THE MEANING OF 'FRA-FRA'

Interim Report on N.E. Ghana Intelligibility Survey

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ABSTRACT.—Three methods of studying dialect—and language—relationships are first discussed. Then the problem of the term 'Fra-Fra' and the scope of the present research are presented. There follow tables of the results of the survey to date (10th Sept. 1973) and comments on the places visited. Appendices give cognate counts and population figures, and an account of the extension of the survey to Kusaal.

METHODS OF SPEECH-COMPARISON

Linguistics has never furnished a generally-accepted objective criterion to determine whether the difference between two forms of speech is a difference of languages or whether it is a question of distinct dialects of the same language. There are three major field methods of exploring this area of study:

1. Word-Lists

In the word-list method a standard list of English (or French, Twi, etc.) words is translated into the form of speech under investigation, and the corresponding forms for the same item in the different languages are examined for indentity, resemblance, cognacy, "look-alikes" or some such correlation. The most frequently-used lists are Swadesh's "first 100" and "second 100", and also, for Africa, Greenberg's-547 word African Word List.

The main *advantage* of this approach is that Swadesh proposed his lists early enough in the history of modern linguistic investigation for them to have become fairly generally accepted, so that one can expect to find at least this basic equivalent set of data on practically every language that has been studied. A good phonetician with an adequate interpreter or bilingual informant can collect the materials in under an hour. Many of the items can be identified (or the interpretation reinforced) by gestures and non-verbal indications. One can even 'do a Koelle' and find informants representing a number of speech communities in one metropolitan centre.

Some *disadvantages* are the obverse of the advantages. If one makes a quick visit just to collect a word-list there is some danger of not recognising misunderstandings and non-representative of the speech of the informant obtained—he may be drunk, have a speech-impediment or an odd idiolect[1], or even be a non-native (the Mampruli list in Swadesh 1966 was given by a Fra-Fra). In any case the identification of some of the items may require some further grammatical analysis ("not" pronouns, etc.), while others may have several possible translations or be polysemous or homonymous in English ("big", "dull", "smell"). In these instances it would be helpful if some standardised context were to be agreed—"big—of a rock", "not—in 'he did

not go' " and so on.[5] Yet again difference of 'breadth' of transcription and the depth of the investigator's knowledge makes the lists not strictly comparable: a travelling spot-check may be purely phonetic and record the informant's first reaction to the elicitation word, while a native-speaker or long-stay linguist may give a phonemic transcription and several synonyms.[6] Moreover, bare lists of vocabulary do not reveal very much of practical interest about the relationships—whether the different groups can understand each other, use the same printed materials, and such questions.

However, the availability of *at least* the basic lists is still useful to give a rough idea of the closeness of relationships. The W.A.L.S. Data Sheets Project with grammatical material included may yield more interesting information. The rapidity with which *something* can be achieved with this method means that we are more likely to be able to get word-lists from remote areas where there is no on-going research and where the methods which are more demanding may never be applied at all. A lot of adverse reaction to word-lists in recent years is due to the inflated claims for precision implied by some studies which have made precise classifications depend on a narrow difference of 'percent cognates', and reconstructed detailed 'time-depth' charts on such a basis.

2. Dialect Geography

In the second method, a large number of subjects respond to a diagnostic questionnaire designed to show up known variations of phonology, vocabulary or grammar characterising regional dialects or closely-related languages. A map is then prepared showing the areas in which the rival forms are used delimited by boundary lines ("isoglosses"). Where a number of isoglosses run together in a 'bundle' we have a geographical boundary between two dialects differing in several co-variant features.

Among the *advantages* of this approach is the considerable precision which is possible. Isoglosses in Europe have been found to correspond with centuries-old temporary political frontiers only known from historical records. The method presents in a clear and accurate way the typical 'shading off' of one dialect into another while the main geographical division remains clear.

