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Language Imperialism in Post-Colonial Ghana: Linguistic Recovery and Change

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Language Imperialism in Post-Colonial Ghana:
Linguistic Recovery and Change

During a trip to Ghana in 2016 I became fascinated by the linguistic complexities of the country. While there, I took introductory classes in basic Twi, a beautiful language which I was told at the time was the most widely spoken local language in Ghana but, while equally valuable, my opportunities to practice and immerse myself in the language were not as I expected them to be. English is the only government sponsored language in Ghana. All commercial signs and documents are printed in English, the courts operate in English, and most of public and private education is in English. However, not everyone I tried to speak to spoke English. For the individuals who have only a very basic, or even a non-standard English vocabulary, they can easily become marginalized and become unable to access public services. The English language influence has direct ties to Ghana's colonial history, but as a linguistics student, I became passionate about the factors that keep this system of linguistic imperialism in place. With reference both to my personal experience in the country as well as scholarly linguistic and anthropological studies and research, this paper will explore some of the significant factors keeping a colonially imposed language in power in a country of rich linguistic history. To comprehend the linguistic situation in Ghana, it was integral to develop an understanding of the linguistic, political, economic, educational, and cultural nuances of the country and its language use. The customs governing the usage of local and colonially imposed languages in Ghana involve intricate historical and societal decisions that cannot and should not be examined unilaterally.

Linguistic Context

Ghana is a linguistically rich and diverse nation.¹ The number of languages spoken in the country is debated, with the highest number consistently stated in literature standing at eighty-one². Part of the reason for the discrepancy is the lack of clarity regarding whether different varieties of speech ought to be considered dialects of the same language or different languages altogether. Kropp Dakubu defines dialects as “varieties or forms of one language that are noticeably different, but not so different as to prevent mutual understanding”³ which is functional in trying to determine the genetic origins of a language, but neglects to consider the social, historical and political reasons that may cause communities to define their languages separately. This is especially important in the context of Ghana and other African nations where communities have been separated by political borders imposed by (frequently undocumented) local wars, may utilize their joint language to maintain their shared history.⁴ An example of this is the ethnic Ewe group, which is currently split between Ghana and Togo, although originally all members of the Ewe group lived as one ethnic group in a small collection of communities.⁵ As a result, language classification can be difficult. Regardless of the exact number of languages

¹ Before delving into the content, it is crucial that I first acknowledge the limited perspective that I am able to offer to this discourse. Despite extraneous research into the subject, I am limited in terms of experience. I am not of Ghanaian descent nor do I speak the majority of the languages I will be discussing, and while I have visited the country – my visit was limited and my experience does not compare to that of the individuals and communities living these realities everyday. I enter this conversation from a position of privilege, for as an anglophone I have always had access to materials in my native language. My background, therefore, does not permit me to fully comprehend the situation of the country nor the experiences of its people. I will however strive to do the situation justice to the best of my ability in my analysis, with the assistance of external research.

² Ethnologue, Ghana.

³ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 9.

⁴ Ansah, Gladys Nyarko. "Re-Examining the Fluctuations in Language in-Education Policies in Post-Independence Ghana."

⁵ Edu-Buandoh, Dora F. "Identity and Representation through Language in Ghana: The Postcolonial Self and the Other."

however, the languages in Ghana are not given equal social or political standing amongst each other or in comparison to a remaining state-imposed English.

The local languages spoken in Ghana are linguistically organized into approximately (there remains some debate regarding several languages) six genealogical language groups. A mention and brief analysis of each of the language groups is important to fully exhibit the linguistic context of Ghana as a whole and to help demonstrate some of the historical relationships between languages. The majority of the languages in the northern half of the country belong to the Gur language group.⁶ Most of the languages belonging to the group did not have a standard written form until recent decades. All of the Gur languages have a relatively small number of speakers — “in the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana there are some 2-3 million people speaking about 25 Gur languages”⁷ — and they have been subject to minimal linguistic study.

