The multilingual African city : past realities and future prospects

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The multilingual African city: past realities and future prospects

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Accra, capitale du Ghana, est une communauté multilingue depuis sa fondation au 17ème siècle. Comme beaucoup d'autres villes dans les pays dits en voie de développement, elle s'est largement étendue au cours des dernières années du 20ème siècle. Des sondages récents font apparaître un processus d'intégration linguistique assez complexe. Nous nous intéressons dans cet article au multilinguisme des migrants du nord du Ghana ainsi que du peuple autochtone d'Accra, les Gã. Nous constatons que le modèle ethnolinguistique "hôte-étranger" (ou "patron-client") permet encore d'expliquer ce qu'on observe aujourd'hui. Cependant, l'identification des acteurs principaux est devenue aléatoire. On prévoit pour Accra un futur multilingue marqué par la coexistence de l'anglais, de l'akan (twi), du gã et du haoussa. Toutefois l'avenir du haoussa comme lingua franca des migrants du nord demeure incertain.

Mots-clés:
Accra, ethnolinguistique, migration, multilinguisme, sociolinguistique urbaine.

Introduction

It is well known that cities in sub-Saharan Africa have expanded tremendously in the past few decades. This is especially true of the capital cities, and it is certainly true of Accra, the capital city of Ghana, which is the focus of this paper. Probably it is not quite so well known that everyday life in these still-expanding cities is very stressful. Heavy traffic makes moving around the city very time consuming, in spite of the expanded road system, and the generally faster pace of life is not supported by a proportional increase in facilities and resources. For the economically less fortunate, life is not necessarily faster, but it is certainly at least as stressful as it is for those with cars. More even than in previous eras, access to jobs, accommodation and opportunities of all kinds depends on personal networks, but as the population of the city has grown to several million, the nature and efficacy of these networks has changed. In the 1960s it was possible for an individual to know, or at least know somebody who knew, virtually everyone from his own ethnic area, in his profession, and so forth. Nowadays that is not generally true. As a result, I suggest, personal networks, and networks of networks, have probably become more important than ever in the individual's effort to compete for what the city has to offer. Therefore, the more language networks an individual has access to, the better, and on the other hand, if one's personal network is confined to a single language, this is extremely limiting.

Like almost all African countries, Ghana is very multilingual; approximately 50 distinct, non-mutually intelligible languages are regarded as indigenous, in a

population of a little under 19 million (Ghana Statistical Service 2002).[1] Again as in most such countries, the population explosion of the cities has been fed mainly by migration from other parts of the country and from neighbouring countries. It is therefore not at all surprising that one can find speakers of a very large number of languages in Accra – probably virtually every language spoken between Abidjan and Lagos. What is not so obvious is how people navigate this sea of languages in order to establish the networks so necessary to their lives.

In this paper I propose first that multilingualism is an important mechanism in the individual's adaptation to the demands of the urban environment, and that in the case of Accra this has been true for a very long time. Secondly, I maintain that the pattern of multilingualism that has arisen in response to communication needs is rooted in a thoroughly indigenous approach to language and the status of migrants. It was present long before colonial times, and there is no particular reason to expect it to change in the immediate post-colonial future. It is this cultural attitude, I shall claim, that largely determines how the language repertoire is institutionalized (or not).

I begin with a brief outline of the historical development of language use in Accra, proceeding to a description of patterns of multilingualism as they were observed in the city in the 1980s, and some very recent data from ongoing research that is suggestive of current trends. I then interpret these patterns in terms of the "host and visitor" model of social interaction as it is manifested in local cultures. I will conclude with a discussion of the current relevance of this model, and its implications for the future.

1. The Geographical and Historical Background

1.1 Ghana and Accra

Ghana is located on the coast of West Africa, only a few degrees north of the equator. Officially anglophone, it is surrounded by officially francophone countries. Despite a bad period in the 1970s and 80s, Ghana and before that the Gold Coast have been relatively prosperous and even stable in the West African context, and therefore a target of migration.

Much of this migration has targeted Accra, the capital of the country. The traditional language of the city and its immediate surroundings is Gã (ordinarily spelled "Ga"), and the city is called "Gã" in the Ga language. The Ga people who speak the language probably number less than a million, although it is also spoken by a fairly large number of other people in the city. Since there are

