



The choice of English as a home language in urban Ghana

Grace Ampomaa Afrifa, Jemima Asabea Anderson & Gladys Nyarko Ansah

To cite this article: Grace Ampomaa Afrifa, Jemima Asabea Anderson & Gladys Nyarko Ansah (2019) The choice of English as a home language in urban Ghana, *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 20:4, 418-434, DOI: [10.1080/14664208.2019.1582947](https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2019.1582947)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2019.1582947>



Published online: 05 Mar 2019.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 63



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 1 [View citing articles](#)



The choice of English as a home language in urban Ghana

Grace Ampomaa Afrifa, Jemima Asabea Anderson and Gladys Nyarko Ansah

Department of English, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we investigate the choice of English as a home language in Ghana, a multilingual nation where 81 languages are spoken by a population of about 27 million people. In the past, while English was reserved as the de facto language of official domains, e.g., government business and education, Ghanaian languages were used in informal domains such as homes, markets and churches. Recent research and observations show a gradual shift from the use of indigenous languages in some informal domains to the use of the English language, especially in urban centres. This study uses audio-recordings, questionnaires and observations to gather data from 20 homes from 2 geographically and socio-economically distinct urban communities in Accra. The findings of the study show that economic status, age, inter-ethnic marriages and educational background are the main factors influencing the choice of English as a home language in urban Ghana. Other factors, such as the media, the language in education policies and the use of the internet, also play a role in the use of English in Ghanaian homes.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 March 2018
Accepted 12 February 2019

KEYWORDS

English; Ghana; home language; language shift; multilingualism

Introduction

Ghana is a highly multilingual society. Scholars do not agree on the exact number of languages that are spoken in the country. Different scholars have quoted different numbers: (Agbedor, 1994; Dolphyne & Dakubu, 1988; Duthie, 1988; Lewis, 2009; Simons & Fennig, 2018); the numbers given by these scholars range between forty and eighty-one languages. Ethnologue currently puts the total number of languages spoken in Ghana at 81 (Simons & Fennig, 2018). According to Bodomo, Anderson, and Dzahene-Quarshie (2009), all the indigenous Ghanaian languages belong to the Niger-Kordofanian language family, specifically, the Gur and Kwa sub-families. The indigenous languages are closely linked with ethnic groups and, as a result, one may be tempted to say that there are as many ethnic groups as there are languages in Ghana. However, a critical look reveals that what is usually described as a language group typically consists of a cluster of socio-culturally and linguistically related ethnic groups who do not see themselves as internally homogeneous. For example, Akan, the largest ethnolinguistic group in Ghana, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, is constituted by a cluster of ethnic and sub-ethnic groups who speak different but largely mutually intelligible dialects of the Akan language (Ansah, 2014). While some of these languages have very

large numbers of native and second language speakers running into millions, e.g. Akan and Ewe, other languages have a total speaker population of less than 100,000. The ten indigenous languages that are recognized for official translation and publication purposes are: Akan in three of its dialect forms, namely Asante Twi, Akuapem Twi and Fante; Ewe, Ga, Dangme, Nzema, Gonja, Dagbani, Kasem, Dagaare and Wali.

Apart from the indigenous Ghanaian languages, there are other West African languages such as Hausa that are spoken widely in Ghana. Ghana's linguistic composition also extends to English and other foreign languages. The 2010 Population and Housing Census reports that 63.6% of Ghanaians, fifteen years and above (15+) speak English while 0.8% of Ghanaians aged 11 years and above speak French. These percentages confirm the increasing use of English and French in Ghana. Kropp-Dakubu has observed that non-indigenous languages in Ghana play important roles, both in daily life and at the national level; however, the most important language in the country is English. It is the language of education beyond the lower primary level. Thus, English exudes so much power and prestige in Ghana. Consequently, its use continues to spread to some informal domains. It is seen by many as the language of the elite and the gateway to success.

In the face of potential language shift and loss, the home has been identified as the best place to preserve and transmit one's language to younger generations (Fishman 1980; Hudson, 2002; Shin, 2005). Recent studies on Ghana, e.g. Anderson et al. (2009), Agyekum (2009), Akpango-Nartey and Akpanglo-Nartey (2012), Ansah (2014), and Anderson and Ansah (2015), have observed that English is fast becoming a home language among many Ghanaians, especially in urban and peri-urban areas. Indeed, the 2010 Housing and Population Census in Ghana revealed that 20.1% of Ghanaian children below the age of eleven can speak only the English language and no other indigenous language while 18.2% of children below the age of fifteen can speak only the English language.

This is a clear sign of language shift in progress. Language shift generally refers to the gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of individuals within a community, and, it is manifested in a number of ways, such as the loss in number of speakers, decline in proficiency, or the decline in the functional use of the language. Language shift has predominantly been used with the contrasting term 'language maintenance,' which connotes putting in place measures to ensure the continuous use of a language in the face of language contact and competition with more powerful or numerically stronger languages (Maitz, 2011).

This study is concerned with the motivating factors for the perceived shift from indigenous Ghanaian languages to English as the home language in urban and peri-urban Ghana. It investigates language shift in urban Ghana by examining the patterns of language use/choice within twenty homes in two urban communities, Madina and West Legon within Accra, the capital city of Ghana. We hope to identify factors that influence the choice and use of English as a home language in urban Ghana. The following sections discuss the methodology used in the collection of data, our findings/discussions and our conclusion.