The main *disadvantage* is the amount of time and work involved in obtaining these results. Some of the classic European and American Dialect Atlases have taken large teams of researchers several decades to complete. This is because of the fine geographical mesh that has to be applied, and the number of subjects needed to ensure representative sampling. This sort of questionnaire is best administered with a literate monolingual population, giving the subject a written example in the 'standard' tongue and asking for a rendering in local home speech. Furthermore it is necessary to have a fairly definite idea of what the criterial dialect-distinguishing features may be before the initial compilation of the questionnaire, therefore the basis is either a subjective appraisal or a prior study using some other method.

However, a modified form of this approach can still be useful. In 1968 I was studying the Lebir (Western) dialect of Bisa, and was therefore able to compare my materials with Fr. Prost's grammar of the Baraka (eastern) dialect (Prost, 1951). From this I was able to recognise the main distinguishing features of the dialects and devise a questionnaire of 20 short sentences which would elicit the divergent forms of the two dialects when translated into Bisa from French or English. This test administered in a number of villages yielded quite a clear-cut isogloss-map showing the location of the main east-west divergence and also showing up a hitherto-unrecognised north-south sub-split (Naden, 1973: App. D).

3. Intelligibility Testing

The method of study used in the research reported here is a newer approach, depending

on efficient and readily-portable tape-recorders (and increasingly-sophisticated populations who are not afraid of them). This was developed by Institute of Linguistics members in Mexico and has not yet been reported in published articles hitherto (several items are forthcoming, N.B. Casad, a similar approach is described in Tay, 1973). Basically, a short sample of free text spoken in the normal local style is recorded at each of the centres to be compared. A number of subjects from each place are then tested on their comprehension of several of the tapes by scoring the correctness of their replies to questions based on the texts. This yields a 'percentage intelligibility' figure for each pair of villages.[4] This figure is non-reflexive—that is, the score of village, A for the speech of B is not necessarily the same as that of B for A (in contrast with the word-list percentage tables where everything on one side of the diagonal is the mirror image of what is on the other). This represents the fact that, for instance, 'provincials' who have to go frequently to a 'metropolis' for economic, political or religious reasons may have to understand the prestige metropolitan speech while the people of the centre do not need to condescend to learn 'rustic' dialects.

The *advantages* of this type of study is that of practical relevance. It can shed light on questions of language use—which forms of speech should be used in schools, in publications, in broadcasting, to cover the largest possible audience with the greatest economy yet without leaving any community with nothing that it can understand. This information is not apparent by comparing word-lists, while the Dialect Geography approach best fits the situation where a standard language is already recognised and research can measure 'dialect' divergences from it. The non-reflexivity of the scores shows up a real factor which is not indicated by the other types of study. This approach is also sensitive to the effects of prejudice—in some cases speakers of a certain dialect *will not* rather than *cannot*, understand speakers of another: this too, may have practical relevance, and may operate when there is very little *linguistic* difference between the dialects.

The *disadvantages* of intelligibility testing include the time taken—it is best to spend at least three days in each centre—and the requirements of personnel and equipment—at least two researchers, one of whom should be familiar with one or more of the forms of speech studied, and at least two tape-recorders with headphones, leads, adaptors, tapes—and transport for the whole lot. In these respects, however, the method is intermediate between the word-list and the Dialect Geography approaches.The investigator is fairly much at the mercy of his local interpreter/s in any place where he is not at home in the language: the ideal is that one of the team should be a linguistically-trained native-speaker of one of the dialects involved. Testing each village with each yields mathematical combinations which soon become impractical, so other methods have to be used to narrow the field so that tests are made in places which are likely to prove dialect-centres surrounded by areas of which they are representative. Also mutual comprehension should only be tested between places with a fairly high word-list cognacy count (over 65 per cent has been suggested as a rule-of-thumb criterion), or with other evidence pointing to close relationship.