A second language group consists of the Volta-Comoé languages. The Volta-Comoé group is home to the most widely used first language in Ghana: Akan (40%). Akan is an interesting language, as the name Akan was adopted in 1950 to refer to a collection of mutually intelligible ‘dialects’ including Agona, Akuapem, Asante, Bron, Fante, Gomua, Twi, and Wasa.⁸ However, the decision to label these varieties as a single language is somewhat problematic. First of all, as previously mentioned, solely considering mutual intelligibility neglects to take into account social and political histories of the groups involved. Further, these ‘dialects’ are not even all mutually intelligible. Kropp Dakubu points out that:

⁶ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 12.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Idem, p. 50.

For example the extent to which speakers of different dialects can understand each other is affected by distance, so that while dialects that are adjacent to each other may be mutually intelligible, such as Fante and Asante on the one hand, and Asante and Bron on the other, mutual intelligibility between Fante and Bron is very low, because they are geographically very far apart, and a Fante speaker will be right in looking on Bron as a different language.⁹

Kropp Dakubu's analysis neglects to acknowledge factors other than the geographic that affect mutual intelligibility between dialects, including social and political influences. Languages that hold specific religious significance, for example, may be classified separately, despite mutual intelligibility. Further, the decision of categorizing a language system as either a dialect or a language is not inherently a linguistic one. This decision may also be due to factors such as cultural similarities or differences or other shared histories. As a result of these factors, many speakers of Akan still refer to the 'dialect' name when discussing the languages they speak. The Volta-Comoé languages are mostly spoken in Southern Ghana and the Ivory Coast.¹⁰ As far as the written word goes, "among the Akan dialects, Akuapem, Fante and Asante [once] had different officially recognised orthographies...[but] there is now a unified Akan orthography...that was set up at the time the name Akan was officially adopted as the name of the language".¹¹ The non-universal categorizing of Akan languages leads to some difficulty in documenting the number of speakers.

The next language group is Ewe. The term Ewe refers to a collection of 'dialects' used across Ghana and Togo that share a written standard, though are not necessarily mutually

⁹ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 15.

¹⁰ Manoukian, Madeline and International African Institute. *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples*. P.15.

¹¹ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 53.

intelligible in the oral form. The Standard Ewe Language was used as a language of instruction by Evangelical Presbyterian missionaries in the late 1800s and 1900s, and many texts were produced during this time; however, “the original roman alphabet with diacritics was replaced by the African alphabet in 1930”.¹² Very few materials remain from either before or after the alphabet change, “only the Evangelical Presbyterian Book Depots in Ghana and Togo have kept much stock of Ewe books...the Ghana Library Board keeps none”.¹³

The next language group encompasses Ga and Adangme. Both languages are spoken in and around Accra-Plains, and Ga is the indigenous language of the Accra area.¹⁴ These languages are believed to have once been one language spoken by a single cultural group, that overtime evolved into two separate language groups whose communities still share many similar traditions.¹⁵ Despite having fewer speakers than Twi, Ga is sometimes considered to be the most published Ghanaian language – though the definite statistics do not exist. This may be due to Ga’s usage in Ghana’s capital, where most of the country’s political and economic decisions are made. Both languages have official orthographies: Adangme has had a standardized written form for approximately twenty years, and Ga has been written for well over a hundred years.¹⁶

Another language group is highly debated in classification, but for simplicity here it will be referred to as the Central-Togo group (though some linguistic anthropologists argue that at least some languages should belong to another classification, called Kwa – Ga may also belong to this group). There are many Central-Togo languages spoken in Ghana, but the majority of the speakers are located in Togo. Most speakers that are in Ghana were separated from their primary

¹² Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 91.

¹³ Idem, p. 96.

¹⁴ Manoukian, Madeline and International African Institute. *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples*, p. 69.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 66.

