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# I own this language that everybody speaks Ghanaians' attitude toward the English language\*

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Based on interviews conducted in ten Catholic churches of the Ghanaian capital, Accra, the paper offers a profile of English use in Ghana and reports on the attitudes of Ghanaians toward English as the official language of their country. The results reveal the influential role English plays in the different settings of Ghanaian communication as well as the high esteem afforded to the English language by the majority of Ghanaian respondents. Most of them cited the numerous benefits that English, as a language of wider communication, brings to the individual speaker and the country.

**Keywords:** Ghanaian English, language of wider communication (LWC), mentalist perspective, linguistic attitude, Accra Catholic churches, interethnic communication, multilingual, linguistic ecology

## 1. Introduction

Though linked with foreign domination, English was still maintained as Ghana's official language when the country became independent in 1957. For many Ghanaians at the time of independence, no indigenous "Ghanaian language [was] sufficiently 'developed' in technical or scientific precision to play an important role in official communication" (Laitin 1994:627). In contrast, English was seen as "an avenue to western technical knowledge", "an adequate lingua franca" for the linguistically heterogeneous peoples in the country and "a means of contact with world thought and commerce" (Owiredu 1957:296; cf. de Klerk 1999: 316).

It is not surprising therefore that many studies found a generally positive attitude toward English in Ghana (cf. Saah 1986; Guerini 2007; Anyidoho and Kropp

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Dakubu 2008) even though only about 32% of the population can lay any claim to English proficiency (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Ghana 2007: 30). Many Ghanaians, as Obeng (1997:72) reports, tend to value English as “a personal asset, an instrument to promote one’s personal career, a stepping stone to getting a job and a social status marker”. This view was confirmed in an ethnographic case study conducted by Akrofi (2002) in Winneba, a Ghanaian town, where she found that parents, teachers and other stakeholders in education were all positively predisposed to the English language. Moreover, in a study conducted by Amissah *et al.* (2001) in order to help the government of Ghana formulate a language policy, it was found that parents were positively oriented toward the English language partly because it is spoken in the Ghanaian parliament. Guerini (2007), in a linguistic survey among 90 students in the Arts Department of the University of Ghana, also found that most of her respondents generally preferred English as the language of instruction in the classroom. In informal communication, however, these same students preferred Akan, one of the three *linguae francae* in Ghana — the others being English and Hausa (cf. Obeng 1997). In another linguistic study undertaken by Anyidoho and Kropp Dakubu (2008), also at the University of Ghana, the researchers found that most students had a positive attitude toward the English language, with some claiming that it was their first language.

These studies are important in terms of highlighting the deep roots the English language has taken in the circles of the educated and upwardly mobile Ghanaians. However, because they focus primarily on the educational setting, they tend to ignore how the less educated perceive the official language. To expand the research on linguistic attitudes toward Ghanaian English, the present study focuses on a different setting: the socio-religious context of church-goers in Ghana.

The religious setting, where both the old and young from different social backgrounds and levels of education congregate to worship and interact, is an important site for extrapolating the general attitudes of Ghanaians toward the English language. This study can thus add to our understanding of the current beliefs, preferences and desires of Ghanaians toward the English language. As Smith (1998: 15) notes, language attitudes are not static and could change “overtime, both in the lifetime of the individual and that of the linguistic group” (cf. Saah 1986). Straddling both the formal and informal settings of language use — and thereby reflecting the complexity that characterises the language situation and language use in Ghana — this study profiles the settings in which Ghanaians use English, examines their attitudes towards it as well as how they view its dominance in the linguistic ecology of their country.

## 2. Theoretical framework and methodology

Baker (1992: 10) defines attitude as “a hypothetical construct used to explain the direction and persistence of human behaviour”. In the view of Ajzen (1988: 4) an attitude is “a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event”. For Appel and Muysken (1987: 16), an attitude is “an intervening variable between a stimulus affecting a person and that person’s response”. We, therefore, define language attitude as the positive, negative, or indifferent disposition a speaker has toward a particular language (cf. Baker 1992; Adegbija 2000).

Theoretically, we draw on the mentalist perspective on language attitude. According to this approach, language attitudes are not immediately observable; rather, they “are accessible by introspection on the part of the subject” (Smith 1998: 14). Moreover, following Baker (1992: 12), we view attitude as having three parts, namely: the cognitive, affective, and conative / call to action. While the cognitive component involves beliefs and thoughts, the affective dimension deals with the expression of one’s emotion toward an object such as language. In the case of the action or conative part of attitude, Baker (1992: 13) explains that it “concerns a readiness for action”, being “a behavioral intention or plan of action under defined contexts and circumstances”. In this study, therefore, we were interested to know what thoughts, beliefs, opinions and expectations Accra residents, especially those in the Catholic Church, had regarding the English language. We also sought to extrapolate from their linguistic choices in different social interactions their attitudes toward the official language of their country.

