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Language Distribution and Vitality: The Case of Mampruli among Migrants in the Sekyere Afram Plains District, Ghana

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Abstract

This study explores language distribution and vitality among migrants in selected communities in the Sekyere Afram Plains District of the Ashanti Region. The main goal of this paper is to determine language distribution and vitality and to account for the choice of Mampruli in the informal public space by migrant settlers in the district. Its analysis of data is done within the general framework of variationist sociolinguistics theory and communication accommodation theory. Fieldworker questionnaire and interview were used to collect data from 150 participants in 20 communities in the district. The study established that Mampruli, Dagbani and Konkomba are the dominant Languages that are used by migrants in the informal public space. Mampruli has become the most vital language used among the three languages and it is even leaking into the public space in certain domains in the entire district to partner Twi. The vitality and the choice of Mampruli by speakers are for social identity. Based on the data analysis, this paper predicts that sooner than later, Mampruli, in addition to Twi will be the most preferred language in the informal public space in the district since most migrants who are not native-speakers of Mampruli have been found to be using Mampruli in various social domains.

Keywords: language distribution, language vitality, informal public space, Mampruli, migrants, multilingual communities, Sekyere Afram Plains.

1.0 Introduction

Social context of language vitality in multilingual communities continue to be the object of study in sociolinguistics research. Domains of language use in such communities have being without controversy because such speech communities are organized into a variety of domains that define social life of the people. The phenomenon becomes multifaceted where these domains reflect language distribution. According to Holmes (2013), “The domain-based approach allows for only one choice of language per domain, namely the language used most of the time in that domain.” However, different languages may occur in a particular domain such that people’s choice of languages may differ in the same domain. It is in the light of the above that calls for Fishman (1972). He defines domain as:

...a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationship between communicators, and locales of communication, in accordance with the institution, of a society and the area of activity of speech community in such a way that individual behaviour and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other.

Typical domains in a speech community take into account ethnicity, family, religion, education, employment and friendship. Fishman (1972) is of the view that topic, role relation and local are influential in the domain of language choice of the speaker. This orientation of Fishman has been expanded by other scholars to include different domains and variety of factors. Batibo (2005) describes domains as places of language use in multilingual speech communities. Within these places, certain factors influence the languages used by the people. These factors include: gender, age, social class, ethnic group, religion, occupation, education etc. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between domains of language use and language distribution in multilingual speech communities. Labov (1972) and Fasold (1987) have all made a case on the correlation between domains and language distribution. Fasold (1987) puts domains of language use in diatopic speech communities into official domain and unofficial domain whereas Batibo (2005) describes the domains as high public space, middle public space and low public space in triatopic speech communities. Others however, categorizes the domains of language use into home, education and religion. It is, therefore, possible to group domains of language use into formal public space, informal public space and private space in order to determine language distribution. Our discussion will focus on domain of language use in informal public space in rural communities.

Language distribution is influenced by contact variables such as socioeconomic prestige, attitude of speakers, mobility and formal education (Labov 1972; Myers Scotton 1993; Amuzu 2010 etc.). Scholars of contact linguistics have shown how language is acquired and distributed in multilingual speech communities (Fasold 1983; Mackey 2000 and (Batibo 2005). The focus of these scholars has been on how socioeconomic prestige of a language, contact variables as well as the attitude of a group influence language distribution in multilingual speech communities.

People with different ethnic backgrounds migrate to different places and have to interact with people they come across. The effect of this is language shift where the people shift to the language which is more prestigious. In a situation where one language is considered prestigious and at the same time controls socio-economic powers of the area, then the shift becomes rapid. How does language domain stratify to reflect the distribution, use and vitality in informal public space? The distribution of languages and their vitality among migrants in some communities in the Sekyere Afram Plains District of the Ashanti Region presents a unique feature. As we shall argue in our discussions, the choice of Mamprili and her vitality among the migrants in these communities is not just an individual decision or choice; rather it is based on established sociolinguistic phenomenon that is understood by these speech communities.

The migrant population in the Sekyere Afram Plain district is heterogeneous with different ethnic groups. Notably among these ethnic groups are Dagomba, Busanga, Mamprusi, Dagaaba, Konkomba among others. Most of these groups speak languages that are mutually unintelligible. It should be observed that the common language in the public space in the district is the Asante-Twi which is not in the language family of these migrants. Despite this unique phenomenon, migrants still stick to speaking their mother tongue at home but select one language in addition to Twi to speak in the informal public space within intra-group and out-group as a unique feature of their language repertoire. It is against this unique phenomenon that this research seeks to explore the language distribution and vitality among these migrants in the informal public space. It establishes the distribution and vitality of the dominant languages and accounts for the choice of Mampruli among the migrants in the informal public space in the district. Beyond this, the paper is organised into four main sections. Section one Presents the theoretical framework and related literature on language distribution and vitality. Section two examines the sociolinguistic background of the Sekyere Afram plains district. Section three on the other hand, presents data collection and analysis procedures and section four presents and discusses results obtained from the data.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The nature of the phenomenon investigated in this study is diverse and requires some sort of quantitative data to be able to arrive at a reasonable decision. We adopt a two-pronged framework for our analysis. We tap from the Variationist Sociolinguistics theory and the Communication Accommodation model. Our main approach follows Labov (1991) variationist sociolinguistic paradigm. The quantitative paradigm in sociolinguistics assumes that people in a speech community may differ in their choice of linguistic forms in the language or their choice of language in a multilingual setting. Labov is of the view that people turn to embrace variation in sociolinguistics context base on certain factors or social variables. In his opinion, mobility and social variables stratify society and therefore reflect language choice and or variation among people in the same community speech. It is assumed that speakers consciously or unconsciously define who they are in terms of such *social variables* as gender, age, social class, ethnic group, and level of education. In our discussion, we will concentrate mainly on the social index on the

choice of Mampruli. This is not to down play the importance of the other social variables or factors. The place of these factors shall be evident in the analysis of the choice of languages as well as the discussion of the vitality of these languages. How does the social background (e.g. age, gender, religion, education occupation etc.) inform their choice and use of a language? The fundamental assumptions of the variationist are that an understanding of linguistic behaviour requires some kind of consideration of social variables and the processes because the variation that we witness at all levels is not random. According to Weinreich, Labov & Herzog (1968) linguistic variation is characterized by orderly or “structured heterogeneity”. These variations come as a result of the “principle of quantitative modeling” and the “principle of multiple causes” (Young & Bayley 1996). The variationist quantitative paradigm will help us demonstrate that the social background of respondents as well as other situational factors accounts for migrants’ choice of language use in the informal public space. To understand the complexity of these multilingual speech communities there is the need to predict and explain the many adjustments that individual make to create and maintain their choice of language use in the informal public space. This study follows Giles’s (1973) convergence accommodative strategy to explain why some settlers converge to speech a particular language in the informal public space. In sum, the above notions allow us to see how settler in the Sekyere Afram Plains District choice of language use is distributed in the informal public space.

3.0 Related Literature on Language Distribution in Ghana

Scholarly research works on language distribution in Ghana are not relatively new in the contemporary linguistics discourse situations. The linguistic phenomenon in Ghana is multilingual. (Bodomo, Andersen & Dzahene-Quarshie 2009; Ansah 2014) acknowledge this multilingual dimension of Ghana’s linguistic situation and further assert that there exist different Ghanaian languages alongside some few foreign ones in use at different domains, (e.g. education, trade and governance). The official language of Ghana is English whilst the Ghanaian languages are distributed across other domains in the speech communities. In spite of the high prestige accorded English language in Ghana, it is not used in the domain of informal public space. English is used in official activities such as business, administration, law, education, media etc. whereas the Ghanaian languages are used for local activities like as durbars, funerals, festivals and informal interactions between families and friends. Some of the scholarly works on the studies of language distribution in Ghana have looked it from the direction of the contact of English language with the indigenous languages and the impact the English language has on different domains. Owusu-Ansah (1997) examines the coexistence of English with local languages and reports that Ghana has three different language varieties: “Unmixed-English, Unmixed-Ghanaian Language(s), and Mixed-English”. The choice of any of these variants depends on the domain and some other social factors. It is not necessary about the individual factor but the sociolinguistics context calls the choice. Therefore, the use a particular variant is socially constrained within certain domains. Awoonor-Aziaku (2015) draws on Owusu-Ansah’s typology and investigates the extent at which the contact of English and Ewe language affects