¹⁶ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 107.

cultural group by political or military causes. Further, “none of the Central-Togo languages are recognized by the Ministry of Education for classroom use or for publication, and none are to be heard on radio or television ... no Central-Togo language has a standardized orthography, and there has been very little independent publishing”.¹⁷

Finally there is the Mande group. The Mande languages are spoken by settled communities interspersed around the country, and likely did not originate in the Ghana area but have been present there for many centuries.¹⁸ Due to the assumption that they are not native to the Ghana area, they will not be explored much further in this paper.

The additional languages spoken in Ghana are other non-local languages of various genealogical language groups. Most of these languages originated in Europe or other parts of Africa. Many can be traced back to countries which once had political control of Ghana (or parts of Ghana) as there is no documented rush of immigration into the Ghana area. Out of all of the languages spoken in the country however, the language that maintains the most social and political prestige is English. Throughout Ghana, English is given a high priority as the remnants of linguistic imperialism linger: “English has become a measure for literacy and upward social mobility, thereby making it easy for some portion of the populace to be represented as ‘illiterate’ or ‘local’ while others are seen as ‘literate’”.¹⁹ The power that the English language holds over the local languages is high and individuals who do not speak it are systematically disadvantaged in their own country.

The relationship between indigenous Ghanaian languages and English is one of complexity, and the factors preventing the reinstatement of a local language as a state official

¹⁷ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 122.

¹⁸ Idem, p. 155.

¹⁹ Edu-Buandoh, Dora F. "Identity and Representation through Language in Ghana: The Postcolonial Self and the Other." P.39.

language are multifaceted and unique. I have separated the considerations into the following categories: Historical, Political, Economic, Educational, and Religious/Cultural. It is important to keep in mind however that these factors do not exist on their own and must be considered in relation to and opposition with each other. These categories are also not necessarily the only or most significant factors, however they are among a multitude of aspects influencing Ghanaian language connections and ought to be taken into account when considering the linguistic challenges the country faces.

Historical Considerations

The territory now known as Ghana was once home to an undocumented number of African tribes. However, upon becoming one state “the main [linguistic] problem...arose from the diversity of languages within its boundaries... especially if they have no literature, and if they emphasize minor divisions between peoples in a society where tribalism is breaking down.”²⁰ The languages belonging to those tribes, each with its own history and politics, became a part of a singular nation. In addition to this, the European influence not only added linguistic imperialism to the equation, but also played a role in which cultural (and language) groups were more powerful.

Ghana, or the Gold Coast, was a British colony from 1867 to 1957. The first Europeans to arrive in the country however were the Portuguese in 1471.²¹ Upon their arrival in Ghana, European traders utilized their own languages with frequency, neglecting to learn the (often unwritten) languages native to the country.²² When African workers were hired into the

²⁰ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P.507

²¹ Idem, p.1

²² Idem, p.508

European ranks, they were taught Portuguese, Dutch, Danish or English (depending on the governing force present at the time).²³ Words from all of these languages have remained in the country, sometimes being borrowed into various local languages.²⁴ English became, and remained, the dominant language.

It was the Fante group that had the most initial contact with Europeans, due to their settlement on the coast.²⁵ Many locals living in trade towns grew up with a European influence around them and often learned at least one European language.²⁶ The first institutional schools in the area were founded by Wesleyan missionaries and attended by the children of Europeans.²⁷ Local children were rarely seen in institutions of formal education. The matrilineal Fante culture did not see the benefit of sending their daughters to government schools and their sons were frequently needed to work on the homestead.²⁸ With missionary urging, however, local families began to register their children in school. By the 1850s there were over a thousand Fante children registered in government schools.²⁹ Classes in missionary schools were almost always in European languages, thus limiting the business vernacular locals knew in their own languages and making European languages inherently the languages used in professional settings.

