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Language Contact in Santrokofi, a Ghana-Togo Mountain Language Community: Impact on Selee

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Abstract

The present study examines the language contact situation in Santrokofi, in Ghana, where Selee, a Ghana-Togo Mountain language, enjoys a good degree of maintenance although it is in triglossic contact with Ewe, Akan, and English. With insight from the triglossic structure model, we collected and analysed quantitative and qualitative data which revealed that Selee is the natives' ingroup language while Ewe (and to a limited extent, Akan) is their intergroup informal language with "others"; English is the dominant language of classroom interactions and other formal settings. There is evidence of lexical borrowing into Selee from the other languages, especially English and Ewe. The youth may be said to be holding on to Selee impressively, but this ongoing language maintenance may be put to the test by the looming encroachment of Santrokofi by Hohoe, the neighbouring major township where most public servants in Santrokofi currently reside.

Keywords: Ghana-Togo Mountain; language contact; language maintenance; language shift; lexical borrowing; Santrokofi; Selee; sociolinguistics; triglossia

1. Introduction

The growing importance of the study of languages in contact stems from the remarkable insights the subfield brings to the study of linguistics. Many linguistic phenomena such as language change and language maintenance and shift are better understood and explained from the historical, sociocultural, psychological, and situational undercurrents of contact between different speech communities. Linguistic diversity, preservation, and revitalisation studies and efforts rely heavily on the deep theoretical, practical, and methodological insights in language contact research. At the core of contact research is the study of the different paradigms and typologies of contact and their real or hypothetical impact on languages. This is anchored on the truism that different situations result in different outcomes. Emerging trajectories delineate the contact situation as a continuum rather than a static phenomenon. The continuum theorisation of contact situations allows for the consideration of a plethora of conditions and variables and how their dynamic interplay may impact languages in contact. Continuum models also enable a transposition of context-specific situations on the continuum, allowing for the expansion of existing typologies, making the continuum approach flexible and adaptive to new trends and theorisation.

Winford (2003), for instance, plots casual contact on one extreme end of the continuum and intense contact at the other end. At the casual end, the impact of contact is essentially “minimal lexical borrowing only” while at the other extreme are results of heavy structural borrowing with the tendency of “significant typological disruption” (Winford 2003, 30). The overall effect of casual contact is the relative maintenance that the languages in contact enjoy over time, but intense contact poses significant levels of threat as the minority languages suffer a shift. The spotlight of contact linguistics has been on examining the resilience of languages in contact especially in urban, cosmopolitan, and linguistic border communities where contact is intense and where the resilience of languages in contact is stretched. However, with growing migration underpinned by social mobility factors, and globalisation engineered by rapid technological advancement, even isolated speech communities whose languages have enjoyed relative stability and maintenance are under threat. The threat in modern times no longer emanates from mass migration or the movement of entire language groups but from individual speakers who “migrate temporarily or permanently” and, in the process, come into contact with other language groups (Batibo 2005, 12). The inevitable effect is not the usual dramatic language elimination, absorption, or suffocation that characterises mass movements of language groups; rather, the effect is less dramatic as individuals acquire the lingua franca of their host communities in addition to their native languages. Individuals, such as itinerant farmers, teachers, and health workers, who migrate to isolated speech communities for economic reasons bring along their languages, interfacing them with the host languages. Depending on the strength of the factors at play and the level of contact, the languages in the long run will be impacted by the contact. In all these, the geographical, social, historical, and political dynamics in the isolated communities will contribute to contact outcomes.

Selee, a Ghana-Togo Mountain (GTM) language spoken by the people of Santrokofi (in the newly created Oti Region of Ghana), appears to be enjoying relative isolation and stability, resulting in a good degree of maintenance. The community is compelled to navigate an unfavourable official language policy which has imposed English and Ewe as media of instruction at school and languages of all official and intergroup communication (including religious activities) over the years. Ewe, by virtue of its official status and dominance, has become the default lingua franca of the region and its dominance across domains of intergroup communication has created different paradigms of plurilingualism among other language groups and impacted their languages. In this study, we examine the nature of the contact between Selee and other languages across domains and report on the impact of the contact situation on Selee. We also assess the factors that have contributed to the maintenance of Selee in the region and make predictions regarding the resilience of the language against all the prevailing and future factors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The present study adopted Batibo’s (2005) triglossic structure, which he based on a 1978 work by Abdulaziz-Mkilifi, to capture domains of language choice in Santrokofi. Batibo (2005) used the triglossic structure model (see Figure 1) to illustrate the relationship between English, Portuguese, or French as ex-colonial languages and the languages in contact in typical multilingual settings in many African communities; in the figure, H stands of High (domains) while L stands for Low (domains).