language use in the informal domain among the Ewe of Southern Volta. He points at language use, and the domains of these varieties in contact situations. Awoonor-Aziaku focuses more on the informal domains such as homes, streets, recreational centres, markets and shops. Though his work focused on the informal space, the dominant languages involve are English and Ewe. This has left a gap when it comes to a choice among different local Ghanaian languages in the informal public space in multilingual speech communities.

Again, Owu-Ewie (2006); Ansah (2014); Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh (2014); Yevudey (2013) have all looked at language-in-education policy in Ghana and language choice variation in Ghanaian classrooms. These studies focus on language in the classroom. It is revealed that there are currently only nine languages used as mediums of instruction in the first three years of primary school in Ghana. These same languages are taught as subjects from the fourth year of basic education and beyond. According to Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh (2014), Ghana has “a 2-9-3-4(3) educational structure”. There is a two-year kindergarten, nine-years basic education, three-year senior high school (SHS) education and three to four-year tertiary education system. What this means is that the nine languages which are studied at school are not enough and do not reflect the number of languages use in informal domains in Ghana. These scholars concentrate on language policy and language choice in the classroom to the detriment the choice of language among multilingual communities in the daily interactions with one another. Some few scholars have explored factors that inform language choices in different domains in multilingual speech communities in Ghana. Brokensha 1966; Johnson 1973; 1975; Ansah 2014) are among scholars from this tradition in Ghana. While Brokensha (1966) presents an overview of the linguistic situation of Larteh, and the functional distribution of Leteh, Twi, and English, Johnson (1973) examines the patterns of language use in Larteh. Surprisingly, findings of the two studies produce the same results. Ansah (2014) on the other hand investigates the functional distribution of Leteh, Twi, and English in three domains: education, tradition, and religion. Ansah reports that situation of the earlier researches has changed with regard to the use of English. He concludes that factors that determine language choice are gradually undergoing some modification. Whilst there exist quite a number of discussions on language distribution in Ghana, the focus has been on education with cursory mention of informal public space. There is no systematic field survey of language distribution and vitality to research the language behaviour of migrants with different language background who constitutes speech communities. This exploratory study seeks to fill this gap to enrich the literature on language distribution and vitality. Our focus is on language distribution and vitality of Mampruli among migrants in their informal public space the Sekyere Afram Plains District of the Ashanti region.

4.0 Sociolinguistic Background of the Sekyere Afram Plains District

The Sekyere Afram Plains District was established in 2012 with Drobonso as the capital. It is located at the north-eastern part of the Ashanti Region. The District shares boundaries with the Sekyere Kumawu District to the south, Sekyere Central District to the west and the Asante

Akim North District on the southwest. It also shares boundary with the Kwahu Afram Plains North District in the Eastern Region to the southeast. It is bounded by the Atebubu-Amantin District on the northwest and the Sene East and Sene West Districts in the Brong Ahafo Region to the north and north east respectively. The population of Sekyere Afram Plains District, according to Ghana Statistical Service (2014) is 28,535. Males constitute 53.2 percent and females represent 46.8 percent. The population is heterogeneous with Akans forming the dominant ethnic group followed by the Mole-Dagbon ethnic group. Despite this unique feature, the common dialect spoken is the Asante-Twi. However, migrants still stick to speaking their mother tongue in informal domains such homes, streets, recreational centres, markets and shops and mosques. Some of these ethnic groups are Dagomba, Busanga, Mamprusi, Dagaaba Konkomba among others. Out of the total population in the district, 46.2 percent are migrants (Ghana Statistical Service (2014). whilst a few of these migrants were born in the Ashanti Region (intra-regional migrants) many of them were born elsewhere in another region in Ghana with majority coming from Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions. This migrants' choice of language in public space presents a unique feature that worth investigating.

