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INTRODUCTION



Multilingualism and language policies in the African context: lessons from Ghana

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Africa is a highly multilingual continent; the languages are diverse and numerous. Even though Maho (2004) suggests that there are 1441 languages in Africa, Simons and Fennig (2018) have a much higher figure of 2143 living languages. They suggest that 198 of the languages are institutional, 538 are developing, while 1018 are vigorous. 255 of the languages can be categorized as in trouble, and 134 are dying. It is clear, given the number of languages in active use, that multilingualism is rife on the continent. The multilingual situation in Africa has often been viewed as the premise for disunity and an impediment to development. This situation provided the premise for the ‘Against All Odds’ Asmara Declaration on African languages and the subsequent celebration of the International Year of Languages with the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism by the Academy of African Languages in 2009. In spite of these efforts, Africa still struggles with the process of unearthing its head from the proverbial sand into which it is buried, in relation to acknowledging that multilingualism, if properly harnessed, is a blessing rather than a curse. Definitions of multilingualism are still very much strapped to the idea of languages as autonomous units because these enable us to concentrate on the broad politics of ethnolinguistic difference and diversity within the nation-states. Trudell’s (2009) plenary in Bamako provided the impetus for a continued discussion on what multilingualism entailed and its prospects for the continent.

Against the foregoing background, the School of Languages of the University of Ghana decided to focus its first ever international conference on issues of multilingualism and how it can be harnessed for developmental purposes. The three-day conference under the theme ‘Multilingualism in the African Context: Resource or Challenge?’ attracted participants from several countries on the continent and elsewhere. Significant to the conference was a colloquium which engaged individuals from varied backgrounds such as policy makers, scholars/researchers, teachers, and parents. The main objective was to address the issue of mother tongue education and its relevance in the current world. The aim was to inform policy on mother tongue education to enhance literacy. The major issues hinged on the need to distinguish between language of instruction and language learning, and consider pertinent issues such as linguistic inclusion, teacher capacity and policies regarding recruitment, and teacher training, posting and transfer. This was against the backdrop of an earlier comment, that same month, from the then Ghanaian Minister of Education,

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Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, that once English as a medium of instruction in (basic) schools was removed, the country would make significant progress. That statement rekindled the national debate on various language policies and planning issues in the country. This special issue, focusing on the Ghanaian context, and dedicated to the memory of our keynote speaker and panelist for the conference, Professor Tope Omoniyi, explores the two dimensions of language policy (Baldauf, 2005; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997): micro planning and macro planning. Engagement with the micro and macro levels is necessary in order to acknowledge and recognize the various contexts of language use and practice beyond the narrow confines of state planning and policy. Scholars (see Kaplan, 2011; Nekvapil, 2011; Ricento, 2006, *inter alia*) have tended to focus more on the macro dimension and discuss language policies of nation-states, as well as the impact of colonialism in the creation of multilingual nations in sub-Saharan Africa. As a consequence of the Berlin Congress of 1885, language hierarchies based on assigned roles and statuses of languages in a country, and language politics in terms of curriculum development have attracted much attention (Omoniyi, 2003). We are of the view that far less attention is being paid to the micro dimension of multilingualism which should enable us as scholars to engage with actual language practices and determine the multilingual repertoires of individuals and communities. At this level, multilingualism ceases to be an abstraction and becomes the lived experiences of people. It is in this dimension that we critically explore the dynamics of developing and managing multilingual resources for specific purposes. Urban multilingualism may only be a microcosm of the region's entire multilingual nature. Unlike the macro dimension of multilingualism, which includes a program of formal language assessment, the micro dimension of multilingualism may or may not have an assessment component. If it does, it is likely to be informally conducted. The papers in this special issue put the spotlight on multilingual resourcing within both the macro and micro dimensions of multilingualism.

The issue consists of carefully selected and peer-reviewed papers from the conference. The papers focus on multilingualism at both macro and micro levels of the Ghanaian society. The first two papers explore macro dimensions of policy at the state level, with a focus on language policies in education. Yevudey & Agbozo examine the sociolinguistic backgrounds of teacher trainees in a College of Education in Accra and their perceptions toward Ghana's current language-in-education policy. Their aim is to explore how these micro-level sociolinguistic insights could provide understandings for language-in-education policies at the macro level. They propose a flexible bilingual language-in-education policy for future considerations at the macro-level. Such a policy should take into consideration all the sociolinguistic and multilingual realities of Ghana to avoid peripheral linguistic imperialism, where sections of the population are deprived of their linguistic rights. Owu-Ewie & Eshun report on a sociolinguistic survey of language representation and practices in selected 104 lower primary schools in Southern Ghana. Their aim is to provide a scientific indicator of the level of multilingualism in both rural and (peri)-urban classrooms as well as examine the extent of compliance of the policy that mandates the use of the L1 as a medium of instruction at the lower primary level of education. They reiterate the important role of the teacher in the implementation of such policies as they suggest that even in multilingual classrooms, L1 was used so long as the teacher was proficient in the languages spoken by the students. As expected, there was high multilingualism in urban and peri-urban classrooms, and sometimes a mis-match between teachers'

language competencies and the languages spoken by the students. These made implementation of the policy often impracticable.

