

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

THE MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE ADA DISTRICT

M.E. Kropp Dakubu

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ada District is an administrative district of Eastern Region of Ghana, which more or less coincides geographically with the traditional Ada state. It is bounded by the Volta River on the east, the sea on the south. To the west it is bounded by the Ga-Dangbe District which traditionally speaks the same language as the Ada District, namely Dangme (also known as Adangme, Dangbe, Adangbe). To the north its closest neighbours are Ewe-speaking. The Ada area is traditionally regarded as speaking a distinctive dialect of Dangme, and although there is considerable internal variation, (Apronti and Dakubu, 1972) this view can be accepted.

This paper is concerned with a portion of the data collected as part of a sociolinguistic survey of the Dangme-speaking area, which was carried out in connection with the multidisciplinary Dangme Area Survey of the Institute of African Studies, Legon. The Ada District was the first to be surveyed. The data examined herein were collected by Dangme-speaking students, in the long vacations of 1972 and 1973.² I attempt an initial examination of the district as a multilingual area, showing the relative status of the various languages spoken within the district. The paper is limited to a definition of the broad linguistic configuration of the area.

The data are drawn from a total of thirty-three localities, most of which

are rather small villages (see Table 1). Almost every village along the beach was surveyed, but in inland areas such complete coverage was not possible. The sample was constructed according to a quota, the parameters being age, sex and degree of formal education. No one under the age of 15 was interviewed.

Table 2 shows the structure of the sample in terms of the first two of these parameters. It is rather more evenly distributed than the general population, because of the method of selection. The relatively large proportion of respondents from the oldest age group is probably relatable to the amount of leisure time people have to spend answering questionnaires. The ratio of men to women in the sample is also not a reflection of the structure of the population at large. 27.0 of the sample - 37.4 of the males and 15.7 of the females - had been to school. This is somewhat lower than in the population at large, and probably reflects the disproportionate number of older people.

The Ada District is almost wholly rural. Big Ada is the focus of the traditional social and political organization, and Ada Foa is the current administrative centre and the home of such institutions as the Ada Secondary School and the government-run Health Post. Otherwise the main occupations are fishing and fish processing and trading, farming and salt extraction and trading.

TABLE I
THE SAMPLE - GEOGRAPHICAL

Villages Surveyed	No. Respondents	Population 15 and over (1970 Census)*
Coast: East:		
Afrive	30	105
Azizanya	31	422
Otrokpe	48	230
Totimekope	46	591
Ocanseykope	27	352
Anyakpor	26	113
Patunkope	17	124
Adedetsekope	22	270
Songutscekpa	9	154
Elevanyo	35	262
Puteh (Upper + Lower)	81	546
Totope	29	331
West:		
Lolonya	56	561
Goi	74	882
Akplabanya	65	771
Anyemam	77	964
Wekumagbe	35	391
Total	708	7069
Ada:		
Big Ada	67	2282
Ada Foah (Upper + Lower)	119	2394
Total	186	4676
Inland:		
Togbloku	49	477
Kunyenya	17	?
Bedeku	41	322
Tamstoku	34	646
Dogobon	18	296
Adokope	20	492
Bonikope	54	156
Koluedor	33	521
Toflokpo	84	215
Agbedrafor	20	?
Sege Junction	53	620
Sege Nakomkope	51	186
Koni	17	?
Luta	11	?
Total	502	over 3741
Total	1396	Entire District: 27,374

* ? indicates that the locality was not distinguished in the Census report.

TABLE 2
SAMPLE - BY AGE AND SEX

Age	Coast		Adas		Inland		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
15 - 19	50	36	9	14	44	35	103	85
20 - 24	65	52	14	18	41	39	120	109
25 - 29	55	53	13	10	35	39	103	102
30 - 34	35	34	7	8	26	23	68	65
35 - 39	33	27	5	9	18	21	56	57
40 - 44	32	23	11	7	18	17	61	47
45 - 49	24	23	5	5	17	15	46	43
50 - 54	23	23	7	6	17	12	47	41
55 - 59	21	33	8	7	19	16	48	56
60+	<u>38</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>62</u>
Total	376	332	92	94	261	241	729	667
	708		186		502		1396	

For purposes of comparison the district is divided into three. The Adas are treated as a geographical unit in virtue of being relatively urbanized as well as being a socio-political centre for the entire district. The coast and the inland villages are distinguished, in virtue of the different occupations of their inhabitants, namely fishing plus some farming versus farming. The coast is further subdivided into an eastern section, between the Volta and the Songaw Lagoon, and a western section, from the western side of the Songaw to Wekumagbe. It is hypothesized that the Lagoon, which is a large one, is a natural barrier to communication, and that somewhat different configurations may occur on either side of it. Dialect study and an investigation of multi-

lingualism among the unschooled on the coast from Ada to Prampram, undertaken as part of the survey, have provided tentative confirmation of this hypothesis. Afrive is actually on an island in the Volta opposite Ada, but as a fishing village is included here with the coastal villages.

