10-1-1998

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The Function of English in Contemporary Ghanaian Society

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Independent Study Project
Fall 1998
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Mama, Lue, Carmela and Juana, for preparing me to come to Ghana, Drs. Naana and Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, my academic directors, for the warm welcome home, Dr. J. A. Sackey, my advisor, for your time and guidance, Aba Cobb, my “liver”, for all those times the isp was ‘doing” me, A.K.N. for continuing the laughter even though we were apart.
Table of Contents.

Abstract

Introduction

Methodology

The History of the English Language in Ghana
   How did English Come to Wield So Much Power?

The Social Context and Use of English in Contemporary Ghanaian Society
   The National Language Debate
   Language As A Symbol of Culture and Identity

Conclusion

Bibliography
The following report explores the unique structure of multilingualism that is present in contemporary Ghanaian society. It also seeks to determine what purpose(s) Ghanaians have for the English language, specifically in comparison to their indigenous languages. More importantly, it examines the social and cultural ramifications involved in the use of the English language in regards to the future of Ghanaian society.
INTRODUCTION

“It’s the language of our colonial masters.” This is how a number of Ghanaians explained why English can be seen and heard in Ghana so much even though for the majority of Ghanaians, an indigenous language is their primary language. When these people answered my question, their tones were matter-of-fact, almost as if to say, ‘that’s just the way things are’, period; end of story; subject closed. The truth is, the topic of Ghana’s official language has been the subject of many conversations for a long time. It has been debated in parliament, schools, homes and just very recently, it was the subject of a paper presented at the National Festival of Arts and Culture 1998.

Ghana has been an independent nation for over forty years, therefore one would assume that the colonial pressures that made English such an important part of Ghanaian society in the past were no longer present. However, despite the significant number of years that have passed since Ghana’s “colonial masters” left its soil, the language they imposed on this country remained. It has become the national language and continues to have a deep impact on its society, and will, it seems, be an important issue in the shaping of its future. To say the least, the English language has come to wield a lot of power in Ghana.

It is this very power that perplexes me. I admit that I didn’t really pay much attention to it at first, English is my first language and I use it at home, in school, with family and friends, to communicate all day and everyday. As a result of my frequent practice of English, I speak and write it very fluently. I think that sometimes, very often in fact, I take for granted the privileges it affords me.

A couple of summers ago, I spent three weeks in Western Europe. I can’t speak a word of French or German, so far much of the time I was able to communicate playing charades; that is, I made gestures as best as I could to describe the things I wanted to say. It was quite frustrating at times, mainly because there are only so few terms that can be mimed. Of course, I did meet a few people who knew English, but overall their fluency was very limited and didn’t increase the amount of information we shared. No matter what, it was clear that if I wanted to communicate with them I would have to become more fluent in their languages, I would have to accommodate them.

However, my experience in Ghana has been much more different. The Ghanaian public sector is essentially designed for an English reader and speaker. Most signs are printed in English, also, I have been able to keep up with current events because national newspapers are printed in English, and the local television and radio news is read in English. Therefore, considering that Ghana is a foreign country, I have been able to find my way around with relative ease.
This ease has left me very confused. I was able to assimilate in Ghana early on in my short three-month stay, much more so than I was in Western Europe, mainly due to, I think, my fluency in English. In my daily observation alone, I’ve noticed that most Ghanaians speak a language other than English, an indigenous language, during most of the day; many people don’t seem to speak English at all. I began to wonder what their experience must be like. I saw and heard people making very conscious decisions about what language they would use when and where. It seemed that there was an obvious demarcation between what spheres are appropriate for speaking English and others in which it’s definitely more appropriate to speak an indigenous language. This concept is definitely very foreign to me, I’m used to using English for everything I want to say because it’s the only language I know. More importantly, though, it seems I am much more at liberty to decide that because English is the language I speak best, it’s what I’ll use all the time.

I began to wonder what it meant for me to have choices and for others not to I became intrigued by the idea that a country could operate for so long using a language which so few of its people seemed to be able to use well. How was a society functioning under these circumstances? I was interested in finding out how this made people feel. I wanted to know what Ghanaians thought about what I’d observed, was I even observing what I thought I was? I decided to investigate why English was still present and so prevalent in Ghana. The language was obviously adopted for specific reasons, what were they? My ultimate question was one posed by a Ghanaian scholar who studies the use of English in Ghana: “for precisely what purpose does the (Ghanaian) need the English language?”