The remaining three papers are concerned with language use and practices in domains without clearly articulated language policies – the church, migratory contexts and the home. Obiri-Yeboah examines language practices in a rural Christian church. She identifies different practices with different groups within the church, such as the youth and the elderly women. She concludes that multilingualism remains pervasive in her rural study community, despite its size. Although the indigenous language of the community is Akan, the most dominant in the country, members of the community have a positive attitude towards multilingualism. In the next paper, Amuzu, Nutakor & Amfo are concerned with language socialization practices of migrants of Nigerian origin living in Ghana. They examine the migrants' language practices in various domains, including work and home, and interrogate whether such practices reflect the level of socio-economic integration that the migrants experience. In the absence of formal language policies in relation to migrant settlement, the authors ascertain the role that members of the host communities play in the migrant's language socialization. They conclude that there is a strong correlation between a migrant group's socio-economic integration and their sociolinguistic integration. The final paper, by Afrifa, Anderson & Ansah, compares language choices in selected homes of two geographically and socio-economically distinct communities in the capital of Ghana, Accra. Using Fishman's theory of language shift, the authors investigate the instances of language shift that take place in these communities. They conclude that trans-generational transmission of indigenous Ghanaian languages in urban Accra is minimal, as majority of children who use English as a home language are unable to speak any indigenous language, including the mother tongues of their parents.

Given the existence of 81 living languages in Ghana (Simons & Fennig, 2018), multilingualism within urban and peri-urban communities, and even rural ones, are to be expected. Language policies, where they exist, are expected to be carefully enacted such that they are both pragmatic and useful. African countries need to pay attention to language practices beyond the education sector, and put in deliberate measures to manage multilingualism in other formal as well as semi-formal spaces.

In addition to the five articles, this special issue presents two book reviews: *Translingual Practices and Neoliberal Policies. Attitudes and Strategies of African Skilled Migrants in Anglophone Workplaces*, by Suresh Canagarajah; and *LINGUANOMICS: What is the market potential of multilingualism*, by Gabrielle Hogan-Brun. The first book is reviewed by Ana Deumert, and the second by Oladipo Salami.

In memoriam -Tope Omoniyi

This special issue of CILP is in honor and to the memory of Professor Tope Omoniyi, who was the keynote speaker at the first University of Ghana School of Languages conference. He was also one of the panelists at the special colloquium on the language-in-education policy, which made a number of recommendations on an inclusive and practical language-in-education policy to the minister of education.

Professor Tope Omoniyi was at the time and until his death the Chair of Sociolinguistics at the University of Roehampton in London. His research focused on language and identity and explored issues in language education, language and borderlands, popular

culture, nation, and religion. He was the Director of the Centre for Research in English Language and Linguistics and coordinator of the MPhil/PhD programs in Linguistics at Roehampton. Working in conjunction with his mentor, the late Professor Joshua Fishman, he created the new sub-discipline of interdisciplinary scholarship known as the Sociology of Language and Religion.

His publications include *The Sociolinguistics of Borderlands: Two Nations, One Community* (Africa World Press, 2004), the co-edited volumes *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (John Benjamins, 2006), *The Sociolinguistics of Identity* (Continuum, 2006) and *Contending with Globalization in World Englishes* (Multilingual Matters, 2010). He had over 50 publications in journal articles and books and a long list of plenary and keynote lectures.

Professor Omoniyi's status as an international scholar was evident in a number of high profile appointments he held. He was on the Board of International Directors of the Centre for Multiple Languages and Literacy at Teachers College, Columbia. He was an assessor for the National Science Foundation of the United States of America, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and a second term member of the Peer Review College of the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the United Kingdom. He also served as a consultant on professorial appointment and promotion committees in Cyprus, Israel, Singapore, Nigeria, Ghana, UK and the US, and as external examiner for doctoral theses in universities in Ghana, Singapore and UK. As a visiting professor, he went twice to the National Institute of Education, Singapore; the University of Jyväskylä, Finland; the Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria; and the City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong. In the autumn of 2015 and 2016, he visited the University of Ghana under the UG-Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Scheme.

In addition to his accomplishments in Linguistics, Professor Omoniyi was an accomplished poet. In 1985, he won a runner-up prize in the National Anti-Apartheid Poetry Competition in Nigeria and, in 2001, he received honorable mention in the *Anthropology & Humanism* Annual Poetry Competition in the USA. His volume *Farting Presidents & Other Poems* was published by Kraft Books, Ibadan, in 2001. And, more recently, he was the editor of an anthology titled *Poems for a Century: An Anthology on Nigeria* published by Amalion Publishing of Dakar in 2014, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Nigeria's independence from Britain.

Professor Omoniyi's contribution to the academy, particularly in his area of interest in language and identity as it relates to language in education and borderlands, is deservedly honored by this special issue on *Multilingualism and Language Policies in the African Context*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Nana Aba Appiah Amfo is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Ghana. Her PhD is from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Within the broad areas of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, her research interests include information structure, grammaticalization and language

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Jemima 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.

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