Methodology

This study compares language use by speakers in twenty selected homes within two communities in urban Ghana. The two communities were selected from Accra, the most

urbanized city in Ghana. Fishman (1966) has argued that urban dwellers are more inclined to shift languages while rural dwellers are conservative and less inclined to language shift. Akpango-Nartey and Akpanglo-Nartey (2012) also propose that the closer a language community is to Accra, the capital of Ghana, the more endangered that community's language is likely to be because English and dominant indigenous languages like Akan and Ewe have currently become important Ghanaian languages in Accra. Batibo (2005) lists demographic superiority, socio-economic attraction, political dominance and cultural forces among others, as the cause of language shift in Africa. The two study sites are demographically and economically distinct communities in the same geographical area, Accra.

West Legon, otherwise known as Westlands, falls within the northern geographical region within the Accra Metropolis. Based on the pricing of land and houses in Accra, West Legon is recognised as a place reserved for the rich and wealthy elite, academics, government officials, and ex-patriates (www.ghanadistricts.com). Its location also presents it as an extension of the University of Ghana community, enhancing its elitist nature. Additionally, because the persons living in the community are presumed to be of different ethnic origins and with different mother tongues, the community provides a fairly balanced language mix which is critical to the study. On the other hand, Madina also lies within the northern geographical region of Accra. It is also in close proximity to the University of Ghana, Legon campus. However, it was originally established as a migrant community and now has one of the largest markets in Accra. Madina has a population of about 111, 926, 82.3% of which are actively engaged in the informal sector of the economy, e.g. small-scale trading and commerce and agriculture. Thus, the individual characteristics with regard to diversity in locations, social, economic backgrounds provide a good representation of the linguistic diversity that this study requires.

Ten homes were selected from each community for the study. The homes were purposively selected, using the snowball approach in order to ensure that (i) the occupants were three years or older, (ii) the occupants of the home were Ghanaians, (iii) at least one of the occupants was a parent or guardian. In all, ninety-four (94) individuals who occupied the twenty homes participated in the research. Data were collected through observation, interviews and audio recording, staying in each home for at least one hour at a time. With permission from the heads of family, linguistic interactions and everyday conversations among family members/occupants in each home were observed and audio-recorded. In addition, participants either filled the written questionnaires or verbally responded to the items on the questions (in instances where participants were not literate).

Findings and discussion

The study combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the analysis. The data from the audio recordings were analyzed qualitatively while the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively in order to answer the following key questions:

- i. What are the patterns of language choice and home language use in the selected urban communities in Accra, Ghana? This question sought to discover the extent to which English was/is used as a home language in these communities.
- ii. What factors account for these patterns of language choice and language use in these communities?

Patterns of language use at home in West Legon and Madina use English

Responses from the questionnaires on parents' L1 (PL1) were compared with the language parents frequently used at home (PLF) as well as the children's L1 (CL1) and the language children frequently used at home (CLF). [Table 1](#) below summarizes the analysis of the responses obtained from each home in Madina, which illustrates the occurrence of a sequential language shift.

The data from Madina shows that only one family (MH 7) shifts from an indigenous Ghanaian language, Akan, to English. The shift begins from the mother and extends to the child. It is obvious that the family is moving away from the use of its L1 (Akan) to the use of English. The other type of shift that takes place here involves a shift from one indigenous language (Guan and Ewe) to another indigenous language (Akan) in the case of parents. In the case of the children, children from MH 5 and 6 are seen to be shifting from their L1 to English. One interesting observation is that the child from MH 9 whose L1 is English, eventually shifts to Akan. All the incidents of language shift to another indigenous language appear to favour Akan. Statistics from the 2010 Population and Housing Census shows that it is a major language spoken in Ghana. Additionally, this incident of language shift to Akan could be attributed to the concept of domain theory, which postulates that when one language in a bilingual situation gains an expanded domain of use over other languages, there is the tendency for bilingual speakers to shift to it. Thus, it is possible that Akan had extended its domain of use into the community as a whole, the reason for which other residents are shifting towards it in their homes.

Contrary to what happens in Madina, the data from West Legon presents a rather different outcome. Here, four parents (WLH 1, 8, 9, 10) are involved in a shift toward English. They shift from their indigenous Ghanaian languages, Ga, Akan and Ewe toward English. A look at the data of the children with those of their parents indicates that only one out of the four homes where the parent shifted to English have the child also using English as a home language. It is, however, clear that in six homes in West Legon, the children have English as their L1 while their parents have an indigenous Ghanaian language as their L1. [Table 2](#) below summarizes the responses from West Legon.

It is quite obvious from the data that language shift towards English is more apparent in West Legon. Families in this community are more inclined to adopt English in particular as a home language compared to families in Madina. Though the factors causing this are not clear from the data, it is evident that there is minimal transgenerational transmission of the parents' L1 to the children. In six of the ten families, the children speak English as their L1 with no indigenous Ghanaian language, and thus disrupting the transfer of indigenous languages to the next generation. Unlike West Legon, the transmission of indigenous Ghanaian languages from parents to children is high in Madina. All but one family have children who speak an indigenous language as their L1. The only child in Madina whose L1 is reportedly English observed using an indigenous Ghanaian language at home, implying that almost all children from this community can speak at least an indigenous Ghanaian language unlike the case of children in West Legon.