Data were collected from ten Catholic churches (see Table 1) in the Accra metropolis, a microcosmic melting pot of all the languages employed in Ghana, using the interview method from June to August 2009. We were aware of the drawbacks to the interview method in this type of research, i.e. the likelihood that respondents might “consciously or unconsciously ... tend to give desirable answers” to questions in order to “put themselves in the best light” (Baker 1992: 18) or might be influenced by the presence of the researchers and the stated purpose of the study. In view of these challenges, we asked probing questions regarding participants’ use of the English language and played the devil’s advocate when it came to how interviewees perceived the language, noting particularly its tendency to hurt the viability of indigenous languages and the fact that it originated from a different culture. Such an approach was also intended to address the behaviorist criticism of the mentalist view of language attitude as one essentially grounded in participants’ questionable self-reporting on language use (Ihemere 2006: 195; cf. Fasold 1984).

146 persons from the selected churches were interviewed in English mainly on their acquisition, use of and attitudes toward the English language. Practical reasons determined the choice of Accra Catholic churches as the research sites.

Firstly, Accra has the highest number of English speakers in Ghana (UNDP, Ghana 2007: 31). Secondly, it is mostly in Accra Catholic churches that the ritualised parts of the Mass are said in English (cf. Kropp Dakubu 1997).<sup>1</sup>

As evident from Table 1, the churches were selected based on the socio-economic conditions of the areas in which they are located, that is, elite / upper class (Christ the King, Corpus Christi and Holy Spirit Cathedral), middle class (St. Theresa's, John the Evangelist, St. Thomas More and Blessed Sacrament) and lower-middle class (St. Peter's, St. Kizito and St. Francis Xavier). It must be noted, though, that this categorisation was a mere approximation of the socio-economic situation of the areas in which these churches are located because in any of them one is likely to find some socio-economic diversity. The interview questions requested information on respondents' age and gender, how many languages they spoke, when and where they learned to speak English and their use of and attitude toward the English language. Although all participants were asked the same questions, they were allowed the freedom to answer in any way they wanted. In other words, instead of just answering a question, respondents were encouraged to comment on the question or even use an anecdote to answer it. By the same token, an interviewee could be asked to explain an answer if it was felt that it was not clear enough or contradicted an earlier response. In all the interviews conducted, participants' responses were noted down manually because many interviewees showed reluctance to have their voices recorded. Attention was paid to respondents' use of the English language, and their apparent proficiency, or lack thereof, was noted and matched against their responses.

**Table 1.** Socio-economic classification of churches.

Class of churches	Number of churches	Number of respondents
Upper class	3	45
Middle class	4	57
Lower-middle class	3	44
Total	10	146

### 3. Analysis and discussion

This section presents results of interviews conducted at the ten selected churches. It looks at the gender and age of respondents, number of languages spoken by respondents, their first language, where they learned to speak English, the frequency

1. It should also be noted that one of the researchers, Dominic Maximilian Ofori, is a Catholic priest from Ghana, a fact that facilitated his access to the research sites.

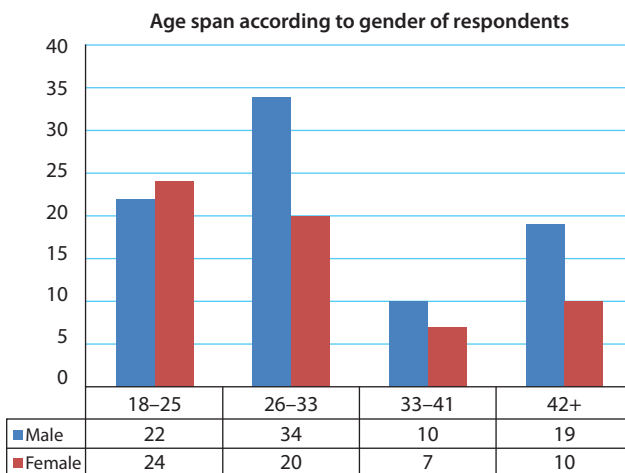
with which they used English in social interactions and the languages they spoke in different settings, including home, church as well as their attitudes towards the English language.

