

On Language and Development in Africa: The Case of Ghana*

ADAMS B. BODOMO

Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway

ABSTRACT

In their search for solutions to the development problems of Africa, students of African development have often ignored linguistic and other socio-cultural resources (Prah 1993). When linguistic issues are addressed at all, the fact that there is a multiplicity of languages in African countries is often seen as a hindrance to the development of the continent. This paper focuses on the relationship between language and development and offers a specific proposal for addressing issues of language policy and planning in Africa. Taking the language situation in Ghana as a case study, a model of development communication and education termed *localized trilingualism* is proposed; a model, it is believed, will enable Africa to harness its multilingual resources for accelerated and sustainable socio-cultural, economic and technological development in the 21st century.

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this paper is better highlighted by the story of some young agricultural extension officers and their experiences on one of their first field trips. These young African experts graduated from one of the universities in Africa and were ready to impart new farming technologies to rural farmers in various areas of their country. On the very first day of their jobs they came to terms with one issue which had apparently been neglected in the course of their training: *language*, that most important tool of communication. In spite of all the academic theorizing about sharing new technologies with the indigenous people, apparently nobody ever thought that these scholars were going to start working with people, the majority of whom did not communicate in their language of education, in the language in which all the wonderful theories of agricultural extension were propounded.

This story illustrates quite well the cursory attention that has often been given the language issue in Africa's development discourse. Too often than not theories and issues of achieving an accelerated rate of development in Africa are discussed without considering linguistic issues. There are, at least, two reasons for this apparent neglect of the language issue. The first is that development is often conceived of in a rather narrow sense. In an attempt to demonstrate Africa's underdevelopment most people often rush for their calculators and begin to determine GDP, GNP and other economic notions such as income per capita. The consequences of this quantitative approach to development are that economic

indicators are often erroneously equated with national development and societal well-being. In this narrow sense then the role of language in Africa's development may rather be seen as a bit too marginal to be taken seriously.

The other problem why the language issue has not featured well in Africa's development discourse is that the nature and role of language in society is often completely misunderstood. Probably following from the irresponsible declarations of some African writers and intellectuals to the extent that any language can be used to effectively express African culture, an African development economist and educator who the author talked to said that African development is language-neutral, that Africa's economic indicators can be bettered just by sheer hard work by Africans speaking whatever language, be it English or French. An allied notion of this general misunderstanding of the role and functions of language is that some people often say that it may even be better to use 'scientific' languages such as English and French since African languages are incapable of expressing certain political notions and all the technical expressions that are inherent in many academic fields.¹

Refuting all these contentions, this paper shows that Africa's own languages are central to African development and ought to occupy an important place in the development discourse. We claim that once we liberate the notion of development from the narrow corridors of GDPs, GNPs and the like and reinterpret it in newer paradigms involving a comprehensive transformation of Africa's socio-cultural, economic and technological structures we can begin to appreciate the importance of language in such a transformation.

This interrelationship between language and development is taken up in Section 1. Following this we give, in Section 2, a synopsis of the language situation in Ghana as an example of the multilingual nature of Africa. Section 3 addresses the challenges of interpreting development in a wider perspective. Issues such as mass participation and local initiative are taken up. It is seen at this point that the present linguistic organization and language policy practices, especially in the educational sector, do not favor our notions of development as mass participation and local initiative, etc. In Section 4 then we propose a new multilingual model of communication in Africa which can facilitate such a view of development. In this model the centrality of mother-tongue education is highlighted.

¹ Chris Dunton, in an article, *Africa's language problem*, cites Es'kia Mphahlele, an African writer, as saying that he must use English because his mother tongue has no terms for concepts like 'freedom' and 'liberation' (West Africa, March 22-28, 1993).

1. ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

In this section we shall show that if development is seen as the sustainable socio-cultural, economic and technological transformation of a society then language becomes an important variable in the development process; the indigenous language of the society in focus becomes causally related to its development efforts. What is it that makes language such an important ingredient in the development discourse? The answers must be found in the nature of language and the roles it performs in society.

1.1 THE NATURE AND FUNCTIONS OF LANGUAGE

There exists a considerable amount of literature on the subject of the role and functions of languages in society. One of the most important elements of the nature of language, probably the most important, - and this is due to the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1959) - is that language is a system of signs. Languages are similar in the sense that each is a system of signs for encoding meaning and the realities of the world.

But an important element of language, however is that, it is also culture-specific: each language is systematically different from others in the sense that it has a particular way of arranging the signs that encode meaning, and of communicating the world to its speaker. In that sense then every language is an efficient tool for encoding the peculiarities of the particular environment in which a people live. A particularly strong view of this aspect of language has been articulated by two linguists and philosophers, Sapir and Whorf, and has come to be known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation (Sapir 1929).

Since languages relate first and foremost to particular cultures, each individual language seems to represent the speakers of the culture it encodes. This is the basis of the tight relationship between language and ethnicity in many parts of the world. In this sense then language has a symbolic function.

From the above realities about language we see that language is a granary, a repository of the world-view of its speakers, it is this particular language that best contains and expresses the indigenous belief systems - socio-cultural, political, economic and technological - of any society. New belief systems are immediately related to these existing systems. It is in this sense that we notice that the most intelligible and intelligent reactions by speakers to new ideas and technologies are registered through their language.

With this synopsis of the nature and role of language in society let us look at the nature of development and subsequently see how relevant these functions of language, as mentioned here, are to the development efforts of African countries or, for that matter, any country of the world.

1.2 DEVELOPMENT AS SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

Development is a contentious concept and this is clearly demonstrated by the multiplicity of approaches within the field of development studies (development as modernization, dependency development, etc.). However, there appears to be some consensus that, development does not just involve the narrow-minded calculation of GDPs, GNPs and per capita incomes, but the complete transformation of the socio-cultural, political and economic belief systems of a particular society to suit its present needs. While the modernization school of development appeals to free market forces to achieve this transformation, the dependency school introduces the factors of dominance and exploitation and appeals to radical steps and state intervention.

It is in this broader, more comprehensive, view of development that the language factor weighs in heavily on issues of development thinking in every society. If development involves the appropriate transformation of the socio-cultural, political and economic systems of a society and if language is seen as a repository and a tool for the expression and communication of these very socio-cultural, political and economic belief systems of the society, then it goes without saying that a successful conceptualization and implementation of this societal transformation can only be achieved through the use of the mother-tongues or the languages indigenous to the society.

Furthermore, we shall see that the language question becomes even more compelling when we look at newer paradigms of development which approach development studies with concepts such as community initiative, indigenous knowledge (Hurskainen 1993) and popular participation. Before we do this we would like to ask the question: to what extent has the African development scene approached the interrelationship between language and development as already observed above? An examination of the language situation in some parts of Africa should provide some clues.

2. THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN AFRICA

Current linguistic research has not yet provided us with a comprehensive picture of the language situation in Africa. We do not even have a comprehensive list of the languages spoken in the various countries, let alone to know areas in which they are spoken and how many speakers there are for each language. This is certainly a drawback for research in multilingualism and the subsequent language policies arising from such research. We cannot expect to know the various functions performed by various languages in our multilingual society prior to a detailed linguistic analysis of the languages and their relationships to each other.

Since it is impossible in this context to give a detailed study of the language situation in each African country we wish to do a case study of Ghana, a West African country, a choice based, not just only on the fact that it is the African country the author knows best, - being a citizen of Ghana - but also on the fact that Ghana is quite representative of the African linguistic situation in many ways.

2.1 CASE STUDY: MULTILINGUALISM IN GHANA

In Ghana, there exist some advances in an attempt to take stock of its repertoire of languages. Kropp-Dakubu (1988), Dolphyne (1988) and Duthie (1988) have undertaken quite detailed analyses of the language situation in Ghana. However, most of these were concentrated in the southern parts of the country. In Bodomo (1994) these previous efforts are complemented with a quite concise sociolinguistic introduction to northern Ghana and in Bodomo (1996) I arrive at a quite comprehensive list of the indigenous languages of Ghana indicating where each of them is spoken and by how many people. In this section I shall synthesize information from my previous works and those of others to give the reader a quite detailed picture of the language situation in Ghana.

2.1.1 Indigenous Ghanaian languages

Ghana's indigenous languages can be categorized into ten major language groups or, more precisely, language subgroups but these groups do not conform to a one-to-one matching with the ten regions of the country. Some of these contain very large numbers of mother-tongue speakers while others hardly number hundred thousand mother-tongue speakers. Below is a presentation of the major groups using their cover name. We also indicate some of the individual languages or dialects under these groups with a rough indication as to their regional distribution in Ghana.

2.1.1.1 The Akan group

Dialects under this group include the following: Agona, Akuapem Twi, Akyem, Asante Twi, Brong, Fante, Kwahu and Wasa.² This language group covers the present-day Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Eastern and Central regions. Akan, if it is regarded as one language, is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Ghana. According to the 1960 population census of Ghana,³ 2.6 million people spoke the language as a mother-tongue. This made up 39% of the national population of 6.7 million at the time (Dolphyne 1988), divided between the various dialects as follows: Asante Twi (913,270), Fante (708,470), Bron (320,240), Akyem (203,830), Akwapem Twi (144,790), Kwahu (131,970), Wasa (94,260) and Agona (49,080). There are also many non-native speakers of the language who speak it in various degrees of competence.

