

EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS OF THE BAKA PYGMIES⁽¹⁾

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ABSTRACT This study analyzes the everyday conversations of the Baka Pygmies in southeastern Cameroon. The Baka, the Bakwele farmer-fishers, and the Hausa live together in the study village. I recorded their conversations using a video camera and produced verbatim translations with the help of my informant, which were later subjected to conversation analysis. Excerpts from conversations about several topics that vividly reflect the sociocultural characteristics of, and current problems experienced by, the Baka people are presented. First, I examine the “foraging mode of thought” among the Baka, which is characterized by “interest in the present” and “relationships with the forest.” Second, relationships with actors, such as other ethnic groups and the national/international agencies working in the vicinity of the Baka are analyzed.

Key Words: Baka Pygmies; Everyday conversation; Foraging mode of thought; Intra/inter ethnic relations.

INTRODUCTION: WHY EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS?

“Ninety Percent of Culture Is Communication”

First, I will present an episode that illustrates the focus of this research. Although my current research centers on the Baka Pygmies in southeastern Cameroon, I have also studied the Bongando farmers in the DR-Congo. En route to the research area, I spent 1 night in a small town so that our plane could refuel. During this layover, Mr. David, our American pilot, asked me about my work. His reaction to my response, namely, that I was studying local people’s conversations, made a deep impression on me. “Oh,” he said, “90% of their culture is communication!”

Indeed, the only way that people who are not accustomed to using written language can transmit their culture is by conversation. I assume that most anthropologists who conduct fieldwork for long periods of time are curious about the content of their informants’ daily conversations. The range of topics covered in such conversations is vast, and the venues in which they occur are varied (e.g., gossip and kitchens en route to the forest, respectively). Evans-Pritchard (1940) described the Nuer’s vocabulary for cattle as resembling “the galaxy.” If so, the entirety of their conversations would be “the universe,” which is composed of numerous galaxies.

Advantages and Difficulties of “Ethno-conversation Analysis”

I have been studying social interaction within 2 African ethnic groups, the Bongando in DR-Congo and the Baka Pygmies in Cameroon. Thus far, my articles (Kimura, 1990; 2001; 2003) have focused primarily on characteristic “forms” of verbal interaction, and the “content” of their conversations have not been fully analyzed. In this paper, I focus on my collection of transcripts of ordinary conversations among Baka individuals to understand their everyday lives.

For several reasons, it is actually quite difficult to record and transcribe everyday conversations. One problem is that it is difficult to record natural conversations as people may become nervous or self-conscious in the presence of a video recorder. Indeed, the use of a recording device may influence the content of the conversation. A second problem involves transcription and interpretation. Transcribing daily conversations is often laborious and difficult, even when they are in one’s native language. In my case, the target language was Baka.⁽²⁾ Moreover, the frequency of ungrammatical sentences; word omissions; demonstrative pronouns referring to people, times, and places; and proper names can render the topic of daily conversation quite ambiguous. During the interpretative process, I consistently confirmed the meaning of each demonstrative pronoun by consulting with my informant. The third difficulty concerns “understanding” or “interpretation.” Our understanding of what subjects are saying may be superficial because we do not fully attend to their own “language game” (Wittgenstein, 1953). I believe that these problems partially explain why “conversation analysis” is not common in anthropology.

In this context, then, why did I employ this method instead of the simple “interview” approach used in most anthropological studies? I believe that conversation analysis is valuable for several reasons. First, I find both the process and the results of transcription to be interesting, revealing important and, heretofore, unknown facts. Second, interviewers can, however inadvertently, guide what their subjects say. Ordinary life can be captured only by analyzing daily conversations.⁽³⁾

Subjects and Method

The conversations that follow were recorded from 2000 to 2007 in Ndongo Village (see Preface, in this volume) in southeastern Cameroon, which also contains our field station (Fig. 1, also see Online 1). The Baka Pygmies, the Bakwele, who are farmers and fishers, and the Hausa people, who came from the northern part of Cameroon, live together in this village. When Baka individuals visited our house, I recorded their conversations using a video camera. 1 filming (“session”) lasted up to about 10 minutes. In most cases, they understood that they were being recorded, and I did not ask them to focus on any particular topics. When they addressed their comments to me, I joined their conversation (i.e., I was not an “invisible anthropologist”).

I translated conversations with the assistance of my Baka informant, Mr. Mobisa, using Lingala⁽⁴⁾ as the intermediate language. I tried to transcribe each word of each conversation, and the production of complete transcripts was very time-consuming. For example, a 5-minute conversation took us about a week to transcribe and



Fig. 1. Field Station.

translate because, following the approach of conversation analysis (Nofsinger, 1991), I tried to produce a word-for-word transcript rather than a mere outline of the spoken content. I found it surprising that the participants could understand one another using such ostensibly ambiguous utterances. Such mutual understanding was probably facilitated by their residence in a “high-context” (Hall, 1983) community.

This procedure provides only a glimpse into the “universe” of Baka conversation. However, these transcripts offer insights into several topics. I first investigate one aspect of hunter-gatherers, the so called “the foraging mode of thought” (Barnard, 2002). I will pay particular attention to their “interest in the present” and their close relationship with the forest environment. Next, I will examine how they relate to other Baka individuals and to other actors in their local society. Inter-ethnic relationships with Bakwele and Hausa individuals and with Japanese researchers will be analyzed within the context of the current trend toward globalization.

