Chapter 11
Migration and Language Dynamics:
Reflections From the University of Education Community, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Many different cultural traits are assimilated through migration; one such trait is language. In the processes of migration, many languages are moved from their ecological domain to new ecologies. About 60 known languages are spoken in the country of Ghana, and language experts argue that at the initial stages of migration, migrants might keep their indigenous languages. However, with time, the intents of maintaining the original language become wobbly. This study examines language dynamics in migration at University of Education, a multilinguistic community with diverse migrants. This case study uses a mixed methods approach. Findings indicate evidence of code-switching, code-mixing, dilution of original language, language shift, and total loss of original language and development of a new language. Negotiation of language use among migrants is paramount in or during migration so that existing indigenous languages will be saved from extinction as well as to maintain their vitality and the identity of the people who owns it.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is defined as movement across the boundary of an aerial unit; this could be within or outside a country (Castles, 2000; Geremia et al., 2014). Migration has become a frequent occurrence in human society, with hundreds of millions of people having migrated or planning to migrate in the course of their lifetimes. National populations have not only expanded but continue to maintain an accelerated rate of growth (Lewis, 1971; White, 2016). Migration then becomes a major cause of demographic distribution within and beyond country borders. There are numerous reasons why people migrate; some with the intention of eventually returning to their original places of residence, whilst others vouch never to return because of the conditions that pushed them out. In Ghana, many people migrate from their places of origin to other places in the country for economic reasons (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Kwankye et al, 2009; Sabates-Wheeler et al, 2008; Wong, 2014). However, studies have revealed other motivations for migration: Women, especially, have been found to migrate mostly on marital grounds (Awumbila, 2015).

It has also been suggested that migration is a key extra-linguistic factor leading to contact-induced language change (Czaika & Reinprecht, 2022; Kerswill, 2006). That is, in every case of migration, except where a homogeneous group of people moves to an isolated location, language or dialect contact ensues (Kerswill, 2006; Regan, 2017; Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Trudgill 1994). It follows, therefore, that migration has profound sociolinguistic consequences, as the demographic balance of the outgoing and incoming populations is altered. Sociolinguistically, the critical directional parameter is that of an in-out migration, which typically brings with it demographic changes in terms of age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, language, and politics. At the same time, social network densities will change both for the migrants and the destination societies, with the result being that both language change and language shifts (i.e., from one language to another) may increase (Kerswill, 2006; Waldinger, 2015).

Another noticeable effect of migration is the gradual eradication of ethnicity, language differentials and traditions (European Union, 2018; Lewis, 1971). Other effects include inter-marriage and assimilation of cultures. For instance, emigrants may adopt some of the cultural traits of their new place of abode and also abandon some of their existing cultural traits. Of the many different cultural traits that are assimilated, one key trait is language. This is the primary reason why, on a global scale, people are encouraged to learn other languages: to enhance their possible modes of communication as they move out of their immediate environment (Gong et. al, 2020; Hampel & Stickler, 2005). However, in the process of learning other languages, people can dilute their own original languages. Many African countries have diluted their rich African native languages because of the contact they have had with the colonial masters. This process continues today due to migration (Danso-Wiredu & Brako, 2021; Okafor et al, 2022).

There are more than sixty indigenous Ghanaian languages spoken across the country (Lentz & Nugent, 2000; Owu-Ewie, 2017), of which only fifteen - Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Mfantse, Ga, Gonja, Gurune, Kasem, Nzema, Kusaal, Sisaali, Buli - are studied in schools (Lentz & Nugent, 2000; Owu-Ewie, 2017). Language experts (Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Olwig, 2013; Rumbaut, 2004) explain that individuals in the initial stages of migration maintain their indigenous languages, especially if the migration was carried out by the entire family. However, with time, the original languages are diluted and even become extinct when the generations that follow refuse to speak their original languages to embrace those of their new destinations. For example, such is usually the case because local languages are geographically based and, as individuals and communities move away from their hometown, they are usually obligated to learn other languages, especially those who speak minority languages.

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