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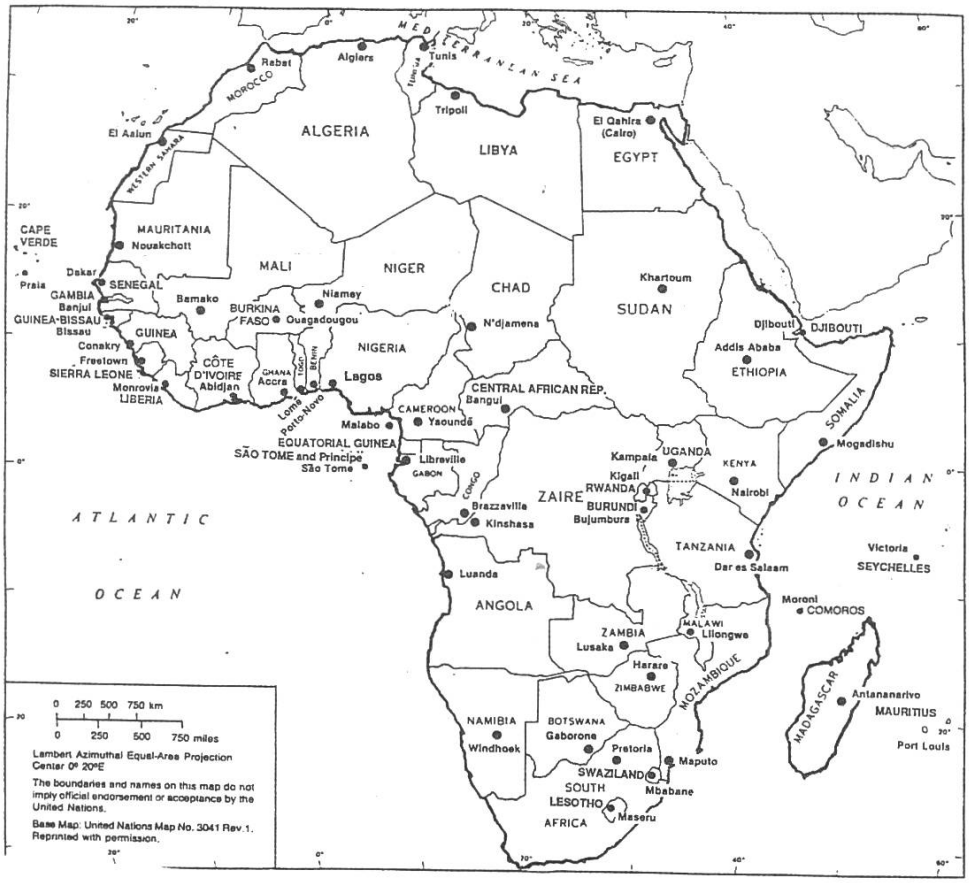
1 For details on the languages of Ghana see Dakubu ed. (1988). For an evaluation of the 2000 census in relation to information on languages and multilingualism in Ghana see Dakubu (2002).

no census data explicitly for language it is impossible to be certain. The population of Accra is about two million.



Linguistically and culturally, the country divides approximately into the southern two-thirds of the country vs. the north. The south is dominated by the Akan language (usually referred to by one of the local terms "Twi" or "Fante"), which undoubtedly has by far the largest number of speakers of any language, but is nevertheless the mother tongue of less than 45% of the population. It is very widespread as a second language. Akan is an immediate neighbour of Accra to the north (and west, in that the speakers of the small Guang languages on the western boundary are bilingual in Akan). Dangme is the neighbour to the east, and the only really close genetic relative of Ga.

1.2 The Founding of Accra

Present day Accra was founded about 1678, when the people known today as the Ga, a trading people of mixed Akan, Guang, and Dangme origins, established themselves there after their capital a few miles inland was destroyed by an expanding Akan group, the Akwamu. Before that, it existed as fishing villages, which probably included speakers of both southern Guang and Dangme dialects, especially Guang. Several European trading nations had already established trading lodges on the coast, particularly the Dutch (Fort

Crevecoeur 1649), the English (James Fort 1673), and the Danes (who took over Christiansborg in 1659), and the city grew in several semi-autonomous divisions or "quarters", based on trade with these lodges which were expanded into forts.