Table 2 below shows the languages used at the masses celebrated in the ten churches and provides the socio-linguistic setting of the research sites showing, for instance, that English is an important language in urban Christian worship, as it tends to dominate language use at masses in upper-class churches (cf. Albakry and Ofori 2011).

**Table 2.** Languages used in the visited churches during Mass

Parishes	English	Akan (Twi/Fante)	Ewe	Ga	Dagaare
St. Thomas More	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Blessed Sacrament	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Christ the King	Yes	No	No	No	No
Corpus Christi	Yes	No	No	No	No
St. John the Evangelist	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Holy Spirit Cathedral	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
St. Kizito	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
St. Peter's	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
St. Francis Xavier	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
St. Theresa's	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

“Yes” means the language is used in some parts of the Mass in the particular church. “No” means the language is not used in any part of the Mass.



**Figure 1.** Age span according to gender of respondents

### 3.1 Age span and gender of respondents

As shown in Figure 1, the ages of the respondents ranged from 18 years to 42 and above. Although no systematic sampling procedure was adopted in the selection of participants, as we interviewed all adult persons who expressed the willingness to be interviewed, the figure is revealing in terms of the history of the English language in Ghana and what type of people have facility in it. First, the fact that the number of English speakers does not decrease significantly with age is because the language has been in Ghana for over 150 years and is, therefore, older than any living Ghanaian (Quarcoo 1994: 331). Since in Ghana English seems to be a literate language, anybody, regardless of age, with formal education, enjoys some level of proficiency in it. Yet the fact that a majority of the respondents, 100 out of the 146, were between 18 and 33 years is an indication that most of the young people in Ghana enjoy English proficiency (cf. Anyidoho and Kropp Dakubu 2008). Second, although the selection of respondents was not deliberate, the study could possibly reflect the ratio of male versus female English speakers in Ghana. According to the UNDP *Ghana Human Development Report* (2007: 31), “[t]here is a higher proportion of illiterate females (50.2%) than males (33.6%)”. Thus the male to female ratio of 11:9 in the interview is somewhat indicative of speakers of English in urban areas in particular, and the whole country in general.

### 3.2 Number of languages spoken and first language of respondents

As expected, all the interviewees were found to be multilingual, confirming the views of Laitin (1994), Gifford (1998), Obeng (1997), Quarcoo (1994) and Adjaye (2005) that there is no monolingual Ghanaian. Most of the respondents, 75%, were

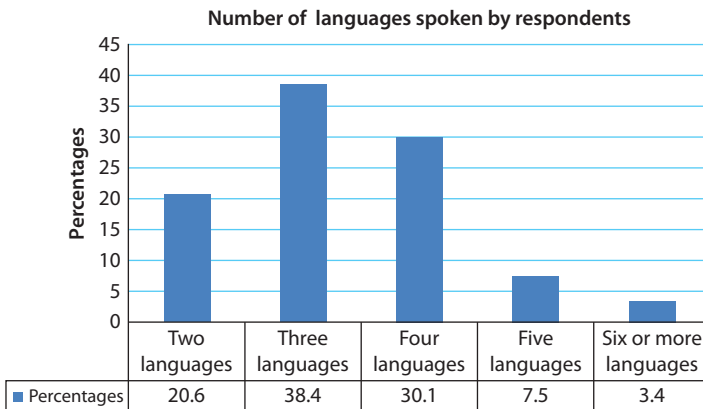


Figure 2. Number of languages spoken by respondents

found to speak between three and four languages, including English. Figure 2 provides more information on the percentages of respondents and the number of languages they spoke.

Considering the fact that all Ghanaians are multilingual, we were interested in finding out which language respondents first learned to speak. Most of the respondents (84.2%) said that they first learned to speak a local language before English. Among the local languages mentioned were Akan (Twi / Fante), Ga, Ewe, Hausa, Dagaare, Brifo, Dangme, Guane and Nzema. However, 13.8% of the respondents, all of whom were from the upper-class neighbourhood churches, claimed that English was their first language. The remaining 2% mentioned that their first language was neither English nor any of the local languages, but rather French. This response can be explained by the fact that Ghana is surrounded by francophone countries like Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, some of whose citizens have migrated to the country.

### 3.3 Where respondents first learned to speak English and frequency of its use

While 27.4% of the interviewees claimed they learned the English language at home and 71.2% at school, 1.4% said they acquired it neither at home nor at school (see Table 3). Of those who learned the language at home, 60% were from upper-class churches, 25% from the middle class and 15% from lower-middle-class churches. The study also found that all those who learned the English language outside home and school settings were members of churches located in lower-class areas. According to these respondents, whose English was characterised by grammatical mistakes and misuse of some words, they acquired the language through interactions with friends. One of these respondents, a male, 28 years old, for example, made the following statement: "My boss is very vulnerable", when in fact, he meant 'vindictive'. This error was not a slip of the tongue because he repeated the same word even when one of the researchers repeated, "vulnerable?" and he replied, "Yes, vulnerable".