This notwithstanding, the data indicates language shift from L1 to L2 in Madina. However, the shift that occurs in Madina involves two indigenous Ghanaian languages – from a minority L1 to a dominant L2, usually Akan (see [Table 1](#): MH 5, 6, 7 above).

Table 1. Parents' and children's L1 with language frequently used at homes in Madina.

	PL1	→	PLF	→	CL1	→	CLF
MH1	Akan		Akan		Akan		Akan
MH2	Ewe		Ewe		Ewe		Ewe
MH3	Akan		Akan		Akan		Akan
MH4	Akan		Akan		Akan		Akan
MH5	Hausa		Hausa		Ewe		Akan
MH6	Akan		Akan		Hausa		Akan
MH7	Akan		English		Akan		English
MH8	Frafra		Frafra		Akan		Akan
MH9	Guan		Akan		English		Akan
MH10	Ewe		Akan		Ewe		Ewe

Table 2. Parents' and children's L1 with language frequently used in West Legon Homes.

	PL1	→	PLF	→	CL1	→	CLF
WLH 1	Ga		English		English		English
WLH 2	Nzema		Akan		Akan		Akan
WLH 3	Akan		Akan		English		Akan
WLH 4	Ga		Ga		Ga		Ga
WLH 5	Akan		Akan		Akan		Akan
WLH 6	Akan		Akan		English		English
WLH 7	Akan		Akan		English		English
WLH 8	Akan		English		Akan		English
WLH 9	Ewe		English		English		English
WLH10	Akan		English		English		English

Key: WLH – West Legon Home.

This could mean that Akan is the 'neighbourhood' language. This is because an interlocutor's continuous use of a language in the neighbourhood with majority of the neighbours is likely to cause the interlocutor to gradually extend the use of that language from its original domain to another and here, the extension takes place in the home. These affirm the assumptions outlined in the domain theory that where a language in a bilingual situation extends its domain of use, individuals are likely to shift to it.

Thus, based on the analysis of the data from the responses from the questionnaires, we may conclude that the patterns of home language use in both communities suggest instances of one kind of language shift or another. On the one hand, the shift in Madina is often from one indigenous Ghanaian language to another – from a minority/less dominant L1 to a more dominant L2. On the other hand, the shift in West Legon, typically, is from an indigenous Ghanaian language (whether dominant or not) to English, creating homes that use English as a home language in the community.

In probing further, the English as a home language phenomenon, the analysis of the recorded data (which was based on observation) revealed three categories of English as a home language families:

1. Homes that use English only
2. Homes that use English with minimal use of an indigenous language
3. Homes that use indigenous language(s) with minimal use of English.

Homes that use English only

In these homes, English is the common language of the occupants and is thus used by all occupants of the home. English is used between the parents and their children as well as among the children. However, the parents in these homes have an indigenous Ghanaian language as their L1. The children on the other hand, have passive knowledge of an indigenous Ghanaian language but do not use it. These families explicitly use English without the inclusion of any indigenous Ghanaian language. Three homes, all in West Legon, were identified in the data WLH 1, 9 and 10. In WLH 1, the mother speaks Ga as L1 and English as L2, the father speaks Akan as L1 and English as L2, while the child speaks English as L1. Below is a sample conversation between the parents and their daughter from West Legon Home 1.

Extract 1:

Father: *Whelma, did you get my shoes?*

Daughter: *Yees dad ...*

Father: *Bring me my car keys too. I think it should be on my bed*

Mother: *When do you think we can go and visit Priscilla and her family?*

Father: *Next week*

Mother: *mmmmh, next week may not be possible. I think we have a programme at church. The music programme Remember?*

Father: *yeah, yeah, yeah, yeaah*

Daughter: *Eii mummy you remember*

Mother: *Of course. I have always told you my mind is like that of Einstein. Heheheee*

Father: *Hahaaa ... you wish*

Mother: *You are just jealous.*

From the extract, there is a clear instance of language shift from Akan and Ga to English with regard to the parents, especially since they all interact in English. There is no form of borrowing or code switching to an indigenous language. English is the sole language used in the home per the recordings and observation.

Extract 2:

Father: *Nathaniel! Nathaniel! Come here! Come and eat your food. Television time is over.*

Son: *mmmmm mmmmm daddy me I won't eat. I am not hungry*

Father: *food too that you will eat na you are doing mmmm mmmm. I have told you that if you don't stop doing this thing I will beat you o*

Son: *mmmm mmmmm I won't eat ah*

Mother: *Rachael, call Amanda for me.*

Daughter: *Yes mummy*

Mother: *Amanda koraa is she there? This one that she doesn't inform anyone before she leaves the house.*

Daughter: *Mummy she says she is coming o*

Mother: *Amanda, were you able to buy me the hair? The curly one?*

Niece: *No o. Today I got a lift straight home so I didn't pass there. Tomorrow ok.*

Mother: *Okay o. If you say so.*

It is evident that the home is an all-English-speaking home where everybody speaks and is comfortable with English. The use of 'Ghanaianisms' is also evident here as the father uses phrases and words such as 'the food too you will eat na you are doing mmmm mmm' and the mother uses 'koraa.' This shift from indigenous Ghanaian languages to English could also be attributed to the constant contact with the media, television to be precise. This is

because, per observation, each time the researcher was in the home, the children were by the television, watching ‘Cartoon Network,’ which is shown in the English Language. Thus, there is an extension of English from school to the home, thereby increasing the desire of the children to use English at home. Additionally, unlike the majority of the children in Madina, who usually go out to play with other children and therefore pick up the languages of other children or the ‘neighbourhood language,’ these children do not go out to play with other children and hardly ever go out into the community. As a result, their main source of entertainment is watching television programmes, which are usually aired in English.