H	Official or technical medium (ex-colonial language)	
L	Lingua franca (dominant indigenous language)	H
	Language of limited communication (minority language)	L

Figure 1. The triglossic structure model (Adapted from Batibo 2005, 17–18)

The ex-colonial languages occupy the top row of the triglossic structure (labelled H, which stands for High) as they are used in the formal public domains (e.g., institutions of higher learning and in courtrooms and parliament) because of the functions, prestige, and socio-economic importance they inherited from the colonial system. The middle row of the structure (labelled both L, which stands for Low, and H) represents informal public spaces or contexts of intergroup interaction (e.g., mass media, marketplaces, commercial vehicles, shops in urban centres). These domains are under the control of dominant African languages of areal, regional, and national importance such as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Nigeria), Lingala, Swahili (DRC, Kenya, Tanzania, etc.), Akan (Southern Ghana), Arabic (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, etc.), and Owambo in Namibia. In the bottom row lies languages of limited communicative functions such as media of intra-group and

intra-family communication; these are minority languages. Batibo (2005, 17) explains that the three categories of languages engage in a “double overlapping diglossic” relationship because, at one level, an official language and each of the majority languages are in an H-L diglossic relationship; at the same time, each majority language is in another H-L diglossic relationship with the minority languages.

With insights from his triglossic structure model, Batibo (2005) proposes two complementary theoretical frameworks to analyse the outcomes of contact (shift vs. maintenance) in multilingual settings. They are: (i) causality-based perspective of language maintenance-shift modelled around the Gaelic-Arvanitika Model (GAM) “established by Hans-Jurhen Sasse (1992)” and (ii) process-based theory of language maintenance-shift (Batibo 2005, 88). The causality-based perspective highlights the triggers of the process of language shift such as extra-linguistic factors (i.e., political, sociological, ethnographical, socio-economic), sociolinguistic factors (i.e., language choice, choice of register, domains of use, language attitudes), and structural linguistic (i.e., phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical) features.

The process-based model, on the other hand, is grounded on the assumption that language shift can only occur in a situation of subordinate bilingualism accentuated by the degree of the causalities identified in the causality-based model. From the process model, language shift evolves in five phases with the first phase reflecting the extreme case of maintenance in a contact situation while phase five at the other extreme marks language death, the ultimate adverse consequence of contact. Phase one involves a limited contact situation where there is a majority monolingual speakers of the L1 but the bilinguals are in the minority. This phase usually reflects the following scenarios: the initial state of contact, ethnohistorical indication of strong resistance to contact, coordinate language contact situation, and subordinate language contact situation with stable diglossia. This contact situation is usually the case in many rural and isolated speech communities with minimal exposure to education, urbanisation, migration, and inter-ethnic interaction. In phase two, contact intensifies, leading to L2 dominance over the L1. Bilingualism takes over, making room for diglossia. Accordingly, the L2 takes higher (H) public functions and inter-ethnic communication while L1 preserves the lower status (L). At this stage, the impact of contact begins to show, with minimal instances of codeswitching and borrowing from the L2. However, the L1 can still be described as safe. Phase three presents an intense situation of asymmetrical relationship between the L2 over the L1. At this stage, the dominance of the L2 over the L1 is overwhelming and evident in the unabated encroachment of primary domains which were the preserve of the L1. Thus, the L2 usurps the community and intergroup domains while leaking gradually into the home domain. The usual intense codeswitching and borrowing that take place at this stage give an indication of the imminent threat of language shift. In the fourth phase the L1 loses almost all domains and becomes highly restricted. Competence in the L1 drops drastically while experiencing widespread abandonment. The language at this level bears the effect of linguistic and cultural intrusion, evident in both structural and functional reduction or contraction, sometimes

described as pidginisation (Batibo 2005). The final phase (phase five) reflects a total replacement of the L1 by the L2, with only residual features (such as place names) of the L1 available. Sometimes there is no trace of the L1. At this stage, according to Batibo (2005), the L1 could be described as dead.

The present study aimed to establish the situation in Santrokofi, which exhibits a triglossic structure involving Selee, Ewe, and English, and to ascertain which stage of the maintenance-shift continuum Selee has reached so far.

2.2 Review of Related Studies

The literature most closely related to the present study includes Ring (1981, 1997) and Kropp Dakubu and Ford (1988). In 1979, Ring carried out a sociolinguistic survey of the 10 non-Ewe-speaking communities located in the central Volta Region, approximately between Have and Kadjebi. The area has many language groups in relatively close proximity. The survey involved settlement sites with concentrated populations as well as solitary or pastoral communities and included formally educated people among the local town populations. In many cases, these educated populations assisted in translating survey materials into the local languages and facilitated the success of the survey. Using quota sampling methods, the study sampled participants across sex distinctions (male/female) and five age ranges (two above 56 and three below). The study covered similar samples across 10 language communities with the exception of Buem, where separate samples for Ewe-medium and Akan-medium of instruction were studied because of the uniqueness of the language policy in towns in Buem. The survey had two language comprehension tests, which tested each participant group's familiarity with the non-Ewe languages in the region (multi-language test) and their comprehension of Ewe, the main regional language. In the multi-language test, a recording of culturally relevant action events in the 10 languages was played to each group (excluding their mother tongue) to measure whether a participant (1) understood all the episode played, (2) heard some details, or (3) could only identify the language. The Ewe-comprehension text was made a bit more complex to allow the researcher to rate the individuals on their depth of comprehension. To complement the test results, thereby giving a more comprehensive language picture of the research context, two formats of questionnaire were administered to individual participants (in simple format) and some community leaders (in a discussion-response format).

Overall, the study found that members of a language community from the northern mountain range (i.e., Nkonya, Buem, Bowiri, Akpafu/Lolobi, Likpe, or Santrokofi) registered very little recognition of languages in the southern mountain range (i.e., Logba, Avatime, Tafi, and Nyangbo) and vice versa. Only Avatime-speaking participants showed any consistent familiarity with the languages from the north. In terms of the results of the Ewe comprehension test averages of the central Volta Region language communities, Logba had the highest mean at 8.7 out of 10 (i.e., 87%) while Buem had the lowest, averaging 4.0 (40%). The other communities were more or less evenly spread out over the interval. Other findings included the feeling among the

people of Santrokofi that their language was being replaced by Ewe. Again, in all the communities surveyed, it was clear from the questionnaire results that the local languages (mother tongues) were actively used although Ewe proficiency was also high among most individuals. The study's residence patterns also showed that few of the communities had any extensive contact with Ewe speakers on a day-to-day basis. Of the northern language communities (where Ewe scores were low), only Bowiri and Nkonya mentioned a mixed living pattern with Ewes among them. The southern communities seem to have developed a rather stable situation, with Ewe used in certain activities and the local language used in others.

Ring returned to the then central Volta Region 15 years later to carry out a sociolinguistic survey similar to the one he had carried out in 1981, this time re-administering the survey in Avatime, Santrokofi, and Bowiri (Ring 1997). The earlier study had proposed that these communities were in a language shift state as a result of the increased use of the regional lingua franca, Ewe. However, the new survey revealed changes in the sociolinguistics of the target communities, resulting in mitigation against increased Ewe acquisition. Local language use maintained strong dominance in these communities, with Ewe use filling a social role among all age groups for activities with a low level of information transfer. The results demonstrated a positive attitude toward the mother tongue in the Avatime, Santrokofi, and Bowiri communities. The community interviews confirmed mother tongue dominance, especially in areas of cultural ritual and identity. The local language was also in prominent focus whenever information transfer was of key importance. The results also showed that Ewe was considered a language of social interaction for use with people from outside the local community. It was used in areas of solidarity in the political realm (including chieftaincy and government matters) or in the religious (i.e., Christian) realm, but only when outsiders were present. Ewe dominated the early years of schooling, but English dominated in all academic activities such as counting and writing in each of these populations. There was a strong affirmation of mother tongue development in each of the communities. There was evidence of efforts to translate the Bible into these languages and to document the unique cultural elements hidden within these languages.

Finally, we review Kropp Dakubu and Ford (1988), which provides useful information on the sociolinguistic situation in the then central Volta Region, part of which now belongs to the newly created Oti Region. The authors review the work of Ring (1981) and other related literature on the subject of languages classified as the "Togo Remnant Group" or Central Togo (CT) languages spoken in towns and communities high up in the hills. They are known to represent populations that existed in the area before the arrival of the areally dominant language speakers who now occupy the plains around them. Kropp Dakubu and Ford (1988) observe that owing to the large number of languages spoken in the area, bilingualism or multilingualism was common although the pattern was not uniform. Bilingualism or multilingualism in these communities was driven by three areal lingua francas: Ewe, Akan, and English, with Ewe being the most widely known or used. The southern CT language communities (Logba area), that share

borders with Ewe speaking communities, recorded high proficiency in Ewe in addition to their mother tongues, while toward the north (Buem area) there was low proficiency in Ewe but high proficiency in Akan. Multilingualism increased among individuals with a personal history of travel and education. The review also reports that generally, communities speaking CT languages were hardly bilingual in two CT languages. This observation is also reported in Dorvlo (2008).

Another significant observation is the generally stable bilingualism in the local language and Ewe, especially in the southern area, and the general unlikelihood that Ewe would replace the local languages in the near future, although some local people felt that Logba, the smallest language, was threatened. In Santrokofi, Ewe comprehension was high (75%); in Akan it was fairly high but got higher toward Buem. English use was significant in communities, especially in the southern area, where higher claims of English proficiency correlated with school attendance. The other languages spoken by significant numbers across the area, though small, were Ga and Hausa by up to 6% or 7% of each community, averaging 4.3% and 1.7%, respectively. These are languages of trade with other parts of Ghana and beyond. Everywhere, the lingua francas were used across domains such as markets, school, and churches while the local language maintained strong dominance in the domestic and traditional domains.

Cumulatively, these related studies demonstrate the vast possibilities in contact research in terms of patterns of language contact situations. The scope of the present study is restricted to Santrokofi, which shares many characteristics with the other GTM/CT language groups as noted by Ring (1981, 1997) and Kropp Dakubu and Ford (1988).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Setting

The setting of this study is Santrokofi, which is located along the Hohoe-Jasikan road to Kadjebi; it is approximately 7 km (15 minutes' drive) from Hohoe (see Figure 2). Until recently, Santrokofi was under the Hohoe Municipal District's administration but following a re-demarcation now falls under the newly created Guan District in Oti Region. The people of Santrokofi are identified as Balee indigenes who speak Selee, a Niger-Congo language of the Kwa subgroup (Agbetsoamedo 2014a). Selee is one of the clusters of languages spoken along the Ghana-Togo-Atakora ridge, which extends from the southeast of Ghana and crosses eastward through the Ghana-Togo border and the Togo-Benin border all the way to the Niger basin (Ameka 2017).

Historically, the ridge served as a refuge for many ethnic groups during "wars and slave raids in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Ameka 2017, 239). These language clusters are Adele, Animere (North); Akebu, Ikposo, Lelemi, Igo (Ahlon), Tuwuli, Siwu (Lolobi-Akpafu), Selee (Santrokofi), Sekpele (Likpe) (Central); and Ikpana (Logba), Siya(se) (Avatime), Nyagbo (Tutrugbu) and Tafi (Tigbo) (Southern) (Ameka 2017, 139). All these languages are spoken in a highland area but are separated into clusters

by lowland area languages such as Ewe (Gbe), Akan (Tano), or Nkonya (Guang) (Ameka 2017). The GTM languages are all distinct from each other.

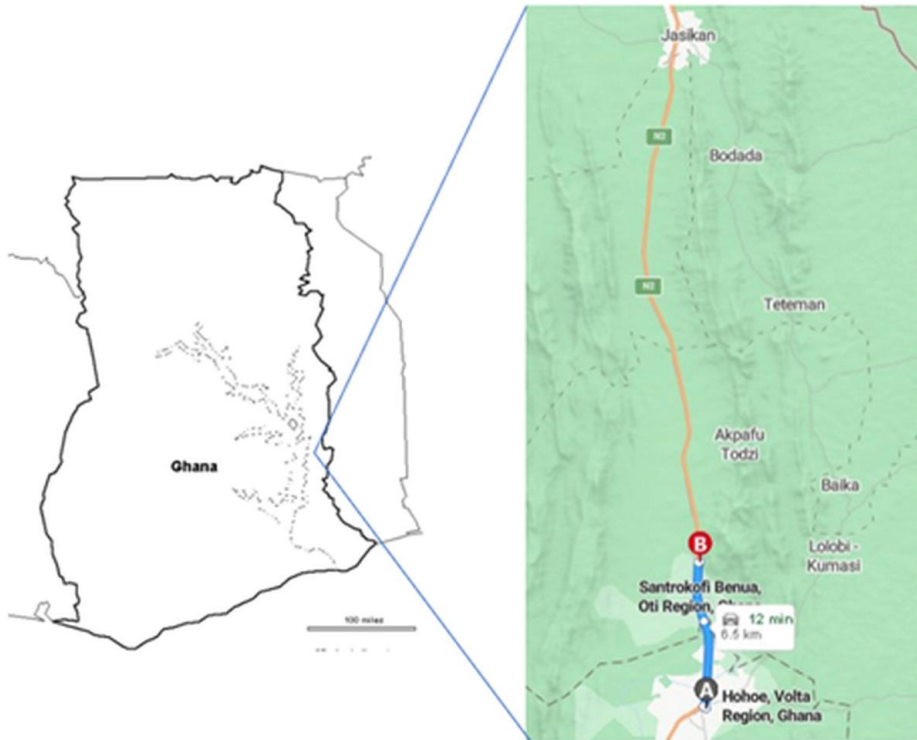


Figure 2. Location of Santrokofi, Ghana (adapted from Google Maps)

Santrokofi originally consisted of three traditional communities—Benua, Bume, and Gbodome—which constituted the Santrokofi paramountcy. However, with the expansion of Benua into three suburbs, the Santrokofi paramountcy has been reconstituted into five traditional areas. The geographical and sociohistorical circumstances of Santrokofi, coupled with other sociocultural and economic factors such as intertribal marriage and migration, have brought about the unique relationship the people have with the rest of the people of the Volta Region and Ewe, the dominant areal language. With English as the official language of Ghana and Ewe as the lingua franca or dominant intergroup language and the language of instruction at the lower primary level, bilingualism and multilingualism are common characteristics of the people of Santrokofi. In addition, the proximity of the three Santrokofi communities to Hohoe (illustrated in Figure 2), the municipal status of Hohoe, and the vibrant market and business activities in Hohoe make Ewe (the language of the people of Hohoe) a more influential language in Santrokofi than any other language spoken along the Hohoe-Jasikan-Nkwanta road.

3.2 Research Design and Data Collection

The study adopted a mixed methods design for two reasons: First, the study aimed to characterise the language contact situation in Santrokofi, highlighting outcomes of the interface between Selee and the languages it is in contact with. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to 188 respondents selected from over 100 systematically sampled households. Participants' reports formed the basis for characterising the contact situation in Santrokofi, including the ramifications of contact such as diglossia/triglossia, multilingualism, and codeswitching. Second, the qualitative framework allowed us to access relevant sociolinguistic data underlying the contact situation and explain the dynamics that play out at Santrokofi. Qualitative data were collected through observation and focus group discussions involving eight youths in the community. Observations and semi-structured interviews were also conducted in schools, churches, homes, roadside stalls, and the general community to corroborate the respondents' quantitative data.

4. Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed to highlight the language contact situation and its impact on Selee and the ramifications for multilingualism in Santrokofi.

4.1 Language Contact Situation in Santrokofi

The quantitative data drawn from the survey questionnaire ($n = 188$) suggest the prevalence of multilingualism among participants with all of them using two or more languages, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of languages spoken by respondents

	No. of languages spoken	Frequency	%	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Valid	2	8	4.3	4.3	4.3
	3	51	27.1	27.1	31.4
	4	95	50.5	50.5	81.9
	5	27	14.4	14.4	96.3
	6	7	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	188	100.0	100.0	

The data show a total of seven languages in contact across the sample: Selee, Ewe, English, Akan, Ga, French, and Hausa. The majority (50.5%) of the respondents spoke up to four languages, indicating a high level of multilingualism. The data also show that none of the respondents were monolingual; eight respondents (4.3%) were bilingual, 180 (96%) were multilingual, and seven identified themselves as capable of speaking all seven languages.

The survey also investigated which languages respondents spoke at home with their mother, father, children, siblings, spouse, and friends (where applicable), as shown in the distribution (percentages) in Table 2.

Table 2. Language use in home domain

	Selee	Ewe	Akan	English	Ga	French	Hausa	NA
Mother	87.2	9.0	2.1	5.0	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Father	89.4	6.9	1.6	1.1	5.0	0.0	0.0	5.0
Children	69.1	2.7	2.7	3.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.3
Siblings	85.6	6.9	3.2	2.7	0.0	5.0	0.0	1.1
Spouse	59.0	8.0	4.8	1.1	5.0	0.0	5.0	26.1
Friends	86.8	5.9	1.6	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0
Mean	79.4	6.6	2.7	3.1	1.9	0.8	0.8	9.9

Note. NA = missing values

Based on the mean percentage scores, the languages used at home were ranked as follows: Selee (79.4%), Ewe (6.6%), English (3.1%), Akan (2.7%), Ga (1.9%), French (0.8%), and Hausa (0.8%). Selee dominated the home domain; the highest percentage was 89.4%, representing those who spoke Selee with their fathers, and the lowest percentage was 59.0%, representing those who spoke Selee with their spouses. The mean percentage score of 79.42% indicated a significant average in favour of Selee. It is not surprising that none of the GTM languages are captured in our data. This lack of bilingualism in GTM languages echoes earlier findings by Ring (1981, 1997) and Kropp Dakubu and Ford (1988).

The strong presence of Selee in the community is shown in Table 3, which indicates that 96% of respondents spoke Selee to members of the community whom they knew to be Balee indigenes.

Table 3. Language use in the community

	Selee	Ewe	Akan	English	NA
Selee speakers	96.8	2.1	1.1	0.0	0.0
Community elders	96.8	2.8	0.5	0.0	0.5
Non-Selee speakers	8.0	55.9	17.0	17.6	1.6
Strangers	2.7	45.7	21.3	28.7	1.6

Note. NA = missing values

Almost all the respondents (96.8%) indicated that they spoke Selee with community elders (mainly the Balee). The data show that respondents were more likely to speak Ewe to strangers and community members they recognised as non-Balee indigenes.

The strong presence of Selee in the community is also reflected in the languages used for trade (buying and selling) at Santrokofi; 95.2% of the respondents reported that they use Selee for trading; Ewe (2.1%) and Akan (1.1%) are sparingly used, while English is not used (Table 4).

Table 4. Language use at the markets

	NA	Selee	Ewe	Akan	English
Buying and selling at Santrokofi	1.6	95.2	2.1	1.1	0.0
Spoken to respondents outside Santrokofi	2.7	4.3	83.0	6.4	3.7
Used by respondents outside Santrokofi	2.7	2.1	86.2	4.8	4.3

Note. NA = missing values

When participants moved out of Santrokofi to nearby communities such as Hohoe and Kpando, they used Ewe for trading transactions. Over 80% of the respondents claimed that they speak to others or are addressed in Ewe. It is important to note that Santrokofi does not have a market; buying and selling are characterised by itinerant retailers, hawkers, and small corner or neighbourhood stalls. The major markets are located at Hohoe, Kpando, and Jasikan.

Data on the church domain confirm the strong contact between Selee and the lingua francas (Ewe, English, and Akan) in Santrokofi (Table 5). Sermons are mainly delivered in Ewe, especially in the dominant Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This is because the supervising priests, overseers, and preachers usually come from Hohoe, which is culturally and officially Ewe-speaking. Most of the churches have their divisional or diocesan headquarters in Hohoe. In the Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) Church, sermons are delivered in Akan and interpretations given in Selee. English dominated church services at the Global Evangelical Church, with interpretations given in Selee and Ewe. As the majority of congregants are Balee, sermons are interpreted in Selee, but Akan or English interpretations are done for visitors. The citing of Tem (also known as Kotokoli) as a language for sermons, though negligible (0.5%), is strange and further qualitative data are needed to understand this phenomenon.

Table 5. Language use in church

	Selee	Ewe	Akan	English	Tem	NA
Sermon	19.1	63.8	2.1	12.8	0.5	1.6
Interpretation	63.3	24.5	5.9	3.7	0.0	2.7
Bible reading	17.6	63.8	1.6	14.9	0.5	1.6
Singing/songs	11.2	71.8	3.7	11.2	0.0	2.1
Announcements	43.1	47.9	1.6	4.3	0.5	2.7
Group meetings	68.1	20.2	0.5	5.9	0.5	4.8

Note. NA = missing values

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (63%) indicated that sermons are interpreted in Selee. Interpretation in Ewe (24%) can be explained by the occasional opportunities given to Balee preachers, especially on weekdays. On such occasions, the sermon in Selee has to be interpreted in Ewe or Akan for non-Selee speakers or visitors (visitors are usually prompted to announce their presence). The data also show that on most occasions the Ewe Bible is read in church. The translation of the New Testament into Selee has enabled some Bible reading in Selee. Church announcements are given in Ewe and Selee almost equally. Often, the announcements from the district or national headquarters are sent in English and are read verbatim before interpretations are done in Ewe and Selee and sometimes Akan for visitors. Church group activities like fellowship meetings, which usually take place during the week, are dominated by Selee but change to Ewe when a non-Selee speaker joins.