5.0 Data collection and analysis procedure

This section examines the methodology that has been employed to conduct this study. The section looks at the study population, the sampled size, and the procedure of doing the sampling. The also looks at instruments for data collection and the method used in collecting and analysing the data.

6.0 Population – Sampled Size and Technique

The entire population of Sekyere Afram Plains District is projected to be twenty-eight thousand five hundred and thirty-five (28,535) (Ghana statistical service (2014). Twelve thousand three and sixteen - 12,316 are migrants representing 46.2 percent of the entire population. Out of this 12,316, the study focuses one hundred and fifty (150) respondents operating in the informal public space. These people were selected through integrated sampling technique where purposive, convenience and random sampling were used. The idea was to get the target people as a true representativeness and who will at the same time be readily available to respond to the questionnaire.

7.0 Instrument for Data Collection

A survey approach of data collection was used through fieldworker questionnaire and interview. The rational for the selection of fieldworker questionnaire was to reach out to the sampled population who are mostly non-literates in that rural communities. The fieldworker questionnaire offered the researchers the opportunity to respond to questions and interact with the respondents for clarifications. The interview was used to augment and consolidate the responses of the questionnaire.

8.0 Method of Data Collection

The study focused on four languages and their distribution in the informal public space among migrants in the Sekyere Afram Plains District. These are Mampruli, Dagbani, Konkomba and Twi. To get the true reflection of the language distribution in the informal public space of migrants, the study demarcated the district into four demographic zones. These demographic demarcated zones are Ayinofi zone to represent the northern part, Funsua zone for the southern part, Drobonso zone for the central part, and Seneso zone for the eastern part. In all these demographic description of the district, the researchers concentrated more on the people who operate in the informal public space. In the researchers' attempt to ascertain the true reflection of language distribution in the informal public space in the district, respondents were selected from different domains which constitute the informal public space with consideration given to sex, age, ethnicity etc. In all, hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were administered to respondents and twenty-five people interviewed.

9.0 Results and Discussions

This section presents and analyses data to answer the research questions one after the other. Besides, the section also makes some discussions and presentation of results obtained from the analysed data quantitatively. Beyond that, the section makes a summary and conclusion. The first research question sort to investigate the distribution of dominant languages in the informal public space among settlers in the Sekyere Afram Plains District. Responses from participants are presented in the following bar chart.

