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.
1. INTRODUCTION

In May, 1979, my wife Kate and I established our residence in Hohoe, Volta Region. With the help of many local leaders we began a sociolinguistic survey of the ten non-Ewe language communities located between Havo and Kedjebi, approximately. By the first of July we were underway; by the end of February, 1980, the field work was complete.

1.1 The Survey Aim

Linguists around the world are developing sociolinguistic survey materials and techniques which can give an inside picture of the language abilities, activities and attitudes of an area's communities.

Ghana's Prof. Gilbert Ansre (1975:68) with one of his colleagues said,

The major use of sociolinguistic surveys is to provide as accurate and as relevant a picture of the "situation" as possible to the many individuals or groups that have the task of making the decisions on matters related to language and to interpret the implications of their findings for the particular community under study in order that decisions may be based on sound information.

It is the aim of this survey to study the practical use of the standard variety of a major regional language in the environment of a minor regional language community and also the social ramifications of its use. For the mother-tongue speakers of the minor regional languages, familiarity with neighboring minor languages is explored as well as the comprehension of the most current examples of literature in the standard form of the major regional language, standard Ewe.

We have approached this field with an "applied" rather than a "theoretical" linguistic viewpoint. The idea behind the project was to field test some methods in order to get some useful information. It is our desire to present data here which will be helpful to people in the area under study.

The survey is designed to help answer such questions as:

a. How many (or what %) of native speakers of Language A understand Language B? To what level and for what purposes?

b. Is bilingualism in B for speakers of A increasing, stabilized, or decreasing?

c. What are the attitudes of speakers of A toward the use of B? Toward the use of A?

In the course of this study we found it possible to gather enough data in a reasonable length of time to answer these questions. Some of the reasons for this include the fact that the central Volta Region has many language groups in relatively close proximity. The settlement sites are both accessible by road as well as concentrated population centers. In places, for example, where settlement patterns are solitary in nature and scattered (as in a pastoral community) the time involved for visiting homesteads would certainly lengthen. Another factor contributing to the survey's completion was the number of formally educated people among the local town populations. The availability of such educated people allowed a high amount of local participation in the survey work, in areas such as translating the survey materials into the local language, making initial village contacts, gathering data, and interpreting during village visits. In environments where such help is not available, survey methods would need to be adjusted.
1.2 Setting and Background

A language map of the central Volta Region could neatly be overlaid onto a
topographical map. Language boundaries coincide strikingly with changes in the
geographical features of the area. Two diagonal mountain ranges run northeast
to southwest in this 80 kilometer long by 40 kilometer wide strip. A 15 to 20
kilometer wide plain divides the two mountain ranges, as shown by the map of
Figure 1. This plain is the territory of one of the Volta Region’s two major lang-

uage communities, the Ewes. Surrounding and south of the southern mountain range
live more Eves. North of the northern mountain range live indigenous Twi speakers,
members of the other major regional language.

In the two mountain ranges of the central Volta Region live ten non-Ewe/non-

Twi language communities. Historically, scholars have had difficulty classify-
ing at least nine of these. Westermann (1927:96-120) put these nine and four
others from central Togo into a class by themselves, calling them the Togo–Rem-

nant Group. Recent studies have maintained this distinction (Mukarovsky 1977:26,
Heine 1968:294), with the suggestion by Heine that they show their greatest sim-

ilarities to the Guang language family. The tenth language of our study, called
Nkonya, is in the Guang family. The other nine languages (listed from North to
South) are traditionally known as Buem, Bowiri, Akpafu/Lolobi, Likpe, Santrokofi,
Logba, Avatime, Tafi and Nyangbo. Though they each have other names for their
own languages we shall refer to them by these more familiar names.

Population figures have been steadily rising for these groups, but as the
figures show in Table 1 there is little increase in local resident populations.
The explanation for this lies in the phenomenon of rural-urban migration, a fact-
or which has been affecting all of Ghana’s rural areas (Caldwell, 1969).

The largest of these ten groups is Buem with an estimated 25,000 total speak-
ers. The smallest groups are Nyangbo and Tafi each with around 3,000 speakers.
The figures for Traditional Area Residents include residents whose mother tongue
is other than the local languages, thus, the number of local residents sometimes
outnumbers the Group Totals (see Table 1 Likpe, 1960).

1.3 Sampling Methods

Throughout the survey we used quota sampling methods. We chose members of
the local community in order to obtain results differentiated according to male/
female distinctions as well as for five different age ranges. Two ranges were
chosen above 30 years and three below. By using the quota sampling method we
were able to (1) obtain balanced, comparable data from group to group, and (2)
observe language learning patterns among the age groups.

Survey samples were taken at each separate settlement site in the ten
language communities. Only Buem varied in this regard. In Buem we sampled the
towns were, according to government policy, Ewe has been used as a medium of
instruction in the schools, i.e., Eastern Buem. The western section, where Twi
is used in the schools, has been surveyed for Twi comprehension by Frempong and
Leonhard (1978) using a simple narrative Twi text. (It was partially because of
the low Twi averages reported by them that this Ewe study was undertaken.) One
town was chosen from the western area and tested for Ewe comprehension for com-
parative purposes. The scores of this town, however, proved much lower than the
corresponding “Ewe” side and would misleadingly lower the averages of the towns
where Ewe has been used. These results are therefore not incorporated into the
Buem survey results.

2. THE COMPREHENSION TESTS AND RESULTS

One of the main aims of the survey was to study the language comprehension
skills of individuals from these ten language communities. We investigated two
areas in this regard: