

## NEGOTIATING IDENTITY THROUGH LANGUAGE AT A MARKET IN ACCRA: THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS GĀ SPEAKERS

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### Abstract

An individual's language is part of their identity and once that language is under any threat, their identity is also affected. In this article, I investigated the position of the indigenous Gā language against the major migrant languages that are used at Kanseshi market in Accra, Ghana. I sought to determine how the native Gā speakers were affected by this position, if and how they negotiated and asserted their identity using their language and what motivated the strategies they employed in doing so. Sixty-two native Gā traders, drivers and conductors were selected as participants. Based on aspects of Swann's (1987) identity negotiation framework and Maslow (1943)'s hierarchy of needs, and using a mixed research design, findings indicated that much to the dissatisfaction of the participants, Akan, not Gā, was the dominant language because many Ghanaians speak Akan either as a first or second language. Even though this situation threatens the position of Gā, the native speakers are unable to properly assert their language because of historical and governmental policies that exist on their land. Also, because of the participants' own motivation to meet their physiological needs, they use Gā as a display cue but readily switch to Akan.

**Key words:** Language, Identity, Gā, Ghana, identity negotiation, Maslow

### Nɔdoomɔ

Mɔ fɛɛ mɔ lɛ ewiɛmɔ fata eyɔsemɔ su lɛ he, hewɔ lɛ keji ate shi awo ewiɛmɔ lɛ nɔŋŋ pɛ, eyasaa eyɔsemɔ su lɛ ni tɔɔ mɔ ni eji lɛ he. Ye niŋmaa nɛɛ mli lɛ, migbelɛshi ketao he ni Gā shikwɛɛ wiɛmɔ lɛ damɔ ye wiɛmɔ krokomei ni ji mɔfrobɔlɔi awiɛmɔi wului ni awiɛɔ ye Kaneshi jara lɛ nɔ ye Gā maŋ lɛ mli ye Ghana. Mitao akɛ mayɔsɛ bɔ ni Gā wiɛmɔ nɛɛ shidaamɔ lɛ gbaa Gā Ga shikwɛɛ wielɔi anaa, keji amehāa ayɔɔ mei ni amɛji ketɔɔ amɛwiɛmɔ lɛ nɔ, nɔ ni woɔ amɛ hewalɛ kefeɔ nakai, kɛ gbɛi anɔ ni amɛtɔɔ amɛfeɔ nakai. Ahala Gā shikwɛɛ jarayelɔi, tsɔnekudɔlɔi kɛ aplankɛi ni yikule shɛɔ nyɔŋmai ekpaa kɛ enyɔ ni amɛhahai saji ahɛtoo. Nibimɔi lɛ damɔ Swann (1987) gbɛjianɔtoo ni kɔɔ yɔsemɔ su hewiɛmɔ kɛ naayeli lɛ, kɛ Maslow (1943) gbɛjianɔtoo ni kɔɔ nibii ni he hia adesai ye ŋɛlei anɔ, kɛ agbɛnɛ hu nitaomɔ mli gbɛi srɔtoi anɔ. Nɔ ni jɛ mli keba lɛ tɔɔ akɛ ɛŋɔɔ mei ni ahala lɛ naa akɛ Akan moŋ, shi jɛɛ Gā wiɛmɔ lɛ, ehe shi jogbaŋŋ ejaake Ghanabii babaoo ji mei ni wiewɔ Akan akɛ klenklen wiɛmɔ loo wiɛmɔ ni ji enyɔ ni amɛkase. Eye mli akɛ enɛ woɔ Gā wiɛmɔ lɛ shidaamɔ moŋ nɛ, shi Gā shikwɛlɔi lɛ nyɛɛɛ amɛfi shi ye ameshikwɛɛ wiɛmɔ lɛ he jogbaŋŋ, jɛ blema saji kɛ amralo nɔyeli akpɔi ni yɔɔ ameshikpɔŋ lɛ nɔ lɛ hewɔ. Agbɛnɛ hu, Agbɛnɛ hu, akɛni mei ni ahala keha shigbelɛmɔ lɛ ashwɛɛ ji atsu amɛgbɔmɔtɔŋ hiamonii ahe nii hewɔ lɛ, amɛkɛ Gā wiɛmɔ lɛ jɛɔ shishi, shi amɛfee kralo akɛ keji efi nɔŋŋ lɛ, amɛbaatsake keya Akan wiɛmɔ mli.

