

# Was there a proto-Bantu word for ‘whale’ and other mischievous questions



Whale off the Gabonese coast

[DRAFT CIRCULATED FOR COMMENT]

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## 1. Introduction

The expansion of the Bantu-speaking peoples from southern Cameroun across the equatorial forest to eastern and southern Africa is one of the great migration narratives of human history. The Polynesian or Turkic expansions are marked by discrete populations, either because they are separated by islands or in the case of Turkic because they are encapsulated among speakers of unrelated languages. This makes it possible to track the routes of their migrations through a synthesis of linguistics, genetics, archaeology and sometimes oral and written traditions. However, Bantu languages lie adjacent to one another and their communities are in constant interaction, making a consensus model on the dates, routes and drivers of their expansion much more problematic. The rather eccentric views of Malcolm Guthrie (1962) created the characteristic discourse of proto-Bantu, and despite many minor changes, the forms he established remain dominant in the field. But Guthrie seems to have believed the proto-Bantu originated somewhere in Zambia, despite a complete lack of evidence, either linguistic or cultural, in support of such a view. As early as the late nineteenth century, Harry Johnston (1886) posited an origin somewhere in Southern Cameroun and this was given significant support by Joseph Greenberg (1963) in his rethinking of the structure of Niger-Congo. This view is now generally accepted by linguists (see review in Blench 2006), despite dissent from some archaeologists (e.g. Eggert 2008).

However, Guthrie (1967-1971) also established the conceptual framework for the reconstruction of lexical items in proto-Bantu and this has hardly changed through the revisions of Meussen (1980) and the electronic database represented by Bantu Lexical Reconstructions III. The model, such as it is, has the Bantu in what is now Southern Cameroun expanding east and south, possibly along the rivers or due east along the northern edge of the equatorial forest, around 4000 years ago. In support of this, there are reconstructions of forest mammals such as the pangolin, elephant and monkey. The animal species are often highly generic; for example there are a minimum of ten monkey species in the likely homeland of the proto-Bantu. Any 'reconstruction' of this type must be treated with extreme scepticism without much more biological detail. Valiant attempts with names of river fish in more restricted geographical areas (e.g. Mougiana-Dauda 2004 and Ankei 1986, 1989) the conclusion can be little more than some Bantu expanded along rivers and caught fish, which could be seen as self-evident. The potential to reconstruct agriculture for these early communities is strong, with 'banana', Bambara groundnut, okra and possibly a species of yam as potential cultigens Blench (1996). However, all these are part of the same mental model; small groups with rudimentary agriculture expanding along rivers or overland. It is safe to say that there is no listed proto-Bantu form for 'whale' and that indeed marine life of all types has been almost entirely excluded from the set of canonical forms. Indeed it would be hard to find any list of Bantu maritime terminology in the literature, except the Vili fish names in Seret & Opic (1997) which are so execrably transcribed as to be almost unusable. Curiously one very early author, Gehr (1912) among a comparative list of Bantu A language animal names does include the dolphin, manatee, whale and *Seeelefant*<sup>1</sup>.

Nonetheless it remains a possibility, geographically at least, that the early Bantu had a seagoing culture, and spread down the west coast of equatorial Africa. We know that the island of Fernando Po was regularly visited in the pre-Iron Age and that its rocks were in particular demand for stone axes (Sheppherd 1983). We know that the ancestors of the Bubi, its first Bantu-speaking residents, reached the island prior to the diffusion of iron smelting; fishing must have thus represented a major aspect of their subsistence<sup>2</sup> (Tessmann 1931). This implies a familiarity with a rich variety of marine species, as well as the many open water species entering the numerous estuaries around the Bight of Biafra, which can be brackish in certain seasons. Despite this, there has been virtually no work on the lexicon of marine life specific to the Bantu of the west coast of Africa. The possibility should be considered that one strand of Bantu expansion was a rapid coastal movement southwards and that this would be reflected in a reconstructible terminology relating to the sea. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the results from ethnoscience workshops held in southwest Cameroun in 2009 and 2010. The vocabulary of coastal peoples revealed a rich vocabulary of marine life

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<sup>1</sup> This latter is particularly intriguing since there are no 'Sea elephants' (i.e. elephant seals) this side of the Atlantic, this being a New World genus. The referent must therefore be an ordinary seal. However, according to the standard reference (Jefferson et al. 1994) there are no seals along this part of the West African coast. See Table 34 for further discussion.

<sup>2</sup> According to Scott Smith (p.c.) only one Bubi village on the island still fishes as part of their subsistence.

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with a large number of apparently underived forms, including terms for ‘whale’ and ‘dolphin’. This suggests that some Bantu A group peoples developed a terminology for this biota and that if a well-identified list of such terms were compiled, early coastal expansion could be tracked.

Complementary evidence for such an expansion would be archaeological. If this was indeed southwards along the west coast, it should be reflected in patterns of pottery and settlement. Unfortunately, coastal archaeology in this region remains poorly developed. The main source is the excavations of Bernard Clist in Gabon (Clist 1991, 1995, 1998, 2005) also Van Neer & Clist (1991). The coastal Iron Age site of Oveng, 12 km. north of Libreville, dates to 1700 BP, and a detailed analysis of the faunal remains indicates that its occupants lived largely by collection of marine species, such as the shells *Anadara senilis*, *Tympanotus fuscatus*, *T. radula* and the oyster *Ostrea tulipa* (Van Neer & Clist 1991) and a variety of fish species adapted to brackish or seawater. There is additional evidence for a smaller component of gathered forest produce and hunting of small mammals. The authors point to the significance of this subsistence strategy and its relevance for the Bantu expansion, expanding the perspective of more simplistic ‘across the forest’ models in authors such as Vansina (1990, 1995).

Earlier work at Pointe-Noire and in Angola is reported in scattered sources (Clist & Lanfranchi 1991). Pais Pinto (1988) describes the Cachama sites near Benguela where the collection of marine resources predominate. The site of Benfica, near Luanda, dating to ca. 1800 BP, also suggests a subsistence strategy where marine resources were highly significant. Sites with published faunal analyses are few and far between, but descriptions of ceramic traditions are more common and point to movement down the coast earlier than 1800 BP. Denbow (1986, 1990) describes the ceramics of Tchissanga, near the mouth of the Congo, which consistently date to around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, and are related to the Okala traditions in Gabon and those of Ngovo in the DRC. He links these to a major movement of western Bantu-speakers towards the Kalahari, where they encountered Khoesan speakers. Herbert & Huffman (1993) proposed that the other major ceramic tradition south of the rainforest, the so-called ‘Kalundu’ tradition, is linked with the Western Bantu. In their version, the bearers of the Kalundu tradition emerge from the rainforest and migrate both eastward and southeast, eventually interlocking with the Urewe tradition somewhere in Zambia. Evidence for a rapid expansion down the west coast remains fragmentary, but what sites there are provide intriguing hints of such a movement.

This hypothesis may explain another problem in African historical linguistics, the long list of apparent cognates between Ijò and proto-Bantu. Ijoid languages are spoken in the I iger Delta, by the Ijò, a nexus of fishing peoples, and are typologically extremely unlike Bantu. Ijoid languages can only be related to Bantu at a very high node on the tree of I iger-Congo since they appear never to have had noun-classes. Kay Williamson (†) in compiling a list of Ijoid reconstructions, noticed numerous lookalikes with Bantu. In her view, languages rarely borrowed fundamental vocabulary, and she thus attributed them to a very ancient period of shared lexicon. However, from a more modern perspective, such borrowing is perfectly feasible and it may be that these apparent cognates are borrowing in one or both directions, dating from an epoch when there was intensive contact between the Bantu and the Ijò as part of a flourishing coastal maritime culture. Even today, there is some contact, with Ijò fishing boats making their way into the relatively rich waters off Cameroun.

We might also expect contact with peoples speaking Lower Cross languages. The Cross River is dominated by languages such as Efik and Ibibio, for which dictionaries exist, but which are not rich in maritime terms. But languages such as Efai and Usaghade, whose speakers have significant marine fisheries, remain little-known. Lower Cross languages are much more closely related to Bantu than Ijò and any similarities would have to be closely examined to establish whether they represent loans and if so in what direction and through what process.

## **2. Regional background**

### **2.1 Geography of the coast**

From the extreme southeast of I igeria to central Angola, the coast is dominated by dense tropical forest with the shore fringed by mangroves and palms, typically coconut and raffia. I umerous rivers reach the coast, some very large and in many places, the coast is broken up by small deltas and estuaries. Rainfall is

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heavy and can occur throughout the year, although there is still a marked dry season in most places. South from Luanda, the climate is significantly drier, eventually becoming the notorious Skeleton Coast and the hyper-arid deserts of I amibia. The aridity seems to have deterred Bantu settlement and until the colonial era, the coast remained largely the preserve of seashore foragers. Estermann (1956) has described the subsistence of some of these non-Bantu foragers.

### 2.2 Which Bantu languages are found along the west coast?

Between Cameroun and I amibia, Bantu languages are the only languages spoken on the western seaboard of Africa, bounded by Cross River languages in the north (Usaghade) and the Khoisan languages in I amibia. Table 1 presents these languages, drawn from the maps of the Ethnologue, listing them from north to south in individual countries.

**Table 1. Bantu languages along the western seaboard of Africa**

Country	Languages North to South
Cameroun	(A10) Londo [=Balundu-Bima] (A20) Abo, Isu, Duala [Malimba, Pongo dialects], Mokpe [=Bakweri. Bakole of various documents appears to be just a variety of Mokpe], Wumboko (A30) Batanga, Yasa, Wuvia (A40) Yasuku [Bakoko dialect] (A80) Mabi
Equatorial Guinea	(A30) Bubi, Yasa, I gumbi, Benga (A80) Bisio
Gabon	Seki, Fang, Benga, Myene, Lumbu
Congo-Brazzaville	Vili
DRC	Yombe
Angola	Mbundu, Sama, Umbundu, I dombe
I amibia	I o Bantu languages are spoken along the coast today, but may have been in the past. The nearest group to the coast, the Himba, are cattle people who presumably have had no interest in marine life in historic times.

Of these languages, only a few are well-described (such as Duala, Fang and Umbundu). However, it turns out that not all languages with present-day access to the seashore actually have significant maritime terminology. The Duala and the Fang are inland peoples with relatively limited maritime subsistence and their terms are borrowed from languages with more in-depth marine experience. The lexical data for all these languages is patchy, but certainly there are no long lists of well-identified and reliably transcribed sea fauna. As a result of fieldwork in 2010<sup>3</sup>, more comprehensive materials have been gathered on a variety of languages, analysed in the following sections.

### 2.3 Sources and transcription

Most of the lexical data given in this paper was directly collected from speakers of the languages on a field trip through Cameroun in February 2010. The languages, informants, dates and places of interview are given in Table 81 in the Appendix. Of the languages surveyed, only Duala has a significant lexical resource (Helmlinger 1972) and names for marine species are largely omitted. The transcriptions are all in IPA (except 'y' is IPA /j/ and the affricate is dʒ). All the lexical data was also recorded and the data has been checked against the digital file. The phonology of most languages is unproblematic, though it is worth noting that there has been little in the way of systematic description. Interesting phonemes encountered include the implosive labial-velar /gɓ/ in Tanga, although this is not in contrast with /gb/. The most problematic area is inevitably the transcription of tone. Many languages have three phonetic tones, and to reach an analysis which posits two underlying tones requires a significant exercise of the imagination. Some languages have pervasive downstep which results in a bewildering diversity of surface tones. Inevitably, the tonal transcription will remain somewhat impressionistic until more detailed analysis is undertaken.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Marieke Martin for working with me to transcribe maritime terminology, to Dan Duke whose logistics and contacts made the whole expedition possible, and Steve Anderson and SIL Cameroun, whose original invitation stimulated the research. Individual informants who assisted with specific languages are given in Appendix I.