Prior to European influence, the Asante people (Twi speakers) held power in most of what is now considered Ghana. They were in control of most of the country's gold and ivory until European relations flourished with the Fante people.³⁰ Following Ghana's independence, neither the Fante nor the Asante were of specific political power. Many political boundaries were

²³ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 508.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ McCarthy, Mary. *Social Change and the Growth of British Power in the Gold Coast: The Fante States, 1807-1874*. P. 33.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Idem, p. 118.

²⁸ Idem, p. 119.

²⁹ Idem, p.124.

³⁰ Idem, p.125.

formed within the country as ethnic and cultural groups fought to regain power that they had held at various points of history.³¹ Communities that were once united separated in the face of disagreements or imposed national boundaries.

As a result of colonization, “political boundaries did not coincide with linguistic boundaries” and no linguistic group was considered to have more of a right to the land than another.³² Consequently, no language was inherently more deserving than another of becoming a state language for the entire country, and various languages may have been more relevant to specific areas within what was now considered a united country.

Political Considerations

Between 1962 and 1992 Ghana underwent a series of military coups. During this time, it was citizens of lower socioeconomic class which were most affected by the political and economic crisis that Ghana suffered as a result.³³ Speakers of languages in the Gur language group were over-represented in the working class, and thus these were also the languages that suffered the most during that time.³⁴ These individuals fought for the right to be included in political decisions and “these events raise very fundamental questions as to who and which classes should wield and exercise political power.”³⁵ Questions regarding how, or if, the working class (and associated cultural and linguistic groups) should be rewarded for their efforts and suffering during military rule remain rampant today.

³¹ McCarthy, Mary. *Social Change and the Growth of British Power in the Gold Coast: The Fante States, 1807-1874*. P. 143.

³² Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 507.

³³ Yeebo, Zaya. *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power : Rawlings, Saviour Or Demagogue*. P. 64.

³⁴ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 12.

³⁵ Yeebo, Zaya. *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power : Rawlings, Saviour Or Demagogue*. P. 65.

In late 1983, the Provisional National Defense Council, which was in control of the country at the time, established the Castle Information Bureau to screen local press and monitor foreign reports on Ghana.³⁶ The Bureau suppressed opinions they deemed dangerous or unfavourable to the militant government. By utilizing pseudonyms to write commentaries and editorials on the nation's leading free-press media, the organization crushed small news outlets.³⁷ Independent newspapers, usually published in various local languages, were forced to either take on a pro-government stance and lose the trust of their readers or shut down completely. Even if they opted to run government propaganda, these newspapers could rarely survive the loss of readership that resulted from the sudden journalistic bias. When covert terrorisation techniques were unsuccessful, the Provisional National Defense Council ordered that the Bureau resort to more direct forms of intimidation.³⁸ Staff of the large national newspaper *The Echo* were forced from the building when it was set on fire in a government-organized act of arson.³⁹ Newspapers throughout the country were banned or threatened for questioning the government. Additionally, newspapers published in less widely spoken local languages were given no financial support and struggled to survive in the state of military dictatorship.

Today, Ghana is a democratic country. That said, this does not mean that all linguistic groups have the same opportunity to run for government. Through interviews I performed for another project while I was in Ghana, I learned about some of the structural barriers preventing certain communities from becoming politically involved. Due to challenges of transportation around the country, groups located within a closer proximity to the nation's capital have an increased chance of becoming involved with the country's political system. The communities

³⁶ Yeebo, Zaya. *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power : Rawlings, Saviour Or Demagogue*. P. 257.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Idem, p. 258.

that have the largest number of speakers in this area are speakers of Ga or many Volta-Comoé languages.⁴⁰ Speakers of these languages would be at an advantage to seek representation for their language in policy and government practice, but they do not represent a large enough portion of the country to ensure votes in their favour.

Throughout the country, there are also smaller government agencies, which could be tasked with choosing a language to be utilized by state in their area. Unfortunately, regional and municipal governments have not been given much priority, especially financially.⁴¹ Local offices are frequently closed due to lack of funding or run with limited resources and services due to only being able to afford a small staff. Despite the advantages of having local civic offices run in languages central to the area they are serving the financial capitals are rarely in place for such programs.