The following transcripts omit several types of information that usually appear in standard conversation analysis (e.g., duration of silences). Annotations by the author are presented in brackets [], and personal names are abbreviated as 3 characters. The names of men are presented as 3 capital letters (e.g., MBS), and those of women are presented as 1 capital letter followed by 2 lower-case letters (e.g., Sau). French and Lingala words are written in small capital letters.

FORAGING MODE OF THOUGHT

I first examine the extent to which the Baka’s “hunter-gathereriness” appears in their everyday conversations.

Interest in the Present

When I began transcribing Baka conversations, I noticed that they frequently talked only about what I was doing in front of them, such as recording a video. As illustrated by the following transcripts, this seemed to represent an “interest in the present,” which is typically observed in hunter-gatherer societies.

Transcript 1: You take the word

In this session, several Baka men and women were talking outside the field station house. (This is the only transcript that includes the Baka language [shown in italic].)

1. MBS: *moa* (you) *kbɔ* (take in) *momo-bo* (mouth of the man) *a ngoma* (word) *ea* (he) *ja* (takes) *ea ja*.
You [= Kimura?] take the word of the people. He takes (it), he takes (it).
2. A man: *nnn*.
3. MBS: *iyē nde* (interrogative) *na* (he) COMMENCE⁽⁵⁾ *na me* (do) *a kē* (that). He begins to do it [to take a video], doesn't he?
4. MLG: *wo* (they) *tɔ* (give) *kē* (that) *e a le* (of mine) *a* (for us)?
They give us ours [= our photos?].
(*omission*)
5. MKG: *wa* (they) *ja* (take) *noo* (other) *bo* (person).
They take other person. [At that time, the author turned the camera.]

Thus, the recording of a video was directly reflected in their conversation.

Transcript 2: The word goes into the recorder

Each Baka village contains a hut for chat, known as an mbanjo. In this session, 2 men in the mbanjo were talking as they consumed alcohol. I tried to record each utterance of each man by using compact tape recorders and asking each participant to suspend a recorder on his neck as if it were a large necklace. Thus, this conversation occurred in a fairly artificial situation.

1. SAC: By the way, I say, my affine [= AUM], I told you like this [about the tape recorder].
2. MBS: I get this. I place water [= distilled spirit].
3. EWA: Give me [the spirit], ooo! What are you doing! Give it here.
4. SAC: It was just like this. We had a harp [tape recorder]. [SAC was talking about his previous experience of the author making a recording in the forest.]
We will, we will wear [tape recorders] like this.
(*omission*)
5. SAC: You will see right now. This time, chore, white man brought this chore. He brought such a good thing [= tape recorder?] and settled here.
(*omission*)
6. MBS: They say. Listen. Someone talks, and after, another talks. After that, his [= Kimura's] friends will take [= listen] it. Because they [= voices] enter the machine [tape recorder].

Line 6 shows that the participants clearly recognized that I was recording and analyzing their conversations.

Transcript 3: They are recording the conversation

Inside the field station, BZL, MNT, and several other Baka individuals discussed the forest camp. They talked primarily about the local tobacco they had planted in that area, but BZL suddenly interrupted by mentioning my recording.

1. BZL: We are having a talk here. They [=Japanese] are doing some other work [=recording of the conversation]. Hehe [laughter].

After this utterance, the conversation returned to the tobacco. Baka conversations are frequently characterized by *non sequiturs* (Kimura, 2010b). According to conversation analysis, in such cases, the structure of the “adjacency pairs” is ambiguous, which renders translation of Baka conversations difficult.⁽⁶⁾

Transcript 4: They are dancing *buma* in the photo

While I was recording a conversation between MBS and another Baka man in the field station, MBS noticed a pamphlet for Jengi National Park, which was going to be established near the village. He saw a photograph of the *buma* dance of the Baka and said the following:

1. MBS: Huhu [laughter], they are dancing *buma* walala-walala [onomatopoeia] showing their ribs.
2. MNT: [while looking at the photo] He [= a man in the photo] is sitting alone.

Transcript 5: This laptop computer is great

The following conversation occurred while MBS and DED were looking at equipment on the table at the field station:

1. DED: Oishi⁽⁷⁾ connected his thing [= video camera to a laptop computer]. To the screen.
2. MBS: To the television.
(*omission*)
3. DED: It [= photo image] passes inside [the computer; meaning “displays the photo image”]. They work, screen works, and the people will watch you.
4. MBS: Because they have another computer, and connect [the photo image] to it.
5. MBS: They connect it [= the computer] to the battery.
6. MBS: And then it [= photo image] appears. The people watch the persons [in the computer display] beautifully.
(*omission*)
7. MBS: It [= computer] is great.
8. DED: Great, indeed.
9. MBS: They do them [= taking the video] here, they connect it here, and if they take it [= photo], they go and give it to the TV station.
10. MBS: [In] their forest. [The Baka refer to one’s own land as “forest.”]
11. DED: They sell it.

This transcript shows that some Baka individuals were aware of video and computer technology. It is also interesting that they used the word “forest” to refer to one’s own land or area.

