with bare hands. The report was given to the chief. He asked for the leopard to be shown to him again. The chief discovered that it was true. He honoured his subject by giving him one of the village quarters to rule and to collect taxes from. He was given the title of Nkem, which means village notable. The chief recognised him as a powerful subject... (narrator and audience say together) who needed some territorial area on which to wield his power. After all, among the leopard pelts in the palace his own will figure among them.

Narrative 2

Once this hunter, you all know him, was very famous and known by most people in this village. During one of the latest exploits he killed a tiger. (Audience: "Ah! A tiger. Did he

kill it alone?") You know the hunter is exceptional. He killed it all alone with his gun and spear and dog. He killed this tiger when he was already tired. The tiger was exceptionally heavy for him to carry alone. He went home and on his way he met the partridge, who was very willing to help him. They returned and the partridge helped him to carry the game. On their way back home, the hunter, who was always very cunning, started thinking of what to do so that the whole animal should go to him. The hunter remarked: "After all, I killed it, should I share it with him just because he helped me to carry it? Can't I have it all for myself?"

The hunter had got a sharp piece of bamboo in his hunting bag. As they were very near home, he allowed the partridge to go ahead and he followed very close behind. He got the sharpened piece of bamboo and pierced the buttocks of the partridge. The partridge quacked off, kwaa kwaa, and fled thinking that the tiger was not completely dead. The hunter ran home. When the chickens were calling in their young ones to retire for the evening, he got two of his family members and they went to carry the dead tiger, which was abandoned by the partridge at the roadside. They went. They collected it. They returned. A good heavy meal was prepared with it.

In the morning, the hunter sent one of his sons to go and fetch water. This, his lazy son refused, saying that he must be induced with some meat before he can go. His parents were very angry but ended by giving him a piece of bone which he ate on his way to the stream. At the stream, this boy, still eating his succulent bone, met with the son of the partridge who asked for a bit of the bone — just a bit. The boy refused. The partridge's son scolded him. The boy poured insults on him, told him that his father couldn't stand a simple push on his buttocks. He, the partridge's son, wondered why such ill luck should befall him to see the hunter's son. The hunter's son asked: "Why should I take a hoe to the farm on the day of Afedgone?"

The partridge's son ran away, told his father the encounter and the exchange he had with his friend's son. The partridge was very upset but continued to deal in friendly terms with the hunter. Having not eaten part of the tiger's meat, he decided upon revenge. He asked his wife to prepare beans, soak them in oil and serve his friend, the hunter, when he comes that day from the bush with him. He left. He went ahead. Then when the hunter came to the partridge's compound, his wife was asked to eat quickly and follow her husband to the raffia-palm bush. He ate the beans like a pig that has not eaten its nsta for three days. The partridge, through his wizardry, had transformed himself into these beans.

When the hunter came near the raffia-palm bush he called out and the partridge directed him to continue. At a certain place after suffering, walking through these various misdirections, the partridge decided to talk to him from his stomach. For nine sunny days the hunter was unable to defecate, for the partridge remained in his stomach so that he couldn't defecate. The partridge said: "My friend you think that I'm a prisoner in your stomach? I'm sorry that rather, you are the prisoner. You have acute stomach aches. I'll live on your delicious intestines, liver and all in your stomach. I'll eat my own tiger meat in your intestines."

For nine market weeks the hunter lived in agony carrying the partridge about. One day the partridge told him to give him a fat goat with up-turned horns. It should be a black goat with no stripes or a white one with no marks on it. The hunter told his son to go and look for a lean white goat. The partridge threatened his life. He said: “Look! You don’t want to obey my instructions. Why bring a lean goat when you have a certain fat one which I know?”

The hunter defended himself by saying that it was the fault of his son. His son didn’t obey him, for he had asked for the fat one. He then told his son to go and bring the fat white goat. The partridge saw it and said: “My dear friend of the village. You should learn to be honest. You fooled me to carry your meat and you ate it alone. You told a lie when I asked for the fattest goat. Do you know that as I’m in you I regulate and receive all messages you send out? Why did you accuse your son falsely? Don’t be too greedy. The things of the world are for everyone, not for one person. Since we have the same God, I do excuse you. That’s the only reason for your pardon.”

The partridge got his goat. He took it home. He left the hunter’s stomach free again. He killed the fat goat which the hunter had kept as a sacred animal for many years. Some people had wanted to exchange it for a cow but he refused. His family had the honour and privilege of eating the meat for more than one whole market week. (Audience comments) ...this was surely better than just a part of the tiger’s meat.

(When the story ended here there was a passionate debate about which of these two characters was admirable, who was a loser, who was wicked?)

Narrative 3

The Nkob is an evil forest in the village. It is said that the Nkob was founded by the first settlers of the land. In this Nkob, most of the ancestors of the land were buried. This place is most often found behind the fon’s palace. Nobody is allowed to enter this forest and not even a tree is cut from this forest. The fon and the elders enter this forest when they want to cleanse the land with sacrifices. This forest also acts as a means of solution in case the village is confronted with a problem. Most often when the year comes to an end and when they are about to celebrate the end of year festivities, sacrifices are poured to the evil forest in a bid to please the ancestors.

Narrative 4

There is a spring in Kom and the only thing one can use to carry water from it is the calabash. One cannot use a cup or a pan because it will raise a lot of dirt in that spring. Anytime one goes there and uses a cup or a pan, on reaching the house, his bucket or container will be empty. As a result of that, many villagers avoided using cups anytime they were at the spring.

Narrative 5

There is a fig tree which is believed to be home to the gods of Alorri. According to the story, this tree possesses mystical powers. It is said and believed that if any organism, be it a bird, a snake, a monkey, etc., stands on the tree, no one is supposed to kill it. The people are prohibited from throwing anything at the tree. It is believed that if you go against the norm and throw a stone at the tree or kill an animal standing on it, you will face dire consequences. The consequences could involve mysterious death, mysterious illnesses, the swelling of the body, etc. Once anybody goes against this, the person must undergo a certain procedure to appease the gods in order to receive their clemency, without which the person will gradually become sick and die.

Narrative 6

In Mundum, there is a story about the planting and harvesting seasons. According to native customs and traditions, prior to the planting season, sacrifices are offered to the gods. The sacrifice is generally offered to the god of the earth to ask for the fertility of the soil and a healthy and abundant harvest. Accordingly, prior to the farming season, a sacrifice comprising a concoction of various natural herbs is placed at all major and minor roads leading into and out of the village. The same exercise is repeated at the level of the individual quarters. Generally, on a fixed date decided upon by the council of elders in collaboration with the gods, men, women, and children all gather at various points in the village with herbs of all kinds. These herbs are then cut into small bits and mixed. While the cutting process is going on, the commoners are called upon to withdraw from the scene. They will then return hours later to pick up their share of the concoction and head to their various destinations. The commoners will place the concoction at the entrances and four corners of the farm. This is done to prevent evil spirits from stealing the good part of the seeds which are supposed to be planted. This is also considered a form of sacrifice to make the piece of land more fertile. It follows that anyone who fails to exercise this runs the risk of having a fruitless cultivation season. The person will plant like any other person, but the crops will either be stunted, overcrowded, barren, or they will be harvested by various animals the moment they are getting ready. It is believed that prior to the farming season, if the rain is not forthcoming, the cutting of the grass means that the next day, it must rain.