The data on the school as a language use domain point to the dominance of English. The use of English among learners (37%) is slightly higher than the use of Selee (35.1%), even in the face of the prohibition against speaking Selee in school (particularly in the classroom). However, when the students are outside the classroom with their friends, the majority of them (63.8%) claimed to use Selee. A similar percentage (62.5%) claimed to also use Selee with sellers outside the classroom, but once it comes to classroom interaction, that is, during lessons with teachers, the predominant language choice is English (72%) followed by Ewe (12.8%) and French (1.6%).

Table 6. Language use in school

	NA	Selee	Ewe	Akan	Ga ¹	English	French
In the classroom with friends	11.7	35.1	12.8	0.5	0.5	37.8	1.5
Outside the classroom with friends	13.3	63.8	6.9	3.2	0.5	11.2	1.1
During lessons with teachers	12.8	0.0	12.8	0.5	0.0	72.3	1.6
With sellers outside the classroom	12.8	62.5	13.8	4.3	0.5	5.9	0.5

Note. NA = missing values

The picture of language use presented in Table 6 reflects the language in education policy of Ghana Education Service (GES). The policy prescribes English as the medium of instruction except from preschool to primary 3 where Ewe is the prescribed language of instruction in the region. Besides, English and Ewe are both taught as subjects at all levels; French is used for French lessons. English and Ewe are effectively the only officially accepted languages in schools. Speaking any other language is not only uncommon but also unacceptable except on rare occasions when teachers ask learners to explain concepts or instructions to their peers in Selee. It was observed that preschoolers, in particular, struggled to understand or communicate in Ewe. The general

1 This was a case of a student who had recently returned from Accra and took part in the survey in the context of Accra.

language situation in schools contravenes UNESCO’s (1953) prescription of mother tongue as a preferred medium of instruction.

Language use in the workplace as reported in the data presents a fluid situation although Selee is still in strong use across the different scenarios.

Table 7. Language use in workplace

	NA	Selee	Ewe	Akan	Ga	English
With colleagues	16.5	54.3	14.4	4.8	0.0	10.1
With bosses/supervisors	36.7	27.1	16.5	5.9	0.0	13.8
With apprentices/subordinates	43.6	43.0	10.1	6.9	0.5	4.8
With strangers	17.6	3.7	44.7	12.7	0.0	21.3

Note. NA = missing values

Workplace as applied in this study included shops, farms, and lorry terminals, where participants mainly converged to conduct their business. This is explained by the fact that most formal jobs such as teaching, health care, and administration are dominated by non-indigenes who mainly commute to and from Hohoe. The local people are mainly artisans, traders, and farmers. Accordingly, it is not surprising that participants used Selee (54%) heavily in interactions with colleagues, bosses (27%), and subordinates (43%). Although Selee dominates in most domains, the percentage drop in the workplace domain is because many of the indigenes are in the informal sector, where some of the survey variables were not applicable (NA).

From the foregoing, it is clear that in all the domains surveyed, the use of Selee is dominant as the primary language for intragroup communication and for primary domains such as the home, followed closely by Ewe for intergroup informal domains such as the community and the church. Akan comes next in use for intergroup communication in informal domains. English remains prominent in formal domains, especially the school. We consider the church to be a space for both formal and informal activities: we consider official Sunday or Sabbath services, conventions, and presbytery meetings to be formal whereas cell and group meetings are informal. Within this arrangement, therefore, Ewe, Akan, and English dominate the formal activities of the church while Selee dominates the informal intragroup space. Ewe and Akan still intrude in intergroup informal meetings. Overall, we extrapolate that informal intergroup communication, for instance, with non-Selee speaking friends, neighbours, and strangers relies on Ewe and on a limited basis Akan. English remains dominant in formal intergroup communication, with Ewe and Akan playing complementary roles.

4.2 Borrowing and Codeswitching Involving Selee

In this section, we interrogate the impact that Ewe, English, and Akan have had on Selee in Santrokofi. We found a complex contact situation between Selee and the three other languages it comes into close contact with, resulting in moderate borrowing from the

languages into Selee. The compilation and examination of borrowed words presented in this section is based on field data and secondary data based on Agbetsoamedo (2014a). As seen in Tables 8, 9, and 10, there are lexical borrowings from Ewe, Akan, and English across different domains such as food, fashion, music, education, health, work, religion, politics, and numeracy.