Economic Considerations

There is something to be said about Edu-Buandoh's argument which acknowledges that "most textbooks are written and published in English rather than the indigenous Ghanaian languages, because there is a higher economic motivation for publishers to publish textbooks and other learning materials in English".⁴² There are few educational materials available in local Ghanaian languages and even the materials that do exist only represent a very limited number of Ghana's local languages. The cost of reprinting or creating new textbooks and curriculums to accommodate local languages, especially when usable materials already exist in English, would be excessive and, without government financial support, writers and publishers are not

⁴⁰ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 15.

⁴¹ Sabbj, Matthew. "Strategic Bureaucracies: Transnational Funding and Mundane Practices of Ghanaian Local Governments."

⁴² Edu-Buandoh, Dora F. "Identity and Representation through Language in Ghana: The Postcolonial Self and the Other." P. 40.

economically driven to produce local language materials. There is not enough money in the industry to encourage the production of such materials without financial incentive. Further, the lack of access to local-language materials disproportionately disadvantages certain populations.

Edu-Buandoh's statement is equally relevant in relation to print media. Individuals living in Northern communities where the poverty rate is higher and the access to schooling is more difficult are less likely to have a solid grasp of the English language needed to understand the multitude of news-media published in the language.⁴³ Due to the difficulties associated with frequent travel, many ethnic and religious groups in Ghana remain in their communities. As a result, limiting the access to news-media in certain geographical locations very specifically limits certain populations. Additionally, as girls are less likely to have access to formal schooling in Ghana, they are also less likely to have an understanding of the English language. The cost of newspapers has also gone up, reaching 2.50 Ghanaian cedis a copy (0.60 CAD), turning the prospect of buying a newspaper into a luxury for many.⁴⁴ As Yeboah-Afari argues "in our context, in the African situation, affordability of newspapers needs to be seen as another side of access to information and a fundamental right".⁴⁵ The right to understand what is happening in one's own country should be afforded everyone.

Studies performed on Ashanti people by Syracuse University show that Ashanti individuals feel the lack of services available to their people through government agencies is discriminatory.⁴⁶ While the study does not comment directly on language as a factor, the lack of services available for individuals who are not comfortable using the English language creates barriers for people of

⁴³ Ansah, Gladys Nyarko. "Re-Examining the Fluctuations in Language in-Education Policies in Post-Independence Ghana." *Multilingual Education* 4, no. 1 (2014): 1-15.

⁴⁴ Pele, Laurent. "Historical Converter."

⁴⁵ Yeboah-Afari, Ajoa. "Of Abundant Newspapers but Fewer Buyers." P. 1.

⁴⁶ Morrison, Minion K. C. *Ethnicity and Political Integration: The Case of Ashanti, Ghana*. P. 89.

lower socioeconomic classes. With funding for civic services being routinely cut, the country's social and government organizations lack the financial flexibility to offer programs in multiple languages. While this substantially disadvantages certain populations, the economic stability of organizations devoted to public service is limited. Producing materials or offering services in more than one language is a cost increase that is not financially logical for organizations in, or at risk of, economic crisis – even if the advantages are extensive for the populations they serve. This is overwhelmingly true when it comes to services offered through oral involvement, as the number of oral languages in Ghana is even larger than that of the written. These limits put into effect a cyclical process wherein, due to English being the only national language, the government does not allocate funds to the maintenance of other languages or services offered in them, however due to the lack of financial support, indigenous languages are unable to reach a point (whether in speaker number, or in material access) where national status would be likely to be instated.

