How Languages Work
An Introduction to Languages and Linguistics

Edited by Carol Genetti

Language Profile 02
Goemai
The photos show Louis Longpûan, a Goemai elder and native speaker of the Kwo dialect of Goemai. At the time these photos were taken, he was around 65 years of age.
He was born and grew up in the village of Kwande, the capital of the Kwo Goemai. After finishing school, he was educated as a teacher, and later settled in Jos, the capital of Plateau State, which hosts a sizeable community of Goemai migrants.

The name *Longpûan* (pronounced /lɔ̃pʊã/) has its own meaning and history. In the days of Louis Longpûan’s grandfather, the people invited the chief to move from the outskirts of Kwande into the center of their village. The chief agreed, and chose to settle in the grandfather’s compound; and the family had to resettle to a new home. On this day, Louis Longpûan’s father was born, and he was given the name *Longpûan*, meaning “the chief has displaced (us)”. His children and grandchildren later took on this name as their family name.
Over the past ten years, Louis Longpûan has played an active role in describing and documenting his language. The photos here and on the previous page show him during linguistic research: transcribing a narrative, and inspecting a web page of Goemai riddles.