2.1.1.2 The Mabilia group

This group, extrapolating from 1960 figures, constitutes 80% of the population of Northern Ghana and approx. 16% of the national population. The 1984 figures by Barker (1986) show that the group as a whole had 1.75 million speakers, making it the second largest linguistic group in the country. The 1984 figures for the various languages in this group are as follows: Dagbane (448,150), Dagaare (320,153) Gurenne (318,802), Kusaal (220,114), Mampruli (112,850), Buli (87,225), Waale (83,084), Talni (53,199), Birifor (50,900), Nanuni (27,111), Nabit (26,730), Konni (3,500) and Hanga-Kamara (3,000). The members of this group cover large areas of the three regions of the North, concentrating around towns such as Tamale, Bolga, and Wa.

2.1.1.3 The Gbe group

This group is dominated mostly by Ewe within Ghana but there are others such as Fon, Aja and Mina in neighboring Togo and Benin. This language covers most of the Volta region, concentrating in the southern parts. Ewe is one of the prominent Ghanaian languages, with native speakers said to number about 1.5 million (Duthie 1988).

² We should notice that some people still insist that these are languages in their own right and not dialects under any so-called Akan language: we leave that question open here.

³ This census was the last in which information on speakers of the various Ghanaian languages was specified. Most other figures about the number of speaker of the various languages are based on extrapolations from the 1960 census.

2.1.1.4 The Ga-Dangbe group

As the cover name implies, this group includes Ga and Dangbe. Dangbe, in turn, includes Ada, Shai and Krobo. This group covers mostly the Greater Accra and Eastern regions. It is quite a sizable group. If we extrapolate from the 1960 census figures Ga may have half a million L1 (i.e. mother-tongue) speakers and Dangbe slightly more than that (Dakubu 1988).

2.1.1.5 The Gurma group

This includes Konkomba, Moba and Bassari, found at the North-eastern border with Togo, i.e. the eastern sides of the Upper-East and Northern regions. Estimates from 1984 for the number of speakers in this group is Konkomba: 225,384, Bassari: 22,000 and Moba: 60,000 (Barker 1986), giving us a total of 307,384 speakers of the group in 1984.

2.1.1.6 The Guang group

Members of this group include Gonja, Gichode, Nchumburu, Krachi, Nawuri, Nkonya, Cherepong, Awutu and Effutu. These languages are sparsely distributed around areas in the Northern, Brong-Ahafo, Volta, Central and Eastern regions. Gonja is the most prominent in this group, concentrating in towns such as Bole, and Salaga. Awutu-Efutu also concentrates in and around Winneba. In the 1960 census the total number of Guang speakers was put at 251,810 (Dakubu 1988), a figure shared between the various languages as follows: Gonja (62,700), Gichode (3,170), Nchumburu (13,500) Krachi (14,140), Nkonya (11,000), Anum-Boso (Gwa) (18,348), Kyerepong (Okyere) (33,780), Larteh (22,330), Awutu-Efutu (55,030) and Nawuri (9,900 - 1984 estimate by Barker 1986).

2.1.1.7 The Nzema group

This includes Nzema, Sehwi, Anyi (Aowin), Ahanta and Anufo (Chakosi). The last may be mutually unintelligible with the rest, as it is located in a small area of the Northern Region bordering Togo while the rest are in the Western region. Nzema is more prominent in the group, numbering approximately a hundred thousand native speakers in 1960. From the 1960 census, the entire group had 226,920 speakers divided between Nzema (113,890), Ahanta (65,230), Sehwi (17,240) Anyi (16,470) and Anufo (14,090).

2.1.1.8 The Grusi group

The Grusi group includes languages such as Kasem, Isaaleng, Chakali, Tampulma, Vagla and Mo. They are found in the Upper-East, Upper-West and Northern

regions, with major towns of concentration being Navrongo and Tumu. Kasem and Isaaleng are prominent in the group in terms of the number of native speakers and general language planning policies. The group had, as of 1984 (Barker 1986), 177,266 speakers divided between Isaaleng (84,642), Kasem (55,731), Mo-Deg (18639), Tampulma (10,000), Vagla (5,254) and Chakali (5,000).

2.1.1.9 The Buem group

This group includes dialects and/or languages such as Adele, Lelemi, Bowiri, Sekpele, Siwu, Santrokofi, Logba and Avatime. These languages are found in the northern part of the Volta region, concentrating around the town of Jasikan. This is a very small group. Together, they number less than 100,000 basing on 1960 population figures. According to Dakubu and Ford (1988), Sedere (Adele) had about 4,800 speakers in 1980, - Animere, a closely related language is said to be dying out (only 250 speakers now) in favor of Adele; Lelemi (Lefana) (24,000); Sekpele (Likpe), 11,600; Siwu (Akpafu and Lolobi), 9,000; Sele (Santrokofi) (no figures available); Liwuli (Bowiri) (no figures available); Siya (Avatime), 11,600; Tutrugbu (Nyagbo), 3,250; Tegbo (Tafi), 2,300 and Ekpana (Logba), 2,000 speakers.

2.1.1.10 The Nafaanra group

This is another small group, probably the smallest. The languages here include Nkuraeng, Nafaanra and Ntrubo-Chala. These hardly number more than fifty thousand native speakers. Barker (1986), estimates that the group in 1984 had 48,200 speakers divided between Nafaanra (23,900), Nkuraeng (16,000) and Ntrubo-Chala (7,500). These are found to the western end of the Brong-Ahafo region, bordering Cote d'Ivoire.

Each of the languages above belongs to one of two wider linguistic branches - Gur or Kwa - which are ultimately members of the Niger-Congo family group of languages.

2.1.2 Other African Languages

In addition to the above languages, there are other West African languages spoken in Ghana such as the Chadic language, Hausa, and some Mande languages (Ligbi and Bisa), whose status as indigenous languages seem to be debatable. While it is true that some of the more acceptable indigenous languages spread continuously into Ghana's immediate neighboring countries where they are also regarded as indigenous, the geographical distribution of Hausa within West Africa, for instance, shows that any Hausa-speaking areas in Ghana would be completely cut off from major Hausa speaking areas such as Northern Nigeria and Niger. This is suggestive

of a migration from a clearly identifiable distant area which most speakers of the language regard as their traditional homeland. Further evidence that Hausa may not be indigenous to Ghana lies in the fact that the language is mainly popular in the migrant quarters known as 'zongos'.

2.1.3 English and other Foreign Languages

Apart from these West African languages which are spoken in Ghana but which may not be said to be indigenous to the country, we can name a third group of languages which are clearly non-indigenous to the country. English is the dominant language in this group but this could include others spoken in very insignificant degrees.

English, though foreign to Ghana, is one of the most important languages in the country; it has been used as an official language since the country was colonized by the British and still enjoys an overwhelming position as the language of education and of mass communication vis a vis the indigenous Ghanaian languages. Though some indigenous languages, especially the government-sponsored ones⁴ including Akan, Dagaare, Dagbane, Dangbe, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema are beginning to challenge this position in their respective regions, English is still very widely used in the country if we consider all its forms - from pidgin to standard educated English. Of course, this situation has come about because of an interplay of historical, linguistic, educational and political factors.

Other European and foreign languages include French (taught as a school subject and spoken among educated bilinguals) and Arabic (taught in Islamic schools known as 'makaranta' and spoken in Lebanese communities).

2.2 SUMMARY

The above case study confirms that African societies are highly multilingual and that Africans themselves are rather polyglot, using their mother tongue in their immediate local environment and any other inter-ethnic languages and lingua francas once they leave their environment. Indigenous African languages are still vibrant and widely used by the vast majority of the population. Unfortunately, however, these indigenous languages - important means of communication in African societies - are not widely used in the formal educational systems. These same languages are not the languages of national government and the languages of

⁴ These are languages selected by government for the purpose of publishing educational material in them through its language bureau, the Bureau of Ghana languages. This, to me, is about the nearest thing to the idea of selecting some of the main languages of the country as national languages, as is the case in some other African countries such as Nigeria and South Africa.

mass communication are hardly the languages of the people. As an example, in Ghana as much as 51% of the total amount of annual broadcast hours is reserved for English alone, leaving the rest for all the many Ghanaian and African languages.⁵ This situation then confirms our contention that there is a linguistic and communicative discrepancy on the African continent and has non-trivial consequences on the development efforts of the people of Africa.

3. PROBLEMS FOR NEW APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT

Given the fact that two or more decades of development theorizing seemed to have brought nothing but hardship on Africans, various initiatives are underway (e.g. UN-NADAF document) to redefine the concept as it pertains to Africans.⁶ Newer paradigms of development studies have come up in recent fora on development discourse (Akin Aina 1993; von Troil (ed.) 1993, etc.).

Most of these newer paradigms seem to have certain things in common. All seem to put indigenous African peoples at the center of the development process. As a result issues such as mass participation, community initiative, the democratization of development (UN-NADAF document) and indigenous knowledge (Hurskainen 1993) come to the forefront.

The above linguistic situation in Africa creates some problems for these newer approaches to development in Africa. For how could we harness indigenous knowledge, how could we generate local initiative and mass participation in the development discourse if the elite in Africa continues to use languages that are not the languages of the indigenous people? Prah (1993: 50) puts things in perspective with the following:

The dilemma in Africa with regards to language and development is that...the elite which is entrusted with the leadership in the development endeavor is created in, and trapped by the culture of western society, and favors the reproduction of entire western images in African development. The elite in effect sees Africa from outside, in the language, idiom, image, and experience of the outsider, in as far as the African mind is concerned. It is unable to relate its knowledge to the realities of African society. It is estranged from the culture of the masses, but realizes almost as an afterthought, that development as a simple replication of the western experience is 'mission impossible'.

What is clear from the above is that if Africa does not have to revise its newest approaches to development within a very short time again, then the language question must be causally tied to African development thinking. The realization that

⁵ Source: Ghana in Figures 1992. Statistical Services. P.O. Box 1098, Accra.

⁶ UN-NADAF stands for United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

development can only be possible with the massive involvement of Africans themselves and not just only the elite puts the indigenous languages right at the center of this development discourse. This is a strong basis for our appeal to practitioners within the field of development studies to evolve a language paradigm for development to be known as Development Linguistics.⁷ If development is seen as harnessing the indigenous knowledge and initiative of Africans then the most effective language of development in Africa cannot be the former colonial languages, languages of the rulers, of the elite, but the languages of the people of Africa, languages in which we expect to find the most intelligible and intelligent reactions from the African peoples who are the agents of development.

If this view is agreed upon by all, then it behooves upon Africans to put in place a language policy that would achieve these development goals and aspirations. In the next section, based on a careful observation of the synchronic features of African society, a model of development communication for Africans termed localized trilingualism is proposed. We believe that this model - which may be regarded as a development linguistic model - can serve as an important development strategy if well implemented.

4. TOWARDS A MODEL OF LOCALIZED TRILINGUALISM

I propose a multilingual communication model which will emphasize the use of the mother tongue and other indigenous languages at various levels of social organization while allowing for a concurrent use of non-indigenous languages at the national and international levels. It is a model which makes it possible to accommodate all of Africa's languages, using them as essential tools of communication for development, irrespective of their numbers of speakers.

4.1 THE THREE-WAY CATEGORIZATION OF SOCIETY

It seems that society in many countries of the world including those of Africa is organized broadly in a three way structure: The figure below is meant to be a partial model of this social structure. It includes various political, administrative and educational levels and their linkages, together with the linguistic entities that are or ought to be used at each level.

⁷ This term should be distinguished from developmental linguistics which deals, among others, with child language acquisition and learning. Development Linguistics, like other fields of Development Studies, such as Development Economics, Development Education and Development Geography, may be concerned with how to apply linguistic and sociolinguistic theory to the development of the developing world.

At the political-administrative level we seem to have district, regional and national administrative entities. These do not have to have the same kind of nomenclature, but it is quite clear that they parallel other political systems with three levels of administration. For instance, in the USA we have county, state and federal levels. Each of these may have sub-divisions but they correspond roughly to the district, regional and national levels of government in many countries of Africa.

The Ghanaian political-administrative structure may be used to illustrate this social organization. Most, if not all, state institutions have three levels of operation: the national, the regional and the district; and this is evidenced by the fact that each such organization would have a national office, a regional office and a district office. Even at the level of government there is, of course, the national parliament, but also new innovations are being made in the political structure, in which we have the important notions of regional consultative councils, and more importantly, district councils. Elections are held at both national and district levels and appointments made at the regional levels.

Educational structure:

The same three way societal organization can be observed in the educational systems of most countries of the world. There is a hierarchical structure of primary, secondary and tertiary educational organization in most countries of Africa, with very minor different internal subdivisions. In Ghana, a new educational system is being developed in which we have 6 years of primary education, 6 years of secondary education, divided into junior and senior secondary schools, and finally leading to a tertiary level of education. At each of these levels we have different participants, interest groups, administrators, teachers, educational resources and goals of education.

It seems to us then that each of these levels constitutes an important level at which communication takes place, at which participation and decision-making by the citizenry takes or ought to take place. The district, the regional and the national constitute discrete and important development cells of any country.

Ingredients for a model of localized trilingualism:

What important lessons does this observation of the society present us in the language debate? It is clear to us that it is desirable for multilingual countries to formulate language policies which would seek to exploit this natural model of social organization to achieve optimal communication among the citizenry at each level. We believe that the best language policy is one that can promote communication between discourse participants at each of these levels and between each immediate level in multilingual set-ups. In short, we observe here that language policy must have a strong interrelationship with social organization.

In addition we formulate the principle of the most appropriate language of development: for effective development communication in each social set up, the most appropriate language must be used in both spoken and written discourses.

Development communication is any communication between participants for the purpose of sustainable socio-cultural transformation. By most appropriate language we mean the language in which the majority of participants in any discourse entity have communicative competence. With the above ingredients, we then move ahead in the next section to formulate and illustrate a model of development communication for African countries which we term localized trilingualism.