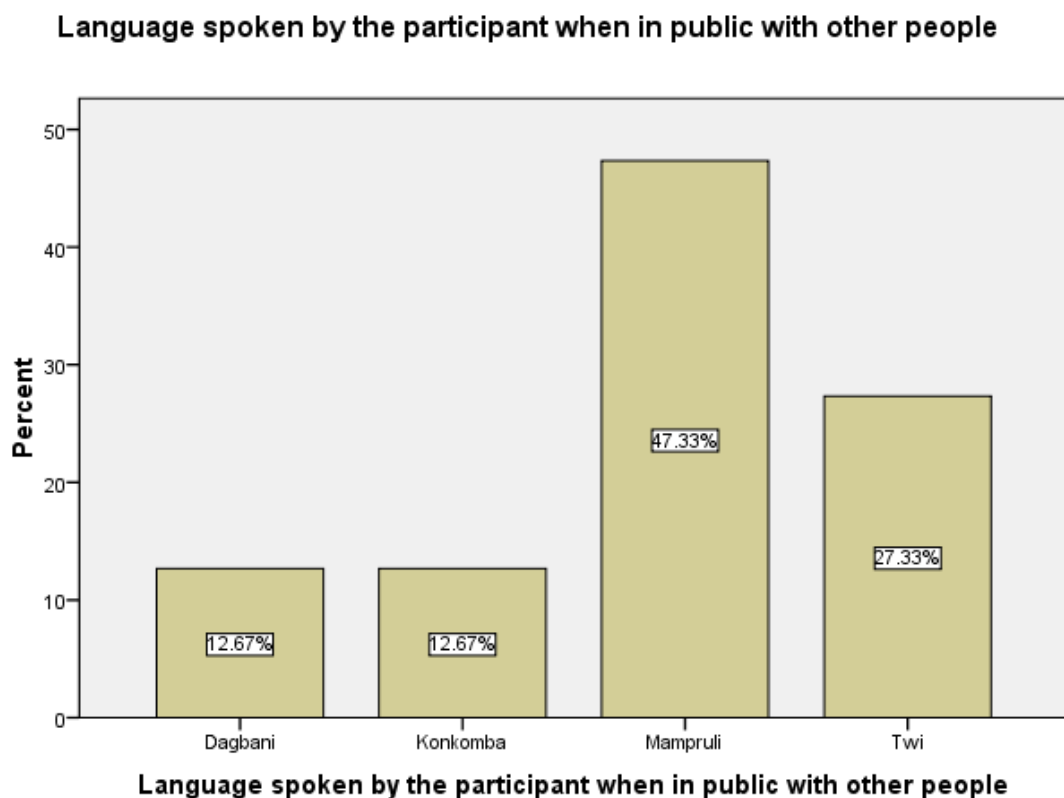


Figure 5.1

The above figure presents language distribution in the informal public space among migrants in the Sekyere Afram Plains District. The language situation is diglossic where Twi and Mampruli are strongly competing for dominance in the informal public space. The dominant languages are Twi, Mampruli, Dagbani and Konkomba. Whilst English Language is the national language in Ghana, Twi is the language of public space in the district. However, migrants use the Twi alongside other languages in the informal public space aside the languages they use in their private space. Fasold (1984) described this kind of language situation as 'double-nested diglossia'. Out of the 150 questionnaire administered, 47.3% of respondents use Mampruli alongside Twi to provide service in the informal public space with people who speak Mampruli and those who cannot speak Mampruli. 27.3% of respondents stated that they use Twi only in the informal public space because they cannot speak any other language apart from the language they speak at home which is not spoken in the district. Both Dagbani and Konkomba recorded 12.7% each. It must be noted that some communities are named after the dominant groups in the communities. Examples of these communities are Mamprusi and Dagomba (Ghana Statistical Service 2014). Because of the peculiar nature of these two communities, the languages use in the public space are Mampruli and Dagbani respectively. The two communities were excluded from the demarcated zones for data collection. Mampruli, however has demonstrated its strength and vitality in the informal public space beyond the borders of the Mamprusi community in the Sekyere Afram Plains District. The rest of the communities are heterogeneous and present unique language situation in the district. It is these heterogeneous communities the data were collected and analyzed because people living in these communities interact among themselves as well as neighbouring communities.

For validity and reliability of the above findings, I included in the questionnaire, the demographic variables to capture information of participants. These independent variables include age, place of birth, number of years stayed in the district, ethnicity, religion, mother tongue, education, occupation, gender and language of religion. These variables are mapped with the language use in the informal public space by migrants to generalise the speech communities. The study found out that ethnicity does not determine the choice of language in the informal public space among the migrants. Among the four languages use in informal public space, 14% of respondents stated Konkomba as their ethnicity. This confirms the results of the Ghana Statistical Service 2014 report that Konkombas are the dominant ethnic group among the settlers in the district. The study however found out that the Konkomba language is not dominating in the informal public space of migrants. To find out where some speakers speak Konkomba at home, but use Mampruli or Dagbani among migrants in the district, it was revealed that they accommodate these languages because of their vitality in the Northern part of Ghana where majority of them come from. Some of them stated that they have learnt the Mampruli somewhere before coming to the district. Apart from the Konkomba, ethnic groups such as the Kussasi, Bimoba, Dagaaba and Busanga accommodate Mampruli whereas majority