**Table 3.** Where respondents learned to speak English

Class	Home (40) 27.4%	School (104) 71.2%	Outside both Home & School (2) 1.4%
Upper class	(24) 60%	(21) 20.2%	0%
Middle class	(10) 25%	(47) 45.2%	0%
Lower-middle class	(6) 15%	(36) 34.6%	(2) 100%
Total	(40) 100%	(104) 100%	(2) 100%

Absolute figures in brackets.

The lack of English proficiency notwithstanding, the finding that some Ghanaians are learning the English language outside the classroom is significant in that it suggests that English in Ghana might cease to be the preserve of the educated elite, as one would not necessarily have to go to school to learn it. The following responses bring into sharp focus how Ghanaians in lower-class neighborhoods are learning the English language:

- (1) I come from a village in the Eastern Region. I didn't go to school, but when I come to Accra, I met friends who sell things. They speak normally English to people who don't speak either Ga or Akan. It's from them I learn to speaking the English (A woman, 25 years old).
- (2) I learn my English here when we youth come for church programs (A young man, 19 years old).
- (3) Sometimes I listen to radio, TV. I listen to football commentary on radio. Yea, that's how I learn to speak the English (A young man, 20 years old).

Clearly, personal initiative and practicality influenced the informal acquisition of the English language by these respondents.

As for frequency of use, the majority of the interviewees, that is 60%, said they spoke English frequently, 30% occasionally and 10% rarely (see Table 3 and Table 4). Of those who frequently spoke English, 46% were from churches in upper-class neighbourhoods, 43.7% from the middle class and 10.3% from lower-middle-class churches (see Table 4). With respect to participants occasionally speaking the language, the study found that 11.4% were members of churches located in upper-class areas, 43.2% from churches in middle-class areas and 45.4% from lower-middle-class churches (see Table 4). As for those who rarely used English in social interactions, none of them came from either upper- or middle-class churches.

**Table 4.** Frequency with which respondents spoke English

Class	Frequently 60%	Occasionally 30%	Rarely 10%
Upper class	(40) 46.0%	(5) 11.4%	(0) 0%
Middle class			
Lower-middle class	(38) 43.7%	(19) 43.2%	(0) 0%
	(9) 10.3%	(20) 45.4%	(15) 100%
Total	(87) 100%	(44) 100%	(15) 100%

Absolute figures in brackets.

Whereas one could contend that the respondents who claimed to use English frequently were only exaggerating, as Guerini (2007:8) points out, such exaggerations are useful in the sense that they reflect the attitudes of Ghanaians toward the English language. Thus, in spite of the fact that English is spoken by a minority group in Ghana, it enjoys a huge favor among Ghanaians because of its tremendous market capital (Mfum-Mensah 2005:84). For instance, a 40-year-male participant, from Christ the King Church located in an upper-class neighborhood, articulated his frequent use of the English language as follows:

- (4) Look, I really can't think of anytime I don't speak English; probably when I go to sleep. Otherwise, I speak English all the time. I live with people from different places in Ghana. Since they don't speak my Brifor language, I've to talk to them in English. Then, on my way to work, when I take trotro [mini-bus], I speak English with everybody. At work too, you know, I work in the ministries, I speak English all the time ... I own this language that everybody speaks.

This example shows that the respondent spoke English frequently because he was educated, lived with people who spoke different mother tongues and worked as a civil servant.

### 3.4 Language use in different social settings

The study also sought to determine the languages participants spoke in different interactions with family members at home, fellow worshippers at church, friends in the street and others in interethnic communication in order to establish their attitudes toward the English language. Table 5 below provides a summary of the main findings.

**Table 5.** Respondents' language use in different social settings

Languages	Home	Church	Private Prayer	Friends	Interethnic Communication
English and local languages	(71) 48.6%	(92) 63.1%	(64) 43.6%	(90) 61.6%	(40) 27.4%
English only	(13) 8.9%	(36) 24.6%	(36) 24.6%	(31) 21.2%	(98) 67.1%
Local language only	(61) 41.8%	(17) 11.6%	(44) 30.3%	(23) 15.8%	(8) 5.5%
Other	(1) 0.7%	(1) 0.7%	(2) 1.4%	(2) 1.4%	(0) 0%
Total	(146) 100%	(146) 100%	(146) 100%	(146) 100%	(146) 100%

Other\* refers to either code-switching or French. Absolute figures in brackets.