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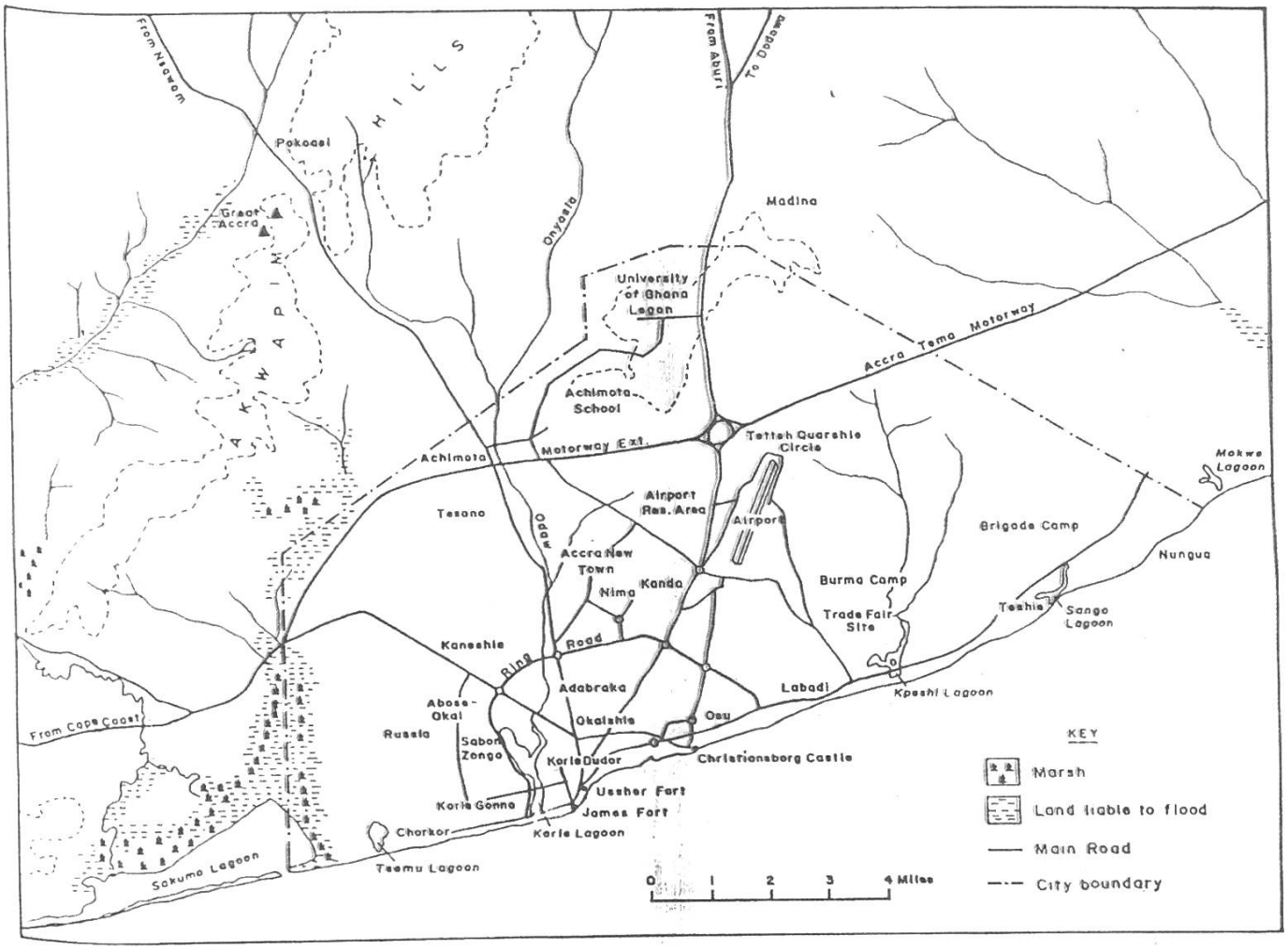
After England bought out all the other nations' trading establishments on what was then called the Gold Coast, colonial rule was gradually established, although not without local resistance. The largest British fort was at Cape Coast to the west, but in the 1870s it was decided to make Accra the capital. However this did not result in any notable growth in the size of the city. That occurred gradually in the first half of the 20th century, but most definitively in the second half, gathering steam towards the end of it.

During the 18th and 19th centuries there were several waves of migrants who became permanent residents of the city. They were assimilated into its existing

sections and subsections. Most of them eventually adopted the Ga language and became identified as Ga people. This pattern continued into the 20th century, but as the rate of in-migration increased, especially in the second half of the century as the proportion of non-Ga migrants increased and came to outnumber the Ga, assimilation became less common, and permanently non-Ga or minority Ga areas were established on the outer perimeter, such as Adabraka, Sabon Zongo, New Town, Nima. Thus the city grew progressively outward, and the Ga presence in these newer areas was progressively less. However it does not seem to be true that settlements tended to form exclusive ethnic enclaves: rather, we find that in most areas the population is mixed, although it is usually predominantly either northern or southern. Therefore, the mother-tongue speakers of a specific language are not typically associated with a particular neighbourhood, although before the 20th century this may well have been the case.



Accra, Ghana. Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana.

1.3 Language at the founding of Accra

Before the establishment of Accra on the coast, the inland trading town that is known in the literature as "Great Accra" was evidently trilingual: it consisted of geographically delimited Ga, Akan (Akwamu) and Guang (Obutu) quarters (Bredwa-Mensah 1990; Dakubu 1997; Field 1940; Reindorf 1966). It seems that these languages (or at least closely related dialects of Ga and of Obutu) were already present in the coastal villages even before the capital moved there. At the earliest stage, therefore, Accra was probably bi- or trilingual in the sense that more than one language community was politically established in it.[2]

This situation did not last, however. On the coast, Ga speaking sections quickly established local political hegemony, despite continuing conflict with Akan speaking states, in which the Akan states generally dominated in a wider domain, and a continuing Akan presence. The Ga language was soon institutionalized as the language of the state. Many divisions of old Accra are known to be of Akan origin, founded by people who arrived for a variety of political and economic reasons, but they were assimilated into the Ga-speaking community, probably in the course of the eighteenth century. However, Akan had been and continued to be a major trade language for the Ga. The southern Guang language known in Accra as Obutu eventually disappeared from Accra, although a closely related dialect, Awutu, is still spoken in a small area to the west. It seems its speakers in the present Accra area all shifted to Ga. Thus in-migration, multilingualism, and linguistic assimilation have been part of Accra life from the beginning.

Furthermore, a European language has always been part of the picture. The major reason why the Ga re-established their state on the coast was to have access to and control of trade with Europeans. The Portuguese built a fortified lodge there (between the sites of the later Dutch and English forts) shortly before 1570. It did not last very long, but the Portuguese language was the lingua franca of trade between Europeans and Africans on the Gold Coast (and elsewhere) for 300 years, ie. from the end of the 15th century until the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the first half of the 19th century, when the British conquered or bought all the establishments of other European nations. In addition, a few Africans spoke other European languages because they worked for one of the numerous European establishments.

An interesting aspect of the use of Portuguese after the departure of the Portuguese themselves is that it was regarded by both Africans and Europeans as a language of the Africans. At the insistence of the Africans, both African and European partners to a negotiation had to learn it if they wished to

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2 The literature on which this and the following paragraphs are based is exhaustively discussed in Dakubu (1997).

engage in sea-borne trade. This meant that a small section of the African population was able to control the trade to its own advantage.

2. The Languages of Accra Today

2.1 "Old Accra"

The oldest part of Accra, near the beach, is still inhabited by Ga who are descendants of those who founded the city in the 17th and early 18th centuries, and at least until very recently it was solidly Ga speaking. However there are now many other people living in this area, especially people from other parts of southern Ghana. This means essentially Akan and Ewe (people of the south east), who are there in roughly equal numbers. This part of the city is poor and overcrowded, but consequently the room rents are low, so it continues to attract migrants. It also includes an area, Zongo Lane, that was not settled until the mid 19th century and was first inhabited by people originating from beyond southern Ghana, although this is not particularly obvious today. This area is what is known as "central Accra".

On the periphery are some major markets, and beyond those, areas that were originally settled by migrants from other parts of southern Ghana, as well as by Ga moving out from the oldest sections (eg. Okaishi and Korle Dudor, Adabraka), and also, districts (like Tudu and Cow Lane) originally settled by people from what is now northern Ghana and beyond, including Lebanese and Indians. These areas are actually quite recent, having been built up in colonial times, just before the Second World War.

From data collected early in the 1990s (discussed in Dakubu 1997) it seems that in the oldest part of the city nearly everyone, including the non-Ga, speaks Ga, ie. over 90%. Most people can also speak Akan, almost 80%. If they are not ethnically Akan themselves they use Akan mainly in the markets (including buying and selling on the street and in the small shops around the markets). Ga is also widely used commercially, but since both buyers and sellers include people from other parts of the city or outside it, most people speak both. This means that Akan has a very audible presence on the street in these neighbourhoods, a fact that leads many Ga people to insist that Ga is severely threatened by Akan.

Number	Ga People (N=194)	Others (N = 100)
1	14.0%	0%
2	24.6%	17.0%
3	35.1%	53.0%
4	17.5%	28.0%
5 +	8.8%	12.0%
Average	**2.9**	**3.3**

Table 1: Old Accra: The Number of Languages People Claimed to Know[3]

In surveys done in 1988 and 1992 in and around one of the oldest markets, where most people lived in the general neighbourhood, it was found that the median number of languages spoken by both Ga and other people is three, but the average for the non-Ga (mainly roughly equal numbers of Akans and Ewes) is slightly higher than for the Ga. These results are summarized in Table 1. However, when people were asked how many languages they really spoke well, 65% of the Ga said they only felt really confident in one language, Ga. Among the others, on the other hand, more than half felt confident of their ability in two or more languages. In the vast majority of cases, about two-thirds, the third language was English, although only about 20% they thought they spoke it well.[4]

In other words, Ga is the strongest language, but Akan is also very widely known, and so is English at least to some degree, even though this is not an educated or prosperous population. Ewe seems to be spoken only by the Ewe.