Homes that use English with minimal use of indigenous language

The second group consists of homes that mainly use English but combine it with an indigenous Ghanaian language. Five (5) homes – WLH 3, WLH 7, WLH 8, MH7, MH8 – used English with an indigenous language. In these homes, the children mainly use English at home, among themselves and with both parents. However, the parents sometimes use an indigenous language among themselves and often codeswitch English with the indigenous language. Occasionally, the children in these homes mix English with an indigenous language but, in all instances, the indigenous language is spoken with a Ghanaian English accent and intonation. Three (3) of these homes are from West Legon while the other two (2) are from Madina.

For one of the homes, MH 8, the children speak only English among themselves and with their father. The father, whose L1 is Frafra speaks to the children in English and vice versa. With his wife, he speaks Ewe, which is his wife’s L1. However, the whole family does not adopt the wife’s L1 which is common to both parents. Instead, the father shifts to English with his children and Ewe with his wife. The children speak Akan with their mother even though neither parents have Akan as their L1. Once again, we recognise the influence of the ‘neighbourhood language’ as stipulated by the domain theory. This corroborates the findings of Nutakor and Amfo (2018).

Additionally, we notice that the parents are shifting from their L1 to English and Ewe in the father’s case and to Akan in the mother’s case. The children, on the other hand, have English as their L1 so are not involved in the shift. However, there is no transmission of the parents L1 to the children. The family appears to have adopted English and Akan as their home languages.

Extract 3:

Child 2: *Laawe, Laawe, shaka shaka belebele, who said go and remove the hair? You have gone to do shaka laka belebele (scary hair style)*

Child 1: *I will buy band and I will use it to do my hair like ...*

Child 3: *Me too I will do sakora (I will also shave my hair)*

Father: *Laawe, come here. Didn’t I tell you not to do that again? Every day you are doing things that I tell you no to do.*

Child 1: *hiiiiihi (sobbing)*

Mother: *me ga de nume na fofoo (don’t mind your father)*

menfii wo papa bra ha (don’t mind your father, come here)

The extract confirms that the children use English with their father. However, when the mother speaks to the child, she combines her mother tongue, Ewe, and Akan. The

repetition of the sentence in Akan is an illustration that the child may not understand the first sentence, which was made in Ewe. Correspondingly, the children immediately converge to the language of their mother. This is probably due to the fact that they are aware their mother cannot speak English; therefore, they unconsciously shift to the language their mother understands. From the recording, we can deduce that though the children understand Akan, they do not speak it often and are not too comfortable with it as they quickly shift to English at the slightest opportunity they get to interact with somebody who speaks English. A recording which included the children and two other friends from the neighbourhood showed that they speak English with these children even though they have a common indigenous Ghanaian language: Akan. In all their songs and games, they do so solely in English and this may be because they learn majority of these songs and games from school and thus extend them to the home. Unexpectedly, this is a home located in the Madina community.

This case is similar to what happens in three other homes. In one of these three homes, the parents speak an indigenous language and the children reply in English. Throughout the recording, the children do not speak any indigenous Ghanaian language with the exception of two children. However, when spoken to in an indigenous Ghanaian language, the children respond in English. They have a passive knowledge of the indigenous language as they seem to understand the language but are unable to speak it. The children understand the indigenous Ghanaian language, Akan, but have difficulty in speaking it. The extract below gives us an idea of the language pattern from this home in West Legon.

Extract 4:

Mother: *Maabena tell your father I am going to the market and come.*

Child 1: *Mummy when you are coming buy me errrm, errrrm errrrm I want that biscuit that the one the last time you bought for me have you seen?*

Mother: *hmm ... you dee I hear. Go and tell your father for me. Kwame, have you finished eating your food?*

Child 2: *yes mummy*

Mother: *Herh Kwesi! Didn't I tell you to brush your teeth before eating? Aaa hwe n'anim bi Mtcheew (Aaa, look at his face ... Sound of kiss teeth).*

Child 1: *Mummy me I have brushed my teeth o*

Mother: *Mtcheew Ɔsan twa ntorɔ (He has the guts to lie) Medee get out of here and go and brush your teeth.*

The extract reveals that the mother codeswitches between English and Akan. However, the child does not respond in Akan nor a code-switch of English and Akan. He, on the contrary, maintains the language he is used to and comfortable with, which is English. He diverges from his mother's code-switching and sticks to English. This may be due to the fact that though he understands the language, he cannot speak it. Here, we notice that there is a passive transmission of the father's L1: Akan. The mother also shifts from her L1, Ga, to English and Akan while the children shift from their passive knowledge in Akan to English. The father, on the other hand, maintains Akan, his L1, by using it when he speaks to both his wife and the children. One observation made in this home was that the kind of codeswitching the mother made was basically intra-sentential. From the extract, we find her beginning with an inter-sentential codeswitching and moving towards an intra-sentential code switching but with the intra-sentential dominating the conversation.