**Yɔsemɔ wiɛmɔi:** Wiɛmɔ, Yɔsemɔ su, Gā, Ghana, Yɔsemɔ su hewiɛmɔ kɛ naayeli, Maslow

### 1. Introduction

Ghana is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country in the West African sub-region. The Greater Accra Region is the smallest region in Ghana. Although the smallest, it is the second most populous region in Ghana. The city, Accra of Greater Accra Region, is the capital city of Ghana. The indigenous people of the region are the Gā-Adangbe who make up about 7.4% of the population of Ghana, according to the 2010 census. In the Greater Accra region, the population of these indigenes is 30.7%. Out of this figure, the Gā subgroup are in the minority (18.9%) while the Adangbe, in the majority, own about 70% of the land.<sup>1</sup> With the capital city in this region, the Greater Accra Region is the most urbanized region. It is also the economic hub of the country. For this reason, there are thousands of people from other parts of the country and even outside the country who have

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater\\_Accra\\_Region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Accra_Region)

come to settle in Accra so that it has become not just the second most populous but also the region with the highest population index (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017).

The highest number of non- Gã-Adangbe in Accra are of the Akan ethnic group, and they make up 39.8% of the population of Accra (Essegbey 2009: 120) There is also a good number of people who belong to the Ewe ethnic group, and immigrants from the northern parts of Ghana that can be found in Accra. Other people from the sub region, particularly the bordering countries of Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria can be found in the Greater Accra Region. There are also several immigrants from outside the African continent which include expatriates from all over the world and particularly Chinese nationals. All these immigrants bring with them their languages, and this is what has made Accra multi-ethnic and multilingual.

Since the Akan migrants in Accra are more than the indigenes themselves, the Gã people are a minority on their own land. When a group of people migrate to a new place, the host-guest hospitality relationship automatically begins. Sometimes, the host welcomes the guests, and a beautiful relationship ensues. However, in certain situations, the newcomers may actually endanger or threaten the host they come to meet (Derrida, 2000b) The position of the host is obviously endangered when the guests have more advantages in terms of numbers, political or linguistic power, among others. Being in the minority, the Gã people struggle to insist on the adherence to their culture on their own land. A typical example regards the observance of the annual ban on drumming and noise making that precedes the celebration of the Gã traditional festival, Homowo. For many years now, the Gã Traditional Council has had trouble in ensuring that this ban is honoured specially by non-Gã residents in Accra since most people who are not native Gã do not see the need to respect and observe a custom which is not their own.

Again, there have been periods when non-natives have been given more approbation than the native Gã. Thompson (2000:1) recounts such a time involving the Asantehene ( the king of Asante, which is a sub-group of the Akan ethnic group) and the La Mantse ( the king of La, one of several divisions of the Gã ethnic group),

*“A few years ago, Gã traditionalists were up in arms when the Asantehene was seated first (and up front) at a public function in Accra and the La Mantse was placed in the back, after having stood around for some time. To many Gã, this was demeaning and reminiscent of the feud over the inauguration of Trade Fair Site, located at La, a suburb of Accra. For whatever reason, the government at the time had decided to invite the Asantehene to commission the site. The La Mantse considered that an insult and reportedly declared upon hearing of the government's plans, ‘Over my dead body!’ Eventually, he was designated to open the site in the presence of the Asantehene and others. Royal peace prevailed.”*

In the discussion of migration issues, language is very pivotal in the hospitality relationship between guests and hosts (Derrida, 2000a). In fact, one of the rules of hospitality, which actually stipulates the respective roles of guests and hosts, insists that it is a moral duty of guests to learn the language of the host (Vigouroux, 2019). Chan, (2005), calls this a ‘debt of hospitality’ that is required of migrants. For Vigouroux (2019:35), “Failure to do so (for whatever reason) is taken as a deliberate act against the ‘welcoming’ host society, and as indexing the migrants’ unwillingness to integrate.”

Ghana’s language policy of education stipulates that the indigenous language of an area first, and English when necessary, should be used as a medium of instruction from preschool and early primary after which this indigenous language is taught as a subject until competition of Junior High School (Ansah, 2014). In Accra, this means that the languages of instruction at these educational levels should be Gã and English. However, this directive is especially flouted by several private schools so that many such schools rather use English and teach Twi (a dialect of Akan). Indigenous Gã children who attend such schools are robbed of the opportunity to learn their own language and are therefore forced to acquire yet another language aside from English in school.