2. A LINGUISTIC PROFILE

2.1 THE STATUS OF DANGME

Dangme, and in particular the Ada dialect of Dangme, is unquestionably the major linguistic vehicle of the district at least as far as this sample can show. For well over 90% of all respondents, the Ada dialect was "home-town" language (*ma gbi*), the first language learned in life, and the

language spoken best at the time of the survey. The figure is slightly lower in the Adas than in the other sections of the sample:

Coast:	688	97.1%
Adas:	172	92.4%
Inland:	483	96.2%
Total:	1343	96.2%

Exceptions to this pattern seem to be clustered mainly around Big Ada and the larger settlements east of the lagoon. Among the fifty-three individuals involved, one or more of an individual's home-town language, first language learned in life, or the language currently spoken the best was another dialect of Dangme: Ningo, Shai, Krabo or Osudoku; or another southern Ghanaian language, namely Ga, Akan or Ewe; or another West African language, namely Hausa. One individual reported her "home-town" language to be Fula, although her first language and the language she thought she spoke best were the Ada dialect of Dangme.

For twenty of the fifty-four, the Ada dialect of Dangme was the language they now spoke best, but twenty-one were completely non-Ada, in that neither ethnic, first nor best language was Ada. This included nine Dangmes, for whom all three categories of language were the Osudoku (1), Shai (3), Ningo (4) or Krabo (1) dialect. Four had Ewe, three had Ga and one had Akan in each category. Four, living in Ada Foa, had Hausa for all three.

In several cases the first language learned and the currently best language were not the same, indicating a shift in the linguistic behaviour of the individual, either from one dialect of Dangme to another or from one language to another. Five people had shifted from the Ningo dialect, which was their ethnic ("Home town") and first-learned dialect, to Ada, and one from Ada to Shai. Seven had shifted from the Ewe language to Ada. For five of them, Ada was also the language of ethnic identity. One had shifted in the opposite direction. There were also a few cases of shifting between Ada and Ga, Ada and Akan, in both

directions.

When the language of ethnic identity, the *ma gbi*, is not the same as the first language learned, it means (usually) that a shift has occurred in the primary linguistic patterns not of an individual but of generations in a family group, or at any rate between the individual and one of his parents: an individual learned one language first, although one or both parents spoke a different one. The sample showed one or two shifts of this kind between Ga and Ada, Ewe and Ada, Ada and another Dangme dialect, in both directions, one shift from Ada to Akan, one from Ningo to Akan, and one from Fula to Ada.

In no case were more than two languages or dialects involved in patterns of shift. That is, ethnic, first and best language were never all different. If the language of ethnic identity was the same as the first language learned, then the language currently spoken best might be one of these or a different one, but if they were different, then the current best language was always the same as one of them. If the language of ethnic identity and the first language were not the same, then either the first language continued in later life as best language or there was a "return" to the language of ethnic identity.

In almost all cases, the "home-town" language or language of ethnic identity can be interpreted as the language of the previous generation, and specifically as the language of the respondent's father. (The Dangme are essentially patrilineal in social organization.) The exceptions to this are insignificant statistically for this sample, but interesting as indicators of socio-linguistic patterns that might repay further study. Two individuals said that their "home town" language was Dangme, which was also their mothers' language but not their fathers', even though they said they had learned their fathers' language (Ewe) first. It may be significant that both were female. Two others said that their father's language, mother's language,

and their own first and best language were all Dangme, but gave something else as their language of ethnic identity - one each for Ga and Ewe. The actual history of each case is not known, but it seems likely that a shift to Dangme as best language (at least) had already occurred in the previous generation, but that the language remains as a symbol of group identification.

Another interesting case was that of a man who gave Dangme as his "home town" language and first language and mother's language, but stated that his father had two languages, Dangme, from the father's mother, and Ga from the father's father. It seems likely that the choice of response to "home-town" language in such a case is related to where the respondent decides to settle.