Language	Men (N=70)	Women (N=235)
Ga	80.0%	88.9%
Akan	35.7%	25.5%
English	84.3%	9.8%

Table 2: Major Languages of Old Accra: Gender of Speakers

It is also of interest to look at gender differences in this group. The relevant figures are displayed in Table 2. Market selling is to a large extent the preserve of women. This survey included a fish market, where traditionally, women sell the fish caught by their male relatives. This is reflected in the very high figures for women's confidence in their ability in Ga. However they are dramatically less confident of their command of English than men are, and the figures for Akan also seem to be significantly different. Men, on the other hand, are more

3 These figures average two survey groups, see Dakubu (1997: 53).

4 These figures are derived from Dakubu (1997) Chapter 3.

likely to keep shops around the market.[5] Note that these are the figures for confident speakers. The 84% for men speakers of English does not mean they speak a particularly standard or educated variety of English, only that they are confident of their ability to use the kind of English they know and need.

The data on which these remarks have been based are now ten years old or more. It has been a decade of continuing expansion and immigration, and we might well ask whether the situation has changed, and whether the position of Ga has weakened in the face of Akan-speaking immigration. We have no new figures for Central Accra, but a recent survey (February 2004) of 20 households in La (generally known in English as Labadi) provides an interesting comparison.

2.2 La today[6]

La is historically an independent city-state, but most people now think of it as a suburb of Accra. It is located a few miles east of central Accra, separated from it by a district of government offices and public spaces and another traditionally independent Ga town, Osu. This area is not wealthy, but it is not as poor as the Central Accra area, and not quite so crowded. For this survey, we did not interview individuals but representatives of households, on the languages used within the household. It must be borne in mind however that these households normally included far more than a nuclear family. Almost all included a number of tenants, or relatives of the householder. The number of people living in the same compound house varied from five to fifty-seven, and the twenty households totalled 516 individuals. Also, many of them included a shop or a workshop within the premises, so that the line dividing domestic from outside contacts was not always absolutely clear.

La (Labadi) is traditionally equally as Ga in its ethnic and linguistic composition as central Accra, and since it is not a commercial, industrial or government centre it is perhaps less obvious as a target for immigrants. Yet, these households (in La Wireless, La Koo) turned out to be very mixed ethnically. It is not hard to see why the Ga feel under threat, because they made up only 53.9% (278) of the total. Just two of the smallest households consisted only of Ga people, and in six of the twenty the Ga were in a minority. One household of 14 people had no Ga at all.

On the other hand, the vast majority of these people, 87%, speak Ga, whatever their origins. There was only one household (but it was also the largest) in which a majority of the residents did not speak Ga in the household – in other

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5 This is a rare survey in which men are under-represented. However it also seems that more women than men live in the area, a fact attributable to their relative poverty.

6 I wish to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Seth N.M. Allotey in carrying out the survey reported in this section.

households it was spoken by 70% or more. It is also noteworthy that non-Ga who did not speak the language were generally either very young, or were people over 30 whose language repertoires had presumably been established before they arrived in Accra. It appears that older children and young people normally acquire Ga. These data are summarized in Table 3.

	Ga		Non-Ga		Total	
Age group	Ga speakers		Ga speakers		Ga speakers	
1-9	47	100%	30	66.7%	77	83.7%
10-19	60	100%	40	82.1%	100	93.5%
20-29	56	95%	39	79.6%	95	88%
30+	112	100%	61	62.9%	173	82.8%
Totals	275		170		445	
	98.9% of Ga		71.4% of non-Ga		86.2%	

Table 3: Gender, Ethnicity, Age and Command of Ga

As one might expect, however, these households are very multilingual. Eight languages were found to be used in one or more households, but by far the most common were Ga, Akan (Twi) and English. 17 or 90% of all households use both Ga and English, even when all residents are ethnically Ga. 16 or 84% use Ga and Twi, and 14 or 74% use all three of Ga, English and Twi. There was no case at all where only one language was used for communication within the household.

Language	Households that use it	
Ga	19	95%
English	19	95%
Akan (Twi)	18	90%
Ewe	7	35%
Hausa	6	30%
Akan (Fante)	5	25%
Dangme	4	20%
Nkonya	1	5%

Table 4: Household Multilingualism in La (N=20)

There was therefore no evidence that Ga is currently losing speakers, so it is not endangered in the usual sense, but it is also clear that everyone in La, both Ga and others, are living in a multilingual society in which one language is not sufficient and two are only a bare minimum, and that this has implications even for domestic language use.