of the Frafra, Kasina and Chokosi accommodate Twi. What is interesting is the case of Frafra that chooses to use Twi instead of a similar Mabia language like Mampruli. This aspect of the way speakers choose language in public space in these communities and elsewhere waits further investigation. Mapping the occupation of participants to their choice of language in the informal public space, we found a significant influence of the type of employment and the language distribution and vitality. 44% of the participants are farmers. They often come together to help one another in their farming activities. As multi-ethnic communities, they always find a way of using a common language to communicate among themselves. As people from the northern extraction, they prefer choosing one of the northern languages to Twi. Also, 19.3% of participants identified themselves as students forming the second force of groups regarding employment. Majority of these groups are those who were born in these communities and acquired multiple languages. This situation has given such children a sophisticated linguistic repertoire in the communities where they are exposed to different languages. The third type of employment that has influence on the language choice of the migrants in the informal public space in the district is trading with 15.3%. Farming, schooling and trading are strong forces that influence the choice of language of migrants in the informal public space.

There is a correlation between the number of years a person has stayed in the district and his or her choice of language in the informal public space. The longer a person stays at the place the more sophisticated of his or her language repertoire. This gives speakers the flexibility to select from the lots, the appropriate language to be used in the public space. The study found that the level of education of speakers has effect on the language distribution and choice among migrants in the district. 35.3% of participants never have formal education. This accounts for the fact that English language has no place in the informal public space of the migrants in the district. 18% of participants has primary education, 30% attended school up to junior high school level. Senior high school and tertiary levels recorded 11.3% and 5.3% respectively. The scenario created here indicates that there is early exit of school among migrants who are not able to acquire the English language properly, hence its absence in use in the informal public space among migrants in the district. Religious denominations of participants and the languages use by their leaders have no effect on the choice of language of migrants in the informal public space in the district. Migrants who belong to either Islamic religion or Christian religion only come together as a group to worship. This maybe in the mosque or in the church. The second research question set out to investigate the rational for the choice of Mampruli among the migrants in the informal public space in the communities. The following pie chart represents participants' source of contact of the language they use in the informal public space.