4.2 LOCALIZED TRILINGUAL MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

We begin by recognizing the fact that the African society is broad and diverse and it is difficult to develop a linguistic model for the whole of Africa. We do believe however that there is an adequate amount of similarities in Africa's historical experiences and socio-linguistic organization which permits some reasonable amount of generalization. Characteristically, most, if not all, of Africa has experienced foreign invasion and power domination with the result that the colonial or the dominant powers have superimposed their languages over already existing indigenous languages. This introduction of new languages of power has not only increased the multilingual repertoire but has created situations in which attempts have been made to suppress the indigenous languages all together or, at least, relegate them to the confines of the informal sectors of each country. This diglossic picture, where the foreign colonial languages are reserved for the formal sectors and the indigenous languages or pidgins the informal, is quite representative of the African linguistic scene.

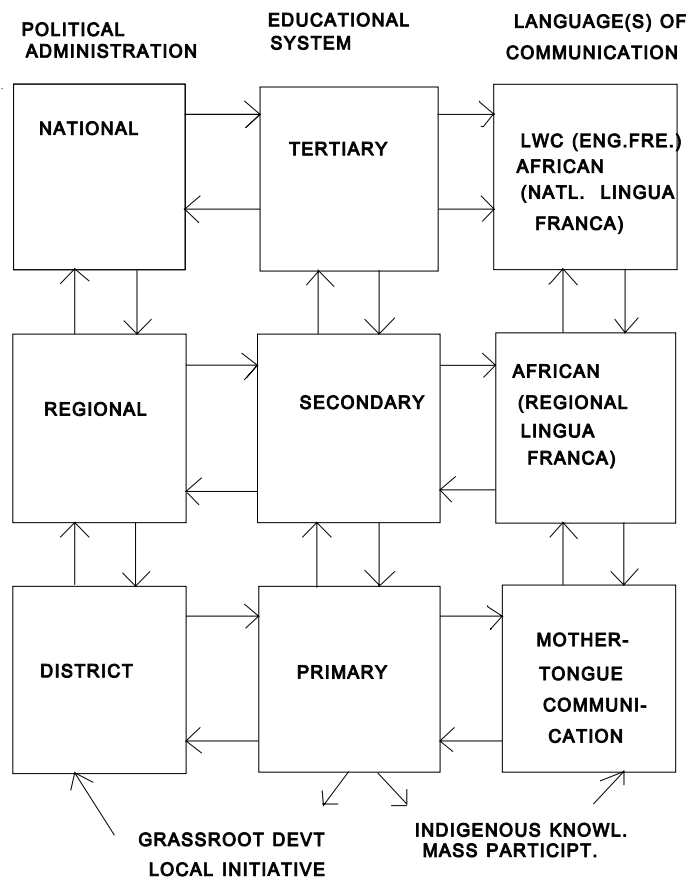
Recognizing the diversity and sociolinguistic peculiarities of each African country, our model does not attempt to specify a particular and specific language policy for all African countries. What it does is to address the above general diglossic situation and to propose the promotion of the use of Africa's indigenous languages in all sectors and levels of the social organization.

The model proposed is referred to as localized trilingualism (Bodomo 1995) because:

- i. the average citizen who has gone through basic education should be functionally competent in spoken and written discourse in at least three languages. Ideally, most citizens should be trilingual in Africa, obtaining competence in their mother-tongues, in a wider regional African lingua franca and in a language of wider communication such as English and French.

- ii. the trilingualism will be different from community to community, with differing mother tongues at the local district levels but more and more similar languages at regional and national levels.

Localised trilingualism: a model of dev't communication:



From the diagram this should be the progression in language acquisition and learning:

- primary/district level - the mother-tongue
- regional/secondary - mother tongue + regional African lingua franca
- (inter)national/tertiary - mother tongue + lingua franca + world language

It may sometimes happen that the mother-tongue is the same as the regional lingua franca. In that case then another African language within the region should be

learnt.⁸ Having given a broad picture of the model we now move ahead to consider each level of the social structure.

The district/primary level

Based on our principle of most appropriate language we believe that the most appropriate language of the development discourse at the local district administrative level and the primary school level is the mother tongue. Since our (formal) model defines most appropriate language as one in which the majority of participants in any discourse entity have communicative competence, the mother tongue is the language most people use at this level. Districts and the primary schools situated in them are usually - but not always - linguistically homogenous entities and the resource persons in such areas - the administrators, the teachers, etc. - are invariably drawn from the cultural area. Village meetings for community self-help projects can best be conducted in the mother-tongues. Primary school children are already orally very competent in their mother-tongue and will therefore learn linguistic abilities such as reading and writing faster. Concepts in mathematics and science presented in the mother-tongue would be more easily grasped than if they were taught in a foreign language. The use of the mother tongue here will enable the children, future leaders of the community, to competently grasp the belief and knowledge systems of the society, given the fact mentioned in section 1 that language is a receptacle, a granary of the indigenous knowledge systems of the community.