Education Associated Considerations

With English being the medium of instruction in schools, local languages are suffering.⁴⁷ As few schools in Ghana have the resources to teach reading and writing skills in the local languages, the number of citizens who are confident in the written form of these languages is rapidly diminishing. A series of government-sponsored, rural newspapers written in local languages existed from 1951 to 1970 (prior to the military coup).⁴⁸ However, most of them did not survive more than a few years due to difficulties with funding, circulation, printing and access to qualified writers in local languages. With fewer readers, fewer individuals purchased these materials and funding issues limited the ability to continue publishing.

⁴⁷ Opoku-Amankwa, Kwasi. "English-only language-in-education policy in multilingual classrooms in Ghana."

⁴⁸ Anyidoho, Paul. "Ethnography of Print and Broadcast Media in Ghana."

Historically, schools were run by European missionaries and most of the teachings had been in English.⁴⁹ The goal was for English to replace local languages with the supposed benefit of increasing progress in the knowledge and civilization of the country.⁵⁰ The linguistic imperialism was effective, leaving more than a generation of educated Ghanaians out of practice in their own languages and without the ability to read them at all.⁵¹ Even when scholarship was implemented in indigenous languages (at least in Fante, Ewe and Twi), the effect the loss of an entire generation had on linguistic knowledge was expansive. With English thereby considered the language of business and progress, English-speaking individuals lost interest in their mother tongues.⁵² English developed a prestige that languages local to the country were unable to achieve. A push for local language instruction in schools did eventually occur due to a wish to make formal education appeal to a larger portion of the country; however, the Ministry of Education intended the grants allocated to this project to be temporary, with the plan to eventually reinstate solely English teaching.⁵³

Even now, with a heavily written word focused curriculum in place in both public and private schools, languages without a standard writing system or without a long history of written work are automatically disadvantaged in the education system. Most languages in the Gur family have only recently developed a written standard, and even Akan, which is spoken by most of the country, has only had a standard orthography since 1950.⁵⁴ While Ewe has a standard written form, the oral production of different dialects is not mutually intelligible making it difficult to

⁴⁹ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 511.

⁵⁰ Cruickshank, Brodie. *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa: Including an Account of the Native Tribes, and their Intercourse with Europeans*. P. 262.

⁵¹ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 511.

⁵² Idem, p. 512.

⁵³ Idem, p. 513.

⁵⁴ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*. P. 53.

teach in schools.⁵⁵ Ga is heavily published and has been written for a large portion of its history, but is only spoken by a small portion of the country, all located around the nation's capital.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, none of the Central-Togo languages have a standard orthography and neither them nor the Mande languages are cleared for use in classroom settings by Ghana's Ministry of Education.⁵⁷ As a result of these orthographic and linguistic obstacles, among others, all the textbooks and classroom materials in the country are published in English.⁵⁸ With the aforementioned educational barriers in place, many languages struggle to maintain speakers or readers, especially ones outside of their direct native groups.

Religious and Cultural Considerations

With English becoming the primary business language throughout the country, local languages found their place elsewhere. Many speakers began speaking their local language during cultural celebrations or times of worship. These changes, however, bring up the question: what happens when a language becomes sacred?

In my discussions with various individuals throughout my time in Ghana and following, many voiced the opinion that when a language has been used primarily in cultural and religious contexts, the idea of using this language in other situations seems *wrong* or *unnatural*. Speakers were used to using these languages in specific instances and using other languages in others. It does not make sense for these speakers to break their culturally imposed linguistic rules. Akan and Ga-Adangme cultural groups, for example, both have significant religious and cultural

⁵⁵ Kropp Dakubu, M. E. *The Languages of Ghana*, p. 91.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, p. 107.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, p. 122.

⁵⁸ Edu-Buandoh, Dora F. "Identity and Representation through Language in Ghana: The Postcolonial Self and the Other." P.40

ceremonies specific to their histories.⁵⁹ Some speakers of certain Akan dialects that still practice traditional Akan religion use their dialect most frequently in these instances.