The greatest threat to the Gã language is therefore Akan, which is the most widely used language in Accra and Ghana. According to the Ghana Statistical Service, about 80% of Ghana's population speak Akan (about 44% speaks it as L1 while the rest speak it as L2). It is the unofficial indigenous lingua-franca in Ghana. For the native Gã, asserting, negotiating identity, and making decisions on the use of language are very important considerations because of the situation they find themselves in. It is a task which each Gã must work at daily irrespective of where they find themselves. But, for those Gã who work in the markets in Accra, this task is even more unique since their work puts them in the position that requires them to be in constant interaction with people of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds who are also workers, customers, or middlemen at the market.

This study, which engages native Gã speakers who are traders, drivers, and bus conductors at the Kaneshi Market in Accra, sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the position of the Gã language in the Kaneshi Market?
2. How do the participants feel about the position of their language?
3. What strategies do they employ on a daily basis to assert and negotiate their identity through their language?

There is a growing fear of the loss of the Gã culture and especially the Gã language because of the threat it is facing from Akan, particularly the Twi dialect (Thompson, 2000; Kuyini, 2010; Akpanglo-Nartey & Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012; Beeko, 2014). Even though a few studies have also shown that Akan has become the language used the most in some of the markets and trading centres (Ansah et al, 2017, Anderson et al, 2020), no such study has been conducted in Kaneshi Market, and no study has engaged the native Gã speakers themselves on this issue. It must be said, however, that Campbell and Anderson's (2021) Accra study of the factors that influence the choice of language in the church domain, whether the congregation espouse the use of the native Gã language or the non-native but dominant Akan and English, comes close. In that study, they found out that, "Although in other spheres of life there is irritation among Gã natives about the diminishing role of their language, in the church domain, this is readily tolerated for the greater good of advancing the church's work" (Campbell and Anderson, 2021:445). This current study is significant in determining if the situation is the same in the market as in the church domain. It also sought to investigate how the native Gã feel about the situation they find themselves in and how they negotiate their identity through the use of their language.

## **2. Language, Ethnic Identity, and Identity Negotiation**

Goffman (1959) equates identity to the way an individual presents him or herself. Norton (1997:417) defines it as the manner in which individuals "understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space and how people understand their possibilities for the future." Danielewicz (2001:10) summarizes it as "our understanding of who we are and who we think other people are".

Noels (2014:89) defines ethnic identity as "a speaker's construction of a sense of self within his/her social world that pertains to ethnic group membership". Many studies, such as Phinney (2003), use the terms ethnic and racial identity interchangeably but it is worth noting that in some contexts, like among the participants in this study, ethnic identity has nothing to do with race. Rather ethnic identity is tied to culture, beliefs, ancestry and language. Once individuals begin to talk, they do not only provide information about a particular subject but at the same time, share who they are and how they function in their environment: they are professing their identity through their use of language (Norton, 1997). Though not the only vehicle of showing ethnic identification, language is one of the most significant:

*“A mother tongue for an ethnic group is the most influential principle and element for ethnic identification because it entails sharing histories and as cultural repository containing emotion, not just phonological or other linguistic traits”.* (Yun, 2017:258).

In Ghana, one significance of language is evident in the way that in most of the cases, the name of an ethnic group and the language they speak are the same; the Akan ethnic group speak Akan, the Ewe speak Ewe, while the Gã speak Gã, for instance.

Once people come together for any kind of interaction, there is the need for all parties to arrive at an agreement as to who each person is, their role in the interaction and how they are expected to behave (Goffman, 1959). Arriving at such agreement is necessary to prevent the complexities that may arise when people come together for any reason because people can assume several different personalities depending on the situations in which they find themselves.

Swann (1987) formulated the framework of identity negotiation to explain this agreement that ensues. Swann Jr., Johnson, & Bosson, (2009:3) assert that in any such negotiation,

*“On the one hand, one person (arbitrarily dubbed the ‘perceiver’ may use his or her expectancies to guide behaviour, thereby encouraging the target to provide behavioural confirmation for the perceiver’s expectation. Meanwhile, the other person (arbitrarily dubbed the ‘target’) may strive to bring the perceiver to treat him or her in a manner that provides verification for the target’s self-views.”*

Following from the above, Swann (1987:1038-1039) makes the assumption that individuals have a

*“fundamental desire to know what to expect from their worlds. Toward this end, they observe their own behavior, the reactions of others to them, and the relation of their own performances to those of others; gradually, they translate these observations into self-conceptions”.*

Verification of self-views is something that has been found to be very important to humans. Getting to confirm one’s self-view provides one with proof that is accepted as more dependable and indicative as compared with behaviour or reactions that do not confirm one’s self-view (Swann, 1987). What is more, verifying self-views arouses a feeling of real security allowing an individual to be in the position of “organizing experience, predicting future events, and guiding behavior ...” (Swann 1987: 1039). Because of the benefits self-verification brings to the individual, there is always an active drive to think and act in ways to confirm one’s self- view, even if this self-view is undesirable.