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1 K.A. Sey, Ghanaian English (London; Macmillan Education Limited, 1973), 11
METHODOLOGY

As much as I hate to admit it, my best research tool was eavesdropping on other people’s conversations. Who was speaking? What was being said? What language was being spoken? Were different languages being spoken at different times? Why?

Not only was I listening to conversations, but watching television, reading newspapers, listening to the radio, reading billboards, store fronts, lorries and taxis. I was not discriminate in my choice of places to “eavesdrop”, I couldn’t be. Everywhere I went both in public places and private, I was always paying close attention to the voices around me, at home, at the lorry station, and at the canteen on the university campus.

This research could not be conducted on listening alone, of course. My theories about why people spoke what language when could only take me so far. My next step would be asking people what their motives were for using a certain language at one time, and another for others. Granted, an advantage to simply observing can be found when one considers the task it is to have someone remember the instances, when and where, they last spoke English, not to mention the difficulty of having someone tell why. Besides, although they are important details, my main interests weren’t really where and when, but why. I would analyze these answers to ascertain what effects this might have on their daily lives, and ultimately on the fate of the nation. To obtain this information, I decided to administer a questionnaire.

The final questionnaire included ten questions. The first five questions requested basic background information about the respondent so that a demographic profile of the respondents could be developed. That is, I asked for the respondent’s name, age, sex, educational background, and occupation. (Note about midway through the process of administering these questionnaires a number of people expressed reservations about completing the questionnaire if they had to give their names, therefore, I decided to make my request for the respondent’s name optional).

I asked for the age of the respondent because I thought that generational differences could possibly influence difference in response, and if so, this would be important to note. I asked for educational background for similar reasons, I thought it might also be interesting, considering that school seems to be the primary location where English is learned and stressed in Ghana, to find out how people’s responses may be influenced by their level of education. Perhaps, the amount of education that someone has will determine their exposure to the language, which would, in turn, influence their viewpoints greatly. I requested the respondent’s occupation because the type of work someone does influences the frequency at which they would need to use English in the workplace.
Question number six asks the respondent to state his or her indigenous language. Subsequently, the respondent is asked whether the language is used at home, why or why not. First of all, it is important to verify that the respondent speaks a Ghanaian language as their first language. Secondly, the answer to whether they use the language at home tells a lot, we can assume that if people don’t have a choice of what language to speak in their workplace, they definitely should have one in their own homes. In my analysis of these responses, I would ask myself the following questions. Do people have a choice of what language to speak in their homes? What are the choices that people make in their homes? How are they made? What factors influence them? Again, what does it mean to have to make choices, both for the individual and in the broader view of society? How does location dictate what language should be used? Which atmospheres are right for the use of English, which for an indigenous language? Is there a known criteria? If so, what is it?

Question number seven asks for the respondent’s frequency of the use of the English language. How often does the respondent speak English at home? How often does the respondent speak it at the workplace or in school? The frequency of use would later help determine the meaning behind the reasons for use.

Question number eight asks the respondent to briefly discuss what he or she uses English to express. Here again, I’m interested in the choices people make about their language use. Should certain topics be discussed in a certain language? Assuming that, in most cases, the message that’s being conveyed basically remains the same regardless of which language is used, why does this matter?

Question number nine asks whether the respondent would prefer for an indigenous language to replace English as Ghana’s official language, and subsequently, why or why not? I had hypothesized that most Ghanaians only use English if they had to, that most people used an indigenous language more often than they used English, and because of this they would rather have an indigenous language as the official language.

The final question, number ten, asks whether the respondent feels that it’s important that they be fluent in English. Answers to this question would hopefully indicate the value the polled Ghanaians placed on their relationship with English. I have already discussed the power that English has in Ghanaian society, finding out how people react to and view that power would be very interesting. Furthermore, the explanation they gave would most likely give more insight into the purpose(s) they had for English.

A majority of the questionnaires were distributed amongst a randomly chosen class of university students. The remainder were completed by Ghanaians from outside the university
campus, specifically for this reason. However, they were not selected to fill out the questionnaire on the basis of having any other common characteristics.