2.3 The Migrant Periphery

When we move out beyond the downtown area, or looking at it another way, beyond the older suburbs into areas that became urbanized after the Second World War, the picture changes. In particular, Hausa now becomes a major lingua franca. In colonial times the land was leased from Ga families by Hausa

and Fulani for keeping cattle. More immediately relevant is the fact that these neighbourhoods were built up and settled mainly by soldiers who, after they were demobbed at the end of the Second World War, for various reasons did not return to their home areas but found jobs in Accra. Most of them came from northern Ghana or savannah regions beyond, as far as northern Nigeria, and the lingua franca of the British West Africa Regiment was Hausa, for reasons that go back to pre-colonial times. Since it was also the language of their landlords, it was appropriate for them to continue to use it as a lingua franca when they settled in the area, and for relatives who came to join them and look for jobs in the capital to learn it. This is the source of the instant association among southern Ghanaians of northern Ghana and Hausa, although as a matter of fact, in northern Ghana Hausa is spoken only in towns, just as it is in the south, and there are certainly more Hausa speakers in southern Ghana than in northern.

Surveys carried out in the 1980s examined language claims of three communities from the far north of Ghana, the Dagaba from the north west, whose community language is Dagaare, the Kusaasi from the north east, whose community language is Kusaal, and the Builsa of north central origin, who speak Buli. The widespread use of Hausa among many of these people does not mean that the other languages already met with are not important. What we find instead is that very many people speak 3 or more languages, and that there are significant differences according to ethnic or regional origin, and also according to gender. Thus the Kusaasi from the north eastern corner of the country are far more likely to speak Hausa than the Dagaaba from the north west, and indeed some instances of shift to Hausa were found, in that there were individuals who thought they spoke Hausa better than their native Kusaal, and/or spoke to their children in Hausa rather than Kusaal. No such thing was found among the Dagaaba, who as Table 5 indicates are much more likely to speak Akan. It is also noteworthy that among all three communities sampled, Akan had significantly more speakers than Ga. In view of the high percentages for both Akan and Hausa in all three communities, more than half except for Akan in the Dagaba, there must be many people who speak both. This is especially true of the Kusaasi, who are significantly more multilingual than the other two communities as measured by the average repertoire claimed.

	Dagaaba (N=502)	Builsa (N=419)	Kusaasi (N=227)
Akan	69.1%	52.3%	54.2%
English	34.1%	21.9%	45.4%
Hausa	42.8%	75.6%	84.6%
Ga	30.7%	9.3%	39.2%
Community Language	95.8%	95.2%	85.6%
Size of Average Repertoire:			
Confident	2.7	2.6	3.8
Any competence	3.8	3.9	5.7

Table 5: Northern Migrant Communities: Languages Spoken with Confidence

2.4 Tema today[7]

The data on which these observations are based are now 20 years old. A new survey has been made, of another northern community, the Dagomba, in Tema just 20 miles to the east of Accra. The Dagomba, whose community language is called Dagbani, are from the north east, but not as far north as the groups surveyed in Accra. Tema is also an originally Ga town, but unlike Accra it did not become an urban centre until post-colonial times. It was developed into a deep water harbour and industrial city with planned residential areas in the 1950s, around the time the country became independent. Apart from a very small section where the original inhabitants were resettled, called Tema New Town (Tema Manhean), all the residents of Tema are migrants.

Dagomba in two areas of Tema were interviewed, in Community 1 which is part of the planned city, and the unplanned satellite town called Ashaiman. The total language inventory among these people is very large, but we shall concentrate only on the major languages, those we have already seen. These are the languages spoken as second languages, since everyone claims to speak the ethnic language, Dagbani, well, and all but an insignificant number learned it first in life.

	Ashaiman (N=59)		Community 1 (N=74)	
	confident	total speakers	confident	total speakers
Akan (Twi)	68%	90%	69%	88%
Hausa	53%	76%	57%	76%
English	48%	72%	38%	80%
Ga	7%	19%	14%	24%
Average repertoire (including Dagbani)				
	2.7		2.7	

Table 6: Major Second Languages: the Dagomba of Tema

7 Thanks to Seidu Issah for his assistance with the survey reported in this section.

First, we note that the two communities are extremely similar. Probably the most striking single finding is that even in these communities, Akan has significantly more speakers than Hausa, both confident speakers and in general. As in the Accra communities studied earlier, a majority had been born in the north, in Dagbon, and a majority of Hausa speakers had learned their Hausa in the south. It was obvious in the earlier study that northern communities differ considerably in the extent to which they use Hausa in the south, but it would be expected that its use by Dagomba, in contrast to for example the Dagaba, would be high, since there has historically been more contact with Hausa in the Dagomba area (Dagbon) than in the north west. It remains to be determined whether this is a sign that use of Hausa is declining among northern migrants generally. In both these survey groups women are under-represented, but it is unlikely that that is a reason for the relatively reduced knowledge of Hausa. A more likely explanation is that they included a rather high proportion of young people who were either students born in the south or recent migrants.[8] Possibly, Hausa is acquired as a consequence of working experience. At any rate it would be premature to announce the demise of Hausa, but it is interesting and possibly relevant that in the La households that used Hausa, the children tended not to use it. Ga is relatively little known, which is not surprising since both Ashaiman and Tema Community 1 have been mixed settlements from the outset.