Relationship with the Forest

The Baka are now sedentary and cultivate cacao or plantain, which raises questions about how this change to a sedentary lifestyle has affected their relationship with the forest. The following transcript offers some insight into this issue.

Transcript 6: *Feke* juice and duiker's meat

This conversation was recorded outside the field station. 4 young men and 4 young women were present. During the year in which the study was conducted, the *feke* (*Irvingia gabonensis*) trees, which produce tasty fruit, were fruiting heavily in the forest. In the middle of the conversation, they spoke about Peter's duiker (*Cephalophus callipygus*).

1. Sau: He he he he he he! [laughter; they were laughing because their clothes had become soiled with *feke* juice.]
2. EWA (to MKG): [MKG's] clothes becomes dirty, all becomes red.
3. Sau: He he he he he he! [laughter]
4. Kwd: U, fu, fefefefe! [laughter]
5. Sau: EWA ate Peter's duiker and grew fat.
6. Kwd: EWA drank *feke* juice and became thin.
7. Bgs: He [=EWA] eats it, even skin, even skin. You see how the *feke* juice worked?
8. Bgs: [MNT] becomes fat eating Peter's duiker.
9. Sau: Hu, nhu, the clothes becomes... by the *feke* juice...
10. MLG: He [=Kimura] took photograph.
(*omission*)
11. Kwd: Why don't you pass us honey?

Forest products, such as *feke* fruits, Peter's duiker, and honey were jokingly referenced in this conversation, indicating that people remain strongly interested in the forest and forest products.

Transcript 7: Elephants come to *bai*

The next example is a conversation among adult men concerning the forest camp, the local tobacco that is cultivated there, and elephant hunting. The term *bai* refers to grasslands that are scattered in the forest and serve as gathering places for animals. Baka hunters go to these sites to hunt elephants.

1. MNT: That place [= the forest camp where MNT stayed] was just like the [cleaned up] village.
2. BZL: I walk with a mortar. That place is like the center of the village.
3. SAC: Exactly.
4. SAC: It is the village.
5. BZL: Nn [affirmation].
(*omission*)
6. BZL: Did you sleep in the *bai*? At that time, when you went there.
7. DED?: We slept there, at the *bai*, in the upstream direction, passing the *gbado* tree there.

8. BZL: Okay!
9. DED?: There, upstream.
10. BZL: There, there, upstream.
(*omission*)
11. MNT: They do, they go and see the elephants come, come to there, under the *feke* tree. They [= elephants] come [to eat *feke* fruits]. They, who are looking for them [= the elephants], they come.
12. MBS: Hun!
13. MBS: Who is looking for? Who is looking for the elephant?
14. MNT: They told a lie about that animal, that elephant, nevertheless.
15. MNT: They [= elephants] hear the gunshot, and are anxious about it, at the *bai*.
16. ?: Large animal [= elephant], it runs.
17. BZL: *Bai* died, died, and no animals.
18. BZL: *Bai* died, and no animals.

Even today, elephants are hunted around *bai*. I cannot fully understand what “*Bai* died” means, but it is obvious that they have a strong interest in the success of elephant hunting at *bai*.

Transcript 8: The honey of stingless bees and yams

This session was recorded in the *mbanjo* hut in the village while 5 men sat and happily talked about forest products, such as the honey of stingless bees (*dandu*), guinea fowl, aardvarks, and *safas* (a kind of wild yam; *Dioscorea praehensilis*). Only a portion of this long conversation is presented.

1. EWA: It went like this, my friend, it occurred upstream of Mbaka River.
2. EWA: It went like this.
3. SAC: A half cup of, only a small spirit, white man gave me. After the rain, I got it. [At the beginning of this session, I gave them some alcohol.]
4. EWA: BID and fellows said.
5. EWA: I talked to them, I actually [saw honey of a stingless bee (*dandu*)].
6. EWA: Go, let's go, let's take a walk. We take a walk, in the mountain. [They went there to look for wild yams, *safas*.]
7. EWA: Yes, I saw him [= BID] coming.
8. SAC: What is that place? [He is asking about the place with the bird's nest and hive of stingless bees.]
9. EWA: There, upstream of Mbaka River.
10. SAC: Yes.
11. EWA: I saw him coming. He said, he and me, come here.
12. EWA: Come here. Under this tree, which they call *ngele*, there are dung of birds.
13. SAC: Een [interjection].
14. EWA: I came papapapa [onomatopoeia].
15. MBS: You should talk into the tape recorder, my friend. Talk well into [the recorder]. [MBS encouraged other participants to follow the instructions for my research.]

16. EWA: I came papapapa.
17. EWA: I go [there]. I say [as follows]. Where is it [= bird nest], oh? Where is it?
18. ?: It is as this.
19. SAC: Our thing, which was there, which was like that [= hive of stingless bees], wasn't like the previous thing [that SAC got previously]? [There was a bird's nest under the tree, and a hive of stingless bees were on the tree.]
20. EWA: Yes, it was, um, it was... I came, I came, I touched around the *ngele* tree. [And, after that, he sat on the tree.]
21. EWA: I, I say, yes, hole [of tree]. Hole, that hole, he got across the hole, mouth [= hole of tree], mouth, this, this, that mouth, yes, that is good, yes, ehen, I say.
22. SAC: Uwe, uwe [interjection], they call, such thing they call, it was not the mouth [= entry of the bird's nest]. Come and see, come and see, friend, [it was] another good thing [= hive of stingless bees]. You call it a good thing.
23. YGM: Yes, the people, we, they call just so. [Their name for such a tree.]