An issue in the historical linguistics of the region is the reconstructibility of terms. If a series of related terms undergo phonological shift in individual languages, then they probably diversified from a proto-language. If they are extremely similar, then borrowing should be considered. For example, the terms for ‘whale’, though cognate, vary from language to language (Table 30). By contrast, words for ‘shark’ seem to be invariant (Table 4). Yet both species are part of the regional zoofauna. Is this because ‘shark’ is a borrowing or because its underlying form already maps against the existing phonological system? Only more detailed linguistic analysis will clarify this issue.

#### **2.4 Identifying marine species**

For the coast of Cameroun and regions south, there are a number of sources used to identify fish and other aquatic species. The most comprehensive and authoritative printed source is Schneider (1990), which covers the commercial species of West Africa<sup>4</sup>. Crustaceans and reptiles are included, but not sea mammals, which however, are best identified from another FAO publication (Jefferson et al. 1993). Marine resources of Angola are described in Bianchi (1986). The limitation of these publications is that many species are illustrated only with schematic line-drawings and that they is restricted to commercial species. Names for fish in European languages are given but there is no useable data on African languages. Information from FAO datasheets has now been incorporated into the online resource, Fishbase (<http://www.fishbase.org>), which allows existing biological data to be analysed in a variety of ways. According to the most recent version accessed, some 545 marine species are recorded for Cameroun. Many of these are small, rare or only recorded in deep water and so unfamiliar to local fishermen. Nonetheless, with enlarged colour photos it might well be possible for oceangoing fishermen to identify further species.

The earliest publication for Cameroun is Monod (1928) which is a remarkable summary of knowledge during the early colonial period. A valuable more recent source for Cameroun is Vivien (1991) which represents a reliable source of identifications, and includes many small fish as well as estuarine and river species. Colour photographs of some species are included, but many are only shown in line-drawings. Coverage is patchy with some significant marine species omitted without comment. Lévêque et al. (1990, 1992) cover fresh and brackish water species of West Africa and a new electronic edition of this is available (Paugy et al. 2004). However, the line drawings that accompany these are often very schematic and are virtually useless when working with fishermen. Seret & Opic (1997) covers only fish but includes a wide variety of pelagic species, focusing on commercial and sport fish and omitting smaller species. This is illustrated with large-scale paintings of fish, some in colour, others regrettably in greyscale reproduction, which is harder to recognise. Marine fauna and flora such as sea-stars, corals, seaweeds and others are not easily identified outside highly specialised publications. None of these publications could be described as comprehensive and none cover all marine species in manner of Richmond’s (2002) Field Guide to the seashores of Eastern Africa.

Gehr (1912) includes terms for sea-mammals, but Monod (1928) is the first author to give vernacular names for marine fish and crustaceans linked to scientific names, with versions of Mabi (Mabea), Tanga and Yasa words. Changes in taxonomic terms sometimes means it is simpler to work backwards from modern transcriptions than trying to establish modern equivalences. Schneider (1990) includes names for fish in European languages are given but there is no useable data on African languages. Vivien (1991) does include substantial numbers of indigenous names, although his transcriptions leave much to be desired. Nonetheless, most were recognised and confirmed by speakers. Seret & Opic (1997) give names loosely ascribed to the ‘Congo’ which is probably Vili. Their transcriptions seem to be a blend of Lusophone and Francophone orthography, not always easy to reduce to an IPA-like formula.

The biogeographic boundary between marine, estuarine and freshwater species is not always easily drawn. Sea species can sometimes be found hundreds of kilometres inland. In Nigeria, sharks and other marine species were caught at the colonial fisheries research centre at Lokoja, which is at the confluence of the Niger and Benue (Reed et al. 1967). The Cross River is well known for its isolated populations of sea species which were apparently trapped inland during a flood some millennia ago (Teugels et al. 1992).

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<sup>4</sup> Also available for download from the FAO website

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Similarly, freshwater species can survive in brackish environments, especially when the river is in flood. This paper includes a number of species that are either freshwater or estuarine, in part because they can provide clues to the origins of the names of seafish. In many languages, marine and freshwater varieties of the same name apply to quite different fish and it is likely in some cases, for example among the Mabi, that these were primarily inland names which were transferred to sea fish.

### 2.5 Fish communities

The pattern in the distribution of fishes on the Cameroonian continental shelf is described by Longhurst (1965). The distribution of a species can be limited by the depth of the thermocline and is influenced by the type of deposits (sand and silt) and the depths on the continental shelf. The main fishing grounds presently exploited by local fishermen are more or less delimited by the upper limit of the thermocline, corresponding to 25–30 m depth contour. Table 2 presents a synthesis of bottom types, water characteristics and main species said to characterise these.

**Table 2. Shelf demersal species assemblages in the Gulf of Guinea**

Bottom type	Water characteristics	Main Species	Assemblage
Soft bottoms (15–50 m)	low salinity - high temperature - suprathermoclineal	<i>Pseudotolithus typus</i> , <i>Dasyatis</i> - <i>Arius</i> - <i>Pteroscion</i> - <i>Pentanemus</i> - <i>Cynoglossus browni</i>	A = Sciaenid (estuarine component)
	mixed layer (“Liberian waters”)	<i>Pseudotolithus senegalensis</i> <i>Galeodides</i> - <i>Brachydeuterus Ilisha</i> - <i>Pomadasys jubelini</i> - <i>Drepane</i> - <i>Vomer</i>	B = Sciaenid (offshore component)
Rock/reefs (15–40 m)		<i>Lutjanus agennes</i> - <i>Lethrinus</i> <i>Balistes forcipatus</i> - <i>Acanthurus</i> - <i>Chaetodon</i>	C = Lutjanid
Hard sand and broken corally deposits (15–70 m)	(subsuperficial discontinuity layer) bottom of the thermocline with some extension in the mixed layer	<i>Sparus caerulostictus</i> - <i>Pagellus</i> <i>Priacanthus</i> - <i>Dactylopterus</i> <i>Epinephelus</i> - <i>Pseudopenaeus</i> <i>Raja miraletus</i> - <i>Balistes carolinensis</i>	D <sub>1</sub> = “eurythermal” eurybathic element of the sparid group
Soft deposits (40–200 m)	below thermocline (subtropical water)	<i>Dentex</i> - <i>Lepidotrigla</i> <i>Paracubiceps</i> - <i>Uranoscopus</i> - <i>Pentheroscion</i>	D = typical sparid group
Soft deposits (15–100m)	from suprathermoclineal to infrathermoclineal with preference for intermediate levels (discontinuity layer)	<i>Cynoglossus canariensis</i> - <i>Penaeus duorarum</i> - <i>Paragaleus</i> - <i>Scoliodon</i> - <i>Trichiurus</i>	A-D eurythermal eurybathic

Sources: Fager & Longhurst (1986); Berrit (1973); Villegas & Garcia (1983)

Adapted from Ssentongo & I jock (1987)

Fish communities show ecological and micro-geographical heterogeneity, with migrations of species from the estuaries and creeks to the open shelf areas and vice versa. Useful detailed information on the ecology, biology and bionomics of marine fish species constituting species communities in West Africa is given by Longhurst (1958, 1960, 1963, 1964, 1965, 1965a, 1969 and 1969a). I jock (1979, 1985, 1985a, 1985b) describes the state of exploited fish stocks.

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The following fish communities are exploited by both local fishermen and industrial fishing fleets:

- a. the coastal (suprathermocline) sciaenid community (on soft deposit) this community presents a particular estuarine facies very close inshore and in the creeks
- b. the shallow water (suprathermocline) sparid community (on more sandy, corally and rocky substrates) in the southern sector of Cameroon
- c. the deep water (subthermocline) sparid sub-community (on both hard and soft deposits) on and off the slope.

### **The Estuarine Sciaenid Community**

The fish community inhabiting the estuaries, creeks and other coastal brackish water consists of both freshwater and marine fish species. The estuarine Sciaenidae (croakers) are dominated by *Pseudolithus elongatus* which extend to 20 m depth, but *P. senegalensis* and *P. typus* also occur in the estuaries. The family Clupeidae constitutes an important element of the estuarine fish community. *Ethmalosa fimbriata* (bonga) and *Ilisha africana* (shad) are both caught in the shallow open waters and in the brackish water. Third, the family Polynemidae (threadfins) contributes significantly to estuarine and creek fisheries, but it is not yet possible to determine the exact magnitude of *Galeoides decadactylus*, *Polynemus quadrifilis* and *Pentanemus quinquarius*, which are harvested from brackish waters. Additionally, other marine species in this sector include: *Pteroscion peli* (drum), which extends from the sea to the freshwater zone; *Lutjanus* (snapper); *Cynoglossus* (soles); *Pomadasy jubelini* (sompat) grunt; *Penaeus notialis* (southern pink shrimp); the marine and estuarine *Parapenaeopsis atlantica* (Guinea shrimp) and *Palaemon* (white shrimp). The other significant exploitable resources in the estuaries and creeks are: *Chrysichthys nigrodigitatus* (brackish water catfish), *Arius* spp. (marine catfish), *Trichiurus lepturus* (hairtail/silverfish), *Cybium tritor* (Spanish mackerel), *Sardinella* and *Sphyraena* (barracuda).

### **Coastal (Suprathermocline) Sciaenid Community**

The dominant elements of this fish community are: *Arius*, *Ilisha*, *Pseudolithus* spp., *Drepane africana*, *Pomadasy jubelini*, *Pentanemus*, *Galeoides*, *Cynoglossus*, *Polynemus* and *Pteroscion peli*. The offshore suprathermocline community occurs along the Cameroon coast on or above the 40 m depth contour in a few sandy and rocky bottom areas occupied by the sparid community in the southern sector towards the border of Equatorial Guinea.

### **Shallow Water (Suprathermocline) Sparid Community**

The sandy and rocky bottom sparid community consists of *Sparus caeruleostictus*, *Pagellus coupei*, *Lutjanus* sp., *Epinephelus* sp. and *Decapterus*. The Sparidae are not well represented on the continental shelf.

### **Deep Water (Subthermocline) Sparid Community**

The deep water sparid community occurs on both sandy and muddy bottoms below the thermocline, down to the continental shelf. This fish community is comprised of *Dentex congoensis*, *D. filusos*, *Pseudupeneus prayensis*, *Paracubiceps*, *Decapterus* and *Trigla* sp. It is not yet accessible to the artisanal fishermen because of the long distances to be covered and the fishing gear needed at depths over 40 m. Also because of their low abundance, the deepwater sparid community is not a target species for the industrial fleet.

### **Eurybathic Species**

Fish species with a wide vertical range of distribution on the continental shelf are: *Cynoglossus*, *Vomer setapinnis*, *Brachydeuterus auritus*, *Trichiurus lepturus*, *Raja*, shrimps and prawns. This species group is harvested by both the artisanal and industrial fleets. There is no documentation of migration patterns of species constituting this fish group and no reliable information concerning the age and length composition of the catch by the artisanal or the industrial fisheries.