### 3.4.1 *Languages spoken with family members at home*

Following the question as to how often respondents used the English language in social interactions, participants were asked what language(s) they spoke at home. As indicated in Table 5 above, 48.6% answered that they spoke both English and at least one local language, 8.9% said they spoke only English, 41.8% spoke a local language and just 0.7% said they code-switched between English and at least one local language at home. While 42.3% of those who spoke English and at least one local language at home were from upper-class churches, 39.4% were members of middle-class churches and 18.3% members of lower-middle-class churches (see Table 6). As for those speaking only English at home, 76.9% attended upper-class churches, 15.4% middle-class churches and 7.7% lower-middle-class churches. Then, of those who employed only local languages in domestic social transactions, 8.2% belonged to upper-class churches, 42.6% to middle-class churches and 49.2% to lower-middle-class churches.

**Table 6.** Language use at home according to social class

Class	English and local languages (71)	English only (13)	Local languages (61)	Other* (1)
Upper class	(30) 42.3%	(10) 76.9%	(5) 8.2%	(0) 0%
Middle class	(28) 39.4%	(2) 15.4%	(26) 42.6%	(1) 100%
Lower-middle class	(13) 18.3%	(1) 7.7%	(30) 49.2%	(0) 0%
Total	(71) 100%	(13) 100%	(61) 100%	(1) 100%

Other\* refers to code-switching. Absolute figures in brackets.

Obviously, in Accra, the home provides a multilingual setting, where both English and local languages are used for a variety of purposes; nevertheless, indigenous languages seem to dominate domestic interactions. The most plausible explanation for this situation, as Kropp Dakubu (1997) points out, is that urban dwellers usually reserve their mother tongues for family and intimate domains. In fact, the home creates a number of scenarios where city dwellers must of necessity use the local language, as for example during the celebration of traditional rites such as funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies or during the visit of a relative and/or a friend who lacks facility in the English language (cf. Owusu-Ansah 1997; Adegbiya 2000). Since the use of the local language during such formal cultural events is indexical of “solidarity and in-group membership” (Bentahila and Davies 1998: 32), Ghanaians normally avoid speaking English. The respondents of the present study most probably employed the local languages at home more often than English because these indigenous languages could articulate their cultural identities and emotional needs better than the English language.

This generalisation could, however, be complicated by the identity of interactants and the emotional nature of domestic conversations. This is because when respondents who indicated that they spoke both English and local languages at home were asked to explain their language choices, some of the married ones replied that they normally spoke the local language to their spouses but English to their children, while the unmarried said they normally spoke English with their siblings, but the local language to their parents. Still others said they spoke both English and one of the local languages because they were the languages everybody spoke at home. One interviewee, the wife of a minister of state and a member of Corpus Christi Catholic Church, an upper-class neighborhood church, explained her use of the English language at home this way:

- (5) Normally, I speak English with the kids, but Dagaare with my husband, Dr. Kumbuor. Yet, when my kids really annoy me, I speak Dagaare since that helps me to tell them exactly how I feel about what they did. In fact I more often use Dagaare than English when I want to speak from the heart (A woman, 46 years old).

Another respondent, a Christ-the-King worshipper, had this to say about her domestic linguistic practices:

- (6) You know I speak English with my siblings at home everytime. But with my dad, who is conservative, I have to speak Fante. He says that's our language (A woman, 23 years old).

What stands out clearly from these explanations is that class per se in Ghana is not the only determinant in language choice at home; factors like facility and emotional state are also important variables in one's linguistic choices. With respect to utterance (5), for example, although the respondent, a member of the upper class in Ghana, employed both English and Dagaare at home, she associated her mother tongue with intense emotions. One could not, however, dismiss the possibility of language shift among young people in Ghana, especially those from the upper class as evident in utterance (6). It appears that whereas the interviewee freely spoke English when interacting with her siblings, she had to be compelled by parental authority to speak Fante, the language of her ethnic group.

Interestingly, although Owusu-Ansah (1997) and Myers-Scotton (1997) claim that code-switching is the norm in informal contexts in multilingual societies, only 0.7% of the respondents in the study said they code-switched or mixed languages at home. But this under-reporting is hardly surprising. As Swigart (1992) observed in his study of the linguistic situation in Senegal, it was possible that those respondents who said they spoke only one or the other of the local languages

at home actually often code-switched and/or code-mixed without being aware of such a linguistic practice.