The other main problem is the difficulty of obtaining suitable and comparable texts (an increase in team size, amount and quality of equipment, and time devoted to the survey would help matters here). In fairly brief visits to "bush" centres priority goes to personal relations—getting the goodwill of local leaders and people, and making them understand what is intended. Thus 'studio' recording conditions are not attainable, and the degree of back-ground noise, echo, and other impediments to clear comprehension will not be the same for all tapes, while speakers vary in the clarity of their diction. Moreover it is difficult to get a natural piece of speech while insisting on the desirable features of a survey text—about 3 minutes in length, personal experience (not a widely-known folktale or history), and concrete narrative (our tape

of a discussion on the pros and cons of facial marking was a brute both for devising test questions and for evaluating answers). Some of these can be allowed for by noting how well the subjects in the speaker's own hometown can understand his tape, and if necessary applying a correction-factor to other scores for that tape.

THE PROBLEM OF FRA-FRA

The name 'Fra-Fra' has been used very vaguely. In the old days practically anyone from what is now the Upper Region would take Fra-Fra as his gentilic 'surname' when seeking employment in the South, or joining the Police or Army. Westermann and Bryan say

"KUSASI called FRA, FRAFRA (their usual greetings[3]) by neighbouring tribes—NANKANSE... call themselves *nankanse:* according to Rattray they called themselves *gurense* and are callled *nankanse* by the KASENA; also known as FRAFRA." (1970, p. 65)

Callow (1969) considers Nankanse and Fra-Fra subdivisions of Gurenne:—

"*GURENNE.*—This is the proper name for a language more commonly known by the names of its Eastern and Western dialect, Frafra and Nankani . . ." (p. 63).

By 1970 the position of knowledge was roughly as follows:
The boundaries of Mamprusi-land were fairly clear—the White Volta River at the foot of the Gambaga Scarp in the sector relevant to our enquiry. Institute of Linguistics workers were established with the Kusasi and Kasena and the boundaries of these groups known (Kusasi eastward from the Red Volta, Kasena north and west of Navrongo). It was clear that the Buli language was somewhat more distant offshoot of More-Dagbani (Swadesh, 1966: p. 33 and table, p. 36), while the southern edge of the Mossi and Bisa approached the Upper Volta boundary to the north. There remained the Bolgatanga area where the names Talensi, Gorisi, Gurensi, Fra-Fra, Nabdam, Nankanse and Namoo had all been mentioned without clear definition. Callow's tentative conclusion (loc.cit.) was that Fra-Fra and Nankani were the eastern and western dialects respectively of Gurenne. When co-author Schaefer and his wife were assigned to study the language of this area it was felt that 'Fra-Fra' might be considered a pejorative term, so the I.L. refers to them as the team working on the "Gurenne" language (which tends to get pronounced [gorəni). The Schaefers felt some consternation when nobody seemed ever to be heard to use such a name to describe the language when speaking *in* the language.

In July-August 1973 the authors of this report were set to the task of conducting an intelligibility survey in the area between the 'known' language-group areas outlined above. The centres were chosen as follows:—

(1) *Zuarungu:* the location of the I.L. 'Gurenne' team: represents the original speech of Bolga town and its environs while less contaminated with 'strangers' than the city.
(2) *Bongo:* 10 miles north of Bolgatanga: reputed to be a small, distinct enclave.
(3) *Nangodi:* last town eastwards before crossing the Red Volta into Kusasi-land. Known as centre of Nabdam.
(4) *Tongo:* south-east of Bolga: centre of the Talensi.
(5) *Kandiga* (Atiabiisi): north of Doba on the Bolga-Navrongo road, representing the Nankansi of the north-west of the area.

Tapes were recorded at each of these centres and 10 subjects from each place were tested on comprehension of all five tapes.[4] In addition some of the tapes were

tested with subjects from two further centres which did not have their own speech recorded:

Feo (-Nabisi): North of Bongo: as it was reputed that the Zuarungu dialect continued beyond Bongo north and east.

Kologo: 12 miles south of Navrongo: the area south and west of the Bolga-Navrongo and Bolga-Tamale roads was reputed to be Fra-Fra, and this village was taken as a sample.

As a further extension of the survey, tapes were recorded at two Kusasi centres:

(6) *Woricambo.* — As representative of the eastern, or Agole, dialect a speakes from Zoterikuom, a dependency of Woricambo was recorded at Garu 20 miler south of Bawku.