Table 8. Words borrowed from Ewe

Ewe	Selee adaptation	Indigenous Selee	English translation
abladzo	blɛdzo	ɔkpasankpla	plantain
agbeli	akpodi	-	cassava
adziadɔ	adiadɔ	kyiifi	herrings
(a)kɔdu	kodu	-	banana
sɔlime	sɔlime	kasisakɔ	church
bibla	Bible	kɔkpanaklekle (holy writing)	bible
kotoku	kotoku / kotofo	-	sack
gate	gate	-	mill
awu	awu	sekpeepe	dress
(a)fɔmizi	fɔmissi	-	rabbit

Table 9. Words borrowed from Akan

Akan	Selee	Indigenous Selee	English translation
kania	kandɛ	-	lantern
abrɔbɛ	leɓɓɔɛ	-	pineapple
nɔkware/nokorɛ	anukware	nwaako	truth
ɔkra	ɔkla	-	cat
kotoku	kotofo	-	sack
nantwie	nankywe	-	cattle

Table 10. Words borrowed from English

English	Selee	Indigenous Selee
plate	plɛti	bɛsitenkle
rubber	wɔba	-
ball	bɔɔl	-
office	ɔfisi	-
lawyer	ɔya	kante
nurse	nɛsi	-
minute (time)	miniti	onumpon ɔpɛ
silver	siliva	alonkyo
bag	bagi	-
catechist	katekisi	-
pastor	pasta	-
bank	banki	-

elder	eda	-
teacher	tikya	-
master	masta / maseta	-
fever	Fiiva	-
clinic	linik	-
cholera	kolera	-
malaria	maleria	-
school	sukuu	-
doctor	dɔkita	-

The borrowing from the three languages comprise both loanwords adapted into Selee, such as *akpodi* adapted from Ewe *agbeli* (cassava), *kandie* from Akan *kania* (lantern), and *pléti* (plate) from English, and loan translations such as *kɔkpanaklekle* from “writing that is holy” (Bible) translated as “holy writing.” *Kodu* (banana) seems to have come directly from Ewe *kɔdu* and not Akan (*a*)*kwadu*. There were several instances in which we found the loanwords alternating with the native words, such as *kyiifi* (herrings) alternating with *adiadɔ*, adapted from Ewe *adziadɔ* and *ɔkpasankpla* (plantain) alternating with *bledzo*, adapted from Ewe *abladzo*. This alternation is mostly common among adults as younger speakers seem to know only the borrowed forms. We also observed that some of the borrowed words are areal diffusions, that is, features or words that have spread across a number of languages within and beyond the region. The word *kotoku/kotofo* (bag) in Selee resembles Ewe *kotoku* and Akan *kotokuo*. Similarly, the Selee nouns *hia* (need) and *osɔfo* (pastor/priest) are the same forms in Ewe and Akan. Names of common cuisines such as “fufu” and “jollof” are areal diffusions found in the repertoires of many languages in West Africa, including Selee.

Many of the loanwords from English to Selee are associated with objects or artefacts of foreign origin, e.g., *bagi* (bag), *pléti* (plate), *siliva* (silver), *fon* (phone), and *bɔɔl* (ball); names of white-collar jobs and institutions, e.g., *lɔya* (lawyer), *tikya* (teacher), *nɛɛsi* (nurse), *maseta* (master), *dɔkta* (doctor), *banki* (bank), *linik* (clinic), *ɔfisi* (office), and *sukuu* (school); registers associated with non-traditional events and religions, e.g., *bibla* (Bible), *pasta* (pastor), *ɛda* (elder), and *katekisi* (catechist); and health conditions, e.g., *fiiva* (fever), *maleria* (malaria), and *kolera* (cholera). See Table 10, which is by no means exhaustive.

Most loanwords fall into Noun Class 1 in Selee (see Agbetsoamedo 2014b for details of noun classes in Selee). These loanwords are in two groups: those that have not acquired prefixes and have not been adapted phonologically or morphologically, e.g., *bɔɔl*, *pɔnkɔ*, *kotoku*, *bibla*, and *sɔlime*, and those that have been adapted, e.g., *pléti* ← plate, *baagi* ← bag, *ɔfisi* ← office, *kodu* ← *kɔdu* (banana), *kandie* ← *kania* (lantern), *ɔkla* ← *ɔkra* (cat).

There are, however, a number of loanwords that fall into other classes. For example: *ablɔbɛ*, from Akan *abrɔbɛ* (pineapple), is placed in Noun Class 8 and reads as a plural because of its onset vowel /a/, which is taken to be the plural prefix a- attached to nouns

The predominant cases of what we regard as codeswitching involve the alternation of Selee and any of the other languages in complex situations where Selee speakers have to sequentially use their language as ingroup code and another language as outgroup code to accommodate non-Selee speakers. For example, on one of our engagements with a chief at his palace, we observed that whenever he or any of his elders wanted to speak to us, they used Ewe but constantly consulted among themselves in Selee. Similar scenarios emerged in the church, where, as stated earlier, Selee is used in Sunday school discussions among ingroup Selee speakers, but Ewe or English is used by those speakers for wider communication such as sermons and announcements because of the presence of non-Selee speakers. In the classrooms too, as noted, students spoke Selee privately among themselves but switched to Ewe or English in open class interactions because teachers are non-Selee speakers; it was emphasised that instances of Selee-Ewe or Selee-English codeswitching were not observed.