In the last home in this category, MH 7, only the children speak English among themselves while the parents speak Akan. From the recording, we note that the children speak only English among themselves with no word or phrase in an indigenous Ghanaian language. They express themselves fluently in English and are comfortable speaking the language to the extent that they unconsciously extend it to their father who continuously speaks Akan with the children and his wife. The children, when speaking with their parents, usually begin with the language which they were originally using and gradually converge to the language of the parents. Where the conversation begins with a parent, then they immediately speak Akan except in the case of the youngest child who speaks less when the conversation becomes dominated by the indigenous language – Akan. She seems to understand the language, but she is not fluent in it as she consistently uses English in an Akan- dominated conversation. Here, the family uses both English and Akan as their home language.

Homes that use minimal English with an indigenous language

Three (3) homes were identified in the third group. These homes have all the occupants speaking an indigenous Ghanaian language except the youngest children who uses English. In all three instances, English is the L1 of the youngest children and that is the language they use at home. They had minimal knowledge in the indigenous language and used it only when the interlocutor did not understand English. To them, English was their home language. They had shifted from the language of the other members of the family toward the English language. This could be attributed to the increasing number of hours children currently spend in school and, during such hours, are in contact with the English language. They, however, extend the use of the language into the home. In the two cases recorded in Madina, the parents of these children could not speak English. However, this did not deter the youngest children from using English; they used English with their other siblings. Apart from the youngest children who had English as their home language, the rest of the family had an indigenous language as their home language.

The three homes were recorded from both communities, one home from West Legon and two from Madina. For the homes in Madina, they recorded only two children from the entire sample size who had English as their L1. All the other children in Madina had indigenous Ghanaian languages as their L1.

Throughout the recording, all the children use Akan among themselves except with the youngest children of the families. The older children use English when communicating with the youngest children. For the two homes, the mothers cannot speak English; therefore, when the youngest children speak to their mothers, they do so in Akan. The father speaks Akan with his other children but uses English with the youngest child. With this trend, it is noticed that the youngest child does not communicate much with the mother as she does with the father, and conversations that ensue between them are rather short. When asked how this happened, the parents answered that she grew up speaking English and she prefers to use English in the house. This could also be attributed to the growing number of hours children currently spend in school with English as the medium of instruction. The children unconsciously get used to the English language and, with the greater part of their time spent speaking it, they extend it to the home as a home language. The extract below gives us an idea of the situation.

Extract 5:

Mother: *Kwame woadidi awie? (Kwame, have you finished your meal?)*

Child: *aaane. (Yes)*

Mother: *na Akosua ε(What about Akosua?)*

Child: *Maa, mennim ooo Se wo nim se Akosua die ɔkyere ne ho. (Mummy I don't know ooyou already know Akosua is fussy)*

Mother: *Kɔhwe ne dan mu hɔ se ɔhye hɔ aa frɛ no ma me (Go and check her room and call her for me)*

Child: *yoo ... medie ɔkyere ne ho dodo, Akosua! Akosua! Mummy is calling you oo Akosua! (Ok ... she is just too fussy! Akosua! Akosua! Mummy is calling you ... Akosua)*

Youngest child: *Yeeees I'm coming ... Mummy I'm here*

Mother: *Woadidi? (Have you eaten?)*

Youngest child: *Naa I'm not hungry*

Mother: *Aden? (why?)*

Youngest child: *Nothing, enye hwee. I just don't feel like eating.*

Mummy: *me deɛ gyae nea worekyere wɔhɔ no (Stop the fussiness)*

From the extract, we note that the youngest child, unlike the eldest, is used to speaking English at home to the extent that even with her mum, who cannot speak English, she unconsciously speaks English with her. The eldest child speaks Akan throughout the conversation with the mother. It appears as if he does this consciously as he immediately switches to English when calling his sister, the youngest child.

The above examples, Extracts 1–5, shows that younger children are the ones most likely to shift towards English, and this is an extension of the domains of use of the English language. The youngest children use only English in almost all the instances cited above. Younger children (who from the questionnaire, fall between the ages of five and sixteen) are most likely to shift because of the increasing number of hours they spend in school. Coupled with that, there is the recent rise in day care centres, where babies as young as six months are taken care of and English is the language of communication in these centres.

Children are most likely to shift because of the medium of instruction in our schools. Today, children spend more time in school than at home and, since English is the medium of instruction in most schools even from nursery, children are likely to become comfortable with the language of the school and extend it to the home. In addition, they use the few hours they spend at home watching television programmes movies that are shown in English. There is, therefore, a more consistent and lengthier contact with English compared to the indigenous Ghanaian language.

Ansah (2014) argues that the changes in language-in-education policy have been caused by instability in government leadership, and the non-implementable nature of the educational policies. This is because the theoretical assumptions underlying such policies were inadequate in addressing the language-in-education needs of Ghana's highly complex multi-ethnic/multilingual populations. Thus, at the early stages, in urban centres, English appears to be the predominant language in schools. Ansah (2014) continues to argue that though some governments have advocated for the use of the indigenous languages at the basic level, policies have not been put in place to ensure the implementation of language-in-education policies. As a result of this, headmasters and headmistresses of especially pre-school, primary and Junior High Schools (JHS) are presented with the challenge of which language to use multilingual classrooms.