In all cases where the "home-town" language was Dangme but the first language learned was something else, the first language had been acquired outside the Dangme-speaking area, except in two cases where the first language learned (in both cases Ewe) was also the language of the respondent's mother.

The interpretation of "home-town" language as language of ethnic identity, identified particularly with the father, is not valid for the four individuals in Ada Foa who gave their "home-town", first, best, father's and mother's language all as Hausa, but gave Gonja as their "tribe" (and did not make any claim at all to speak the Gonja language). The position of Hausa among northerners and especially Muslims (one of the four gave his profession as Imam-butcher) is special, and invites further investigation (see Dakubu 1977).

2.2 SECOND LANGUAGES

Dangme is not a language that is widely known outside its own area. It is also not particularly large, in the Ghanaian context, in terms of the number of its speakers (slightly over half a million). One might therefore expect a fairly widespread know-

ledge of other languages. This proves to be so, although it must be stressed that more than a quarter of the whole sample and a third of the women in it are by their own report monoglot speakers of Dangme. Dangme was itself a second language for 29 respondents, and Ada was a second dialect for 8.

Ga, Akan and Ewe, which are the languages that principally appear as occurring with Dangme in the ethnic-first-best language system, are also the major second languages, with the addition of English. Table 3 lists the main languages that respondents reported themselves as speaking, whether they thought they spoke them well or only a little.

In the district as a whole, Ga is clearly the dominant second language, but there is also significant geographical variation in this respect. Table 4 compares the two sections of the coast. At the eastern end of the coast Ewe is equally popular, but in the western part this is not the case. There is evidence that the popularity of Ewe continues to fall and that of Ga to rise as one continues west beyond the Ada District. In the Adas themselves, however, near the eastern end of the coast, Ga is markedly more widely known than anywhere else in the district.

Polyglottism is in fact generally higher in the Adas, the relatively urbanized centre, than elsewhere, as the figures for average number of languages per speaker and also the figures for monoglottism (i.e., those who know only one language,) show. It is also the only section of the district where the second most widespread second language is not Ewe but English, although in the Inland areas English seems to have a very slight edge over Ewe among men.

In the district as a whole English and Akan seem to be just about tied for third place, but again there is considerable variation, this time related to sex. In all three geographical divisions English is more widespread than Akan among men, but the reverse is true among women. The differences

TABLE 3

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS PER LANGUAGE, IN PERCENTAGES OF TOTAL SAMPLE

	Coast		Adas		Inland		Total		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Dangme	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ga	57.9	44.2	72.8	64.8	47.1	49.7	55.9	49.1	52.7
Ewe	51.3	35.2	47.8	39.3	34.0	34.4	44.7	35.5	40.3
Akan:									
Akwapim	6.3	8.4	5.7	19.1	16.8	17.8	11.5	13.3	12.3
Fanti	2.3	4.5	2.1	4.2	3.0	4.9	2.6	4.6	3.5
Other	11.4	12.6	10.8	17.2	13.7	11.2	12.2	12.7	12.4
English	35.6	11.4	60.8	42.5	36.7	13.6	39.3	16.6	28.5
Hausa	1.5	1.5	11.9	6.3	6.8	4.5	4.8	3.2	4.0
Nzema	0.5	0.3	2.1	0.0	1.1	2.9	0.9	1.1	1.0
Dagbani	0.2	0.6	3.2	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.8	0.2	0.5
Yoruba	0.2	0.3	3.2	0.0	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.5	0.7
French	2.9	0.0	1.0	2.1	0.7	0.4	1.9	0.4	1.2
Dangme only	21.8	36.7	6.52	19.1	29.8	38.5	22.7	34.9	28.5
Average Number of Languages per Speaker:	2.71	2.19	3.33	2.94	2.63	2.40	2.75	2.37	2.57

TABLE 4
NUMBERS OF SPEAKERS PER LANGUAGE: THE COAST

	East		West	
	M	F	M	F
Dangme	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ga	56.0	47.7	60.7	40.1
Ewe	58.7	45.5	40.5	23.0
Akan:				
Akwapim	5.8	8.8	7.1	7.8
Fante	1.7	2.2	3.2	7.2
Other	11.6	13.8	11.1	11.1
English	37.6	14.4	33.3	7.8
Hausa	2.2	1.1	0.6	1.9
Nzema	0.8	0.5	0.0	0.0
Dagbani	0.4	1.1	0.0	0.0
Yoruba	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.6
French	2.6	0.0	3.2	0.0
Dangme only	18.8	28.8	26.1	46.0
Average Number of Languages per Speaker:	2.77	2.35	2.60	2.00

are of 10% or more, except for women in the Adas, of whom approximately 2% more spoke English, and Inland men of whom only about 5% more spoke English. Knowledge of Akan seems to increase from east to west along the coast, although never rivalling Ga, and there is evidence that, as for Ga, this trend continues beyond the Ada District. Fante seems to be distinctly less widely known than other dialects of Akan.