Due to the particular nature of the questionnaire (it is written in English and the author cannot read any indigenous Ghanaian languages), the respondents obviously had to have some substantial amount of fluency in the English language in order to complete it. Therefore, the data collected does not include responses from (English) illiterates. Two important factors explain why this study does not include representation of (English) illiterates: a) the research time was extremely short, and b). The purpose of the research was to find out how the English language functioned in Ghanaian society, hence, the main people to poll would be those who use English.

In addition to the observations and questionnaires, I also conducted some interview. These were usually follow up interviews for someone who had completed the questionnaire but whom I felt should elaborate on the answers they had provided. Other interviews were done of people who could not complete the questionnaire because the discussion wasn’t planned, and therefore, the questionnaire was not at my disposal. Nevertheless, the interview was conducted using questions which were generally along the same lines as those in the questionnaire.

I conducted the majority of my fieldwork in Cape Coast. I chose Cape Coast because of its small size and relatively non-cosmopolitan atmosphere, which my experiences have shown, is reflective of most of Ghana. While collecting research at the University of Ghana, Legon I administered approximately ten questionnaires in Accra.

The following is a view of the demographic profile of the questionnaire respondents. (More specific analysis of the short-sentence answer questions (6-10) will follow later).

A total of sixty-eight completed questionnaires were received and reviewed.

**Sex:**
- 41 Males
- 27 Females

**Age:**
- younger than 20 : 2/2
- 20 – 29: 18/21
- 30-29 : 10/3
- 40-49 : 8/1
- 50 and over: 1/0
- No response: 2/0

* The first figure represents male respondents, the second represents female respondents.

**EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:**
Responses for educational background varied among the following:
Undergraduate degree, JSS 3, middle school, secretarial training, SSS leaver, 3 year post secondary, construction technician training, teacher’s certificate, basic secondary, post secondary, GCE. ‘O’ Level, GCE ‘A’ Level.
OCCUPATION:

Student: 34    Civil servant: 1
Teacher: 18    Unemployed: 3
Farmer: 1    Land Surveyor: 3
Photography 2    Prison Officer: 5
No Response: 1

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES:
Responses for indigenous language varied among the following:
Dagaare, Kasena, Fante, Twi, Ga, Ewe, Hausa, Wala, Buem, Dangme, Nkonya, and Kyerepon-Akwapim.
The History of the English Language in Ghana:

*How Did English Come to Wield So Much Power?*

When one sees or hears English in Ghana today, one must consider that the words go much deeper than the page they are written on or the message they are conveying at the given moment. They are telling a story about the past: those words are pieces of one of the longer and more important chapters of Ghana’s history. The themes of the chapter are colonialism, trade, and missionary work; the setting is Ghana, beginning around four centuries ago. To fully understand the connection between today and tomorrow, we must first turn to yesterday.

The Europeans who colonized Ghana came as conquerors and invaders. The purpose of their journey was very specific, as such, they would employ almost any means to make their excursion more expedient, no matter what the cost to the indigenous people. Generally speaking, one could say that the main goal of the colonist is to exploit the indigenous people in order to acquire the nation’s most valuable resources as easily as possible.

Historically, one of the cruelest methods of exploitation in colonial times has been the colonist’s insistence to impose his culture upon the indigenous peoples. In doing this, the goal of the colonist is to make the indigenous people believe that all the things they know and value, i.e. their culture, and / or lifestyle, their religion, their method of education, etc. are all wrong, and as a result the people themselves are worthless.

Before exploring how this tactic works to demobilize a people, let’s first examine the history of how this barrier came into existence. One factor falls into the rubric of these imperialistic tactics as were imposed by the British colonists of Ghana, was that of language barriers.

Training in literacy of the English language in Ghana was historically been targeted to select groups of Ghanaians. The earliest recorded teaching of the English language to Ghanaians was to rain them as interpreters to assist the British colonists in trade. It is also documented that the colonists went so far as to send a small number of Ghanaians to Britain to receive this training.²

The second major purpose of educating Ghanaians was to make them literate so that they could read the bible. European missionaries came to Ghana with the purpose of imparting religion and morality upon the ‘pagan’ African. According to writer K.A. Sey, “English in (Ghana) has from the very beginning been associated with Christianity…all schools were run by Christian

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missionaries.”