What we have seen could be squeezed into a conventional African trilingual configuration of languages of local, regional and foreign origin and scope of communicative value, as shown in Figure 1. (See Abdulaziz-Mkilifi 1972 for the classical statement of this configuration.)

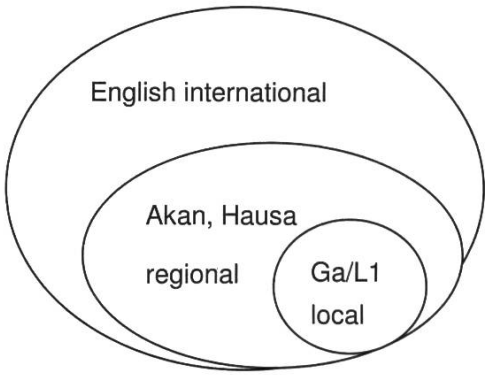

Figure 1: The "Tri-lingual" Configuration

In fact, of course, it is quadrilingual, or even quinquelingual, not just in terms of societal distribution but in terms of individual repertoires. The question then

8 The minimum age of respondents was 15.

arises, why such a system should be maintained, and indeed whether it can be. Historically it is not difficult to determine how and why the various languages have arrived on the scene. What seems particularly interesting is that although the terms in the quadrilingual configuration of earliest Accra: Ga, Akan, Obutu and Portuguese, are not the same as today's (Obutu and Portuguese have vanished, Hausa and English have arrived), such an extensive system still exists.

To a large extent the functionality of the multilingual system has remained stable. Ever since the days of Great Accra, Ga has been the domestic language of the Ga, Akan has been used for regional trade, and the two languages have shared a space. In pre-colonial times it is likely that Akan also had a domestic function and it certainly had political and diplomatic functions. It is not entirely clear whether it has ever been a true lingua franca, in the sense of serving communication between people of different, non-Akan language communities; among the Ga it still seems that it is used mainly to communicate with Akans, but it may be that its use as a lingua franca is increasing. Portuguese as the language of commerce and relations with Europeans has obviously been replaced by English, although the functions of English today are much broader than those of Portuguese ever were, as far as Accra is concerned. Both may be regarded as lingua francas, since neither is or was necessarily the mother tongue of either of the parties to an interaction. However there is no discernible parallel between Obutu and Hausa: Obutu was a domestic language that disappeared from Accra through political defeat and assimilation, although in a religious function it still has a marginal presence. Hausa on the other hand is a genuine lingua franca, functionally more comparable to English in the Accra context than to Akan, although among Ghanaian users it has few if any literacy-related functions.

The question then can be narrowed down: why do significant numbers of Accra residents find it necessary or useful to learn Akan and English and Hausa? Assuming the economic value of English, the question really is, why both Akan and Hausa?

It is not true that no Ghanaians of southern origin speak Hausa. Many do, but there is no doubt that far more northerners do. Since Hausa throughout Ghana is a language of the town, a majority of these speakers whether from the north or the south learn Hausa only after they arrive in Accra. Historically this has presumably happened because new migrants tended to look for their initial accommodation with family connections who were already living in areas where vehicular Hausa was current, but this does not really explain why in current circumstances they do not rely on their mother tongue plus English and/or Akan, without Hausa.

Part of the explanation may be related to the status of northerners as outsiders in southern Ghana. They are particularly vulnerable to status considerations

because they come from a poor part of the country, and their linguistic communities are generally relatively small, but the Ga also perceive the Akan with their superior numbers as culturally and politically threatening (see Dakubu 1997, Chapter 1).

In the city, identities need to be protected from assault by larger, richer, better established groups. In Ghana, unlike in Nigeria or Niger, vehicular Hausa has no ethnic or political associations, for there is no place in Ghana where Hausa counts as indigenous. Therefore, the language provides a vehicle for an urban identity that does not interfere or conflict with ethnic identities, or imply that the speaker has altered his/her loyalties. More people shift to Hausa than to Akan, because there no perceived threat from the ethnic Hausa community, which is regarded as foreign – an approximate parallel to the usual explanation for the success of Swahili on the other side of Africa.