Hausa is a minor language, particularly on the coast. Yoruba, Dagbani and French are definitely rare, but are claimed by at least one speaker in each. It is noteworthy that the majority of French speakers are at the eastern end of the coast, the part nearest

Togo.

The woman who reported Fulani as her ethnic language also claimed to speak it. One person in Ada Foah claimed to have learned Ahanta in Takoradi. In Big Ada a man employed as a driver in Tema Harbour claimed to know a little Chinese and Japanese, which he spoke with visitors there.

There are further differences of linguistic patterning between the sexes. In every division, including both subdivisions of the coast, women have a lower ratio of languages to speakers, and a much higher proportion of monoglots. Even in the Adas, where women are more polyglot and include fewer monoglots than men elsewhere the difference between

men and women is just as great. Ga, Ewe and English are all consistently spoken by a higher proportion of men than of women, except that Inland approximately the same proportions (2% more women) speak Ga. Akan on the other hand seems for some reason to be more popular among women than men. It is spoken almost everywhere by a very small but consistently higher percentage of women, and in the Adas by a considerably higher percentage.

From east to west along the coast the proportion of women speakers for every language except Akan drops considerably - a trend that continues to the west until one approaches another administrative centre, Prampram. For men, knowledge of English and Ewe decreases, although not quite so drastically as among women, but knowledge of Ga increases. In the Adas more men than women know every language except Akan. Inland, however, where polyglottism is generally lowest, except with respect to Akan, and monoglottism highest, the sexes are about equal for every language except English.

2.3 THE LINGUISTIC ENVIRONMENT

The linguistic environment of the Ada District can be visualized in terms of a series of receding concentric circles. In the middle circle, at the centre of the collective linguistic consciousness, would be Dangme, the first and best language of the vast majority, and their language of ethnic and geographical identity, especially in the form of its Ada dialect. At a considerable distance out from this centre are found Ewe and Ga. Their relative positions and their closeness to the centre vary considerably between different parts of the district. Akan is beyond these, but like Dangme, Ewe and Ga is one of the languages towards which shifting occasionally takes place in individuals who regard themselves as Adas. English is not one of these, and therefore is to be considered as farther still from the centre even though sometimes more people claim to speak it. Ewe, Ga and Akan all share geographical boundaries with

Dangme, although only Ewe has a boundary in common with the Ada dialect.

Out beyond these languages we meet Hausa and then Nzema, Dagbani, Yoruba, French. Often hardly anyone in a locality is aware of their presence. In some localities they are rarely if ever heard. Yoruba and Hausa were reported to be sometimes heard from passing salesmen. On the dim horizon is Fulani, of which there are speakers resident in the district, but which very few thought to mention, and only one respondent spoke.³ A small number of respondents in the Adas were aware of Kotokoli, "Kroo" and Dagaare in their neighbourhoods, and several recognized "Dahomeyan Ewe" to be present as a distinct language, that two or three also spoke.

3. THE POSITION OF ENGLISH

English is the only non-Ghanaian language that is claimed as spoken by more than a quarter of the sample: 28.5%. However, both proportion of speakers and status as L2 relative to other languages are much higher among men than women. It is claimed to be spoken by 39% of the men, and ranks third after Ga and Ewe, with 14% more speakers than Akan, but among the women it is spoken by only 16% and ranks fourth, well below the three Ghanaian languages. It may or may not be significant that while about half the women (52.2%) who claimed to speak English claimed to speak it well, with the rest claiming to speak it only a little, almost two-thirds (63.7%) of the men claimed to speak it well. Just what this claim really means in terms of performance ability for either group is impossible to say. At any rate, not only do significantly more men than women claim to speak English, but they claim to speak it better.

As expected, the vast majority of respondents reported having learned English at school. Only about 5% of each sex reported having learned it at home (5 individuals) or elsewhere.