Often, the funds for these schools were controlled by very biased interest groups. The money would go to schools that taught English and did not stress the local languages. In fact, “schools which used the indigenous languages as medium of instruction could not quality for grants-in-aid.”

Gradually other schools opened that weren’t necessarily only for the purpose of spreading religion but to train people for jobs. Moreover, “…the main objective of promoting the European languages was to train cheap manpower for the administration of the colonies.”

Based on this policy, it can be inferred that the goal of the colonial administration was not to provide nationwide literacy to give people the tools they need to participate in development, but to train as many people as were needed to satisfy its needs. Those who could be of no use to the administration in this respect, were undoubtedly useless in its viewpoint.

This policy creates another important advantage for the administration. Without the “proper” English education, a large number of people were illiterate and virtually powerless against the government. If the colonist’s language was that which was spoken and taught in school, used to conduct public business, and also to interpret the laws and rights of the people, only those who were fluent in that language held most of the power, and were essentially better equipped to operate successfully in society.

In addition to this stripping of political power, something perhaps even more important occurs. The colonial administration was making a deliberate effort to destroy any sense of personal identity and cultural pride that the indigenous people had. Without these things, they hoped that the people would feel they had no choice but to accept the lifestyle and culture of the colonial administration.

Increasing the use of the colonist’s language at the same time increases its importance in daily life. If the government was run by the British, and they offered the most lucrative jobs, it became very important to be fluent in English for some Ghanaians. Soon, a good command of the English language demonstrated the ability to obtain one of these jobs, hence it became a symbol of status.

The responses given to question ten of the questionnaire which asks whether respondents think it is important that they be fluent in English indicated that this sentiment still holds true today. For example, a young woman responded that yes, she thought it was important for her to be fluent in English “because it brings prestige and confidence…” Similarly, a 56 year old man

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3 K.A. Sey, Ghanaian English (London; Macmillan Education Limited, 1973), 5
4 Sackey, 129
6 Naa Adjeley. Student. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of Author. California
responded, “Yes. It makes you influential and contributes to success”7 If the ability to speak and write English well displays these types of characteristics, what does that say about the indigenous language?

Peter Evans Ackon, a thirty-nine year old Fante, refers to the process by which Ghanaians are conditioned to believe that status can be gained through the acquisition and proficiency of the English language as “mental enslavement”. However, despite Ackon’s obvious contempt for the process of colonialism he still seemed to regard the Ghanaian acquisition of the English language as on the positive things that resulted from it. He views the imposition of the English language on his people as a method to “eliminate some of Ghanaian’s bad lifestyles”8 He gave the impression that he felt that Ghanaians were better off because of their ability to use English.

Of course, the problem is that no matter how much the indigenous people assimilates into the colonial administration’s culture, he or she will never reach the level of being respected as an equal of the colonist.

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7 John Kobina Eshun. Teacher. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of Author. California
8 Peter Evans Ackon, Farmer, Interview by Author, 23 November 1998, Cape Coast. Possession of Author, California.
Social Context and Use of English in Contemporary Ghanaian Society

The use of English in Ghana has, indeed, become a very technical one. This form of bilingualism that is used in Ghana, as well as other countries with similar histories, has been termed *diglossia*\(^9\). Diglossia describes the condition where the second language is learned in formal education and used only for “most written and formal spoken purposes, but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.” This term can best be explained when one considers how very unusual it would be to see English used at a traditional Ghanaian ceremony.

Evan Graves, a Fante, commented that he has never seen a traditional ceremony conducted in English\(^10\). He adds that even if all the people present at the ceremony didn’t speak the indigenous language, customarily, the words would first be spoken in the indigenous language and later be translated into English by a linguist. In another interview, Evelyn Berber, also commented on the inappropriateness of using English at a traditional ceremony. When asked how Ghanaians would respond if someone used English while pouring libations, she replied that they would be viewed as not doing the “indigenous thing”, mainly because the ancestors didn’t speak English\(^11\).

Fundamentally, in contemporary Ghanaian society English is used for official purposes: ie. government, education, and diplomacy.