(7) *Zebila:* about midway between Bolgatanga and Bawku, and between the Red Volta which marks the edge of Kusasi and the White Volta which divides this western, Toen Kusaal, from the eastern dialect,

—and these were cross-tested with Zuarungu and Nangodi. (See Appendix B.)

SURVEY FINDINGS

(to date)

The results of the primary (Fra-Fra) survey are presented in Table 1. The five columns represent the five tapes from centres 1–5 detailed above. The seven rows represent the scores of subjects from these five centres and the additional two, Feo and Kologo, on understanding the tapes. These are expressed as a percentage which in most cases is also an aggregate—ten subjects being asked ten questions each on each of the tapes. From uses of the test method in Mexico it may be supposed that a group could use primers and new-literates' materials in a language for which they score 80 per cent or above, while fluent readers should be able to master written material in a dialect where they have 70 per cent oral comprehension.

TABLE I

Fra–Fra Survey Scores

SUBJECTS FROM \ *TAPE*	1 *Zuarungu*	2 *Bongo*	3 *Nangodi*	4 *Tongo*	5 *Kandiga*
Zuarungu	81	61	64	71	82
Bongo	83	77	47	49	78
Nangodi	75	55	81	68	58
Tongo	79	52	94	80	58
Kandiga	85	61	29	50	79
Feo	80	91	62	no test	93
Kologo	90	no test	no test	61	84

COMMENTS

Further explication can probably best be done by commenting on the various centres:—

Zuarungu: Subjects from the other centres understood this form of speech well, in all cases except Nangodi subjects very well: Zuarungu subjects also scored well on the other dialects, though less so on Nangodi and Bongo. The people prefer to call themselves 'Fra-Fra' ['fərʌfərʌ] though some will use 'Gudeni' ['gwrəni] to distinguish themselves from Bongo speakers.

Bongo:—Bongo speech was not readily understood except by their near neighbours at Feo: the people understood Zuarungu and to a slightly smaller extent, Kandiga. A small enclave of about two miles around Bongo contains the Boonsi (sing.: Boona) speaking Booni ['bo:ni]. It was here that people seemed most concerned with dialect/sub-tribe groupings and with their own distinctiveness—in line with a common tendency of the smallest groups to show the greatest chauvinism. It was at Bongo that we most often heard Zuarungu speech described as Gudeni, while the Boonsi consider both groups to be Fra-Fra.

Nangodi.—While Nangodi people only hear Zuarungu at all well, they themselves are only understood by the Tongo subjects. They are Nabdem speaking Nabit ['nabəth]. A number of subjects at centres 1, 2 and 5 declared that they could not hear Nabit, although several of them scored quite highly when encouraged to try.

Tongo.—Tongo subjects understood Zuarungu and Nangodi speech well but have difficulties with the other two. They are not well understood except, perhaps, at Zuarungu. Several Bongo and Kandiga subjects, on hearing the beginning of the Tongo text, announced that it was Nabdam which they did not understand (but often did—see above under Nangodi). They are Talensi ['tae lensi] not [ta'lɛnsi] speaking Talni ['tae ləni].

Kandiga.—The people at Kandiga could only really understand Zuarungu of the forms of speech in the test, although Bongo as well as Zuarungu people could understand Kandiga speech. They call themselves Nankansi [nʌnʌ' kaensi] and speak Nankan ['nʌnkʌnə]. However, this would seem to be a clan rather than a dialect name (see below—Kologo).

Feo.—The Feo subjects understood their neighbours in Bongo and Kandiga, and also Zuarungu (on which they were first tested, so this 80 per cent is on the low side).

Kologo.—Kologo people say they are Nankansi but both on expressed preference and on test scores seemed closer to Zuarungu. It is possible that clan or sub-tribe names here do not correlate with linguistic dialect.