It must be admitted however that use of Hausa might also be interpreted as an indication that the population of Accra is a divided community, and that this reflects a further division in the country. At some levels this may well be true. Others are the unequal stages of development of parts of the country most distant from Accra in such areas as education, modern communications, and general prosperity. But if Hausa is giving way to Akan among younger migrants from the north, as the Tema data hint, we should presumably regard this as a positive sign of increasing social integration.

3. The Host-Visitor model of inter-group communication

We shall now explore another way of looking at the linguistic constitution of Accra, and the cultural basis for its maintenance, or at least recurrence, namely a model derived from the local ethnography of speaking, the rules of spoken interaction, that we can refer to as the Host-Visitor model. These rules are founded on the notion that all public transactions are transactions between groups, and in particular, individuals outside their home areas represent not just themselves but their groups. I have proposed elsewhere that these rules provide a locally grounded model for explaining the acquisition and spread of second languages (Dakubu 1997: 166ff). I now consider it as an explanation for maintenance of a multilingual configuration.

The people of this area conduct their personal affairs in a fairly formal style. Traditionally among the Ga and also the Akan, although with differences in detail, visits begin with a symmetrical exchange of greetings between host and visitor, accompanied by presentations of drinks and prayers. Although the performance of speeches, gift-giving, prayers and exchange of "news" or accounts of the circumstances leading up to the visit is symmetrical, the social relations enacted are symmetrical only in the sense that the aims of the performance are balance and reciprocity; they are premised on social

inequality in that the host, the owner of the place, the one who was there first, is the patron and the controller of the interaction, while the visitor is in the position of client or supplicant. Performance of the greeting ritual establishes the local heirarchy and the new arrival's place within it. Once the formalities have been gone through, the visitor becomes a member of the host group with respect to any later arrival. (For details see Dakubu 1987.) What must be emphasized is that neither visitor nor host is seen as representing only themselves, even if they happen to be alone (which is rare). Everyone always represents a group.

Being a stranger is therefore an inherently dangerous situation, as is receiving a stranger. To ensure smooth relations, the stranger must show that he (or sometimes she) is not a Trojan horse, and the host must make it plain that the visitor has not walked into a trap. The formal locutions proper to these situations lay great emphasis on openness and the absence of any hint of deception or under-handedness. The language used is an aspect of this: it is accepted that the visitor should adopt the language of the host, but in a really formal context the host must at the same time ensure that an interpreter formally delivers all messages in the language of the visitor. The results are sometimes surprising to a non-African observer. For example, when wholesale buyers of farm produce travel to make purchases they will commonly use the language of the producer, for on his territory they have the status of client.

On the whole, this cultural form serves to institutionalize a monolingual state. It is granted that different groups of people have different languages, and each is entitled to maintain its own, but if individuals or groups want to become part of the Ga people they must adopt the Ga language. There is no strong pressure to adopt a single language or lingua franca, but if you want to belong, you must adopt the language of the group. This principle seems to have governed the integration of foreign groups into the Ga polity throughout its history, and probably still does. Yet, in the very complex social environment of today, there may be considerable uncertainty about identifying one's host group. Within the geographical entity known as Accra there may in fact be more than one host, depending on the circumstances. If one has dealings with the Ga it is certainly the Ga who are the host, but in the heterogeneous society that most migrants experience there are likely to be many occasions when it is not. Considering the relatively low rate of its acquisition by migrants from the north, it is likely that their encounters with the Ga are these days relatively infrequent, and that they are more likely to find themselves in situations where the personal and public identity of the host/patron, combined with the social and economic purpose of the approach, makes Hausa, Akan or English the suitable language – it may not always be immediately clear which. When it is necessary to visit a government office or even a private business, for example, the language in which a client or customer approaches the officer or seller can affect the outcome of the transaction. The choice of language is related to a complex of

such factors as a desire to indicate ethnic solidarity, which encourages the use of a common mother tongue if possible, regional identification, which might encourage the adoption of either Hausa or Akan, and assertion of prestige based on education and economic class, which might encourage use of English if possible. Uncertainty about how to apply the "rules for speaking" can potentially lead to embarrassment – loss of face, and a fear of being misled or deceived. Therefore, the safest thing is to have a range of languages at one's disposal. Then, one can confidently represent oneself and one's people in any situation without fear of being disgraced or cheated.

To conclude, it seems obvious that multilingual Accra is not a vestige of colonialism. It does not follow that the present situation will persist indefinitely. But for the immediate future, Accra is likely to remain a web of overlapping networks of bi- and trilinguals. There is no sign that the Ga language is being eliminated – but it seems very unlikely that it will ever again dominate the whole political space, and its long-term future is a subject for speculation. The future of Hausa in Accra is no less questionable. Twi (Akan) and English, on the other hand, are strong and getting stronger.

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