There are two strategies that people follow to verify their self-views. The first is behavioural and involves the creation of social environments or opportunity structures that will lead to the continuity of their self-views, while the second deals more with cognitive processes during which ideas of reality are altered. To create opportunity structures, an individual may strategically choose interaction partners and social settings, display identity cues and or adopt interaction strategies that evoke self-confirmatory responses (Swann, 1987: 1039-1040).

### **3. Maslow’s theory of needs**

Perhaps, one theory that is commonly used to explain human motivation is Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which he perfected over a period (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1962, 1987). He expressed the notion that as humans, we are motivated to achieve our needs in a form of a hierarchy because some needs take pre-eminence. In his own words,

*“It is quite true that man lives by bread alone — when there is no bread. But what happens to man’s desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled? At once other (and “higher”) needs emerge and these, rather than physiological*

*hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still "higher") needs emerge and so on. This is what we mean by saying that the basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy of relative repetency" (Maslow, 1943, p. 375).*

Maslow's original hierarchy presented five levels (McLeod, 2020):

1. Physiological needs - these are things humans need to survive and include requirements like air, water, food, air, clothing, shelter. Physiological needs are the most basic and most important of human needs, and until they are not satisfied to an extent, the individual is not motivated to move to the next level.

2. Safety needs - they concern the desire of humans to feel safe, have the ability to predict and control what happens in their lives. The feeling of being secured physically, financially, emotionally, etc. fall under this level.

3. Love and belongingness needs – every human has the need to feel and give love. They also have the need to enjoy the sense of belonging to, or being connected to a larger group.

4. Esteem needs – at this level, humans yearn to achieve self-worth, respect from others, and a sense of accomplishment.

5. Self-actualization needs – this is the highest level and when an individual is said to have reached this level, it means that they are at the peak, and being moved by the motivation to be the best they can ever be.

Though this theory has suffered some criticism over the years (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976; Michaels, 1988; Neher, 1991), it is still very relevant today, and continues to be used to explain human behaviour and motivation.

The discussions above on the importance of language and identity negotiations are very relevant to this current study as this study investigates how the participants negotiate their identity through their use of language and how their views about themselves and others affect the strategies they employ in this process of negotiation. The adoption of Maslow's theory of need is to assist in finding out what other factors, apart from self-conception, may be influencing the strategies the participants apply at their workplace. The study is based on ethnic but not racial identity and the participants are not people who have moved to a different environment and are in a minority, but rather indigenes who have become a minority in their own land.

#### **4. Method**

This section of the study concerns the approaches and site for data collection and analysis. It also includes information on the number and type of participants and the research design employed for this study.

##### **4.1. Research site**

The study was undertaken at Kaneshi Market Complex. This is located in Kaneshi, a suburb in the Accra Metropolitan district of the Greater Accra Region. It is one of the biggest markets in Accra, with many shops, banks, factories, stalls, and street vendors in the market itself and around it. It was on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1960 that the market was officially opened for use. This market, together with the Kantamanto, Makola and Agbogloshie Markets, falls under the management of the Accra Markets Limited, a private company that manages the day to day running of these markets, after taking over from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly.

Getting to the market is very easy since it is one of the central points and popular hubs in Accra. For this reason, there are several vehicular stations in the market that ensure the movement of people from place to place. Two of these stations, one taxi and one trotro station were selected for this study. A trotro is a minibus which is used as a means of transporting people (and sometimes goods) from one place to another.

The market is opened every day, but its busiest days are Wednesdays and Saturdays. It is on these days that fresh agricultural produce arrives from the hinterlands. Kaneshi market is a very active place with sellers sitting in their shops, stalls, under umbrellas or hawking; buyers and window shoppers moving around; truck and wheelbarrow pushers moving products from one place to the other; ‘**hwan n’eeke?**’<sup>2</sup>, drivers and mates calling out for customers and passengers; revenue tax collectors; preachers; and of course the usual pick-pockets, petty thieves and swindlers also going about their trade.

The Kaneshi Market Complex was chosen as the research site because it is one of the major Gã markets in Accra. I have patronized this market for over twenty years and thus I am very familiar with it. I have heard on countless times the kind of exchanges on the topic of language that goes on between traders and customers. Some of these exchanges do get heated occasionally. As a native Gã myself who is interested in language issues, I found these issues and emotions worth exploring further.