Owu-Ewie (2006) asserts that bilingual education in Ghana commenced with the inception of formal education, which began with the castle schools and was later continued by

the Christian missionaries. The languages used were those of the home country (the metropolitan languages). Portuguese, Dutch, Danish and English were used as media of instruction wherever and whenever the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes and the English respectively were in power. The situation, however, changed with the arrival of the missionaries, who resorted to the development of the local languages in both their educational and missionary efforts. Thus, from 1974 to 2002 a Ghanaian language (language of the locality) was used for the first three years of school. However, the 2002 policy stated that English should be used as the medium of instruction from primary one, with a Ghanaian language studied as a compulsory subject in the Senior High School. The government on 15th August, 2002 approved this policy for implementation in September 2002. Since the announcement of the change in policy, the debate on the language of education has picked up momentum from academics, politicians, educators, educational planners, traditional rulers, and the general public.

In some parts of the country, schools have resorted to using the language that is convenient to them and this language has, more often, been English. As a result, children spend the bulk of their time with the English language from the basic level and they become used to it. They are, therefore, tempted to gradually quit using their indigenous languages and extend the use of English from the classroom into the home. Additionally, the addiction of children to Television and the media in general presents an extension of English into the home. The consistent and continuous contact with English makes it easier for the children to identify with and speak it.

Factors that account for the use of English as a home language

Respondents were grouped into classes based on their level of education: primary, secondary, post-secondary, tertiary and post-graduate. Within the group, 'Yes' represented respondents who frequently used their L1 to communicate at home and 'No' for those for those who used another language other than their L1 frequently at home (Table 3).

From the above table, we see that all parents with primary educational background maintained their L1 when communicating at home. Therefore, there was no noticeable incidence of language shift. However, the occurrence of language shift begins with those with secondary level education, representing a 5% shift. This level of language shift is maintained at the post-secondary level, but there is a major increase (25%) at the tertiary level. Parents with post tertiary education experienced a language shift of 5%.

Level of education

Since respondents with primary education experienced no shift in language use, the researcher sought to investigate if this was as a result of the fact that they were monolinguals. Therefore, a cross tabulation of educational level and number of languages spoken by the respondents was done to figure out whether there was any correlation between educational background and number of languages spoken. The table below shows the relationship between the number of languages spoken by respondents in both communities and their educational background (Table 4).

From the data, 20% of parents had primary education, and 15% out of the 20% were monolinguals while 5% spoke two languages. In addition, 25% of the parent-respondents

Table 3. Cross tabulation of level of education and shift in language use.

			Shift in language use		Total
			No	Yes	
Level of education	None	Count	1	0	1
		% of Total	5%	0%	5%
	Primary education	Count	4	0	4
		% of Total	20%	0%	20%
	Secondary education	Count	2	1	3
		% of Total	10%	5%	15%
	Post-secondary education	Count	1	1	2
		% of Total	5%	5%	10%
	Tertiary education	Count	2	4	6
		% of Total	10%	20%	30%
	Post-graduate education	Count	3	1	4
		% of Total	15%	5%	20%
Total		Count	13	7	20
		% of Total	65%	35%	100%

were monolinguals and 20% out of the 25%, representing a huge majority had primary education.

The data shows that the lower the level of education of an individual, the more probable it is for that person to speak fewer languages. Out of the 20% who had secondary education, only 5% were monolinguals while another 5% were bilinguals and 10% were multi-linguals, speaking over 5 languages. Those with post-secondary education all spoke two languages. Respondents with tertiary education had majority, 20% of 35%, speaking four languages while 10% spoke three languages and 5% spoke two languages. No respondent with tertiary education was a monolingual. Respondents with post-tertiary education formed 15% of the total number and all parents in this category spoke three languages. In effect, the higher one climbs on the educational ladder, the more likely it is for that person to speak more languages and thus shift to another language, mostly English. Those with secondary education and above spoke more languages compared to those with primary education. Thus, from the data, we observe that the level of education is a determining factor in the number of languages a person speaks.

Income level and home language choice

This section compares parents' income levels with the language mostly spoken at home. Under each income level category, two groups of languages are identified: the indigenous language and the language toward which Ghanaians are shifting to (English).

Table 4. Cross tabulation of level of education against number of languages spoken.

		Number of languages spoken						Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
Level of education	None	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Primary education	2	2	0	0	0	0	4
	Secondary education	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
	Post-secondary education	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
	Tertiary education	0	1	1	3	1	0	6
	Post-graduate education	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
Total		4	6	4	3	2	1	20

For the analysis, the income levels of the fathers were added to those of the mothers to constitute the total income of the home. In homes where there were single parents, the income level of the single parent was used. The majority (70%) of respondents from Madina had an income below GHc 1500 (\$333.00). Twenty percent of them had income levels between GHc 1600 (\$355.00) – GHc 4000 (\$888.00) and the remaining 10% had an income of above GHc 4000 (\$888.00) (Figure 1).

As demonstrated in Figure 2, more than half (60%) of the respondents in West Legon had income levels between GHc 1600 (\$355.00) – GHc 4000 (\$888.00) and the remaining respondents (40%) had an income above GHc 4000 (\$888.00). None of them had an income below GHc 1500 (\$333.00), an indication that those who reside in West Legon earn higher than those in Madina. The results show that none of the respondents who had an income below GHc 1500 (\$333.00) frequently communicated at home with the English language. Out of the 25% that had an income of above GHc 4000 (\$888.00), only 5% frequently used English when communicating at home. However, those who had income levels between GHc 1600 (\$355.00) – GHc 4000 (\$888.00) had half of that sample size (20%) communicating frequently at home in English and 20% did so in an indigenous language. The results accordingly show that the majority (25%) of those who used English at home had income levels of not less than GHc 1500.00 (\$333.00). Inferring from this, the data indicate that high income earners are likely to adopt English as a home language than low income earners. Thus, economic status can be a factor for language shift.