5. Results and Discussion

The data indicate a subordinate language contact situation between Selee and two of the languages (Ewe and English) in contact with it in Santrokofi. While the data show that up to seven languages (Ewe, English, Akan, Hausa, Tem, French, and Ga) are in contact with Selee, the prevailing or dominant contact is between three languages: Selee, Ewe, and English, with Akan faring closely as *lingua franca*. The results show that there is relatively moderate contact between Selee and the languages it comes into contact with. This stems from the relative isolation of the Selee speakers in the region. Although the *lingua franca* is Ewe with English as the official language of Ghana, the Balee community maintained their language in all intragroup interactions while allowing Ewe, English, and Akan to dominate intergroup communication. Clearly, Batibo's (2005) triglossic pattern of language contact is reflected in Santrokofi, with English as Ghana's official language at the top as high (H) language followed by Ewe (and in some cases, Akan) as low (L) to English but high (H) to Selee. Selee is low (L) on the structure and mainly reserved for primary or unofficial intragroup domains.

From the process-based perspective of language shift proposed by Batibo (2005), Selee may fall under phase two on the maintenance-shift trajectory. This rating is based on the data analysed and consideration of other sociolinguistic characteristics observed about the host speech community. In this phase Selee is fairly safe and appears to be immune from any threatening encroachment from the languages it is in contact with. Although Selee has ceded control of secondary and higher domains to English and Ewe, it comfortably controls the primary domains such as the home and essentially all domains of intragroup interaction. The result of this situation is moderate lexical borrowing and only occasional switching from Selee to Ewe or English when strangers need to be accommodated.

The significance of Selee's relative safety despite the heavy presence of Ewe and English needs to be placed in context. Is the language immune from the forces of

language shift and change? We do not think so. However, the proximity of Hohoe to Santrokofi appears to insulate Selee from the tensions of language contact. Hohoe, as noted, is approximately 7 km (15 minutes' drive) away from Santrokofi and was the municipal head of the municipality in which Santrokofi was originally located until recently. Hohoe's proximity to Santrokofi enables most non-Balee workers such as teachers and pastors to maintain their residence in Hohoe while plying their trade or businesses in Santrokofi daily. This means that their families, especially children, remain and school in Hohoe. This also means that Ewe-speakers in Santrokofi have not been absorbed into the community as they are seen as outsiders who are restricted to such domains as school, church, and other intergroup settings. This situation allows the Balee to regard Selee as their ingroup language and Ewe and English as outgroup languages. (There are exceptions: e.g., non-Balee spouses who speak Selee are accommodated in the language because they are not regarded as strangers.)

The most significant beneficiaries of the "Hohoe factor" are the Selee children, who enjoy near exclusive socialisation in Selee during their formative years in Santrokofi until they move out of the community for secondary and higher education or by other mobility factors. They are largely insulated from peer pressure in Ewe socialisation as their peers are mainly Selee speakers. Their socialisation is, therefore, untainted with any other language socialisation. The situation is different from that of Okere (Eastern Region of Ghana) where young people are reported to have more exposure to Akan, and to some extent English, than older people (Agyakwa 2018).

Other factors that have contributed significantly to the maintenance of Selee are the positive attitude of Selee speakers towards their language and language revitalisation efforts championed by the people. In a focus group discussion, the youth of Santrokofi bemoaned the level of development of their language for official purposes. Some of them recounted their school days when they were prevented from using Selee on the school premises and thought that it was wrong, as suggested in the discussion below:

Youth A: I find it regrettable that I could not speak my own language in my own school when I was young.

Youth B: We were even punished anytime we spoke Selee.

Youth C: It was ok to speak Ewe or English.

Youth D: I believe the situation has not changed.

Youth B: My biggest wish is to see Selee being used in school at least for teaching and learning even if it would not be examinable.

These views are pointers to the strong attitude the youth of Santrokofi have towards maintaining their mother tongue. There are similar sentiments among older people as well. They are enthusiastic about ongoing revitalisation and language development efforts in the GTM communities, with the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) supporting the translation of the Bible into GTM languages. At the time of the study, GILLBT, with the active involvement of community leaders and volunteers as consultants, had successfully completed the translation of the

New Testament into Selee and it was already in use in the churches visited; work is in progress with the translation of the Old Testament. Various researchers have collaborated with educated indigenes in and outside the community to develop the language; their efforts have produced the orthography and grammar of Selee as well as primers for teaching the language.

6. Concluding Remarks

As previously stated, Ring (1981) feared the dominance of Ewe but by 1997 had revised his position after realising that dominance was not taking place. Nearly three decades on, Ewe is still not dominant in domains that threaten Selee. This study points out that the principal reason for this is the proximity of Hohoe as the residential site of the non-Balee workers who would have brought intensive contact between Selee and Ewe to Santrokofi. We have noted that Ewe is treated as a language of strangers with Selee as ingroup language and a language of peer socialisation, a situation we think is very critical to the ongoing survival of Selee. We have also argued that the Hohoe factor may evaporate the moment settlement in Santrokofi becomes attractive to the non-Balee. The attractiveness of Santrokofi as a place of residence for the non-Balee seems to be on the horizon because the government plans to mine iron ore in the Akpafu area, 4.7 km north of Santrokofi (see Figure 2). Once mining commences in that area, Santrokofi, being closer to Hohoe, may become a preferred place of residence for miners and migrant workers. This scenario may open the floodgate for any eventuality—the dominance of Ewe or of Akan or of a variety of English, depending on the configuration of the new settlers.

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Abbreviations

3SG: Third person singular
CM: Class marker
DEF: Definitive
HOD: Hodiernal
LSM: Lexical subject marker
PP: Past perfect

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