Before presenting other transcripts, I will outline 2 scenes. 1 was recorded in the village Mbaka III while several women were chatting in front of a house. They were talking about the fishing camp that they were about to visit, noting they could eat much *mosuka* at such camps. In the Baka language, *mosuka* refers to foods high in protein such as meat or fish.⁽⁸⁾ They delightedly chatted about cooking equipment, such as pans, and the details of their diet.

The second scene, which occurred in an *mbanjo* and involved 3 adult men, including BZL, and 1 middle-age woman, is somewhat amazing. Their utterances frequently overlapped,⁽⁹⁾ and the conversation proceeded as follows. "A young woman in N'Djamena village went into the forest for 2 months after quarreling with her husband. She might be mentally deranged. She went around in the wide area of the forest, in half-naked style, but could obtain some foods like papaya or plantain in the forest. Recently, YGM in Mindulu village caught her, saying 'Don't escape.' YGM will take her to the witch doctor, when she comes back to her home." Although it is unclear whether this story was apocryphal, it is notable that the Baka individuals involved in this conversation never expected that a young woman could survive in the forest alone under the conditions described.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

The Baka gossiped not only about others in their society but also about neighboring farmers, the Japanese researchers, the World Wildlife Fund, and the logging companies that surround their society.

Intra-ethnic Relationships

In contrast with their gentle mood, Baka individuals are often critical of others during conversations. They seemed to happily and, at times, excitedly engage in gossip (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Gossip among Baka women.

Transcript 9: DED drank too much and did bad things

Several women were discussing DED's actions, saying he was drunk too frequently and was violent to his family.⁽¹⁰⁾ His wife returned to her parents' home in Congo-Brazzaville with their children. Every woman became excited, exclaiming that he would die. Their utterances overlapped, and the same word was frequently repeated.

1. Ngl: If he [= DED] was called there, he told the problem there, at the place of his uncle [= AJK], he told him the problem, told him the problem. [The man whom DED told was] like another uncle, another person. [DED spoke disrespectfully, as if AJK were not his uncle.]
2. Ngb or Myn: Wasn't it so? [It was so.]
3. ?: Iyoo. [cheer]
4. Myn: [AJK said:] At that time, he [= DED] didn't do him [= AJK] [good], did he [= DED] do for you [= AJK] good?
5. Ngl: Maybe, maybe, he [= AJK] called inside [of the problem]. [AJK tried to agree with DED.]
6. Ngb: Does he [= DED] consider the aged person [= DED's mother] as his wife? [His mother is not his wife, so he should not do bad things to her.]
7. Ngl: Weuwe! [cheer]
8. Ngb: An old person [= AJK], that person, stood. He [= DED] [was drunk and] went. [AJK failed to persuade DED.]
9. Ngb: He [= DED] will kill her [= DED's mother]. It is good [for him] to stand. He goes.
10. Ngb: I will ask you about it. That old man, uncle of yours, how will he walk toward there. [AJK cannot go to Congo-Brazzaville to get DED's wife.] His body is trembling with fever there. [AJK is sick.]

11. Ngl: Will he [= AJK?] go to get [DED's] wife?
(*omission*)
12. ?: If he [= DED] will call you, Myn, if you will see him coming through the forest path [you should not do anything].
13. Myn: My friend [= Ngb], by the amulet [which stops wrongdoing], he [= DED] will die.
14. Ngb: This child [= DED, who is Myn's child], what is he doing?
15. Myn: He will die, my friend, place [leave this problem], he will die.
16. Myn: To him, that thing, amulet, will enter.

Transcript 10: NJG was drunk and beat his wife

This session also focused on a drunken quarrel as NJG had beaten his wife the previous day.

1. BZL: It [= spirit] made NJG beat his house. [NJG drank too much and beat on the wall of his house.]
2. KPM: And they didn't sleep.
3. ?: You avoided me at night. Why? [The word of NJG's wife.]
4. KPM: They didn't sleep.
5. BZL: Up to the morning.
6. EWD: These persons drank too much today.
7. BZL: They don't sleep.
8. BZL: NJG beats on the house.

Transcript 11: BKL won't come back

MNK's next comments were uttered in the *mbanjo* while he was sitting alone and talking loudly.⁽¹¹⁾ He complained that BKL, his young relative, had left his home and was traveling among several villages. (Because the following transcript depicts a monologue, the style of transcription differs from that used elsewhere.)

BKL told / BKL did, e, did, ee! / I [= BKL] do like this, I do like this. / I come, I come. [MNK was speaking on behalf of BKL.] / [But] He goes / BKL, that [= BKL] there [he is]. / Every time BKL stays [in N'Djamena village]. / He always left. / Till today he doesn't see us. / If I don't go there, I...their mother... / I tell you here. / MYL, come here. / Your mother suffers. / MYL, hey, come here. / Your mother suffers. / Haa, yes. / [BKL says] I will come, I will come, I will come. / [But] I don't see him. / If you are strong today, this Sunday, / this day, this day, / you won't live together with your mother. / If you will see [her], / I will send the children to you. / You will go to tell [the problem of mother's illness]. / MYL will come, he will come. / You say this. / All the while, all the while, cough [of mother] ends. [Do you think so?] / If something happens to you this year, / Do you think it [= cough] ends quickly?

Similar to BKL, adolescent Baka males often leave their home villages to travel to other villages or towns. They do so to seek both jobs and marriage partners.

Inter-ethnic Relationships

One main topic of the conversations of hunter-gatherers in the African rain forest is their relationships with neighboring farmers. The following transcripts provide examples of how these farmers are portrayed in daily conversations among Baka individuals.

Transcription 12: I don't like that woman

When situated in a house located along a road, Baka individuals always notice persons passing by.

1. MBS: What did he [= a Bakwele man] do to you? [He called a Bakwele woman who was passing by on the road about an incident that occurred the previous day.]
2. Woman: ...[Can't be heard.]
3. MBS: Ee? [Asked again]
4. MNT: At that time, he [the Bakwele man] drank.
5. BET: I don't like that *kaka* [= farmer] woman.
6. MNT: I don't like such situation [= the incident]
7. BSG: What she [that Bakwele woman] did to RAF [the Bakwele man] is, her insult is, bad.
8. ?: Sure.

In this case, the Bakwele woman passed along a distant path, and the Baka participants in this conversation were rebuking her with this critical appraisal of her actions.

Transcript 13: Our ball

4 Baka men were talking about the soccer balls that I had brought to the village. I planned to present them to 2 other villages, but they wanted to keep 1 ball for the Baka.

1. MBY: Tell me. I see a ball.
2. YMB: Round one.
3. MBY: Our balls, where are they?
4. MBY: Huun, our other balls, where are they?
(*omission*)
5. YMB: They were 2. 1 is there.
6. BMT: He [= Kimura] will say. It [= bulldozer] will, the persons [of bulldozer] will dig there. They will make soccer ground here, for us. These people will kick the ball. Why do they pass [the ball] to the farmers?
7. YMB: CHR did so, people of Ndongo Village take 1, and 1 remains here.
8. MBY: Why did they give it to them?
(*omission*)
9. MBY: Yes.
10. YMB: If, afterwards, the Bakwele continue to do like that, it is bad.
11. MBY: We, we don't like it.

In this session, the Baka individuals were seeking equal status with regard to the soccer ball. This kind of complaint was frequently heard in their conversations.

Transcript 14: Is “*yekeyeke*” a Baka word?

This transcript illustrates the Baka understanding of the cultural differences between themselves and farmers (such as the Bakwele). 5 Baka men and 2 Japanese (the author and Ichikawa) were sitting in a Japanese house discussing whether the word *yekeyeke* (confusing) is part of the Baka language. (Words in the Lingala language are presented in small capital letters [e.g., KILIKILI].)

1. AJK: This is a Baka word.
2. MNT: What do they say [in Lingala]? KILIKILI?
3. AJK: Yes.
4. MNT: Oh, it’s a word of farmers.
5. SAC: Isn’t it a word of farmers?
6. AJK: Yes.
7. MNT: Wei [agreement].
8. SAC: Let’s call it, it, in our Baka language.
9. DED: It, it goes into Lingala. [Lingala words such as KILIKILI are being introduced into the Baka language.]
10. AJK: Aaaaaan.
11. MNT: Fun, fun.
12. DED: There, that is Lingala.
13. MNT: They call it *yekeyeke* [in Baka language].
14. DED: It (*yekeyeke*) is Lingala.
15. SAC: This discussion is *yekeyeke*. [SAC says that this discussion itself is *yekeyeke* (confusing).]
16. MNT: *Yekeyeke* [= confusing].
17. AJK: Yes, it [= *yekeyeke*] is Baka language.
18. MNT: [It is] Baka language.

This session reflects the Baka ethnic identity with respect to their language.

Transcript 15: A Baka child died from a curse placed by a Bakwele individual

This transcript focuses on a curse involving the Baka and the Bakwele. BZL and several women were talking in front of our field station house. The conversation proceeded as follows. “2 Baka children, EWE and ANM, did jobs in the cacao field of EMN (a Bakwele man). They frequently thieved and ate the cooking there. EMN’s wife got angry and put curse medicine in the dish. A Baka child who ate that dish died after he came back to his home. EMN knew about that incident and got angry.” Irrespective of the veracity of other portions of this conversation, the Baka child may, in fact, have died.

1. BZL: It [= curse medicine] comes into a man’s [= his] body. Into that child, his children [= the children EMN employs; EWE and ANM]. They [= EWE, ANM] every time get a thing [= curse medicine].
2. Ngl: They [= EMN’s sons’ wives] brought [bad things] into the house. Into their place.

3. BZL: They brought [problem] into the house. He [= EMN] didn't know [what it was]. He didn't know. [Because EMN visited another place, he didn't know about the incident.]
4. Ngl: They [= persons who were in EMN's house] knew that there was sorcery.
5. BZL: Yes, her, her sorcery, he [= EWE?] said that she gave him [= dead child] her sorcery. Her sorcery, they gave him that sorcery.
6. BZL: She doesn't eat [= kill] a person, she doesn't kill a person. [She should do so, but actually she killed persons.]
7. BZL: Her, her sorcery. She goes into the animal meat. [= She eats flesh.] Blood. She eats animal meat. [She should eat animal meat instead of a human soul.]
8. Ngl: Sorcerer likes to eat food of *fene* [= high-protein foods]. [Sorcerer should eat protein-rich foods instead of human souls.]
9. BZL: Things of *fene* very much.
10. BZL: It is that, the story [which EMN told]. It is that.
11. BZL: In that long story, then, he began to cry aloud.
12. BZL: He cried for the dead child, cried, cried, cried, cried.

This transcript is important for understanding the relationship between the Baka and the Bakwele as well as the status of sorcery in Baka society. In this story, the person who placed the curse was a Bakwele woman, and the victims were Baka children.

Transcription 16: Let's go to cut cacao fruits

The Baka have strong economic ties with the Bakwele and Hausa through local cacao production. In this transcript, people in the *mbanjo* were talking about the work involved in cutting cacao fruits in a Bakwele field.

1. KPM: In the night time, we shouldn't do so. All of us shouldn't walk around.
2. KPM: Yes, when morning comes, for example, we should do.
3. Wife of KPM: That's true.
4. KPM: Men [= we], let's go there. Once, go and cut, cut [cacao fruits].
5. BZL: Ahan.
6. ?: [*cannot be heard*]
7. KPM: Finish [the work] well. Let's go. Remove this [= work], all together.

Transcript 17: Debit and credit of cacao fields

The debit and credit related to cacao fields became a subject of discussion. In general, the Baka lent their field to the Bakwele or the Hausa and received money in return.

1. MBS: That problem of MKW. They do. Why [are they] going to Moloundou?
2. DED: It's because of cacao. [It was rumored that Msk, wife of MKW, stole Hausa's cacao.]
3. MBS: Uwo, they took that cacao from other person?
4. DED: Yes, they, they stole.
5. MBS: In whose place?

6. DED: In the field of KBL. [KBL sold that field to a Hausa.]
7. MBS: Oh, EKB.
8. DED: Then, KBL lent SAL his cacao field. [It was said that this problem was resolved with a payment from MKW to SAL.]
(*omission*)
9. MBS: He then earnestly wanted to leave this problem. They [= Msk and others] go and pick it [= cacao]. It's bad for you [= Msk] to do that again.
10. MBS: Because, in that field, already other people are doing work.
11. MBS: How, and to whom, they [= Msk and others] give burden [of cacao]?
12. DED: Sure.

Transcript 18: Let's get kerosene at the Japanese house

This session shows one aspect of the relationship between the Japanese researchers and the Baka people. They were talking about the kerosene at the house in which the Japanese researchers were staying.

1. MKG: I will ask about kerosene, when they [= Japanese] come back.
2. MBS ?: N... nfu.
3. MBS: They should seek empty bottle. They will get [kerosene] here.
4. MKG: Yes, people will seek the bottle here.
5. MLG: BSG doesn't have a lump, but I will get mine.
6. MKG: People will get kerosene.

Although this conversation seems rather friendly, it also reflects the envy directed toward the Japanese. For example, 1 Japanese researcher paid Baka individuals for the work in the forest, but the Baka people said that he paid so small, even he had much money.

Transcript 19: Driver does not greet his patrons

The topic of this conversation is the driver for the Japanese research team.

1. YMB: By the way, the driver goes there.
2. YMB: He comes, here, and he didn't say anything to him [= Kimura].
(*omission*)
3. YMB: Driver doesn't greet his patron. He passes by, he passes by.
4. YMB: And he avoids him [= Kimura]. Bad. Pardon [It is really something].
5. BMT: They avoid, they avoid, why do they avoid the man [= Kimura]?
6. YMB: His [driver's] body trembles [avoiding the author].
7. MBY: No.
8. ?: He is not our [Baka's] person.
9. YMB: He seems that, he doesn't like to stay in one place [with us].
10. BMT: Ah, o, oh. Friend, we are the upper branch, upper branch.
11. YMB: Aren't we?
12. YMB: Why do you have a dispute with him like this? I say to you, you go, time to go.
13. BMT: Has the driver gone?

Our driver (who had already retired) was a very good man and had established

a friendly relationship with the local people. However, his behavior was severely criticized in this conversation. It is also interesting to note the use of the idiom “upper branch.” My informant explained that the upper branch of a tree grows before the lower branches. Thus, this phrase means, “We, the Baka, lived in this area prior to other people.”

Globalization

Aspects of globalization have been introduced into Baka society. Logging operations and nature conservation activities are 2 main influences in the study area.

Transcript 20: The bulldozer comes

When this conversation was recorded, the roads around the village were being repaired.

1. MNT: That, that road, do they [= the villagers of Mbaka III] leave it? But they will repair that place. [After the expansion of the road, the villagers will move the sites of their houses.]
2. SAC: Een.
3. MNT: They [= road builders] will cut the road.
4. MNT: I say, now, it [= the slope around the road] will be lower [because of the bulldozer].
5. ?: Un...
6. MNT: They will cut. I say to you. Now, that place, that place will be lower.
7. MNT: Because, I saw here, cacao field. It [= the bulldozer] will grind down there.
8. SAC: It grinds down.

It is likely that the Baka often discuss such matters of interest.

Transcript 21: Americans are bad

The last transcript is of a conversation between MBS and DED, who were my informants. They noticed a Japanese novel titled “Mercenary Troops” that I had placed on the desk and talked about the picture of soldiers on the cover.

1. DED: Security staff.
2. MBS: Yes. Are they soldiers? [asked of Kimura].
3. MBS: The things, the persons in this book.
4. Kimura: Book?
5. MBS: That picture.
6. Kimura: This one?
7. MBS: Is he a soldier?
8. Kimura: Yes. He is a soldier. An American soldier.
9. DED: Ue, ue...
10. Kimura: They go to... to many areas.
11. MBS: Yes, they...

12. Kimura: They engage in war.
13. MBS: Oh, I see him in the war.
14. MBS: Americans, they are bad.
15. Kimura: Nhuhuhu [laughter].
16. MBS: Sure.
17. MBS: They every time battle.
18. Kimura: Yes.
19. MBS: Americans often have a program of battle.
20. MBS: At that time, if they wanted, yes, they began war everywhere.
21. MBS: Like that, black men, they kill black men.
22. MBS: Americans are bad white men.
23. NGJ: Nn.
24. DED: There is no goodness in them.

This association between Americans and war probably relates to the war in Iraq. Some Baka men have radios, which allow them to hear about world news, including the Iraq war.

DISCUSSION

Hunter-gathereriness in Baka Conversations

As described in other papers in this volume (Hattori, 2014; Oishi & Hayashi, 2014), the Baka were sedentarized and adopted an agricultural lifestyle in the middle of the 20th century. A central issue in Baka research concerns whether the ecological, social, or psychological characteristics of the Baka people have changed during the 50 years following this major transition. This paper aims to clarify this issue based on the analysis of daily conversations.

Interest in the present

With respect to “hunter-gathereriness,” Barnard (2002) proposed the concept of “the foraging mode of thought.” He suggested that this mode included the characteristic of “immediate consumption.” Woodburn (1982) also noted such a characteristic, which he termed the “immediate return system,” in hunter-gatherer societies. In terms of “immediateness” in “‘Interest in the present’ in the nationwide monetary economy: The case of Mbuti hunters in Zaire,”⁽¹²⁾ Ichikawa (2000) quoted the following excerpt from Turnbull (1983): “[For the Mbuti Pygmies,] if it is not here and now, then it is of no significance.” With regard to the Baka Pygmies, Oishi (2012) described their immediate spending of money earned via cacao cultivation.⁽¹³⁾

As shown in transcripts 1–5, Baka individuals were talking about what was going on in front of their eyes. Of course, we would expect them to talk about foreigners who were engaging in behaviors right in front of them. However, I gathered that such immediate topics are prominent in Baka conversations, and I

am performing the same sort of conversation analysis of the Bongando, who are Bantu farmers in the DR-Congo. However, topics related to the “here and now” appear to be less frequent in their conversations. In general, Bongando conversation is rather abstract.⁽¹⁴⁾ However, because I have gathered data from too few sessions thus far, I cannot provide statistical support for this impression. Additional data are required for further analyses.

What is the meaning of “immediateness”? Obviously, it does not refer to the “underdevelopment” of hunter-gatherers’ cognitive ability; however, it may be a kind of evolutionary adaptation. Thus far, hunter-gatherer societies have been described using terms such as “flexibility,” “frequent meeting and parting,” and “lack of permanent leaders.” These descriptions indicate that the kind of fixed social rules, such as rigid social groupings or predetermined schedules of activities that characterize the lives of farmers would interfere with the ability to respond optimally to frequent environmental changes. Hunter-gatherers can be described as indecisive, but this characteristic can also be construed as an advanced adaptation to the natural/social environment.

Relationship with the forest

Transcripts 6–8 show that the Baka remain very interested in hunting and gathering activities even though they earn their livelihood in agriculture. They earnestly talk, sometimes with excitement, about fruit, animals, such as duikers or elephants, honey, yams, and so on. In contrast, despite the fact that they began agricultural work more than 50 years ago, they do not devote much attention to agricultural activities. Indeed, they barely talk about their wage labor in the cacao field of the Bakwele or Hausa (transcripts 16, 17). We should monitor whether they will develop an interest in agriculture in the future.

Role of gossip

Transcripts 9–11 show that Baka conversations include a great deal of gossip about members of their community. I believe that gossip is the most frequent topic of human conversation. According to Dunbar (1996), as the human population increased, the use of language for gossiping replaced social grooming as the way to maintain social bonds. In particular, most of the knowledge in “high-context” societies (Hall, 1983), such as the Baka, is shared. Thus, constantly changing personal relationships may be the only “novel” topics worthy of discussion. Thus, gossip configures the social bonds among community members.

The Baka and Others

Baka cultural identity

The relationship between the Baka and the farmers was also a frequent topic of conversation (transcripts 12–15). This phenomenon must be understood in terms of the circumstances under which each conversation occurred. The Baka spoke with gentleness in face-to-face conversations with farmers. On the other hand, they spoke unfavorably about the farmers when they were alone with the Japanese

researchers, as shown in transcripts 12 and 13. Transcript 13, concerning the soccer ball, is an especially good example of this pattern. Indeed, such a conversation would have not occurred in the presence of Bakwele individuals. In other words, the Baka are circumspect when talking about others in front of them.

How do the Baka understand their own cultural identity? Transcript 14, which depicts a discussion of whether *yekeyeke* was an original Baka word, offers a clue. Actually, when transcribing their conversation, I noticed that not only French (the official language of Cameroon) but also the Bakwele and the Bangando languages were frequently used.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Baka themselves were sensitive to the difference, and tried to distinguish them.

Another clue about the cultural uniqueness of the Baka can be found in transcript 15. In this session, the Baka were talking about sorcery among the Bakwele. In the incident under discussion, a Baka child was supposedly killed. However, they treated it as someone else's problem, and it remains unclear whether the notion of sorcery even exists in Baka society. Further research regarding this issue is needed. Yamaguchi (2014, in this volume) also discusses this problem, but from the viewpoint of the Bakwele.

In transcript 19, BMT noted, "Friend, we are the upper branch, upper branch." The idiom "upper branch" is rather interesting and was explained as meaning, "We, the Baka, are the indigenous people in this area." Although I do not know whether this idiom is traditional, it suggests the Baka's sense of indigenous identity.

Relationships with other actors and global issues

Transcripts 16–19 involve the Bakwele, Hausa, and Japanese researchers.

Cacao labor was discussed in transcripts 16 and 17. The tone of these conversations seems rather flat compared with the excited tone of the conversations about forest products. The tone of the discussion about the relationship with Japanese researchers in transcripts 18 and 19 was generally friendly, but several harsh words were also spoken.

The problem of road repair was discussed in transcript 20. These kinds of activities, reflective of globalization, will continue irrespective of whether the Baka approve. Although I was unable to record the actual conversations, I often heard people referring to the activities of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). They referred to the WWF as *dobi-dobi*⁽¹⁶⁾ and offered comments such as, "We can't catch animals because of *dobi-dobi*," or "We don't like *dobi-dobi*." In transcript 21, America's political activity was criticized: "Americans often have a program of battle," and "Americans are bad white men." Getting their news via the radio, the Baka are deeply interested in such international affairs.

Society Viewed through the Lens of Conversations

Finally, I will discuss the general problem of "ethno-conversation analysis." I am not arguing that we can obtain a precise understanding of Baka "reality" via their daily conversations. Indeed, questions about what "reality" is arise in this context, and notions of "reality" and "truth" are always ambiguous when

attempting to understand other cultures. At times, it is the “imagined” and not the “real” ideology of a society that is addressed in conversations.

However, the data contained in these transcripts are rather interesting. I was surprised that Baka individuals frequently referred to events occurring in front of them. Additionally, their conversations about forest activities were quite amusing. Their conversations about relationships with others deepened my understanding of their social relationships. Although mere fragments of all the conversations, these excerpts are important for understanding the lives of Baka individuals, and the meanings of these transcripts can be revealed only by conversation analysis.

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NOTES

- (1) I presented an outline of this paper at the International Conference on Congo Basin hunter-gatherers (ICCBHG), September 22–24, 2010, in Montpellier, France. I also published a paper (Kimura, 2010a) in Japanese on the same topic.
- (2) The Baka language is classified as Ubangian, which differs from the Bantu language family.
- (3) Micro-sociological approaches, such as ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and Goffman’s interaction analysis, have always been closely related to anthropology (Clemente, 2012). This is reflected in the fact that the word “ethnomethodology” contains a lexeme, “ethno,” that is associated with “ethnology,” which is almost an alias for anthropology. Erving Goffman’s early work in the Shetland Islands (1953) strongly resembles anthropology, and Harvey Sacks’ lecture notes (1995) frequently refer to anthropological monographs.
- (4) A popular *lingua franca* in DR-Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, and the border region of southeastern Cameroon.
- (5) Several French words were used in this Baka conversation.
- (6) Sugawara (1997) also pointed out a similar phenomenon in Bushmen conversations, referring to it as an “inquiry of ego-centric relevance.”
- (7) A Japanese researcher.
- (8) Another Baka word, *fene*, means a deficiency in or famine of *mosuka*.
- (9) In Kimura (2001), I discussed the frequent overlaps and long silences occurring in Baka conversations.
- (10) Problems related to the consumption of alcoholic beverages are described by Oishi and Hayashi (2014, in this volume).

- (11) This type of speech resembles the “addressee-unspecified loud speech” or *bonango*, which is observed in Bongando society in DR-Congo (Kimura, 1990).
- (12) However, note that Ichikawa used this term in a socio-economic context. Here, I apply it to social interaction.
- (13) Bird-David (1994; 2004) also stressed the immediacy observed in hunter-gatherer societies.
- (14) However, I do not argue that Baka people talk only about “here-and-now” issues. Actually, as shown in several transcripts, they tell vivid stories about their previous hunting and gathering activities.
- (15) Such looseness may relate to the problem of the “original Pygmy language.”
- (16) This is because WWF is pronounced in French as “dublə ve dublə ve ef.”

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