#### 4.2. Research design

The mixed method design was used for this study because it was found to be most suited to help answer the research questions. Mixed methods research generally refers to the situation in which in one single study or in a number of similar studies, the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data are done using the traditional quantitative and qualitative methods (Leech, 2008). The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches provides the opportunity to maximise the benefits of both approaches and therefore lead to a better understanding of the problem at hand. (Creswell and Plano, 2011). It usually involves merging the qualitative data which may be texts or images with the quantitative data that are in numbers or figures, and then discussing the results by first presenting the numeric data followed by the qualitative quotes or themes that either provide credence to the statistical results, or not (Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl, 2009).

#### 4.3. Participants

Only traders and drivers who reported as having native Gã fathers and also identified themselves as Gã, were chosen as participants. The Gã are patrilineal so anyone whose father is a Gã is also Gã. However, four participants whose fathers were not Gã indicated that they had lost ties with their fathers’ side of the family and only identified with their Gã mother relations with whom they had lived with since birth. They saw themselves as Gã natives and for the purpose of this study, I respected and accepted that.

Thirty traders, comprising twenty-seven women and three men; twelve taxi drivers; ten trotro drivers; and ten trotro mates<sup>3</sup> were the main participants selected for this study. This put the total number of main participants at sixty-two. Gender was not a factor in this study, but as is typical in Ghana, a majority of traders are female while drivers and trotro mates are male. In addition to the traders, drivers and mates, one Market Queen<sup>4</sup> and two Vehicular Station Masters were also selected to provide some background information about the market.

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<sup>2</sup>This term is Akan for ‘who is going/ leaving?’ These boys assist marketers by carrying their bags as they move about doing their buying.

<sup>3</sup> A mate is a conductor on a trotro.

<sup>4</sup> A Ga woman who has traded for a long time in the market, has risen through the leadership ranks and has been voted into office to work with a team to ensure the smooth running of the market by seeing to the welfare of traders and ensuring that all rules and regulations are adhered to.

#### **4.4. Data collection procedure**

Two research assistants helped with the data collection. Before we commenced data collection, we visited the market to get the research assistants familiarized with the place. We then contacted the Market Queen, introduced ourselves and presented a petition to conduct a study in her market. We were invited to the next general market meeting and given the chance to talk to the traders. After the meeting, those interested in the study provided their contact details to enable us to get in touch with them later. On agreed days, we met these traders at their places of business, got them to sign the consent forms and then engaged them in recorded interviews during which questions related to each research question were asked.

The same procedure was followed at the taxi and the trotro stations where after meeting with the respective Station Masters to present our intention, we were granted permission to select our participants. The language used for the interview was Gã since all participants spoke Gã fluently and the study was about the use and position of the Gã language and Gã identity, after all. Also, most of the participants did not have formal education and could not speak English fluently. All the participants reported speaking only Gã at home. 45 of them use mostly Gã to converse with their friends in the market. Most participants (28) speak three different languages (Gã, Akan and English or Ewe); 22 speak two languages (Gã and Akan); 4 speak five, while 5 speak four languages. Upon further questioning and observation, three who indicated that they spoke only Gã exhibited that they spoke some amount of Akan too. It can be surmised then that even though many of them spoke Akan in addition to their Gã, the level of fluency varied with each participant.

Both the research assistants and research investigator (a native Gã) speak Gã. The decision to engage the participants in conversations as they worked proved advantageous because we were able to observe what could be said to be happening typically in the market. This helped in triangulating what we saw with what the participants said. The whole period of data collection took three months.

Each participant was given a code to protect their identity. The traders were given the codes MW (Market Woman) and MM (Market Man). The taxi drivers had the code TXD, while the trotro drivers and trotro mates were TRD and TRM respectively.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

The recordings were played back a number of times and orthographically transcribed into English, as the interviews were conducted in Gã. It must be noted that the participants sometimes codeswitched to Akan and English. Information needed to answer the research questions were extracted from the transcripts. In the extracts presented for analysis, Akan codeswitched expressions are underlined, while English ones are italicized. The results were presented quantitatively with figures and supported with relevant extracts from the responses of the participants.

#### **5. Findings and Analysis**

In what follows, the quantitative results and a selection of the transcribed responses from the participants for each research question is presented:

##### **Question 1: What is the position of the Gã language in the market?**

###### *The most used language in the market*

Out of the total of 62 participants, 28 indicated that the most used language in the market was Akan; 25 said it was Gã; 7 said both Akan and Gã while 2 said they felt Akan and

Hausa were the commonest languages. Hausa is a West African language spoken by the largest ethnic group that originated from Niger and Nigeria. Because some immigrants from the northern part of Ghana and from Nigeria and other neighbouring countries to the south of Ghana tend to speak Hausa, it used to be a common lingua franca in Ghana.

*Advantages of using Gã*

Nonetheless, most of the participants (60) indicated that they still use Gã in the market because it gave them a sense of pride, identity and made it easier for them to communicate:

- 1) **TXD5: Oh, bɛ i-maŋ wie-mɔ ni hewɔ kɛ mi-wie-ɛ, e-ha-a mi feeliɔ proud**  
'Oh, because it is my mother tongue when I speak it, I feel proud.'
- 2) **TRD4: Gã wie-mɔ nɔŋŋ ji mi hu i-culture, ni mi-nyɛ-ŋ ni ma-tsi ma-to afa.**  
'The Gã language is also my culture, and I cannot push it aside.'

Using Gã is however problematic at times because of some customers' inability to speak and understand it:

- 3) **TRD5: No ji naagba ni yɔɔ wie-mɔ lɛ he ejaakɛ almost-ɛ majority ni a-baa-ba, Twi.**  
'That is the disadvantage about the language because almost the majority that comes here, [speaks] Twi.'
- 4) **MW1: Kɛ mɔ-ɔ nuuu lɛ, e-baa-jwɛŋ akɛ shi oo-wie e-he.**  
'If the person does not understand it, he/she will think that you are insulting them.'

*Reactions to the use of Gã*

All the participants reported receiving positive reactions from other Gã speakers when they used Gã in the market. Again, forty-seven of the participants also reported a positive reaction from non-Gã speakers as well. Those who reported negative reactions mentioned that some non-Gã speakers were rude or felt they were being insulted, passing comments like:

- 5) **MW14: Me diɛ wo- o ha me ne saa kasa wei**  
'As for me you are worrying me with this language.'
- 6) **TXD9: Me diɛ saa wo kasa no me- n- te oo.**  
'As for me, I don't understand that language of yours.'
- 7) **TRD5: Ni kɛ o-wie Gã, mɔ ko yɛ ni e-mli baa-fu kɛkɛ e-fee wie-mɔ.**  
'And when you speak Gã, some get angry and then an argument ensues.'

**Question 2: How do the participants feel about the position of their language?**

*The language of the market*

Forty-two of the sixty-two participants felt that the language that should be used the most in the market was Gã since the market was in Gã land:

- 8) **MW13: Ejaakɛ Gã shikpɔŋ nɔ a-yɔɔ.**  
'Because this is a Gã land.'

- 9) **TXD12: Ejaakɛ he fɛɛ maŋ nɔ ni o-baa-ya, e-sa ni o-kase jɛmɛ wie-mɔ.**  
'Because you must learn the language of every land you go to.'

Two participants, TRM5 and TRD9 thought Akan should be the language used:

- 10) **TRD9: Amɛ-yi fa fe wɔ yɛ biɛ. No hewɔ-ɔ no ji nɔ ni wɔ fɛɛ wɔ-wie.**  
'They are more than us here. So, that is why we should all speak it.'

*Feelings about the position of Gã*

Fifty-three of the participants expressed dissatisfaction about the position of Gã in the market. As TXD6 expresses:

- 11) **TXD6: E-ŋɔɔ mi-naa ejaakɛ 'mi-n-ti-mi-n-ti' e-fa tsɔ**  
'I am not happy because the 'I don't understand', 'I don't understand' has become too much.'

MW12 explained that their forefathers should be blamed since it was their policy of hospitality which allowed migrants to settle in Accra with the belief that in numbers lie strength:

- 12) **MW12: Wɔ-kɛɛ ablekuma a-ba-kuma wɔ shi bianɛ amɛ-ŋ-yɛ wɔ-nɔ.**  
'We said others should come and join us but now they are subduing us.'

The rest of the participants put the blame either on the Gã people of today who were not asserting themselves enough, or the foreigners who looked down on the language and made no attempt to learn it:

- 13) **MW28: Ni kɛ o-hiɛ bo diɛntɛ o-nii, ni oo-tɛ a-fɔ ni o-ya-kɔ mɔ ko nɔ lɛ, keji taflatɛ, o-lu-ko-ɛ o-baa-fee nakai?**

'If you have your own thing, and you are throwing it away for someone else's, if you are not, excuse me, a fool, will you do that?'

- 14) **MW13: Shi Gã-mɛi Gã ni wɔ-yɔɔ, shi nɔ fɛɛ nɔ ni a-feɔ aa-wie Twi.**  
'But as for Gã people we have only our Gã, but we use Twi for everything.'