Sacred languages exist all over the world. Hebrew was declared a sacred language by Jewish practitioners as it was considered the language spoken by the Biblical God. The limited use of this language undoubtedly contributed to its near-extinction.⁶⁰ Latin underwent a similar situation with the Catholic religion, however it was not revived in the same way as Hebrew. Arabic, despite its sacred status in the Islamic religion, has managed to also remain an evolving language spoken all over the world. Arabic however is the outlier when it comes to surviving sacredness.

With significantly fewer speakers of Ghanaian languages, granting them sacred status could easily result in language death. While speakers reserve the right to utilize and categorize their own cultural language in whichever way they please, there risks being a loss of culture and history if the language is unable to survive limited use. Whether or not that means these languages should inherently not be considered for national language status is complicated, especially when not all of their speakers consider the language sacred. Due to social complications causing separation amongst cultural groups, their beliefs may change independently despite continuing to maintain a shared language.⁶¹ For one group, this language may become sacred, but for another the language could remain quotidian. That said, imposing state policy on these languages to increase their use would be unethical if it is not supported by native speakers. This is especially significant to religions affected by the suppression of religious

⁵⁹ Manoukian, Madeline and International African Institute. *Akan and Ga-Adangme Peoples*. P. 55.

⁶⁰ Weisman, Yaffa. "Sacred Languages: Language and Literature, Hebrew."

⁶¹ Ansah, Gladys Nyarko. "Re-Examining the Fluctuations in Language in-Education Policies in Post-Independence Ghana."

freedom implemented by the Provisional National Defence Council during their military coup.⁶² The Council enforced Law 221 which insisted that all religious establishments undergo registration and pay a fee of 50,000 cedis (local currency, equivalent to approximately 12,000 CAD in today's economy however at the time it was closer to 20,000 CAD⁶³) in order to be allowed to operate within the country.⁶⁴ Less practiced religions were disproportionately affected. This law also forced religious establishments to join together in order to afford registration, and thus prevented religions from being practiced in any language. Small language groups which had created independent places of worship to practice in their own language were forced to join larger organisations which may practice in another language. Once religious freedom was reinstated, and individuals became free to worship in any language they chose, the politics of language and religion once again shifted. The right to maintain the sacristsy of these languages is crucial to some religious practitioners who were previously prevented from performing religious ceremonies in their native language.

Conclusion

Historical, political, economic, educational, religious and cultural aspects all play into the linguistic complexities of Ghana in independent and connected ways. With all of the factors against the instatement of a local national language, reasons why such a change would benefit the country still exist. National sentiment is grown from the presence of a shared cultural heritage and a shared language.⁶⁵ Despite the multicultural realities and the European-imposed borders, Ghanaians do share some aspects of cultural heritage, but the national consciousness

⁶² Yeebo, Zaya. *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power : Rawlings, Saviour Or Demagogue*. P. 260.

⁶³ Pele, Laurent. "Historical Converter."

⁶⁴ Yeebo, Zaya. *Ghana: The Struggle for Popular Power : Rawlings, Saviour Or Demagogue*. P. 260.

⁶⁵ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 507.

remains fragile. This is not to say that a sense of nationalism is impossible without a shared language. It is whether that heritage is best shared in English that remains to be a discussion, and whether English is truly a language that represents the entire country. In Ghana, English represents an educated class of individuals who, at least at some point, benefitted from enough financial security to attend formal schooling. English represents the elite, but the history of Ghana is far more multi-faceted than this representation allows.⁶⁶

The intricacies of language use in Ghana are complex and deep-rooted in national and sub-national histories. Ghana remains a richly multilingual country because speakers care about their indigenous languages and keep them relevant. Despite the systemic challenges faced by small languages, linguistic communities fight to keep them alive. With these factors in mind, “it is therefore not surprising that in the Gold Coast, with its multiplicity of languages and dialects, there has been no strong, united demand for a national language.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Kimble, David. *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism*. P. 517.

⁶⁷ Idem, p. 507.

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