CONCLUSIONS

We may therefore present our tentative conclusions at this stage as to the use of these various names and the relationships involved. Most of the Bolgatanga area speaks the Fra-Fra language, with dialects Northern Nankan (N.W.), Booni (Bongo) and Gudeni (remainder). Nabit and Talni are either more divergent dialects or closely-related languages. In any case all these peoples understand Gudeni Fra-Fra well enough for it to be used as a standard language in the area. Some people consider 'Fra-Fra' an insulting term—perhaps reflecting older attitudes of people in the South to Northerners in general. Gudeni people often, on the other hand, call themselves

simply Fra-Fra. This 'we are the true people, the others are a dialect' attitude is common—Prost was told that the dialect he studied was simply 'Bisa' while the westerners spoke 'Lebir': my (eastern) Kusasi colleague, Mr. Philip Ayam after identifying Zebila people as Toendem was asked what his own group were and immediately replied 'Kusasi'.

APPENDICES

A. Cognate Counts and Population Figures

100-word lists were taken for Nankan and Nabit in the course of the present survey. These may be compared with the results for the other groups drawn from Swadesh, 1966 as presented in Table 2 below (some 1966 figures adjusted from additional data):

TABLE II

Nankan				
	Gudeni			
91		Talni		
83	91		Kusaal	
82	90	93		
81	82	91	90	Nabit

These figures are so high that a few per cent of difference cannot be considered significant. It is noticeable, however, that there are two groups of scores separated by 10 per cent—81–83 and 90–93. These groups Talni-Kusaal-Nabit together over against Nankani-Gudeni, with an overlap in that Talni and Kusaal are also close to Gudeni.

It does not appear that the 1970 Census will have a volume of 'tribal' statistics like the 1960 Census Appendix E. Dr. J. C. Callow and Miss C. Root of the I.L. have made an extrapolation of the 1960 figures to yield some indication of present size of these groups. The method was to take the 1960 ratio of the number of members of a tribe in the whole of Ghana to the population of the census district/s covering the tribal 'homeland', and to apply the same proportion to the 1970 population of the said districts. The resulting approximations are:

Fra-Fra	...	...	...	204,000	(approx. $\frac{1}{3}$ Nankanse)
Kusasi	...	...	...	244,000	
Nabdam	...	...	...	18,000	
Talensi	...	...	...	34,000	

B. Extension to Kusaal

Co-author Naden, assisted by Mr. Philip Ayam—himself a Kusasi of the Eastern (Agole) group, has tested the Zuarungu and Nangodi tapes, along with Zebila and Woricambo ones, in the two main Kusasi areas. Meanwhile co-author Schaefer ran the same tapes at Zuarungu and Nangodi. These results are in need of further checking as only 8 Agole Kusaal subjects were tested (6 from Misiga, 4 miles East of Bawku, 2 from Woricambo living at Garu) and the Toendem subjects were from Zebila, so that a sample from a smaller centre off the main road would be an advantageous supplement. The results as presented in Table 3 below are, nevertheless, suggestive:

TABLE III

Fra-Fra/Kusasi Scores

SUBJECTS FROM \ *TAPE*	1 *Zuarungu*	3 *Nangodi*	6 *Woricambo*	7 *Zebila*
Zuarungu	84	64	60	67
Nangodi	75	84	77	66
Kusasi/Agole	26	45	80	60
Kusasi/Toen	54	49	80	77

A comparison of these figures amongst themselves and with Table 1 will show:—

(1) The Kusasi do not readily understand the Gudeni or the Nabdam.
(2) Zuarungu subjects hear the Kusasi about as well as they hear Booni and Nabit.
(3) The Nabdam are linguistically, as geographically, intermediate between Fra-Fra and Kusaal—they hear Agole as well as Gudeni and Toen as well as Talni (and both better than Booni and North Nankan).

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FOOTNOTE

1. As would seem to be the case with the Talni informant behind the list in Swadesh 1966; my data agree with Fortes against this list where the 'TL' has initial *ŋ* against *ny* throughout the group (items 26, 41, 43, 54, 57, 81, 84).