- 15) **TRD 6: Gbɔ-i ni baa amɛ-fee amɛ-yiŋ akɛ wɔ-Gã e-he bɛ sɛɛnamɔ because-ɛ amɛ-kɛɛ akɛ Gã po nɛgbɛ e-ya-shɛ-ɔ?**

'The foreigners that have come have decided that our Gã is useless because they have said that even the Gã itself, how far does it go?'

*The use of other languages besides Gã*

44 of the participants found no issues with the use of other languages in the market. The general position was that the ability to use other languages aside from Gã was beneficial:

- 16) **TXD1: E-ha-a nitsumɔ-ɔ feɔ simple.**  
'It makes the work simple.'

- 17) **MW3: E-sa ni o-wie koni o-kɛ-he e-shika yɛ e-dɛŋ**  
'You have to speak it so that you can get his/ her money from him/her.'

However, others felt that they had no choice in the matter:

**18) TXD4: Akɛ ni wɔ-bɛ hewalɛ ko lɛ, wɔ-nyɛ-ŋ nɔ ko wɔ-fee yɛ he.**  
'Because we do not have any power, we cannot do anything about it.'

**Question 3: What strategies do they employ on a daily basis to assert and negotiate their identity through their language?**

*Language used initially to communicate with customers.*

37 participants said that they called attention to customers in Gã; 18 in Akan and 7 said they used both Gã and Akan. This showed that most of the participants could be said to attempt to speak Gã with their customers, to assert their language. This notwithstanding, 59 of them, indicated that they readily switched to the customer's language if that customer was not using Gã. 1 participant used Akan all the time, while 2 of them did clarify that they only switched sometimes:

**19) MM2: Hɛɛ. E-dependɔ. E-jɛ-ɔ bɔni mɔ-ɔ fee e-he ni e-kɛ-damɔ shi ni e-bi akɛ 'enyiɛ?'**  
'Yes. It depends. It depends on the person's demeanour when asking "how much?'

**20) TXD12: Mi nɛkɛ, kɛ mi-kɛ bo wie Gã ni o-kɛɛ o-nuuu lɛ, dani ma-tsake**  
'As for me, it is when I speak Gã with you and you say you do not understand, then I change it.'

It must be noted that most of the time, if customer did not communicate in Gã, the language they were most likely to use was Akan because most non-Gã and even some Gã speakers used Akan as an indigenous lingua franca. This is corroborated by MW27:

**21) MW27: Other languages ɛ, amɛ fɛɛ amɛ-wie-ɔ Twi.**  
'Speakers of all the other languages speak Twi.'

*Only native Gã speakers can be Market Queens*

From the interview with the Market Queen, every year, she is expected to perform some rituals at the Palace of the Chief of Asere, who owns the land on which the market was situated. To ensure that these rituals are performed per the traditions and customs of the Gã people, only native Gã women can be chosen to be Market Queens.

Apart from these two measures, the data did not reveal any other means that directly or indirectly indicates the assertion of the Gã language or culture in the market.

## **6. Discussion**

*The dominant language of the market*

The responses given to the question as to the position of Gã in the market clearly showed that Akan was the language of the market, even though the market is situated on Gã land. This finding corroborates earlier findings like that of Ansah et al (2017), Essegbey (2009) and Dakubu (1997) that though Accra is the home town of the Gã people, Akan was used the most in Accra. This observation may be as a result of the fact that there are more native Akan migrants in Accra than the Gã themselves. In addition, other non-Akan migrants also acquire and speak the Akan language.

The fact that Akan is used the most in Gã land does not mean that the Gã language is not relevant. On the contrary, it is still a very significant language to both the Gã and the non-Gã. It was observed that when the participants spoke Gã in the market, it gave them a sense of identity and a feeling of pride and belongingness. As TXD5 puts it, 'Oh, since it is my mother tongue, when I speak it I feel proud'. MW1 also says that speaking Gã, 'allows me to be seen as a Gã'. Language, or more specifically the mother tongue of a people "is the most influential principle and element for ethnic identification because it entails sharing histories and as cultural repository containing emotion, not just phonological or other linguistic traits (Yun, 2017:258)". The power of gaining or expressing an ethnic identity through language is exemplified by the fact that a majority of the participants indicated that they initiate communication with their customers in Gã first. Again, this power was seen through the way the three participants in this study who though would not culturally be said to be Gã, by virtue of having Gã as their mother tongue, identified themselves as Gã.