## **2.6 Who knows what and why?**

Gathering information on the sea and marine terms is not a simple exercise. Fishing peoples are distributed along a thin strip of coast and the knowledge of this terminology rapidly disappears even in villages a few miles inland. Moreover, coastal peoples have interlocking specialisations, such that some are riverine fishers who reach the coast but know only the name of estuarine species. Others are specialised in river and

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seashore exploitation and have almost no knowledge of pelagic species. However, a people such as the Wuvia [=Bubia], who trace their history to the island of Bioco, and are probably most related to the Bubi, seem to have a profound knowledge of deep sea species. The Wuvia were, for example, the only people who recognised the sunfish (*Mola* spp.) and who identified different species of whale. Another aspect of terminology loss is the cosmopolitan nature of fisheries in certain areas. Down the coast towards Idenau, west of Buea, fishermen from a wide spectrum of nearby nations have settled to exploit the fisheries. These include many Igerians, who bring a knowledge of Pidgin English<sup>5</sup>. Combined with the widespread use of Camerounian Pidgin, this has combined to erode and relexify local speech forms. For example, Wumboko, apparently a dialect of Mokpe [=Bakweri], seems to have lost all plural classes, despite the clear evidence of singular prefixes. Common fish seem to have undergone replacement from Pidgin, and this has in turn caused a loss in distinctions between species (for example, all flatfish have been subsumed under the Pidgin term ‘cover-pot’). Even languages with well-conserved marine vocabulary have been invaded by English; for example, Tanga has *makero* [mackerel], *sadi* [sardine] and *bonito* incorporated into its lexicon. Although Cameroun Pidgin (recently rebaptised ‘Camtok’) has been the subject of much well-meaning waffle by linguists, the task of actually documenting it is less advanced. Appendix 2 therefore includes a list of Cameroun Pidgin terms for fish recorded by this survey (Table 82).

### **2.7 Can the present be read back into the past?**

Although the image of sea fisheries is very ‘traditional’, numerous introductions in the post-European era have changed the dynamics of subsistence fisheries considerably since the sixteenth century. A significant problem is the extent to which modern techniques are simply updating of former practices as opposed to introductions. For example, the anchor is almost certainly a European introduction, yet it appears to have an embedded local name (Table 64). Plank boats may well also be post-European, although there is no evidence for this. If pre-Iron Age sailors could cross the surf to Bioco on a regular basis, they must surely have had large boats, and not just the small monoxylous canoes made today. Sails are not much used on the open sea, but are found in more sheltered lagoons and estuarine areas and are certainly post sixteenth century. More difficult to determine is net-fishing. Although nets are certainly pre-European, it is less clear whether the floats and sinkers characteristic of European nets are later developments. All the parts of the net today are manufactured industrial materials, plastic and other synthetics. Some types of net-fishing, such as shore dragnets, have names that point to European origin, in this case *tire-tire*.

Present-day fishermen also operate within a very different economic context compared to the pre-colonial era. Trawlers, particularly from the European Community, conduct a predatory offshore operation, scooping up large shoals of fish. However, the conflict with traditional fishermen may be limited, as few fishermen travel so far offshore, due to the limited power of even motorised boats. Better-funded Igerian pirates using modern speedboats operate throughout the region but these are of more concern to oil companies and banks. However, other developments along the coast do impact more directly on the fishermen; the Chad pipeline oil outlet near Kribi and the continuing construction of a large-scale deepwater harbour between Campo and Kribi have reduced fishing harvests due to pollution and water disturbance. It would be interesting to know the extent to which global warming is affecting the ocean currents in the Gulf of Guinea, since these bring significant fish populations from further south, but there seems to be no clear evidence as yet on this topic.

## **3. Proto-Bantu maritime terminology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The languages along the coast of Cameroun include those of groups A10-A30 and A80. I therefore assume that words attested widely in these languages must be reconstructible to proto-Bantu. As it happens, there are no Bantoid languages with a coastal presence, therefore any innovative roots are unlikely to be traceable beyond the proto-Bantu level. Where it seems reasonable, I have included a quasi-reconstruction for proto-Bantu; this is not a form worked out by strict historical correspondences, merely an indication of the

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, although many of the Igerian migrants are speakers of Ijoid languages, no borrowings from Ijo fish terms were detected. This might seem to contradict the argument in §5, which points to early contact between the Bantu and the Iger Delta. But if the argument of this paper is correct, contact was broken after this early period when the trade to the island of Bioco ceased. Igerians now resident in Cameroun are of recent vintage and are more likely to be Pidgin speakers than to transmit their fading knowledge of Ijo and related languages.

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existence of a likely form of approximately this shape. Such quasi-reconstructions are marked with the hache #. Cognates in adjacent Cross River languages are most probably borrowings. The sources of innovative roots are clearly an important point for discussion. From the data gathered so far, it seems likely that the coastal peoples consist of two quite different groups, those who have long been on the coast and demonstrate a rich, apparently indigenous terminology and those groups which arrived quite recently and either borrowed terms or adapted them from river fish names. Typically, such groups have a much less detailed lexicon for marine species, for example having a single term covering all crabs or marine shells.

### 3.2 Fish names

Sea-fish can be broadly divided into estuarine, shore and open sea. For interesting reasons, ‘fish’ as a generic has no very stable root in this region. Its identification as a staple element in diet allows semantic shifts to take place, in particular ‘meat’ to ‘fish’. Table 3 shows the terms for ‘fish’ as a generic in northwest Bantu, together with an etymological commentary;

**Table 3. Words for ‘fish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation	Etymological note
Londo		
Mokpe	ɲàmà	also ‘eat, animal’
Wumboko	ɲámá	
Isu	ɲàmà	
Wuvia	ɲàmà	widespread I iger-Congo root for ‘meat, animal’
Duala	swé	also applied to ‘meat’
Yasuku		
Mabi		
Tanga		
Yasa	wêy	? reduction of forms with initial s-

Sharks are numerous and highly speciated in the Atlantic, but most languages only have a generic term for ‘shark’. By contrast, the Yasuku distinguish no less than ten shark species. The common term for ‘shark’ in northwest Bantu is #*ndomi*. Table 4 shows the reflexes of this root for ‘shark’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 4. General terms for ‘shark’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Mokpe	ndomi
Isu	ɲdòmí
Wumboko	ɲdómè
Wuvia	ɲdòmí
Pungu	ɲdóm
Malimba	ndómé
Duala	ɲdóm
Yasuku	ɲdómí
Mabi	ɲtúmá/bi- large shark
Tanga	ɲdómé
Yasa	ɲdòmí

There is another, less well distributed root which may apply to all small sharks, shown in Table 5;

**Table 5. The #kɔmbɛ root for ‘small shark’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Yasuku	kòmbóó
Mabi	kòmbé / mà- shark general term
Yasa	kòmbó

The hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna zygaena*), rather picturesquely named ‘aeroplane shark’ in coastal pidgin, is highly distinctive and is usually called the ‘shark with ears’, for example Mabi *ɲtúmá málúú*.

Guitarfish (Fr. *raie-guitare*) of the Rhinobatidae family and the wedgefsh (Fr. *poisson-paille africain*) (*Rhynchobatus luebberti*) are commonly caught in deeper water, are often associated with sharks, although they are batoid fish. They can be up to 3m. in length, so their capture is somewhat specialised. Table 6 shows the terms for ‘guitarfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 6. Words for ‘guitarfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	è-tòmátómá /bè-
Isu	è-tùmátùmá /βè-
Wumboko	ètímètímè
Wuvia	è-tùmátùmá /βè-
Malimba	é-tútúmá /bé-
Yasuku	ètútúmâ /bi-
Mabi	ḡgúḡgâ /bi-
Tanga	ḡgóngâ
Yasa	mò-ḡgóngâ /mè-

The not dissimilar angelsharks, *Squatina oculata* and *S. aculeata*, which occur in the Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic from Morocco to Angola are found on sand and mud bottoms of continental shelves and upper slopes mostly to between 50 and 100 m but deeper in the tropics. They may well be classified with guitarfish in most languages, but Tanga distinguishes angelsharks as ḡgóngâ mwágîḡnâ as opposed to ḡgóngâ for guitarfish and Yasuku has èvívíné ètútúmâ against the generic ètútúmâ.

Another extremely salient species along the coast is the sawfish (*Pristis* spp.) which inhabits inshore coastal waters to moderate depth and estuaries, lagoons, river mouths, and even freshwater. It feeds on fishes and bottom-living animals. There are three species, *Pristis pristis* (**Figure 1**), the common sawfish, *P. microdon* and *P. pectinata*. The last two regularly enter estuaries and are the species most likely to be encountered by coastal fishermen. In the I iger Delta, the saws are regularly used for ritual purposes and sawfish masquerades are widely performed; this practice seems to be absent in Cameroun and further south.

**Figure 1. *Pristis pristis*, the common sawfish**

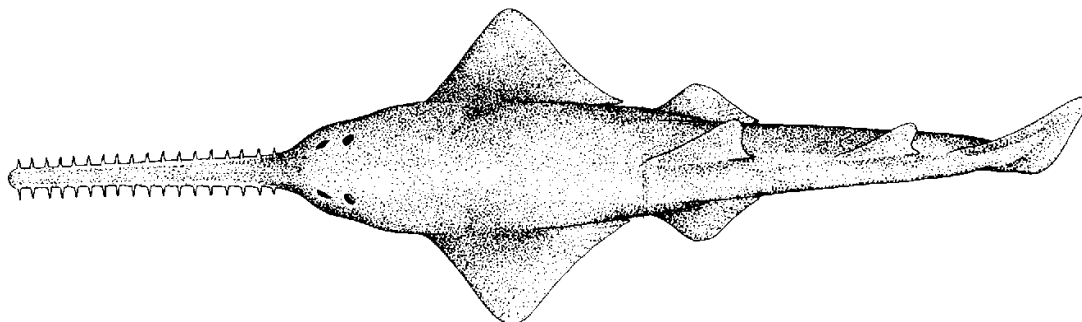


Table 7 shows the terms for ‘sawfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 7. Words for ‘sawfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	̀ndz̀ongá
Wumboko	̀ndz̀ongá
Wuvia	̀ndz̀ongá
Malimba	dzúáŋgè
Duala	̀ndz̀ongá
Yasuku	
Mabi	̀núúŋá
Tanga	̀ndz̀ongá
Yasa	̀ndz̀ongá

A number of families of flatfish occur along the coast, most notably the Rajidae or true rays, the Dasyatidae, stingrays, and the Gymnuridae, butterfly rays. Photo 1 shows the common stingray, *Dasyatis pastinaca*, widely caught along the coast. These families are known as batoids and are quite distinct from the true flatfish, the flounders and turbot. There is a common root along the coast of the approximate shape #nduba, and it seems likely that this originally applied to the rays, as it still does among specialised fishing peoples such as the Yasa. Rays and sometimes true flatfish are known in local pidgin as ‘cover-pot’ and this term has spread to the flounders among populations such as the Wumboko who are losing their specialised vocabulary. Table 8 shows the distribution of the root #nduba in northwest Bantu; this applies to *Raja* spp., *Dasyatis* spp. and perhaps *Gymnurus* spp.

**Table 8. Reflexes of #nduba ‘stingray’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Londo	̀lùbá
Isu	̀lù-bà /mù-
Wumboko	̀lùbà
Wuvia	̀lù-bà /mù-
Pungu	̀dù-bà /mù-
Malimba	̀dù-bà /mù-
Duala	̀dùbà
Yasuku	̀dùbà / m̀b̀b̀à
Mabi	duba V.
Tanga	̀dùb̀à
Yasa	̀ndz̀-ùb̀à /m̀-

Yasa recognises the butterfly-rays, Gymnuridae, as a distinct species, with the name *n-dzùbà dzi ẁndz̀ó*. The great manta rays of the open ocean, the Mobulidae, are only known to populations specialising in pelagic fishing. Table 9 shows the terms for ‘manta’ in northwest Bantu;

**Photo 1. Common stingray, *Dasyatis pastinaca***



Source: Author photo

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**Table 9. Words for ‘manta’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	í-wírì / lò-
Isu	
Wumboko	yómbè
Wuvia	è-yòmbè / βè-
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	wómbé a màdíbà
Yasuku	
Mabi	bàbàngù /bi-
Tanga	
Yasa	ébábàng <sup>wê</sup>

An important commercial species along the coast of Cameroun is the ladyfish, ‘herring’ (in Cameroun English) *Elops lacerta* and *E. senegalensis* (Photo 2). Table 10 shows the terms for ‘ladyfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 10. Words for ‘ladyfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	mótàngà
Wuvia	mò-tàngà /mè-
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	móndē ākò
Mabi	ń-tàngá / mí-
Tanga	ntàngà
Yasa	mòtàngà / mè-

**Photo 2. West African ladyfish, *Elops lacerta***



Source: FAO

The Atlantic tarpon *Megalops [Tarpon] atlanticus* is a wide-ranging species found in shallow coastal waters, bays, estuaries, mangrove-lined lagoons, and rivers in the Eastern Atlantic from Senegal to Angola, with occasional sightings off the coast of Portugal, the Azores, and the Atlantic coast of southern France (Photo 3). Table 12 shows the terms for ‘tarpon’ in northwest Bantu;



**Table 11. Words for ‘tarpon’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Isu	̀ndé̀lì
Wumboko	̀mbé̀lì
Wuvia	̀mbè̀lì
Pungu	mbè̀dì
Mabi	̀mpé̀rè /bò-
Tanga	̀mbé̀dì
Yasa	mbè̀dì

**Photo 3. The Atlantic tarpon, *Megalops atlanticus***



The moray eels (*Muraena spp.*) are very common throughout this region. Photo 4 shows one the typical species of this region, *Muraena melanotis*, the honeycomb moray. Table 12 shows the terms for ‘moray eel’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 12. Words for ‘moray eel’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	̀ngò̀ò túwé
Mabi	
Tanga	
Yasa	̀ngò̀nú

Different species of morays are quite distinct in appearance and Yasa at least has names for them (Table 13). It is also interesting that this name also applies to the catfish, but this is probably a secondary application since the basic term seems to deal with the strictly marine morays.

**Table 13. Yasa names for moray species**

Yasa	Identification	FAO English name
ngònú	generic for morays	
ngònú à bòtù	<i>Muraena melanotis</i>	honeycomb moray
ngònú ā dībā	catfish	
ngònú à mángà	<i>Muraena helena</i>	Mediterranean moray
ngònú à wānjā	<i>Muraena robusta</i>	stout moray

**Photo 4. *Muraena melanotis*, the honeycomb moray**



Source: FAO

One of the most common and commercially important species along the coast are the sardinellas. The main species are the Guinean sprat, *Pellonula leonensis*, the round sardinella, *Sardinella aurita* (Photo 5) and the Madeiran sardinella, *Sardinella maderensis*. Table 14 shows the terms for ‘sardinella’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 14. Words for ‘sardinella’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Wuvia	è-lóló / bè-
Pungu	è-lóló /bè-
Malimba	mù-lóló /mì-
Duala	è-lóló /bè-
Yasuku	è-lóló /bì-
Mabi	lúlú /bì-
Tanga	èlóló
Yasa	è-lóló /bè-

**Photo 5. The round sardinella, *Sardinella aurita***



Vivien (1991) notes related names in Yasa and Koko for the freshwater species *Labeo parvus* and *Labeo annectens*. Whether these names have travelled from marine to freshwater or the reverse cannot yet be determined.

One of the most well-known species along the coast is the bonga fish or shad, *Ethmalosa fimbriata* (Photo 6), which occurs in all types of water, coming into estuaries and even freshwater areas.

**Photo 6. Bonga shad** *Ethmalosa fimbriata*



Table 15 shows the terms for ‘bonga shad’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 15. Names of ‘bonga shad’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
#Proto-Bantu	epaka
Londo	epara
Isu	è-yàáká / βè-
Pungu	é-pà /bé-
Malimba	é-pà /bé-
Duala	è-pá /bè-
Yasuku	è-pàgà /bi-
Mabi	páyà /bi-
Tanga Bapuku	épákà
Tanga Bano’o	épaà
Yasa	è-pàkà /bè-

A closely related species is the razorfish, *Ilisha africana* (Photo 7). Table 16 shows the terms for ‘razorfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 16. Names of ‘razorfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
#Proto-Bantu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	j̄ōò pl. míyōò
Mabi	
Tanga Bapuku	
Tanga Bano’o	
Yasa	mô-wô /mé-, mōhòwò [B.]

**Photo 7. Razorfish, *Ilisha africana***



The giant sea catfish or mâchoiron, *Arius heudeloti*, is commonly caught all around the Gulf of Guinea. Table 17 shows the terms for ‘sea catfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 17. Names of *Arius heudeloti* in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Wuvia	
Malimba	ʃèndá
Duala	yèndá
Yasuku	kèndā
Mabi	kindá /mà-
Tanga Bano’o	sènndá
Tanga Bapuku	kènndá
Yasa	ʃèndá

The flying fish, *Cypselurus spp.*, *orphies* or *aiguilles* in French, is commonly caught all around the Gulf of Guinea. Table 18 shows the terms for ‘flying fish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 18. Names of the ‘flying fish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Mabi	tândāaʃ /mà-
Tanga Bano’o	ètàndá
Yasa	è-tândá /bè-

Yasa also recognises a difference between the inshore species, most likely *Cypselurus cyanopterus*, and the open ocean species such as *C. nigricans* and *C. pinnatibarbatu*s, which are known as *ètāndā á múndzà*.

The remora, *Echeneis naucrates*, has a highly characteristic appearance, as it has a sucker which it uses to attach to sharks. Table 19 shows the terms for ‘remora’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 19. Names of the ‘remora’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Duala	m-bèm
Yasuku	
Mabi	m̀pèmí / b̀-
Tanga Bano’o	m̀bémì
Yasa	m̀bémì

The dolphinfish, *Coryphaena equiselis*, coryphène-dauphin in French, is distributed globally and is commonly caught all around the Gulf of Guinea (Photo 8). What is known of its biology and distribution is summarised in Palko et al. (1982). Table 20 shows the terms recorded for ‘dolphinfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 20. Names of the ‘dolphinfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Yasuku	èkóngó/ bì-
Mabi	kúŋgú / bì-
Tanga Bano’o	è-kóŋwā /bè-
Yasa	è-kóngó /bè-

**Photo 8. Dolphinfish, *Coryphaena equiselis***



The kingfish or crevally jack (Fr. *carangue franche*), *Caranx hippos* (Photo 9) is widely caught along the coast. Table 21 shows the terms for ‘kingfish’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 21. Words for ‘kingfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Londo	
Isu	mò-tòndò /mè-
Wumboko	mòtòndù
Wuvia	mò-tòndò /mè-
Pungu	mù-tòndò /mi-
Malimba	mù-tòndò /mi-
Duala	mùtòndò
Yasuku	ñ-tòndò /mi-
Mabi	ñ-túndù /mi-
Tanga	ñtòntò /mé-
Yasa	mò-tòndò /mè-

**Photo 9. *Caranx hippos*, kingfish**



Source: FAO

Fishermen usually distinguish the tongue-soles, with their narrow profiles from the other types of ‘turbot’ or Bothid flounder, which tend to be more circular as well as more colourful. Photo 10 shows a typical tongue-sole, *Cynoglossus browni*, the most common species in Camerounian waters.

Photo 10. The tongue-sole, *Cynoglossus browni*



Source: Author photo

Table 22 shows the terms for ‘tongue-sole’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 22. Terms for ‘tongue-sole’ (*Cynoglossus spp.*) in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
#Proto-Bantu	#èlómó / β-
Londo	
Isu	ijomɔ
Wumboko	
Wuvia	è-lómó / βè-
Pungu	ɲómó
Malimba	lómó / ɲómó
Duala	ɲómó
Yasuku	ɲoni V.
Tanga	lómò
Yasa	

The name recorded by Vivien (1991) for Yasuku is obviously cognate with the regional term. However, in 2010 the term recorded was *ɲgólí* meaning ‘belt’ which is a back translation of the local French *sètúr* i.e. *ceinture*. This is a good example of the erosion of technical vocabulary, even where fisheries remain a lively subsistence practice.

The biglip grunt (Photo 11), *Plectorhynchus macrolepis*, enters estuaries throughout the region and is commonly caught by local fishermen. Table 23 shows the terms for ‘biglip grunt’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 23. Words for ‘biglip grunt’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	#ɛpɔndʒɔ
Londo	è-pɔndʒò / bè-
Wumboko	èpɔndʒó
Wuvia	èfɔndʒó
Malimba	è-pɔnzó / bè-
Duala	èpɔnjó
Yasuku	è-pɔndʒó / bi-
Mabi	pʷɔŋgí / mà-
Tanga	é-pɔndʒɔ̄ / bé-
Yasa	è-pɔndʒí / bè-

**Photo 11. The biglip grunt, *Plectorhynchus macrolepis***



Source: FAO

One of the more distinctive fish species in the region is the sicklefish, *Drepane africana* (Photo 12), known in local French as *disque* and by some slightly quirky re-analysis in Cameroun English as the ‘disco fish’. Table 24 shows the terms for ‘*Drepane africana*’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 24. Words for ‘*Drepane africana*’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Wuvia	èyâ / bè-
Pungu	
Malimba	èyáwà /bè-
Duala	èyáwà
Yasuku	eyabu V.
Mabi	yáo / bì-
Tanga	yáo /báo
Yasa	yáo

Vivien is quoted for Yasuku as our informants gave ‘disk’ a back-translation of French *disque*.

**Photo 12. *Drepane africana*, the disco fish**



Source: FAO

The giant threadfin, *Polydactylus quadrifilis*, known in local French as *capitaine* (although this is also used for the freshwater Nile perch, *Lates niloticus*) is widely caught in the region. Table 25 shows the terms for ‘giant threadfin’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 25. Words for ‘giant threadfin’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Isu	sê
Wumboko	sê
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	sê
Duala	sê
Yasuku	sé
Mabi	
Tanga	
Yasa	

**Photo 13. Giant threadfin, *Polydactylus quadrifilis***



The lesser threadfin, *Galeoïdes decadactylus*, capitaine-plexiglas, is widely caught in the region. Table 26 shows the terms for ‘lesser threadfin’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 26. Words for ‘lesser threadfin’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Isu	
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	sé ótùn áméyè ‘theadfin with short beard’
Mabi	béngì /má-
Tanga	bíbēngì /má-
Yasa	

The terai pompano, *Trachinotus teraia*, is extremely common all along the coast, caught both in industrial trawling operations and in all types of indigenous fishing (Photo 14). Apart from coastal waters, it enters estuaries and even ascends some rivers. Table 27 shows the terms for ‘terai pompano’ in northwest Bantu;



Table 27. Words for ‘terai pompano’ in northwest Bantu	
Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Londo	ngupe
Isu	ḡ-gòvé / imì-
Wuvia	ḡgófé
Malimba	ḡgópé
Duala	ḡgópé
Yasuku	ḡgópí mitṵn <sup>6</sup> pl. ḡgópí mitṵn
Mabi	
Tanga	ḡgópē
Yasa	ḡgwépé

Photo 14. Terai pompano, *Trachinotus teraia*



Source: FAO

The barracuda is one of the most distinctive species in this region. Its highly visible teeth and elongated body make it an effective predator. The Sphyraenidae or barracudas, are represented by three species in the region, *Sphyraena barracuda*, *S. guachancho* and *S. sphyraena*. Table 28 shows the terms for ‘barracuda’ in northwest Bantu;

Table 28. Words for ‘barracuda’ in northwest Bantu	
Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	
Londo	mò-sùrí / mē-
Isu	mò-káú / mē-
Wumboko	màú
Wuvia	màwú / miàwú
Pungu	
Malimba	mwàbó / mi-
Duala	mwàbó
Yasuku	mwako V.
Mabi	ḡàbú / bì-
Tanga	ḡkábū / mèkábú
Yasa	mò-kábó / mē-

<sup>6</sup> ‘pompano with spots’

### R.M. Blench Was there a proto-Bantu word for whale?

Most of these probably apply to the smaller striped barracuda, *Sphyraena guachancho*. Only Tanga records a distinction between the larger barracuda, *Sphyraena guachancho* òkábũ and *S. guachancho* ògābũàbũ. Duala has a term for the immature barracuda, *mùsòdí*, which is also applied to the ‘brochet d’eau douce’, i.e. *Hepsetus odoe*. This must be a cognate of Londo *mò-sùrí*, accounting for the change in root.

Some of the large species in the open sea are only known rather indistinctly to inshore fishermen. The large istiophorids of the open ocean such as the swordfish (*Xiphias spp.*), the sailfish (*Istiophorus albicans*) and the marlins (*Makaira spp.* and *Tetraptera spp.*) are known to fishermen only rather vaguely and are almost never caught. As a result, the usual name, where there is one, groups them all together, despite their obvious phenotypic differences. The mola, or sunfish (*Mola spp.*), despite its huge size, seemed to be almost unknown.

A common sight on the shore throughout the region is the mudskipper, *Periophthalmus papilio* (Photo 15). Table 29 shows the terms for ‘mudskipper’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 29. Words for ‘mudskipper’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mù-vòóná / mè-
Wuvia	kókó mbómbê
Malimba	mùkóngó
Duala	mbúkú
Yasuku	ñ-sòndóŋ /mì-
Mabi	fúŋgú / mí-
Tanga	mikunge (V.)
Yasa	mó-òndzè / mí- (mukenge V.)

**Photo 15. The mudskipper, *Periophthalmus papilio***



Source: Courtesy Robert Hedinger

### 3.3 Other aquatic species

#### 3.3.1 Sea and estuarine mammals

Apart from bony fish, the sea offers a wide variety of other edible resources. Largest are the sea-mammals, whales, dolphins and porpoises. The most comprehensive global guides are Jefferson et al. (1994) and Rice (1998). More specialised regional studies include Jefferson et al. (1997), Best (2007) and Van Waerebeek et al. (2009). Whales were never captured by coastal peoples (although the transplanted populations of São Tomé e Príncipe did go after whales, using small boats, a technique they may have learnt from Basque sailors in the sixteenth century). Nonetheless, whales can be seen off the coast in Cameroun and Gabon and are occasionally beached. The whale features in a number of oral traditions and whale rib-bones are sometimes used to adorn the chairs of chiefs, rather like elephant tusks in inland areas. Species are quite



Porpoises are also found off the coast of Cameroun, and although the evidence is rather fragmentary, there may also be a distinct term for porpoise. Table 33 shows one term that is attested in at least two languages;

**Table 33. Other terms for ‘porpoise’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Tanga	èhèndé
Yasa	è-ndéndé /bè-

It is also possible that some of the other terms for small whales listed in Table 31 are in fact applied to porpoises.

Seals are not typically part of the fauna of the coast of West-Central Africa. I nonetheless, although most of the populations interviewed had no knowledge of seals, they are sometimes seen on the coast and names were recorded in several languages (Table 34). I one of these terms appear to be cognate with each other. Biologically, the most likely candidate is the South African fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) which may occasionally migrate up from I amibia in exceptional years. Less likely is the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) which occurs as far south as Senegambia. Interestingly, the Wuvia have a name for ‘seal’ which is recorded in proverbs and oral tradition; none of their fishermen had ever seen a seal in the ocean, but through nature documentaries on television they are now aware of the appearance of seals.

**Table 34. Words for ‘seal’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Wuvia	ngùú
Yasuku	í-yê /bí-
Mabi	bòŋ mâŋ/ mà- má-

In Wuvia oral tradition, the seal originally lived on land, but lost a battle, became very ashamed and went to sea. Thus ‘don’t behave like the seal!’ is a proverbial expression.

As noted in the introduction, Gehr (1912) records a number of vernacular terms against the German gloss *Seeelefant*. These are shown in Table 35 and all essentially can be translated ‘elephant of the sea’.

**Table 35. Words for ‘Seeelefant’ in Gehr (1912)**

Language	Attestation
Duala	nj̄ou a madiba
Bakoko	nsog mindim
Basa	njog maleb
B̄o	njog maleu
Subu [=Isu]	njoka maliwa
Bakundu	njoku kya madiba

I o similar terms were recorded in the present survey and it remains a matter of conjecture whether these could refer to a species of seal.

Another mammal found throughout the northern part of the coast is the manatee, *Trichechus senegalensis* (Photo 16). Most manatees are strictly marine, but the West African manatee has penetrated the river systems of West Africa, colonising both the I iger and Benue systems (Figure 2). Its diet of seagrass and slow movement have made it very susceptible to overhunting and very few now remain in this region. Most of the fishermen interviewed had never seen a living specimen. Despite this, it has a very solid reconstruction in Bantu and almost unprecedentedly, the name appears to be cognate with Ij̄o and ultimately with Mande. Table 36 shows the names recorded together with possible external cognates;

**Photo 16. Manatee, *Trichechus senegalensis***



**Table 36. Terms for ‘manatee’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Mokpe	manga G.
Isu	manga G.
Duala	manga G.
Yasuku	ɖʒàʒà
Mabi	
Tanga	máŋgã
Yasa	máŋâ
Proto-Ijo	iměĩ
Bamana	mǎ
Tieyaxo	ma

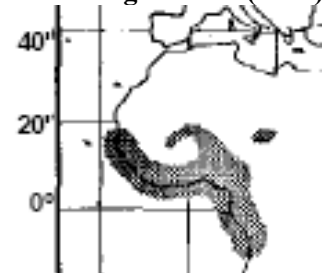
Gehr (1912) recorded a series of terms for the manatee (*Seekuh*), which was obviously more common when he was recording vernacular names.

Otters occur in estuaries and sometimes penetrate quite brackish water in pursuit of fish, but it did not prove possible to get any consistent terms. There are several species of otter, so it is possible that different ones were known in different areas.

### 3.3.2 Crustaceans

Marine and seashore crustaceans are highly diverse along this coast (Schneider 1990). The diversity of vocabulary reflects the economic importance in different regions. For example, some groups have a single word for ‘crab’, other distinguish up to six species in categories closely matching scientific identifications. Table 37 shows the variety of aquatic crustaceans in this region.

**Figure 2. Distribution of African manatees according to FAO (1997)**



**Table 37. Crustaceans occurring along the Cameroun coast**

Typical groups	Economic species
Marine Shrimps <sup>7</sup>	<i>Penaeus duorarum notialis</i> , <i>P. kerathurus</i> , <i>Parapenaeus longirostris</i> , <i>P. atlantica</i>
Estuarine shrimps	<i>Penaeus spp.</i> , <i>Palaemon spp.</i> , <i>Namatopalaemon hastatus</i>
Mantid shrimps	<i>Squilla spp.</i>
Ghost Shrimp	Callianassidae. <i>Callinectes turneranus</i> swarms in enormous numbers every few years
Lobsters	Decapoda (True Lobsters), Palinuridae (Spiny Lobsters), Polydoridae, Scyllaridae (Slipper Lobsters)
Crabs	
Box crabs	<i>Calappa spp.</i>
Grapsid crabs	<i>Grapsidae</i>
Ghost crab	Ocypodidae. <i>Ocypode africana</i> , <i>Ocypode spp.</i>
Fiddler crab	<i>Uca tangeri</i>
Hermit crab	
Swim crabs	<i>Callinectes spp.</i>
Mud crabs	Xanthidae. <i>Menippe spp.</i>
Starfish	

Source: Expanded from Schneider (1990)

<sup>7</sup> Although the fishery is entirely marine, these shrimps pass a crucial part of their life-cycle in the creeks and estuarine areas.



Language	Attestation
Londo	mù-nùṅgá / mè-
Isu	
Wumboko	bíátò
Wuvia	mò-nzòṅgá/ mè-
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	cf. Table 40
Yasuku	
Mabi	
Tanga	ìbáṅgà / mà- spider shrimp
Yasa	ì-báṅgà /mà-

Helmlinger (1972) has quite an elaborate list under the gloss *crevette* shown in Table 40.

Gloss	Identification	Attestation
la petite crevette	<i>Palaemon</i>	mùsá
la jeune petite crevette		njanga musá
la grande crevette		dìngòsò
la grande crevette de petite taille	<i>Nematopalaemon hastatus</i>	dìbáṅgà
le camaron	<i>Penaeus</i> spp.	mùsóm̀b̀è

It seems possible that the *-báṅgà* roots may all apply to the estuarine shrimp, *Nematopalaemon hastatus*.

The stomatopods or mantis shrimps (*Squilla* spp.) were recognised by some fishermen and it is likely they are usually classified with the prawns and shrimps. The names that were forthcoming were cognate and also show a lexicalised form of ‘sea’, which suggests that the term was borrowed from a third language with *-b-* already reduced to medial *-w-*. Table 41 shows the terms for ‘squill’ in northwest Bantu;

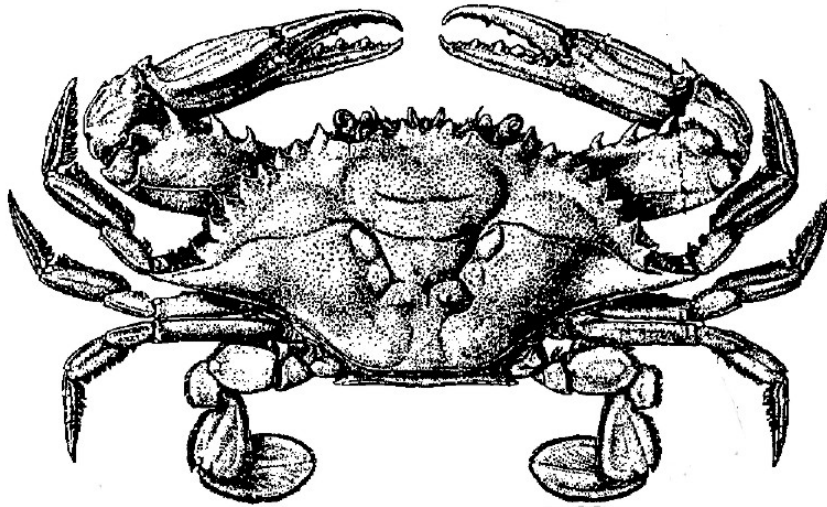
Language	Attestation
Tanga	̀m̀p̀è̀yá tówè
Yasa	b̀è̀yá tówè

The large marine crabs in this region are both diverse and numerous. There are also a much small variety of freshwater crabs and also land crabs. Many languages only have a single term for ‘crab’ but others make quite complex distinctions. Table 39 shows a series of cognate terms for ‘crab’ in northwest Bantu that probably all apply to the swimcrabs *Callinectes* spp.;

Language	Attestation
Londo	mákáká
Wuvia	li-kàkò / mà-
Duala	dikàkò
Yasuku	li-kàkò / mì- ‘marine crab’
Yasuku	mikáyólà mì tuwe
Tanga	ìkākù / má- ‘swimcrab’
Yasa	màkàkò ‘má túbè ‘swimcrab’ <i>Callinectes</i> spp.

Figure 3 shows the marbled swimcrab, *Callinectes marginatus*, one of the species occurring along the coast of Cameroun;

Figure 3. Marbled swimcrab, *Callinectes marginatus*



Source: FAO

On of the more common families of crab on the coast are the calappids or box crabs. Box crabs burrow in mud and sand and can be found in quite deep water off the coast. They have a characteristic shape, as suggested by the yellow box crab, *Calappa gallus* (Figure 4). Table 43 shows the terms for 'box crab' in northwest Bantu;

Table 43. Words for 'box crab' in northwest Bantu

Language	Attestation
Wumboko	mákákálákô
Tanga	ikákù dzá ngûlù
Yasa	kùmbélè

Figure 4. Yellow box crab, *Calappa gallus*

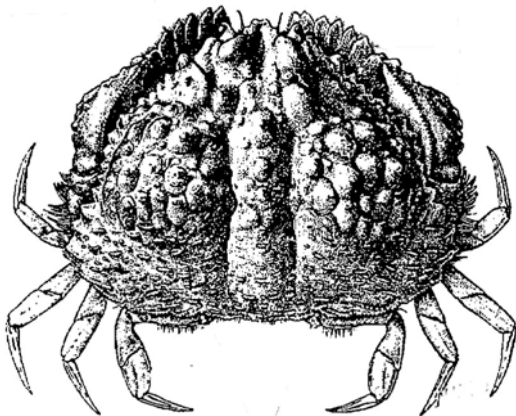


Table 44 shows a possible cognate set for the lagoon land crab, *Cardiosoma armatum*, a large crab found on the shore throughout this region;



**R.M. Blench Was there a proto-Bantu word for whale?**

**Table 44. Words for ‘lagoon land crab’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Duala	dìngómbò
Tanga	ndzômbó /mômbó
Yasa	ɖzômbó

Table 45 shows the names for the stone crabs, *Menippe nodifrons* and *Panopeus africanus*;

**Table 45. Words for ‘crab spp.’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Tanga	ḡgwō yínyà
Yasa	ḡgòkónyò

Table 46 shows a term for the fiddler crab, *Uca tangeri*, recorded in a small number of languages;

**Table 46. Words for ‘fiddler crab’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Duala	m-pólibé, m-pódibé
Tanga	ī-pókédè /lò-
Yasa	vi-kópídá /li-

Table 47 shows a miscellaneous list of terms recorded for individual crab species;

**Table 47. Words for ‘crab spp.’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation	Gloss	Latin
Wumboko	éyàngì		<i>Liocarcinus corrugatus</i>
Wuvia	è-yàngà / bè-		<i>Goniopsis pelli</i>
Duala	ḡgàlàtándà	crabe tourteau	
Duala	ntèpè	crabe dont la carapace est molle	
Yasa	kókó à màtándâ		<i>Goniopsis pelli</i>
Yasa	dǎngádǎgè /m-		<i>Grapsus grapsus</i>
Yasa	ḡgòlò		<i>Maja squinado</i>
Yasa	kókó		<i>Ocypode africana</i>

There is no doubt that further work with informants on this highly specialised vocabulary is likely to produce more cognate sets.

### 3.3.3 Cephalopods, jellyfish and others

There are three types of cephalopod found along the coast in this region;

Squid	Calmar	<i>Teuthoidea</i>
Cuttlefish	Poulpe	<i>Sepioidea</i>
Octopus	Seiche	<i>Octopoda</i>

However, in sharp contrast to other regions of the world, these species are barely recognised and almost never eaten. Most languages either had no word at all, or one word covering all species. Table 85 shows the terms for ‘cephalopod’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 48. Words for ‘cephalopod’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	ikpere yangɔ <i>octopus</i>
Wuvia	è-éjànè / βè-
Mabi	ní-óndò / bò- (squid, cuttlefish)
Tanga	ɲóndò
Yasa	ɲóndò à túbè ‘sea onion’
Yasa	mòpòpò <i>calmar</i>

¶ of all languages have a word for ‘jellyfish’, although the capacity of some species to sting was well-known to fishermen. The exact species found on the coast are hard to determine from a rather sparse scientific literature. Kramp (1961) On the southern coast, for example among the Yasa, there is an idea that jellyfish are immature squid and thus the two categories have the same name. Table 49 shows the words recorded so far;

**Table 49. Words for ‘jellyfish’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mòròndòkò
Isu	èkà ùmà
Wumboko	éká múŋgê
Wuvia	m <sup>w</sup> ánzò pl. miánzò
Duala	èkàbùmà
Yasuku	ñzé kàbùmà ‘stinging leopard’
Mabi	békúmà / bí-
Tanga	é-békúmè/ bé-
Yasa	élóŋĩ

These form a curious set, since the Isu form appears to be cognate with the Duala and Yasuku, with loss of the intervocalic –b-. However, Mabi and Tanga also appear to be related, although the b~k have undergone metathesis. Although the *kàbùmà* root was interpreted as ‘leopard’ this is far from the usual root for leopard and may be a pseudo-etymology.

As for other sea flora, terms recollected for corals and barnacles seem to be somewhat sporadic. Table 50 shows the terms so far collected in northwest Bantu;

**Table 50. Words for ‘sea flora’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Wuvia	ñdòndá lilálè anemone
Wuvia	è-lùmà / βè- coral
Yasuku	m̀bòndzì ètùwé ‘coral’
Mabi	mpàŋgàlá mákwâ <sup>s</sup> barnacle, goose barnacle
Tanga	báálálè coral
Tanga	yèbá barnacle
Yasa	èsésé ádzèŋgú coral

### 3.3.4 Marine shells or molluscs

Marine shells divide into two major classes, bivalves and gastropods. Bivalves include all shells divided into two halves and almost all occur in the intertidal zone. ¶ early all are edible, but they are not considered important into diet and vernacular names are often extremely vague. Many languages have a single term for ‘bivalve’ and a term for ‘gastropod’ which is identical to the term for land snail. Table 51 shows the characteristic species occurring on the coast in this region.

**R.M. Blench Was there a proto-Bantu word for whale?**

**Table 51. Molluscs and crustaceans occurring along the coast**

Category	Typical groups	Economic species
Molluscs	Oysters	<i>Crassostrea gasar</i>
	Periwinkles	<i>Tympanotonus fuscatus</i> , <i>Pachymelania aurita</i> , <i>Cerithiacea potamididae</i>
	Clams	<i>Galatea paradoxa</i> , <i>Equeria radiata</i>

Source: Expanded from Schneider (1990)

Table 52 shows the terms for ‘bivalve’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 52. Words for ‘bivalve’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	
Mabi	ìpàngàlá
Tanga	mbāngālá
Yasa	ì-yéyé /mà-

Oysters are common in rocky areas and also attach themselves to the stilt-roots for part of their life-cycle. The mangrove oyster, *Crassostrea gasar*, occurs on both sides of the Atlantic, and is much appreciated as a food source (Photo 18). Table 53 shows the terms for ‘oyster’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 53. Words for ‘oyster’ in northwest Bantu**

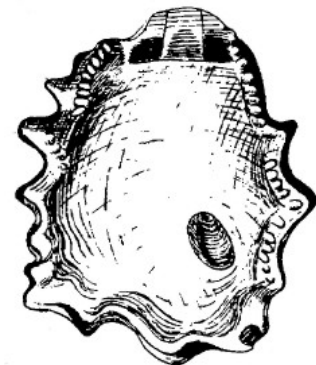
Language	Attestation
Wumboko	yòwá
Wuvia	li-dzódzó / mà-
Duala	èkàndzó
Tanga	ì-tāmbē /mà-
Yasa	h-tāmbé /mà-

**Photo 18. Mangrove oyster, *Crassostrea gasar***



Source: Wikipedia

**Figure 5. *Ostrea cucullata***



Source: FAO

Typically, seashore gastropods are compared to snails in many languages. Table 54 shows the terms for ‘gastropod’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 54. Words for ‘gastropod’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	bètólè moon snail <i>Natica spp.</i>
Wuvia	è-tólè / bè- nodose rock shell <i>Thais nodosa</i>
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	ndòngò
Mabi	tólò / bì-
Tanga	
Yasa	è-tódè / bè- rock shell <i>Thais spp.</i>

### 3.3.5 Marine turtles

The other important marine species is the turtle. Five species of turtle nest on the beaches of Cameroun (Chirio & LeBreton 2007). These are given in Table 55;

**Table 55. West African sea-turtles**

English	Scientific
Leatherback	<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>
Loggerhead turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>
Green sea turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
Hawksbill turtle	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>
Olive ridley turtle	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>

Turtles are protected under various international wildlife conventions, but still they seem to be regularly exploited. Most languages have a single term for all marine turtles and this is often the same word as for freshwater turtle and tortoise, with ‘sea’ qualifying it. Table 56 shows the terms for ‘turtle’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 56. Words for ‘sea turtle’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	ku ya mariba
Isu	è-ku / vè-
Wuvia	kû
Malimba	kúdù
Duala	ndiwá leatherback
Duala	èkù green sea turtle
Duala	ndwà ? loggerhead
Yasuku	kúlút
Tanga	kúúdù
Yasa	kúdù

Many of these terms are identical with or closely resemble the names for the river turtles or even the land tortoises.

### 3.4 Fish capture techniques

Fish are captured using a wide variety of techniques. Some of these are presumably of great antiquity and adapted to particular species, locations and seasons. Others are introduced or adapted using modern industrial materials. Table 57 summarises the fishing gear used along the coast;

**Table 57. Fish capture techniques used along the coast of Cameroun**

Category	Types	Comment
Harpoon guns		recent introduction
Hooks		probably of recent introduction
Cast-nets	double clap-nets	
	plunge-basket	
	sweep-net	
Seines	hand-seine	
	circular seine	
Gill-nets	floating gill-net	
	bottom-set gill-net	
Valve-traps	cylindrical valve-traps	
	conical valve-traps	set in extensive networks of fish-fences
	valveless non-return traps	used for shrimps
Long-lines	Baited long-lines	
	Foul-hook long-lines	

Source: Terminology from Reed *et al.* (1967) and FAO/I IOMR (1994)

Although harpoons and other types of fishing-spear were widely used in the I iger Delta, especially for manatees and crocodiles, there is no obvious trace of them in Cameroun. Whether they have disappeared in recent times or were never used is an open question.

Table 60 shows some of the general terms for ‘net’ recorded in northwest Bantu;

**Table 58. Terms for ‘net’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	ikóngì
Isu	èfèsè
Wuvia	βèlóngí sání
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	bàtá small net
Duala	ɔ̀zòngà deepwater net
Duala	mùnàngà seine net
Yasuku	è-péhá /bi-
Mabi	
Tanga	è-péyê / bè-
Yasa	èpéyè
Yasa	èpéyè á bòdùbákà <i>filet calé</i>

The cast-net (Fr. *filet-épervier*) is extremely common in calmer waters. Whether it is genuinely an old method of fishing is doubtful and may have been introduced in the Portuguese era. Table 60 shows the general term for ‘cast-net’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 59. Terms for ‘cast-net’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mbunja
Isu	mbùndzà
Wumboko	mbúnzá
Wuvia	mbúnzá
Malimba	mbùndzà
Duala	mbùndzà
Yasuku	
Mabi	
Tanga	mbùndzà
Yasa	mbúdzá

A very characteristic method of catching fish is the fish-fence (Fr. *nasse*). This is a long fence stretch across the entire channel of a river, with a characteristic V-shape. The water can pass through the weave of the fence, but fish of any significant size are channelled into a series of non-return traps set in the fence. Typically, such fences are set in estuaries, where fish returning to open water pass. Table 60 shows the terms for ‘fish-fence’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 60. Terms for ‘fish-fence’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Isu	kòtò
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	ì-yàò /lò-
Duala	èyàwò
Duala	ilòmbá
Duala	èlínǵá
Yasuku	òkúl /à-
Mabi	
Tanga	
Yasa	è-kúlù /bì-

An intriguing question is whether fish-hooks were known prior to European contact. All fish-hooks today are made of industrial steel, so this says little about their antiquity. Fish-hooks have been found in archaeological contexts across Sahelian Africa, but all the evidence is that they fell out of use thousands of years ago. Despite this, northwest Bantu has a relatively stable term that does not look like a borrowing. Table 61 shows these terms for ‘hook’;

**Table 61. Terms for ‘hook’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	iyɔbi
Isu	yóvì pl. vóvì
Wumboko	nòwí
Wuvia	itʃɔwò /βèyɔwò
Duala	ɖʒòbí
Yasuku	ñ-lóó /mì-
Mabi	
Tanga Bano’o	víóbbò / mábbò
Tanga Bapuku	víóbbò / wóbbò
Yasa	ì-yóbbò /mà-

It is now recognised that the domestication of calabashes for fishing-floats was a key initial step towards plant domestication in the I ew World. However, fishing floats in Africa may well be post-European. All

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fishing floats in use today are made from industrial materials, either commercially produced floats or cut roundels of polystyrene. Table 62 shows the terms for ‘fishing-float’;

**Table 62. Terms for ‘fishing-float’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mbongo
Isu	mbëndú
Wumboko	mbëndú
Wuvia	mbëndú
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	mbëndú
Yasuku	mbëndú
Mabi	
Tanga	mbëndū
Yasa	mbëndú

### 3.5 Boats

The principal method of boat construction along the west coast is the canoe made from a single tree-trunk. Fire is used to split the canoe and open up the interior and adzes shape the outside of the canoe. However, today only small canoes are made in this way and all larger boats are made from planks (Photo 19). Ssentongo & Ijock (1987) suggest that all the plank boats are of Ghanaian or Igerian origin and are thus not very old. They refer to very large canoes with up to fourteen paddlers used with large purse seines used for Sardinella and bonga; no such canoes were seen today. One study exists of terms for ‘canoe’ in Bantu languages, the still unpublished Bulkens (n.d.). This identifies several widespread roots for ‘canoe’ including *\*(n)yato* which occurs along river systems through much of the Bantu world and indeed beyond. However, Bulkens assumes the characteristic term for ‘boat’ along the coast of Cameroun is cognate with the *\*ato* root. However, while  $t \rightarrow l$  is a possible sound-shift, the Cameroun root always has an initial *\*b*, which makes it fairly certain it is a regional innovation with a distinctive coastal distribution. Table 63 shows the stem for ‘canoe’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 63. Words for ‘boat, canoe’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Class	Attestation
Londo		wá-lò /má-
Isu		wò-lò /mò-
Wumboko		bálò
Wuvia		gbá-yò/ má-
Duala		bòlò
Yasuku		m̀-̀bòngó mì-
Mabi		
Tanga		mbóólò /myálò
Yasa		bwálò /mè-
Mbuun	B87	bwár

It is not impossible there has been some re-analysis through interference with French *bateau* though there are clearly a series of older roots.

Photo 19. Canoes at Lonji Beach



Canoe paddles have a distinctive shape throughout the region. Table 64 shows the terms for ‘paddle’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 64. Terms for ‘paddle’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Proto-Bantu	kápi
Londo	kafi
Isu	pàki
Wumboko	fáki
Wuvia	fái
Duala	pái
Yasuku	páyó ? < Fr. <i>pagaille</i>
Mabi	
Tanga	kápi
Yasa	káví

If the Isu and other terms are metatheses of PB *kápi*, then external apparent cognates such as I upe *èpà* are presumably lookalikes. However, it is at least possibly that these languages preserve an older form and it is *kápi* which has developed. Paddling is such an important activity in some areas that a nuanced terminology of paddling styles has developed. Helmlinger (1972) records a whole variety of techniques in the Duala language (Table 65);

**Table 65. Duala paddling styles**

Style	Duala
douce et lente	mbàkà
lente, mais forte et régulière	èdùtè
avec des petits coups rapide	dzásà
très rapidement	mùdòbò

Helmlinger (1972:624)



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A technology whose ancestry is unclear is the anchor. All anchors in use today seem to be based on European models (Photo 20) but the word itself appears not to be a borrowing. Table 66 shows the terms for ‘anchor’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 66. Terms for ‘anchor’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Isu	dìó
Wuvia	lí-yò /mí-
Duala	dìò
Yasuku	édíò /bì-
Mabi	
Tanga	é-díyò /bé-
Yasa	édíyò

**Photo 20. Modern anchor, Lonji beach**



Source: Author photo

### 3.6 The ocean

Early Bantu had a panoply of words describing the sea and weather conditions. Table 67 shows the terms for ‘ocean’ or ‘sea’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 67. Words for ‘sea/ocean’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mbo
Isu	mwándzá
Wumboko	mwánzá
Wuvia	m <sup>w</sup> ànzà
Malimba	túbè
Duala	múndzá
Duala	túbè <i>haute mer</i>
Yasuku	túwè
Mabi	
Tanga	túbè
Yasa	túbè

There appear to be two main terms, #*mwandza* and #*tube*. Duala seems to have retained both words, probably to distinguish the sea from the open ocean. Although languages such as Wuvia have \**mwànzà* as the current lexeme, #*tube* survives in fossil form in compound terms. This suggests that this may have been the original Bantu term for ‘sea’. Also compound forms such as the Yasa for ‘squill’ (Table 41) have an eroded form, *tówè*, even though the citation form is *túbè*, pointing to borrowing from a language in which this reduction had already taken place.

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The typical shoreline in this region is fringing sand lined with palms and mangroves. There are, however, quite a few rocky areas, which create habitats for different fish species. Table 68 shows the terms for ‘shore’ or ‘beach’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 68. Words for ‘shore’ or ‘beach’ in northwest Bantu**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Attestation</b>
Londo	loso
Isu	li-wó /mà-
Wumboko	mòkókó
Wuvia	lùô
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	dibó
Yasuku	
Mabi	
Tanga	mángà
Yasa	mângà

Storms at sea are one of the most dangerous events for fishermen, but also are said to attract fish sometimes. At any rate they are a characteristic meteorological phenomenon. Surprisingly, however, there is no basic root applied to ‘storm’ and the terms seem to be all different. Table 69 shows the terms for ‘storm’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 69. Words for ‘storm’ in northwest Bantu**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Attestation</b>
Londo	ngun̄ga
Isu	nḡöy, è-wùli /βè-
Wumboko	mòmbànù
Wuvia	mbimbì
Duala	mũdi
Yasuku	
Mabi	mbvân̄
Tanga	yóngówà
Yasa	òókúdi

One of the most characteristic winds in this region is the wind coming from the land, in practice the East, which drives canoes out to sea. Some languages recognise several types of wind, for example, Duala *ilòndà* ‘strong wind in the rainy season’ but only this wind has a specific term. Table 70 shows the terms for ‘wind from shore’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 70. Words for ‘wind from shore’ in northwest Bantu**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Attestation</b>
Londo	è-kuri
Isu	likòle
Wumboko	ènòngè
Wuvia	èkélíkéli
Malimba	dibòngò
Duala	dibòngò
Yasuku	libòngò
Mabi	kúndùà máná
Tanga	kúndúwà
Yasa	kúndúwà

There are several rather local roots here, #-*kole*, #-*bòngò* and *kúndúwà*; it would be interesting to further investigate their etymologies.

One characteristic feature of the sea is whirlpools, created by local intersections of currents. All languages seem to recognise this phenomenon but the words are quite diverse. It seems likely that in most languages the word is the same as for dust-devils, the small whirlwinds seen on land in the dry season. Table 71 shows the terms for ‘whirlpool’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 71. Words for ‘whirlpool’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	riʃa
Isu	lifyo
Wumboko	mòhúmbà
Wuvia	lifiyò
Duala	difyò
Duala	è-tyà /bè-
Yasuku	líhà
Mabi	tʃià
Tanga	édóŋgè
Yasa	édóŋgè

Fishermen also noted that there places in the sea where detritus accumulates and the sediment on the sea-floor is deep. The water is relatively still in such places. Table 72 shows the terms for ‘still zone’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 72. Terms for ‘still zone’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	dì-fùké
Wuvia	ñzámbeŋgè
Pungu	
Malimba	dùútù
Duala	
Yasuku	líkùnt
Mabi	m <sup>v</sup> ángà
Tanga	m <sup>v</sup> ángà
Yasa	m <sup>v</sup> ángà

The important currents affecting the Gulf of Guinea are the Guinea Current, which runs from west to East along the coast of West Africa and twists around the Gulf turning outwards into the ocean and the south equatorial current which flows from East to West, due south of the Guinea Current (Wauthy 1983). Most languages have a simplified terminology where one term covers all the currents. However, there seems to be little consistency in the local names, which are highly varied. Table 73 shows the names for ‘current’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 73. Words for ‘current’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Attestation
Londo	mò-sisa /mè-
Isu	è-tiyá /bè-
Wumboko	yúŋgà
Wuvia	see Table 74
Duala	m <sup>w</sup> ángò
Yasuku	tóndá
Mabi	
Tanga	tóndà
Yasa	síŋgá

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However, the Wuvia have a much richer terminology, as shown in Table 74;

**Table 74. Wuvia names for ocean currents**

Direction	Name	Comment
N→S	èbáwè	
W→E	fófó	brings good clear green/blue water
E→W	mòisá	brings rubbish, which accumulates on the shore in one place <i>nzám̀b̀èng̀è</i>
S→I	lisê	

Table 75 shows the terms for ‘large wave’ and ‘small wave’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 75. Words for ‘wave’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	Large	Small
Londo	mò-keba / mè-	
Isu		
Wumboko	mèwáŋ	
Wuvia	βéwúnê	mètóŋgbà
Duala	èwùdí	èmùnè
Duala	yòndò	
Yasuku		
Mabi		
Tanga	nè-bà / mè-	
Yasa	mò-ŋ̀èbá / mè-	èvúlúá

A knowledge of the tides is essential to successful fishing in this region. There appears to be a common Bantu root for ‘tide’ #èbé. High and low tide are usually recognised as distinct and sometimes rising and falling as well. Table 76 shows the terms for ‘high tide’ and ‘low tide’ in northwest Bantu;

**Table 76. Words for ‘high tide’ and ‘low tide’ in northwest Bantu**

Language	High tide	Low tide
Londo		
Isu	moliyo mondene	moliyo mosali
Wumboko		
Wuvia	èβé ndénè	èβé sàli
Duala	èbé (general)	
Yasuku		
Mabi		
Tanga	èbé títi	èbé tómù
Yasa	èbéé	mòkwálání

Table 77 shows the specialised terms recorded for Duala tidal states;

**Table 77. Duala terms for tidal states**

Gloss	Duala
Rising tide	màsòŋgò
Falling tide	móndò
High tide	màlóǹdà
Low tide	mbàndzè
Turning of the tide	mùdyò

Fishermen also recognise the importance of different seasons. However, each community appears to divide up the year in different ways. The simplest classifications divide the year into wet and dry, but more complex patterns are also recognised by some languages. Table 78 sets out the Tanga classification of the seasons;

**Table 78. Tanga classification of the seasons**

Tanga	Duration
ééṽḍ	dry season, Jan-Mar
māhándzâ	cold season, Apr-May
viündâ	May-Jul
èjǒ	rainy season, Aug-Dec

and Table 79 the Yasuku system;

**Table 79. Yasuku classification of the seasons**

Yasuku	Duration	Characteristics
àsíí	Dec/Jan	fish/flooding
ēsēè	Feb-Apr	cultivating
òlùndè	May-Ì ov	little fish

Interestingly, the two systems seem to have little in common.