The use of English in homes is a rapidly evolving phenomenon among educated and wealthy Ghanaians with only a few being conscious of its predicament. The emerging economic difficulties have also affected language use to an extent. This is because, when parents spend less time at home with their children, it is quite impossible for the children to learn the languages of their parents. Today, babies as young as six months are taken to day-care-centres so their parents can return to work. When this happens, the children get familiar with the language used in these nurseries and day-care centres, which is usually English, and they may never learn to speak the languages of their parents. Due to the fact that the standard of living in West Legon is higher than that of Madina and the economic pressure is also higher in West Legon than in

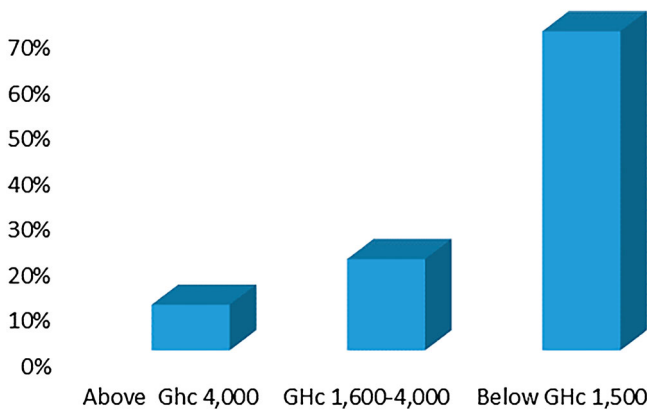


Figure 1. Income level of parent-respondents in Madina.

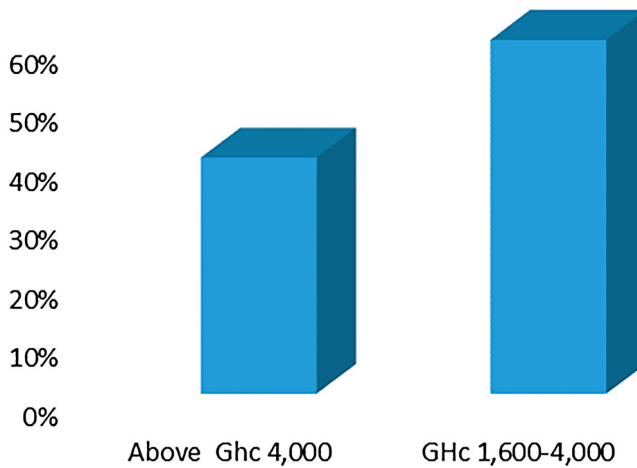


Figure 2. Income levels of Respondents in West Legon.

Madina, the study showed that more children in West Legon spoke English at home than those in Madina, confirming the assumption that the absence of parents from home most of the time contributes to the shift in language use. In addition, answers from the questionnaire showed that the income of the majority of fathers in West Legon exceeded GHc 4000.00 (\$888.00) while the majority of parents in Madina recorded salaries below GHc 1500.00 (\$333.00) and this reflected in the language choices of their children. This confirms that income levels influence language choices at home especially in the case of children.

In addition to the factors leading to language shift outlined in this study, age appears to be a major cause of English usage in the home. From both the qualitative and quantitative analysis, we notice that it is mainly children (between the ages of five and sixteen) who use English among themselves and sometimes with their parents. In most of the cases, the youngest children in the families hardly spoke any indigenous language and used English with almost every occupant of the home. On the other hand, most of the parents used indigenous languages at home and the few that chose to use English at home did so mainly because English was the common language between them since they had different L1s. Therefore, in these cases, English was used as a linguistic solution to the linguistic barriers created by inter-ethnic marriages.

Furthermore, parents with high educational background had their children mainly communicating in English at home. The findings from the study showed that the majority of children-respondents whose parents had tertiary or Post-tertiary education used English at home. In some cases, though the mothers could not speak English and did not have high level of formal education, the children spoke English among themselves and with their fathers, who had high formal education and could speak English. Thus, demography, economic status, age, inter-ethnic marriages and educational background are the main factors influencing the choice of English as a home language in urban Ghana. In addition to these factors, the media, language-in-education policies and the internet play a crucial role in the use of English in the Ghanaian community.

Conclusion

Trans-generational transmission of indigenous Ghanaian languages is on a lower side as the majority of children who used English at home could barely speak any indigenous language, not even the mother tongues of their parents. Most of these children understand the indigenous languages but can barely speak them. If children of today can hardly speak indigenous Ghanaian languages, then what is the future of our indigenous languages in the next four generations if measures to sustain these indigenous languages are not put in place?

Comparing the findings of this study with Batibo's triglossic structure (Batibo, 2005), we can conclude that English is extensively used in Ghana. It is the language of government, medium of instruction, language of trade and the language toward which Ghanaians in the urban domains are shifting as is the case in several African countries such as South Africa, Kenya and others. The second language on the Ghanaian linguistic structure per this study is Akan. This appears to be the dominant indigenous Ghanaian language that other indigenous languages are shifting to. English and Akan are seen to be taking over domains of other indigenous languages.