It was suspected that the pattern of multilingualism obtaining among those who

had learned English might conceivably differ from the pattern in the sample at large. The number of English-Ga, English-Ewe and English-Akan pairs were therefore counted, and also the number of speakers who spoke only Dangme and English. The number of English (and Dangme) speakers who speak Ga, Ewe or Akan was then compared with the number of speakers of these languages in the sample at large. The figures are displayed on Table 5.

between the English speakers and the general sample is bigger for women, although not so drastic. It seems then that among English speakers in this sample there is a very much higher rate of polyglottism than in the sample at large, that this has to do with a more widespread knowledge of Akan and Ga among English speakers and occurs in spite of a reduced incidence of knowledge of Ewe, and that the trends that obtain among English

TABLE 5

ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES

% English speakers who speak:		Ga	Akan	Ewe	Dangme only
	M	72.1	31.7	40.7	7.6
	F	86.4	52.2	29.7	2.7
% of sample at large:					
	M	55.9	25.0	44.7	22.7*
	F	49.1	29.0	35.5	34.9*

* Figures for monoglot speakers of Dangme.

The differences between the English speakers and the general sample are dramatic. The proportion of English speakers who speak Ga is far higher than in the sample at large, and so is the proportion of Akan speakers, especially among women. The proportion who speak no additional language is also much smaller.

Even more dramatic is the reversal of the patterns for men and women. Among the relatively small proportion of women who claimed to know English, that is, knowledge of Ga and Akan were extremely high, much higher than among men, and hardly any did not know at least one of Ga, Akan or Ewe.

Unlike Ga and Akan, Ewe has a somewhat smaller percentage of speakers among English speakers than among the sample at large. As with the other languages, the difference

speakers as a group are present in a more extreme form among women than among men.

The reasons for this situation cannot be fully explained at present. Obviously it is not the English language itself that leads to more widespread knowledge of Ga and Akan and less widespread knowledge of Ewe, but something about the circumstances in which English is learned, which alters the multi-linguistic *gestalt* in the population that it affects. Since 95% of English speakers reported having learned it at school, one supposes that the school environment must have something to do with it. It is a common observation that Ga is much used by girls in secondary schools, but this does not explain its increased incidence among men, or the increased incidence of Akan. In any case, although the boarding school

environment, with students from different parts of the country, is an attractive explanation, it cannot account for the situation described because the majority of these people who claim to be English speakers did not proceed beyond primary school.

It would be premature to suggest that the pattern in the Ada District is typical of Ghana, even of rural Ghana. A much smaller survey carried out among about one hundred members of a single Ga lineage living in Accra and its farming villages indicated that in that group, English tended to replace a Ghanaian second language in the individual's linguistic repertoire, especially among those under 25 (Dakubu 1981, Chap.2). The environment in which Ga is spoken is much different from the one in which Dangme is found. Dangme is surrounded by languages that are spoken by far larger numbers of people (Akan and Ewe), whose speakers have in the past contributed significant numbers to the Dangme-speaking population and have had considerable cultural impact (also Akan and Ewe), or have impact today as the languages of modern centres of political, economic and cultural innovation (Ga and probably also A'an). Ga, on the other hand, is subject to only one such powerful linguistic force from inside Ghana, that of A'an, and the general level of polyglottism is accordingly less. Addition of English to the repertoire in this situation is apparently not accompanied by a general rise in polyglottism.

NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented to the 12th West African Languages Congress, held at Ife, Nigeria, 14-20 March, 1976. Although the data discussed are

therefore more than ten years old, no comparable study has been made in the area since, and the Editorial Committee feels that the material is still of interest.

2. Fieldwork in 1973 was largely supported by a grant from the West African Linguistics Society, which is gratefully acknowledged. Further findings of this survey are included Dakubu, ed., 1988, and Dakubu (in press).
3. The questionnaire included the question "Are there people around here who speak languages other than your own?", "What language do you speak with them?", and (farther on in the questionnaire) "Are there any languages spoken around here that you don't understand at all?".

REFERENCES

- Apronti, E.O. and M.E. Kropp Dakubu, 1972. Towards a dialect geography of Dangme, in *Research Review* Vol.8 No.3, pp.35-46.
- Dakubu, M.E. Kropp, 1977. A note on Hausa in Ghana, in *Papers in Ghanaian Linguistics* No.2, pp. 14-22.
1981. *One Voice: the linguistic culture of an Accra lineage*. Leiden: African Studies Centre.
- Dakubu, M.E. Kropp, editor, 1988. *The Languages of Ghana*. International African Institute/Kegan Paul International.
- Dakubu, M.E. Kropp (in press). *The Dangme Language: an introductory survey*. Macmillan.