### 3.4.2 Languages used in church interactions

The study found that, while 63.1% of the interviewees used both English and local languages when they went to church, 24.6% employed only English, 11.6% only local languages, and just 0.7% code-switched / code-mixed (see Table 5). Of the number that spoke both English and local languages at church, 26.1% were members of upper-class churches, 44.6% members of middle-class churches, and 29.3% members of lower-middle-class churches (see Table 7). Regarding respondents speaking only English, the study found that 58.3% attended churches in upper-class areas, 19.4% churches in middle-class areas and 22.3% churches in lower-middle-class areas (see Table 7). While none of the participants attending upper-class churches spoke only local languages at church, it was found that 47.1% and 52.9% of those worshipping at middle-class and lower-middle-class churches respectively used only local languages.

**Table 7.** Language use at church according to social class

Class	English and local languages (92)	English only (36)	Local languages (17)	Other* (1)
Upper class	(24) 26.1%	(21) 58.3%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Middle class	(41) 44.6%	(7) 19.4%	(8) 47.1%	(0) 0%
Lower-middle class	(27) 29.3%	(8) 22.3%	(9) 52.9%	(1) 100%
Total	(92) 100%	(36) 100%	(17) 100%	(1) 100%

Other\* refers to code-switching. Absolute figures in brackets.

As in the case of language choice in the home, respondents who said they spoke both English and the local language at church were asked to explain the motivation for their linguistic choices. For some (about 63%), they spoke English to people they did not know or share the same mother tongue with, but for others (about 12% and all members of the upper-class churches), they spoke English to just about anybody with whom they interacted. Still, there were 25% who claimed that their choice of language usually depended on the context. For instance, an interviewee, who was a civil servant, explained his linguistic choices at a church located in a lower-middle-class neighborhood as follows:

- (7) You see, here at St. Peter's, my friends include Akans, Gas, and Northerners. Although I don't speak any of the Northern languages, I speak Twi, Ga and English, in addition to Ewe, my mother tongue. When I chat with my friends here, we don't follow any particular formula. We use all the languages all of us can speak (A male, 57 years old).

This multilingual respondent employed the different languages in his linguistic repertoire in informal interpersonal transactions without any premeditation. In other words, it could be argued that some Accra Catholics use both English and local languages in informal social interactions because they have facility in such linguistic codes. Their linguistic choices are therefore a function of their multilingualism.

The research also sought to elicit from respondents what languages they employed in their private prayers (see Table 5 and Table 8). This question was particularly important, as it was intended to help determine the extent of the role English plays in the sociolinguistic landscape of Ghana. We were interested to know whether Ghanaians use the English language in multiple settings merely for societal approval. As Smith (1998:14) points out, “[s]ocial desirability may prevent secretly or subconsciously held attitudes from being directly revealed”. Since interviewees were not obligated to choose any particular language in their private prayers, it was felt that their responses to the question would be crucial in any discussion of the Ghanaian attitude towards the English language. Of the 146 participants, 43.6% responded that in their private prayers they used either English or a local language, while 24.6% used English only, 30.3% a local language and 1.4% some other language (particularly French; see Table 5). Of those who said they prayed in either English or a local language, 23.4% were from upper-class churches, 46.9% from the middle-class churches and 29.7% from the lower-middle-class churches. Of those who prayed only in English, 56.8% attended upper-class churches, 32.4% middle-class churches and 10.8% lower-middle-class churches. In the case of the number of those praying in local languages, it was found that 17.8% came from upper-class neighborhood churches, 35.6% from middle-class neighborhoods and 45.7% lower-middle-class churches (see Table 8). These findings suggest that a significant number of Accra Catholics are comfortable using English in the personal domain of private prayers.

**Table 8.** Language use in private prayers according to social class

Class	English and local languages (64)	English only (36)	Local languages (44)	Other* (2)
Upper class	(15) 23.4%	(20) 56.8%	(8) 17.8%	(1) 50%
Middle class	(30) 46.9%	(12) 32.4%	(16) 35.6%	(1) 50%
Lower-middle class	(19) 29.7%	(4) 10.8%	(20) 45.7%	(0) 0%
Total	(64) 100%	(36) 100%	(44) 100%	(2) 100%

Other\* refers to French. Absolute figures in brackets.