On the other hand, the use of the mother-tongue at all institutions situated in the district - schools, offices, district parliament and other community gatherings - will enable the chiefs and people of the community, today's resource persons for grass-root development, achieve maximum participation in terms of the ideas and information they receive and provide. They will be able to react to new ideas in the most intelligent ways possible.

From the diagram, it may be observed that it is at this level that we find newer ideas and approaches to development, such as local initiative, mass participation and grass-root development. The mother tongue is intimately tied to this level of the social structure and ought to be the most appropriate tool for achieving the development goals of the particular society.

Our intimation then is that there should be an uncompromising institution of the local language of the community in all areas of human activities. An important goal of the educational system at this level should be to ensure that primary school graduates are well-grounded in the mother tongue and can use it to speak and write about any grade level theme, be it in religion, mathematics or science. Workers coming into this district and who do not already have competence in this language

⁸ In the 1970s, the Ghanaian government had a program which, at least in rhetoric, encouraged every citizen to learn how to speak another Ghanaian language.

should be given proficiency courses in the language so that they serve the indigenes of the society more competently.

The question has come many times as to how mother tongue education can be achieved in more heterogeneous sections as in urban centers? Our response is that more than half of Africa is still in the rural set up where there is more homogeneity. We claim, however, that while the choice is difficult in urban centers, the model can respond to it adequately and the answer should not be to teach English or French or any of the former colonial language as the case may be, but to undertake a sociolinguistic study of the classes and the most appropriate language here chosen. This would most likely be the lingua franca of the area, a language in which most of the children have near mother-tongue competence. For instance, in urban centers like Accra and Kumasi, the most appropriate language in most schools may not be English but Ga or Akan. While the situation may be a bit tricky in urban and cosmopolitan centers, mother-tongue or near mother-tongue education and societal use can still be achieved, based on the principles and assumptions of our model of development communication.

The regional/ secondary level:

For effective development discourse to take place at the regional (e.g. Ghana) or state (e.g. Nigeria) level as the case may be, it is our contention that the most appropriate language be encouraged and used as the medium of communication at political and administrative institutions. In the educational sector, this most appropriate language which would most likely be the lingua franca of the region should be the main language of instruction at tertiary institutions. A student graduating with the General Certificate of Education, if he or she is to be useful to his or her region and the vast majority of indigenous people in that region, should be competently literate in the language spoken by the vast majority of the people of the region. As a future agent of technology transfer, of general development, the high school graduate must be able to carry out a sustained spoken and written communication on issues from his or her chosen field - arts, science or technology - in this major African language of the region.

Again questions may be raised about the success of this model in linguistically heterogeneous regions or states or provinces. We claim again that more often than not, in the African linguistic situation, we have homogenous administrative regions in the sense that one main language is naturally used as inter-ethnic communication, without any policy imposition from above. To illustrate this, in Ghana, of the ten administrative regions, as many as eight of them have salient lingua franca - Akan in the Asante, Central, Western, Eastern and Brong-Ahafo regions; Ga in the Greater-Accra Region; Ewe in the Volta region and Dagaare-Waale in the Upper West Region. Even in the other two regions, Northern and Upper-East, one can get only just two salient languages acting as lingua franca - Dagbane and Gonja in the Northern Region and Gurenne and Kasem in the Upper-East. In fact, the Ghana Government nine Approved Languages - Akan, Dagaare, Dagbane, Dangbe, Ewe,

Ga, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema - correspond largely to these regional lingua francas. These can certainly be used as regional languages of development communication and as media of instruction in the second-cycle institutions for teaching most school subjects. Investigations in Nigeria may also show that many of its states correspond to unitary lingua franca, though there may be many smaller mother-tongues.

This investigation is meant to demonstrate that though it may be more complicated to implement the model in some regions of many African countries, the model can easily be implemented in most regions. One possible step that could enhance our model would be to, as far as possible, demarcate regional, state and provincial administrative boundaries along linguistic and cultural lines. This is essential if the winds of political decentralization that are blowing across the continent would achieve any meaningful effects on the development efforts of the people.

The national/tertiary level: a reality of afriphone Africa

Choosing a single indigenous language as medium of communication at the national level has been elusive for most African countries. As has been mentioned above, apart from the linguistic multiplicity in these countries, there are many major regional languages, all of which are competing candidates, and it is obviously difficult to settle on any one of them, without causing some discontent among sections of the population. (see Laitin 1994 for Ghana).