*The National Language Debate*

Ghanaian author Kofi Sey calls it a “historical accident”\(^12\). In other words, when Ghana became an independent nation there was a need to decide what language would be the national language, and because of the prominent historical role that English had already played in Ghanaian society, it was chosen. As has previously been discussed, the British began an early tradition of using English as the official language and when their colonial reign over Ghana ended everything was already in order to continue its use. Sey refers to this as an accident, perhaps because, Ghanaians would have rather have chosen an indigenous language. Furthermore, English seemed

\(^{12}\) Sey, 10
to be the best alternative because “…the country had no single indigenous language of government, law, education, and social intercourse at all levels…”\textsuperscript{13}

As a matter of fact, Ghanaians speak over forty indigenous languages\textsuperscript{14}, the task of choosing one to be the national language was said to involve a lot of problems. To choose one language would infer a hierarchy among the people and their languages. Undoubtedly, there would be huge disagreements between different ethnic groups, the opposition would be remarkable. For instance, some Ewes would most likely be very upset if Fante was chosen as the national language and vice versa because they would feel that their language had been slighted. It would be assumed that the government had not respect for their language\textsuperscript{15}. Respondents seemed to be interested in having an indigenous language as the national language, but saw too many problems with making it happen.

For example, Anthony Sempah, a student, replied, no, he would not like an indigenous language to replace English “because it may bring about tension between the various tribes”.\textsuperscript{16} An overwhelming number of those polled expressed similar concerns over changing the national language from English and replacing it with an indigenous language. Interestingly, there seemed to be an underlying sentiment that this was the only thing really standing in the way of making this change. People seemed to really find it problematic that English is the official language, but didn’t see any way around this dilemma of choosing one language. This clarification becomes even more interesting to note when one considers the difference it is showing between Ghanaian’s view of English in comparison to their indigenous languages. It illustrates how despite the considerable amount of time English has been present in Ghana, it is still, in large part, viewed as foreign by most Ghanaians. It was very common for respondents to refer to their indigenous language as belonging to them.

Secondly, the very idea that there would be conflict over choosing one indigenous language illustrates the important connection that exists between people and their language. Essentially, what’s being said here is that while most Ghanaians feel an emotional attachment to English. It is because of this lack of attachment that English has been referred to as a “neutral” language in Ghana.

In addition to acting as a method of avoiding conflict between the different ethnic groups, another said benefit of this “neutral” language is that different speakers of more than forty languages can come together and communicate. As Ghanaian and university professor J.A.

\textsuperscript{13} Sackey, 131
\textsuperscript{16} Anthony Sempah. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of author. California
Sackey stated, “English brought (Ghanaians) all together under one umbrella.”\(^{17}\) Before the neutral English language was introduced to Ghana, there was little communication between respective ethnic groups. The minimal interaction they had was through trade and / or warfare.\(^{18}\) This advantage was duly noted by a number of respondents. Many said that knowing English gave them the opportunity to speak to people who don’t speak their languages. However, as some other respondents acknowledged “very often (they) meet (other Ghanaians) who can’t speak English”\(^{19}\).

Marian Adoma Kusi, a twenty five year old student, replied that she would like to replace English with an indigenous language specifically because of this issue. In fact, more than half the population can’t communicate in English.\(^{20}\) Therefore, another important issue comes to light, the co-called common link that English creates in Ghana is really only beneficial to Ghana’s formally educated class, which, as has previously been noted, is a very small minority.

Similar issues arise when considering the notion that English is beneficial because it can be used for international communication. Assuming that the frequency of most Ghanaians traveling to an English speaking country (outside of Africa) is very low, this argument seems very inaccurate. Furthermore, in the case of governmental affairs, we are faced with the issue of whether the indigenous languages can gain some status in the outsider world. Based on these responses, it can be inferred that the value and the status that English has in the international community, for some Ghanaians, is greater than what any of the indigenous languages could achieve. One respondent commented that for needs of international communication, adopting an indigenous language may be problematic because other countries ‘might not accord the indigenous languages the desired respect”\(^{21}\). This sentiment was shared by several other respondents. This should not be of ultimate concern. The respect a country gives to its own language should be the respect that is accorded to it by other countries. It’s Ghana’s decision whether to have an indigenous language. As a sovereign nation, in this case especially, it has the right to decide its own policies on language regardless of how difficult they might be for the outside world, the outside world should have to accommodate Ghanaians, not vice versa.