### 5. The legend of the red fish and other aspects of oral history

An interesting contribution to the early history of the Bantu-speaking area is entitled ‘The Pygmies were our Compass’ (Kliemann 2003). Among other topics this refers to the widespread myth or narrative that the pygmies were already resident in the forest when particular Bantu groups reached their present site and that they were led there by pygmies. An interesting variant of this myth is reported in xx. In this version, the pygmies are in residence on the seashore when the Bantu arrive. show the Bantu peoples a red fish which has eyes which not change colour when cooked. Appendix 4. gives the French version of an account by a Mabi-speaker from a manuscript apparently written in 1936. This is a sea fish (perhaps the grouper, *Epinephelus sp.*) and from this knowledge the Bantu began sea-fishing. This is a story is beguiling but puzzling because there is no evidence for pygmies taking any significant interest in sea-fishing.

### 6. The Ijoid connection

If there was previously a far more active maritime connection across the Bight of Biafra than now exists, then one aspect of this could have been lexical interchange. Kay Williamson identified a number of Bantu-Ijò lexical parallels which are set out in Table 80. I ot included are those which I find doubtful, and those where it is likely they do indeed go back to a more ancient I iger-Congo root. I have excluded the data on the minority language Defaka, which Kay used to construct proto-Ijoid forms, because Defaka often has a different lexeme, and because its Ijoid status as remains questionable. I do not expect all the parallels to stand; this table is presently a list of suggestions to be investigated. Also, no hypothesis is advanced about the direction of spread; indeed words may have travelled in both directions.

**Table 80. Bantu-Ijo lexical parallels**

Gloss	P-Ijò	BLR3
all	sɛ	?BLR <b>ce</b> L 499 <i>all</i>
beat, flog, hit	fɜmũ	LR <b>pam</b> H 2382 <i>hit</i>
bind, tie (bundle)	fɛnã	BLR <b>pind</b> H 2578 <i>tie knot</i>
blood	asĩĩ	BLR <b>cii</b> LH 6453 <i>blood</i>
burn (as house) vi	ijəkĩ	BLR <b>jokı</b> L 3532 <i>roast; burn</i> BLR <b>jonki</b> L 3578 <i>roast; burn; tr.</i>
catch, hold	kɔrɪ	?BLR <b>kod</b> H 6999 <i>take; touch</i>
chest, width (of chest)	kuɓu	BLR <b>kuba</b> HL 2106 <i>chest</i>
cloth, raffia	okuru (KOIɪ )	?BLR <b>kɔto</b> HL 2077 <i>garment</i>
create = mould	tɛmẽ	?BLR <b>dem</b> L 7451 <i>create, make sp.</i>
faint vi	fɜmõ	BLR <b>pɜɔm</b> H 2647 <i>breathe; rest</i>
feather	ipĩkõõ	BLR <b>piko</b> LL 2515 <i>wing</i>
front	ɓɛlɛɔ	BLR <b>bede</b> LL 121 <i>front; before</i>
good, become	eɓi	?BLR <b>boi</b> 7060 <i>good</i>

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<b>Gloss</b>	<b>P-Ijò</b>	<b>BLR3</b>
hard = strong	kɔrɔ	BLR <b>kɔt</b> H 5215 <i>be dry; hard</i> BLR <b>kod</b> H 1874 <i>be strong; be hard; be difficult</i>
intestines	ɪla EI	BLR <b>da</b> L 773 <i>abdomen, intestines; pregnancy; inside</i>
kite (bird)	ekulɛi ?	?BLR <b>kodi</b> HL 1883 <i>bird of prey spp., hawk spp.</i>
love	tari	?BLR <b>tand</b> 8568 <i>love; like; wish</i>
melt vt	sanĩ	?BLR <b>caanɔdɔd</b> L 9267 <i>melt, tr.</i>
mix (blend) vi	kɔbu-i	?BLR <b>kib</b> L <i>mix clay</i>
Ì ile monitor	ɔbɔdi	?BLR <b>bɔdɔ</b> HH 308 <i>reptile: monitor lizard; lizard</i>
obstruct = prevent	kiki	BLR <b>kɪk</b> H 1796 <i>put across; obstruct</i>
paddle (canoe)	jɔgɔ	BLR <b>dug</b> H 1248 <i>paddle</i>
pierce = stab	temĩ	BLR <b>tum</b> H 3108 <i>stab</i>
pound vt	temĩ	?BLR <b>tump</b> 5999 <i>pound</i>
set (trap)	pɪta	?BLR <b>pɪa</b> LL Ì 116 <i>trap</i>
shadow = spirit	temɛ	?BLR <b>dima</b> HH 3820 <i>spirit</i>
slice vt	sɛgi	BLR <b>ceng</b> L 545 <i>cut</i>
snore	ɔgɔri	BLR <b>gon</b> L 1440 <i>snore; sleep; lie down</i>
song	dumɔũ ?	BLR <b>dɪmb</b> H V 5554 <i>sing</i> BLR <b>jimbo</b> HL 3364 <i>song; dance</i>
spear (fishing)	dɔmɔũ/dũmɔũ	?BLR <b>tumo</b> HL 3109 <i>spear</i>
strong = hard	kɔrɔ	BLR <b>kɔt</b> H 5215 <i>be dry; hard</i> BLR <b>kod</b> H 1874 <i>be strong; be hard; be difficult</i>
tie (rope)	kakar	BLR <b>kak</b> L 1682 <i>tie up</i> BLR <b>kaak</b> L_ 9294 <i>tie up</i>
throat = voice	pɔkɔ ?	BLR <b>pogo</b> 7107 <i>throat</i>
wide, become	finĩ-ĩ	?BLR <b>pana</b> 8280 <i>wide</i>

It is noticeable that not many terms point to a specific fishing subsistence pattern and a more detailed comparison with Ijò fish names<sup>8</sup> has produced no further resemblances. This suggests strongly that the Ijò names were locally constructed in the Ì iger Delta, after the Ijò reached the sea following their migration down the Ì iger River. Bantu names probably originate quite separately, although their sources are presently opaque.

## 7. Conclusions

The literature on the Bantu expansion and the standard list of PB reconstructions assumes a land-based expansion across the equatorial rainforest following the rivers. But there is nothing inherently impossible about an active Bantu maritime culture spreading rapidly down the western seaboard of Africa after 4000 bp and indeed this has some support from archaeology. The collection and synthesis of maritime vocabulary in the languages of coastal Cameroun points to a rich lexicon which has previously gone unrecorded. Early traffic with the island of Bioco, perhaps connected with the stone axe trade, has shown that pelagic fishing techniques and a knowledge of the open ocean must have been a significant element in Bantu subsistence in this region. Lexical links with fishing populations north and west of the coastal Bantu also suggest active sea-based interchanges in prehistory. The problem is how far south this population expansion was able to push before increasingly rough surf forced its bearers inland. Until more data is available on coastal language in Gabon and other countries, this question will remain difficult to answer.

<sup>8</sup> A manuscript on Ijò fish names was left by the late Richard Freeman, containing a list of comparative fish names in many languages of the Ì iger Delta which has served as a comparison for this paper.

**Appendix 1. Languages, informants, dates and places of interview**

**Table 81. Languages, informants, dates and places of interview**

Language	Date	Place	Informants
Pongo		Kribi	Gustave I gange I gambi
Tanga Bano'o		Kribi	Joseph Celestin I gabe
Tanga Bapuku		Kribi	Mathieu Ebobo
Malimba		Kribi	Jacques Elessa
Yasuku		?	Alex Epuji, Bertrand Biyang, François Ekemba
Yasa		Loloabe	Calvin Meme
Wumboko	22/2/10	I jonji	Sylvester Musanga
Wuvia	22/2/10	Wovea	James Cotton Bieyo, Peter Mbongo Luma
Mokpe	23/2/10	Limbe	Solomon Itise, Cecilia Bila
Londo	25/2/10	Ekondo Titi	Francis Esan, Julie Andu
Isu	26/2/10	Bimbria	Peter Maliva

**Appendix 2. Some names of fish in Coastal Pidgin**

Discussions with fishermen, especially in the northern zone of the coast are often conducted partly in Pidgin and the names of fish are not recorded in any useful reference source. Table 82 gives the Pidgin names of some of the fish species along the Cameroun Coast;

**Table 82. Fish names in Pidgin of the Cameroun Coast**

Pidgin	English	French	Identification
Aeroplane shark	Hammerhead shark	Requin-marteau	<i>Sphyrna</i> spp.
Disco		Disque	Drepanidae
Broke married		Otolithe bossu	<i>Pseudolithus elongatus</i>
Five-star	Starfish	Etoile de mer	
Wisu longmouth	Trumpetfish	Poisson-trompette	<i>Fistularia</i> spp.

**Appendix 3. Some local names of fishing gear**

Similarly, fishing gear has developed its own vocabulary in both English and French and it is useful to link the vernacular names with the technical names used in fisheries literature. Some of the names given in Table 83 were drawn from Ssentongo & I jock (1987) and were not heard in the field.

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**Table 83. Names for fishing gear in Cameroun**

<b>Vernacular</b>	<b>Technical name</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>Comment</b>
drawing net, drawing chain	beach seine	tirez- tirez	
mbunja	cast net	épervier	
ngoto	conical shrimp net		
pèsè, musobo net, musobo chain	multifilament bottom set gillnets		
strong kanda net, strong kanda chain	monofilament bonga gillnet		
waka-waka	drift net		
watsha	artisanal purse seine		introduced by Ghanaians

**Appendix 4. A Mabi account of the legend of the red fish**

The following text is typed up from a manuscript account apparently written in 1936.

A l'arrivée de l'homme Mabi au bord de l'Océan, il n'y avait personne sur le lieu. Le groupe Boguieli ayant trouvé l'Océan, est rentré en arrière pays chercher son Mi (Mabi) tout en lui montrant qu'ils ont rencontré sur leur chemin une grandeur énorme (Mang ma nenni) cours d'eau sans fin ou bord opposé. Quand un Mabi part pour l'Europe (France) il dit qu'il va à Mang ma nenni (continuation du grand cours d'eau sans bord opposé). Quand l'homme Mabi atteignit la côte, le groupe Bogiéli y avait déjà installé des huttes pour leur campement. Au cours d'une pêche, ils avaient pris un poisson bizarre dont ils ne connaissaient pas le nom; ils l'ont emballé dans des feuilles et placé au feu, au moment du repas, ils constatèrent que les branchies du poisson étaient toujours rouges aussi bien que les alentours de ses yeux qui n'avaient pas changé. Ils remirent le paquet au feu, toujours le fait était le même, alors nos fidèles compagnons décidèrent que le cours d'eau pouvait disposer des choses porteuses de malheurs, et que ce poisson pouvait tuer, ils ne pouvaient pas vivre au bord de cette eau il fallait rentrer en brousse.

Thanks to Dan Duke for making this available.

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**Error! Reference source not found.** shows the terms for 'xxx' in northwest Bantu;

**Table 84. Words for 'xxx' in northwest Bantu**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Attestation</b>
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	
Mabi	
Tanga	
Yasa	

Table 85 shows the terms for 'xxx' in northwest Bantu;

**Table 85. Words for 'xxx' in northwest Bantu**

<b>Language</b>	<b>Attestation</b>
Londo	
Isu	
Wumboko	
Wuvia	
Pungu	
Malimba	
Duala	
Yasuku	
Mabi	
Tanga	
Yasa	