From the findings of the study, we make a number of recommendations to address language shift especially in urban Ghana. In addition to the patriotism exhibited by Ghanaians, parents, guardians and all Ghanaians should consciously adopt a language planning strategy in their homes. Just as parents adopt family planning and financial planning mechanisms in order to manage their childbirth and finances, parents should do same with languages. Such language planning from the home could translate into a language policy at the national level.

Finally, the issue of language shift in Ghana needs the critical attention of all. Since language shift in this case is occurring in an informal domain, it will be difficult to control this with an institutionalized language maintenance model. However, we suggest that addressing this issue from the national level may impact on language use in other domains including the home. Thus, there should be a national awakening and sensitization on indigenous Ghanaian languages as well as concrete language-in-education policies. The implementation of these policies should also be adequately and regularly monitored. These will enhance the prestige of our indigenous languages as well as promote their usage among Ghanaians.

Future studies can focus on a larger number of homes. The concept of collecting data in homes, especially recording natural conversations, is an unexploited approach in Ghana's sociolinguistic context. It comes as a concept that Ghanaians are not familiar with and, as such, poses difficulties for research. However, it leads to a rather interesting and huge chunk of information that can be used for several studies to produce fascinating and relevant results especially in the area of language shift and language maintenance. Researchers are of the opinion that in order to maintain a language, it is vital to be informed of the extent of shift as well as the patterns of language use to be able to find solutions to it. In conclusion, conscious efforts must be made to guarantee that indigenous languages survive side by side with a world language like English in Ghana and in other parts of Africa.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Grace Ampomaa Afrifa holds an MPhil in English from the University of Ghana, Department of English. Her research interests include sociolinguistics and syntax. Her MPhil thesis focused on language shift in Ghana. Grace is a research assistant at the University of Ghana and a research consultant on gender and governance in Ghana.

Jemima Asabea Anderson is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Ghana, Legon. She is co-editor of *Crossing Linguistic Borders in Post-Colonial Anglophone Africa*. Her research interests include language choice and language use in specific domains in Ghana, language and the media in Ghana, codification of Ghanaian English, language and migration in Ghana, cross-cultural pragmatics, politeness/impoliteness in English in Ghana.

Gladys Nyarko Ansah is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English, University of Ghana, Legon. Her research interest is in applied linguistics as pertains to language, culture and cognition, language and education and language bi/multilingualism. She is currently involved in projects that investigates aspects of language and migration, health and education.

References

- Agbedor, P. (1994). Verb serialization in Ewe. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 3(1), 115–135.
- Agyekum, K. (2009). Language shift: A case study of Ghana. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 3(3), 381–403.
- Akpango-Nartey, J. N., & Akpanglo-Nartey, R. A. (2012). Some endangered languages of Ghana. *American Journal of Linguistics*, 1(2), 10–18.
- Anderson, J. A., Ansah, G. N., & hMensa, P. H. (2009). Domains of English in Ghana and its use for specific purposes. In M. Krzanowski (Ed.), *English for academic and specific purposes in developing, emerging and least developed countries* (pp. 122–129). Reading: Garnet Education.
- Anderson, J. A., & Ansah, G. N. (2015). A sociolinguistic mosaic of West Africa. In *Globalising sociolinguistics: Challenging and expanding theory* (pp. 54–65). London: Routledge.
- Ansah, G. N. (2014). Re-examining the fluctuations in language in-education policies in post-independence Ghana. *Multilingual Education*, 4(1), 1–15.
- Batibo, H. (2005). *Language decline and death in Africa: Causes, consequences, and challenges* (Vol. 132). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Bodomo, A., Anderson, J., & Dzahene-Quarshie, J. (2009). A Kente of many colours: Multilingualism as a complex ecology of language shift in Ghana. *Sociolinguistic Studies*, 3(3), 357.
- Dolphyne, F. A., & Dakubu, M. K. (1988). The Volta-Comoe languages. *The Languages of Ghana*, 53, 17–18.
- Duthie, A. (1988). Ewe. In M. E. Kropp-Dakubu (Ed.), *The languages of Ghana* (pp. 91–101). London: Routledge.
- Fishman, J. A. (1966). *Language Loyalty in the United States: The maintenance and perpetuation of non-English mother tongues by American ethnic and religious groups*. The Hague: Mouton & Co.
- Fishman, J. A. (1980). Bilingualism and biculturalism as individual and as societal phenomena. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 1(1), 3–15.
- Hudson, A. (2002). Outline of a theory of diglossia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2002, 1–48.
- Lewis, M. P. (2009). Languages of Ghana. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.
- Maitz, P. (2011). On explaining language shift: Sociology or social psychology of language? *Multilingua-Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 30(2), 147–175.
- Nutakor, Y. E., & Amfo, N. A. A. (2018). Language socialisation practices of children in multilingual Accra, Ghana. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 29(1), 162–194.
- Owu-Ewie, C. (2006). The language policy of education in Ghana: A critical look at the english only language policy of education. In *Selected proceedings of the 35th annual conference on African linguistics* (pp. 76–85). Somerville, CA: Cascadilla Proceedings.

- Shin, S. J. (2005). *Developing in two languages: Korean children in America* (Vol. 5). Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2018). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world, twenty-first edition*. Dallas, TX: SIL International. Retrieved from <http://www.ethnologue.com>