The easier solution, if it may be said to be any solution at all, has mostly been to agree on the former colonial language as the official language. This is the basis of the linguistically false terminologies we often hear about African countries: African countries which are more appropriately called *afriphone* are divided in to 'anglophone', 'francophone' or 'lusophone'. It is my contention that until we revise this fallacy of referring to *afriphone* countries as europhone we can never come to a real and deep understanding of the linguistic realities of our continent. The term 'anglophone' used to describe a country like Ghana, for instance, masks the reality that more than 90% of Ghanaians use African languages in their day to day activities; it is only about 10% of the elite, dominating academic and political administrative institutions, who use European languages profusely in their day to day affairs. It is therefore they who find it more expedient to refer to afriphone countries as 'anglophone', 'francophone' or 'lusophone'.

We believe therefore that even at this national level, efforts must be geared towards promoting one or two indigenous languages in each country as national and official languages to replace the former colonial languages. These former colonial languages, for the time being, may be best described as care-taker official languages until substantive and indigenous ones are democratically arrived at, based on the historical, ethnic and political realities in each country. Of course, European languages may continue to perform limited roles in the country as languages of diplomacy and of contact with the outside world.

Our model responds to all these by featuring an African language and the former colonial language (English, French, etc.) at this level. As a transitional process, these and any one or two African languages may be used concurrently in all national institutions and at the tertiary levels. This arrangement would be easier for certain countries such as in East Africa, with the spread of one main lingua franca, Swahili, but may be a bit more challenging in some West African countries.

The Linkages:

Our model diagram indicates connecting arrows between the various levels of our three-way social organization: the district-primary, the regional-secondary and the national-tertiary. These are supposed to represent transition points, points at which participants and realities at these levels interface and influence each other. For instance, it is district administrative level personnel that influence decisions at the first educational cycle more than the other levels. National government is mainly responsible for public tertiary education.

From a linguistic perspective one has to consider, for instance, how to move from the mother-tongue medium of instruction to the regional and finally to the national language or official language. One solution at the primary level would be to teach the regional language as a strong school subject in anticipation of using it as a medium of instruction in the second cycle institutions. At the second cycle institutions, one must start teaching the official language as a strong school subject. The concept of a strong school subject implies giving the student proficiency lessons in the language for at least one hour daily.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed a new strategy for development - a strategy which draws attention to the language issue in the development discourse of sub-Saharan Africa. Africa seems to have had more than its fair share of the global political, economic and social instability. Three decades of attempts at national development and prosperity since the attainment of independence still leave the continent with mostly bleak economic and political statistics. Faced with this state of affairs, newer paradigms of development have been sought for Africa (e.g. UN-NADAF). Central to these newer paradigms are concepts such as mass participation, local initiative, indigenous knowledge, etc. But the language issue has hardly been taken seriously, even in these newer paradigms.

It has been the contention of the paper that the aims and goals contained in these concepts which draw attention to the role of indigenous Africans themselves in the development discourse can never be achieved without serious considerations of the role of African languages. The point is that there is an important language paradigm in African development. It was this same point that the Dutch psychiatrist

Hilbert Kuik aptly expressed and which has stayed largely ignored by students of African development:

When people speak of developing countries, they immediately think of economic backwardness. To deal with that, projects are conceived and technicians and money sent. When the projects fail, blame is put on the social and cultural practices of the people...Only rarely do people (from the donor countries) realize that the language barrier is the culprit which prevents new ideas from taking root...the fact that the inherited colonial official languages, French and English operate more as inhibiting than facilitating factors, is a point which in my estimation is poorly appreciated by both the local governmental authorities and the international agencies (quoted from Prah 1993).

It is only when new ideas are communicated, when technology transfer is done, in the indigenous African languages that Africans can begin to get nearer an increased participation in the development discourse.

All these points were argued for by drawing on facts about the nature and functions of language as a tool for communication and as a vehicle, store and receptacle of indigenous and new knowledge. Development was reinterpreted as a comprehensive socio-cultural transformation which needed massive participation of the indigenous people as agents of change.

But an examination of the African linguistic situation, based on a case study of Ghana, indicated clearly that there was a linguistic discrepancy: the language of government is not the language of the governed, the language at the district level did not feature much in the development decisions.

To redress this discrepancy, a model of development communication - a development linguistic strategy - we termed localized trilingualism (Bodomo 1995) was developed. In this model, the mother-tongue is to be widely used in the district institutions such as local political assemblies and first cycle institutions as a medium of communication and education. Another African language is introduced at the regional level and another or a language of wider communication such as English and French is introduced and used for national and international communications.

One objection might be that a three language model is too cumbersome. But this criticism would not stand if we realize that Africans by nature are already very polyglot and their society very multilingual. Africans naturally and voluntarily learn newer languages as they move further and further away from their districts in the rural set-ups to the national level. This model is based on and motivated partly by this linguistic flexibility on the part of the majority of Africans. Rather than being a hindrance to national development, polyglotism, multilingualism and the attendant multiculturalism are resources (Baugh 1994, Rickford 1995) that can be harnessed for the development of Africa. The language issue is highly crucial in African development discourse.

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