*How the Gã participants feel about the situation, and what they are doing about it?*

Majority of the participants were disgruntled about the position of Gã as second to Akan at the market, and yet it seems they are doing very little to address this. One would have expected people in their position with such concerns to be more assertive with their language, and not simply blame the foreigners for refusing to learn it and thereby violating the rules of migration which indicated that the guests were to learn the language of their hosts (Vigouroux, 2019:35). Though the participants explained that they were not worried about the use of other languages in the market, only that Gã must be used the most, they were not doing much to make this happen. Also, just insisting that the Market Queen should be a Gã indigene cannot be said to be enough to assert the language and the culture of the Gã people in the market.

*Why the Gã participants have taken this stance*

The self-conception of these participants as a minority in their own land and the issue of ensuring that they are successful at their workplaces, are two major reasons for this seemingly latitudinal attitude towards the (non-)use and position of their language. As the market is a place with people of different identities, there is the need for some form of identity negotiation. In this particular situation, the individuals involved in the negotiation are the Gã participants (targets) and the non-Gã customers (perceivers). These negotiators have over time developed self-conceptions stemming from "their own behavior, the reactions of others to them, and the relation of their own performances to those of others" (Swann, 1987:1039-1039). Generally, by their experiences and conducts in the market and in Accra, the Gã participants have come to accept that although Accra is their homeland, they are not in the majority. In addition, their language is second to that of their Akan speaking guests, who may be seen as using their numbers and position in the country as a reason to refuse to honour their 'debt of hospitality' which required them to learn and use the language of their hosts (Chan, 2005). What is more, the lack of governmental control and implementation of the language policy in the country have left the Gã people in a state of helplessness when it comes to their language. Since this is the reality in which they live, they behave in ways that will allow them to confirm this self-view because the more this is validated, the more stable and meaningful their world will remain, allowing them to predict how to behave each day. The strategies they employ confirm what Swann Jr. et al, (2009:3) assert happens in a typical identity negotiation situation.

The other explanation for the behaviour of these participants is economic in nature and bordered on the desire to satisfy physiological needs. As Maslow's hierarchy of needs has shown, the motivation to satisfy biological and physiological needs is the most basic and important of all needs (McLeod, 2020). For many of the participants, trading or working

in the market is the sole source of their livelihood. They spend the better part of each day working to get as many customers as possible so that they could meet their targets and make some money for themselves and their families. Many of the traders claimed that they take loans from the banks to keep their trading business afloat. A large number of the drivers too did not own the vehicles they used and thus must give an amount of their proceeds of the day's labour to their car owners. The participants were therefore constantly under a lot of pressure to make money and were ready to make the sacrifices needed to achieve this. Considering that one effective way to win customers is to communicate in the language they understood (Sauter, 2012), it makes sense that the participants in this study will readily speak the language needed to ensure their livelihood, even if it means having to go against the way they feel and what they may expect to be the optimum situation. Being humans, their need to satisfy physiological demands far surpasses any need for self-esteem.

Similar to Campbell and Anderson's (2021) study, the Gã participants in this current study too are willing to disregard their feelings concerning the use of their native language. However, while those in Campbell and Anderson (2021) were doing this so as to get more people to join their churches, those in this current study are after seemingly more basic life needs.

## 7. Conclusion

In this study, I sought to determine what language was dominant in a market in Accra, an indigenous Gã city in Ghana; how the native Gã speakers felt about this and if and how they negotiated and asserted their identity using their language. The findings indicate that much to the dissatisfaction of the native Gã, their language is not the dominant one of the market. However, they find themselves in a situation that seems to make it challenging for them to assert themselves through their language.

Language is not just an identity marker but also a determinant of how the world works. For people who find themselves in situations where their language is in the minority, it is inevitable that they will have to acquire and use other languages if they intend to live in harmony. This must happen irrespective of whether they are the host or indigenes; the guests or migrants. Just like everybody else, day in and day out, these people must consider which language to use based on the benefits that come with the use of each language.

This notwithstanding, there is so much the Gã can do to change the existing narrative and thus ensure continuity and preservation of the Gã language. For instance, they should support the few Gã radio and TV stations and encourage the setting up of even more. They should instil in the next generation a sense of pride in knowing and speaking their mother tongue, and insist that the Ghana Education Service implement the policy that the Gã language should be taught in all schools in Accra. There is also the need to fund and encourage the writing and reading of literature of and in Gã, which will provide information on the language, people, history and culture of the Gã.

Until the Gã people realise that they have the power to do something about their situation and actually take steps to do so, their culture and language will continue to be under threat, and future generations will suffer for it.

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