Another difficulty that is noted by scholars is that the indigenous languages aren’t “developed” enough to be used for government, or education, especially, that is they don’t account for many modern terms. Robert Baiden, a chemistry instructor at Komenda Teacher’s Training College and a Fante, commented that using the indigenous languages for instruction, specifically

\(^{17}\) J. A. Sackey. Lecturer, UCC. Interview by author, 27 November 1998, Cape Coast. Written notes. Possession of author. California.


\(^{19}\) Marina Adoma Kusi. Student. Cape Coast. Questionnaire. Possession of Author, California.


Fante, would be problematic because many of the terms he teaches, such as atom, don’t have Fante equivalents.\textsuperscript{22} He also mentioned that as a result of this difficulty, an even greater one is created because students have even more pressure to be fluent in the English language.

In his own experience, Baiden sees his fluency in English as having occurred at the expense of his fluency in his indigenous language. Baiden’s story is a good example of the dilemma that seems to be facing many Ghanaians. He is also an assemblyman in his town and he attributes much of the respect he is accorded from his constituents as being a result of his command of the English language. He has reached a level of success in his career, yet he feels ashamed that he cannot read or write his indigenous language, Fante, as well as he can read and write English. His mastery of English has in many respects guaranteed him a job and respect among his constituents, however, it has damaged his self-esteem.

Several respondents agreed with Baiden that the languages aren’t “developed” enough; however, a few suggested that development should occur. As a matter of fact, one respondent compared Ghana’s case with Western nations, stating that, “the Western countries have developed their language, so we should be able to develop our language.”\textsuperscript{23}

Just recently, Dr. Florence Abena Dolphyne, a linguistics professor at the University of Ghana, Legon, made a speech, calling for a national language\textsuperscript{24}. Dolphyne’s suggestion was that Ghana split the responsibility between three of the most widely spoken languages. Ewe, Hausa, and Akan. Dolphyne’s suggestions were made on the basis that a national language in the indigenous language would promote unity and a sense of identity among Ghanaians. Also, she argued that with the use of indigenous languages, integration into society becomes easier and leads to social, economic and cultural development. Dolphyne’s suggestions are most interesting because the languages she proposes are only spoken by a majority of the people, not all. So, then, the question become why should Ghana even bother to change from English when there still isn’t even an indigenous language that is spoken by all?

\textit{Language as A Symbol of Culture and Identity}

The answer, or part of the answer, is that there’s something important and special about speaking a language from your country as opposed to one that was forced on you by outsiders. The responses provided for the short-answer questions (6-10) indicate that this is definitely an issue that should be taken into consideration by policy-makers.

\textsuperscript{24} Akwasi Ampratwum-Mensah. “Call for a National Language.” The Daily Graphic 7 Nov. 1998: 1
Of all sixty-eight respondents, only seven answered that they don’t use their indigenous language at home. Five respondents said they don’t speak their language at home because it is not spoken by their family members or that they were unfamiliar with the language themselves. One respondent was unclear about why he didn’t speak the language, but indicated that he spoke English at home. The seventh respondent, a forty year old woman, said that she didn’t speak her indigenous language, Twi, at home because she wanted her children to become more fluent in English. “I think speaking English at home is the best way to achieve this”\textsuperscript{25}. I wonder what she feels about not passing her own language to her children. It may be interesting to note that she’s a teacher, so this probably influences her view of the importance her children should place on being fluent in English. She seems reluctant, yet, willing to sacrifice the connection her children have to their language if it means that they will be better in English and have better chances at obtaining lucrative jobs.

A twenty five year old student replied that she spoke her indigenous language at home to make her family members “feel more at home, especially those who are illiterates.”\textsuperscript{26} This was a response given by several respondents. In fact, the main reasons cited for speaking their indigenous languages at home was because of comfort, and practicality (i.e. is the language they were raised speaking primarily and its spoken by the people they interact with most often).

The comfort is obviously with the local languages. How can someone excel in the use of a language they are not comfortable with? It’s also interesting that a number of people thought it was important to choose to speak their language because they feel the need to preserve it. This, again, reinforces the notion that Ghanaians feel that their language is a part of them and that they do have some special connection to it. Preserving the language, perhaps, includes preserving the people and their cultural identities.

Some responses of why people spoke their indigenous language in their homes were indicative of this assumption. A twenty five year old female replied that her family spoke their indigenous language at home first because her parents aren’t formally educated and, second, because they “don’t want their language to be forgotten”\textsuperscript{27}. Similarly, a forty year old man, Felix Thompson Ashimadi said that he spoke his indigenous language Ewe at home “to help increase and improve the culture of the people.”\textsuperscript{28} A fourteen year old male responded, “Because I’m a Ghanaian”. A forty three year old woman replied. “because I’m proud of it”.

In regard to the question of whether they used the language more at home or at work, the question may have been asked too openly, making it difficult to categorize or generalize the

\textsuperscript{25} Anonymous. Teacher. Questionnaire Cape Coast. Possession of Author California.

\textsuperscript{26} Esther Aboagye. Student. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of Author California

\textsuperscript{27} Anonymous. Student. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of Author California.

\textsuperscript{28} Felix Thompson Ashimadi. Teacher. Questionnaire. Cape Coast. Possession of Author California
answer definitively. That is, perhaps it would have been better to give choices for responses. For example, many people answered that they occasionally spoke English at home or not often did they speak it at work, or something vague such as “when the occasion demands it” or “as often as necessary”. However, despite the ambiguity in many of the responses, there does seem to be somewhat of a pattern. For the majority of the people polled, while they use English at home occasionally, the frequency with which they used it at work was almost always higher. There were fewer people who said no, they didn’t use English at home, ever. In fact, of the ten respondents who don’t speak English at home, all ten of them spoke it in the workplace or in school very frequently. Did they need to be able to speak it in the workplace? Specifically, what type of work were they doing?

When asked to discuss what they use English to express, a few people responded, “To express myself officially.” This is an unusual comment that seems to have made itself useful only in the context of discussing Ghanaian multilingualism. Perhaps this means that these respondents use English only when discussing official topics, e.g. school, government, or workplace issues. However the most common was that the respondent doesn’t use English unless they come into contact with someone who doesn’t speak their language. The purposes and uses of English are very clear and well defined. The use seems to be restricted to the public sector in so far as people don’t come into contact with others who don’t speak their language. For example, in the workplace, I have observed, if one’s co-workers speak the same indigenous language one usually chooses to speak it rather than speaking English, despite the fact that they are in an “official” setting.

For some Ghanaians, English will be used in daily life outside of the public sector, to “distance’ themselves. Both a young Ghanaian man and woman said that there is also a demarcation between spheres but that certain subject matters also call for a choice between English and the indigenous language. For example, if they were to find themselves talking about a taboo subject such as sex, they would use English to avoid being too specific. Furthermore, they went on to add that using the traditional language would make the conversation “too deep”, meaning it would be too specific and therefore they would be viewed as being impolite. Also, a few respondents noted that they wanted to have an indigenous language as the official languages because they “can best express (their) culture through (their languages)”.

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29 Ibid.
CONCLUSION

“You have to greet in Fante; if you greet in English it means you are still in States.”

As a result of three weeks of Fante instruction, I am now able to walk into the market and greet the women and men there with a surprisingly clear, “[tse den]?” They are always surprised, I would even say a bit taken aback at times, by the effort I am making to speak their language. When I am walking down road, and greeted by the ever familiar “Obroni, how are you?” My best defense is to respond, “Mo ho ye. Na wo so we?” The look I receive is one of surprise but at the same time, there is encouragement and respect. I could go on and on about how everyday I break down barriers with a simple how are you spoken in the local language. By trying to speak the local language I am not only making communication easier, but also acknowledging something very important about the people I come into contact with. By making the choice to speak the local language, if feel as though I am showing respect for the people, their culture, and the importance of their history.

It is interesting to note that English is not only referred to as the national language, but interchangeably so as the official language. Considering this distinction, a lot of questions about English’s function and place in Ghanaian society can be answered. It’s used for official business, and mostly because people have to. It seems that most people would rather be able to use their indigenous language. English is not the language of the people. The debate of whether English should be replaced as the official language is about something much deeper than improving communication between different peoples. It is about people having the ability to thrive when they display pride in themselves and their culture. In Ghana, one way of displaying this is through the use of the indigenous languages.

The current system is only working for a small minority of the people. The disparity is much too great to ignore. At some point, the welfare of the majority should outweigh the current success of the minority if it means success for all in the long run.
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