3.4.3 *Languages spoken with friends*

The study also required information on respondents’ choice of language when they interacted with friends. This question was meant to test the claim held by many sociolinguists that, whereas bilinguals use the official language in formal settings, they employ the mother tongue in informal, personal and intimate settings (cf. Bentahila and Davies 1998: 32). As seen from Table 5 above, a majority of the respondents (61.6%) used both English and local languages in communication with friends. However, 21.2% said they employed only English, while 15.8% interacted with friends in only local languages, with 1.4% code-switching / mixing. Of those who spoke both English and local languages, 20% came from upper-class churches, 47.8% from middle-class churches and 32.2% from lower-middle-class churches (see Table 9). Regarding respondents using only English when interacting with friends, 64.5% were from upper-class neighbourhoods, 19.4% from middle class and 16.1% from lower-middle class (see Table 9). Among the reasons cited for the choice of codes were interlocutors’ having mutually unintelligible mother tongues, topic and mood of interactants as well as what language would first be spoken in any given conversation setting.

Another revelation was that all the upper-class participants who said they spoke only English with friends were between 18 and 33 years, with most of them being high school and college graduates. Thus this finding seems to corroborate the claims by Phillipson (1992) and Schaefer and Egbokhare (1999) that, in Africa, English is gradually taking over the traditional functions of the local languages as more people, especially the youth, prefer it in communication with friends. A combination of factors, however, such as class, age and level of education can determine linguistic choices in social interactions with friends.

Table 9. Language use with friends according to social class

Class	English and local languages (90)	English only (31)	Local languages (23)	Other* (2)
Upper class	(18) 20%	(20) 64.5%	(5) 21.7%	(2) 100%
Middle class	(43) 47.8%	(6) 19.4%	(8) 34.8%	(0) 0%
Lower-middle class	(29) 32.2%	(5) 16.1%	(10) 43.5%	(0) 0%
Total	(90) 100%	(31) 100%	(23) 100%	(2) 100%

Other\* refers to code-switching. Absolute figures in brackets.

3.4.4 *Languages spoken in interethnic communication*

67.1% of respondents interviewed reported that they used only English in inter-ethnic communication, 27.4% used both English and at least one local language (particularly Twi), and 5.5% used a local language (particularly Twi; see Table 5). Of those speaking only English, 40.8% were from upper-class churches, 48% from

middle-class churches and 11.2% from lower-middle-class churches (see Table 10). In terms of absolute figures, 40 of these participants were from churches in upper-class neighborhoods, 47 from middle-class churches and eleven from lower-middle-class churches (see Table 10). This means 88.9% of Catholics from upper-class neighborhood churches, 82.5% of worshippers from middle-class churches and 25% of members from lower-middle-class churches respectively used English in interethnic communication. It does appear, therefore, that among Accra Catholics, the use of English in interethnic communication is a common phenomenon and may depend not only on one's social standing but also on the ability to speak the language.

**Table 10.** Language use in interethnic communication according to social class

Class	English and local languages (40)	English only (98)	Local languages (8)	Other* (0)
Upper class	(5) 12.5%	(40) 40.8%	(0) 0%	(0) 0%
Middle class	(7) 17.5%	(47) 48%	(3) 37.5%	(0) 0%
Lower-middle class	(28) 70%	(11) 11.2%	(5) 62.5%	(0) 0%
Total	(40) 100%	(98) 100%	(8) 100%	(0)

Other\* refers to either French or code-switching. Absolute figures in brackets.

### 3.5 Respondents' view of the English language

Following the questions as to what languages they used at home, in church, the street and in interethnic communication, respondents were asked how they felt about the English language. This question was posed because the study was interested in finding out what Ghanaians, known for being proud of their indigenous cultures, thought of the English language, a vestige of colonialism, after 52 years of independence. It was assumed that participants' responses would throw light on the situation of English vis-à-vis the local languages in Ghana.

Of the 146 respondents, 98.6% indicated that they liked the English language, citing a number of benefits that English, as a language of wider communication, brings to the individual speaker as well as the country. The following excerpts express the typical positive responses of participants and even their intimate attachment to the English language:

- (8) You know, I don't just like the English language. I love it! As a child, I was always spoken to in English by my parents, especially my dad, who was a teacher. He was Fante and my mother Ewe. They always conversed in English and never in any local language. My dad took time to teach me how to speak good English even before I started school, which was a good thing because in school I made a lot of friends because of the way I spoke English.

English is, for me, a language I won't give up for anything (A 35-year-old male teacher from a middle class church).

- (9) I feel with English, the sky is the limit. Here in Accra, I go anywhere without difficulty because of English (A 65-year-old retired female teacher from a lower-middle-class church).
- (10) I like English because it is spoken anywhere in the world. Do you know Don Bortey? That man [football player] couldn't survive outside of Ghana because he can't speak English. Me I want to succeed when I travel abroad (24-year-old unemployed man from an upper-class church).
- (11) You know, I couldn't get my girlfriend if I didn't know how to speak English. This girl speaks nothing but English every time. In fact, it took me several days to practice what to say to her before I made my move. I think she was impressed with my performance so when I asked her out she agreed. Can you believe that the only language she and her family speak at home is English? (21-year-old male college student from a middle-class church).
- (12) In Ghana if you can speak English, you get what you want. One time I went to a provisions store to buy some items. When I went to the counter to check out, the salesgirl asked me in Twi to buy the polythene bag I had to carry my things in. Then pretending I didn't understand what she was saying, I asked, "What did you say?" She exclaimed in Twi, "So you don't understand Twi? That's why I don't like selling to these Anglophiles. You take it and leave. Next time, don't come here". She went ahead to put the items in the polythene bag and handed it to me. I just smiled and took my things and left thinking, "It's great to know English in this country" (A 37-year-old male teacher from an upper-class church).

We can therefore say that the following, among other things, account for the Ghanaian love for the English language: (a) its ability to facilitate upward social mobility; b) its global reach; c) its capacity to confer prestige on users; d) its ability to facilitate interethnic communication and trade, and e) its role in speakers' romantic life. Hence, it seems plausible as Anyidoho and Kropp Dakubu (2008: 157) argue that the popularity of the English language in Ghana is not going to wane any time soon because Ghanaians have accepted its dominance on the country's linguistic landscape as a fact of life. In this respect, Ghanaians' attitudes toward English are not significantly different from those of other anglophone African countries, where the language is an official language (cf. Breitborde 1998; Matiki 2001; Phaswana 2003; Michieka 2005; Kamwangamalu 2007).

In spite of the overwhelmingly positive attitudes to English, however, there were still a few people (1.4% and all from upper-class neighborhood churches)

who were of the view that they did not like the language because of its complex grammatical rules, its being too technical, its ability to marginalise indigenous languages, and its being a colonial legacy. The following samples represent the views of respondents with negative attitudes toward English:

- (13) You know, because of English the young people in our country today can't speak the language of their ethnic group. A university student goes to the village to visit his grandmother and he can't have a good conversation with her in say Twi. Why should this be the case? Because he's been speaking English all the time (A 56-year-old lawyer).
- (14) You know, English is so complex. I remember when I was in secondary school and had to learn all these rules in English class. Oh no, there are too many rules governing that language (A 20-year-old female first-year college student).
- (15) Well, I do not see why we as an independent country still bother ourselves with English. That language is a foreign language. Period! We've plenty of languages of our own. Let's choose one of them and make it our official language (A 51-year-old male member of parliament).

While the number of respondents with such negative views is negligible, their views reflect the ambivalence with which some Ghanaians, albeit very few, regard the one-time colonial language, as well as explain why, despite the dominance of English, the local languages of Ghana will continue to hold their own in the social, cultural, economic and religious lives of Ghanaians (Laitin 1994). Furthermore, such views from the elite, direct beneficiaries of the prestige that English confers, indicate that looking at language attitudes in Ghana through the prism of only class merely oversimplifies the complex medley of factors operating both at the conscious and unconscious levels of interlocutors in any sociolinguistic transaction.

#### 4. Conclusion and limitations of the study

As argued by Smith (1998: 15), "a person's attitude towards a particular language will be one of the determining factors in whether [he or she] chooses to speak it in a given situation". By choosing to speak a particular language, speakers in multilingual settings demonstrate their allegiance with that linguistic code (Fasold 1984: 208). Apart from overtly expressing their approval of English as a language meeting their practical communicative needs, most of the respondents in this study also demonstrate their allegiance to the language when one considers such items as frequency with which English is used, languages spoken at home, at church, in

the street, and with people having different mother tongues. The study, indeed, challenges the notion that English is completely a second language in Ghana, as it revealed that about 13% of the participants consider English as their first language. This result, coupled with the finding that 27.4% of the respondents acquired the English language at home, only underscores the popularity of English in Ghana. Clearly a significant number of Ghanaians in Accra are enamored of the language so much that they are prepared to claim it as a mother tongue and/or teach it to their children at home.

However, because the study was limited to just ten Accra Catholic churches and their members' use of and attitudes toward the English language, it cannot be said that the sample size is a perfect representative of all Ghanaian Christian denominations with their distinctive liturgies, and, hence, different ways of using language. Further research on attitudes toward English in different religious contexts outside Accra, therefore, needs to be done in the future to validate any broad generalisations regarding the way Ghanaians view the English language.

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