How participant learnt the language used in the informal public space

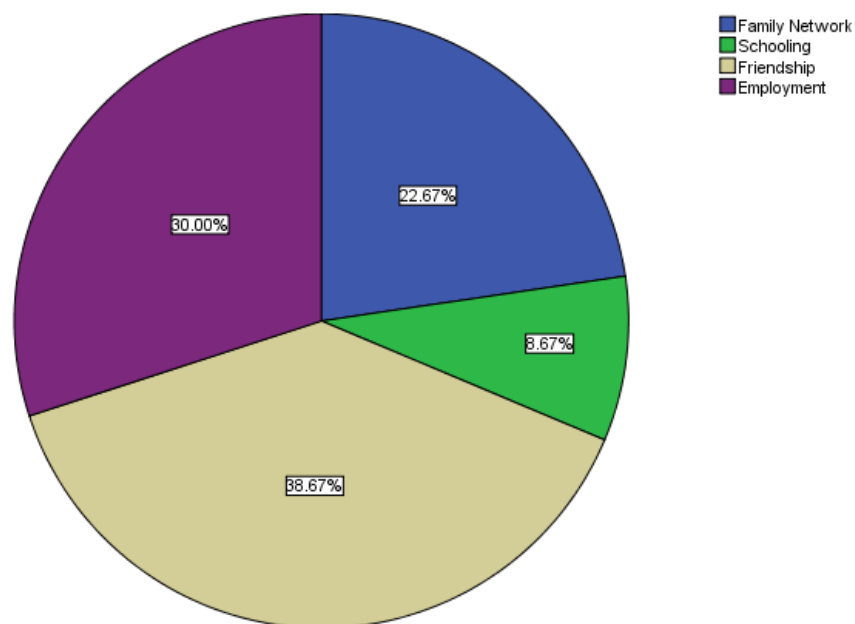


Figure 5.2

From the above chart, it is shown that majority of the speakers who constitute 38.67% learnt the language they use in the informal public space through friendship. During the interview, most of them stated that they learnt the language of their friends to show solidarity. One Kusaal speaker, a respondent remarked that, “Mampruli is not difficult to speak”. They even said that their friends have also learnt their language, but do not use them in the public space. This shows the level of accommodation of some speakers in the communities where the prestigious languages force others to converge to use those languages in the informal public space. Languages such as Mamprulli and Dagbani have strong vitality among migrants in the district. This phenomenon has suppressed Konkomba who form the majority ethnic group among the migrants to use Mampruli/Dagbani in the informal public space instead of using Likpakpaln. The situation has also put pressure on Twi which has enjoyed dominance in the district. This is because native speakers of Twi in the district now have to learn to speak Mampruli/Dagbani in order to function well in the informal public space.

Employment constitutes the next source of contact of language distribution in the district. The type of work the community members are engaged in forces them to speak certain languages in the informal public space. 30% learnt the languages they use in the informal public space through the jobs they do. As already stated, most of the settlers are farmers and the farming activities expose them to a particular language variety. This is particularly the people whose ages range from 30 up wards. Those within the age brackets of 10 to 29 said that they have had contact with the languages they use in the informal public space through their friends during schoolings. 8.67% participants stated that they have acquired the language through schooling. 22.67% contact source of the language use in the public space is through family network. We also conducted an interview to augment the information provided in the

questionnaire. Out of 25 people that we interviewed, 19 of them said that during political rallies, political speakers choose Mampruli to communicate to migrants after speaking English or Twi to the entire population. Six (6) of the respondents said that speakers some time use Dagbani after English or Twi to serve a language that represents migrants from the northern extraction. It must be noted that both Mampruli and Dagbani are all dialects of the same language and speakers or hearers of these dialects need no much adjustments to understand whatever is been communicated because both languages are mutually intelligible (see Naden 1988; Olawsky 1999; Hudu 2010; Issah 2011). The use of Mampruli during political rallies in the district is marked. It is an indication of potential leak diatopia. Mampruli is gradually sneaking into the general public space of the entire district to compete Twi. In an interview with one native speaker of Akan (Twi) who owns a provision store in one of the settler's communities confirmed this hypothesis. She initially denied using any other language apart from Twi to trade with the people. Upon further interrogations, she admitted using some expressions of Mampruli to transact business with her customers and revealed also that all her three children aged 10, 7 and 5 can speak fluent Mampruli and therefore use it when they are with their peers in the public space. All the above scenarios demonstrate the vitality of Mampruli competing Twi in different domains in the informal public space in the Sekyere Afram Plains District.

10 Conclusion

The study has discovered that apart from ethnicity, and formal settings, language can be learnt through the level of duration, occupation and other strong linguistic contact variables. The responses have revealed that the amount of pressure and duration a person is exposed to a language can influence his or her language repertoire as he or she socializes with a group. The study has identified Mampruli, Twi, Dagbani and Konkomba as the dominant languages use by migrants in the informal public space. The study shows that Twi and Mampruli are keenly competing in the informal public space of migrants while Dagbani and Konkomba are relatively stable. These public spaces were previously noted to be occupied by Twi which serves as a lingua franca among inter- group communication in the district. We are of the view that the situation in the district, if it continues that way, sooner than later, Mampruli in addition to Twi will be the lingua franca not only for migrants but also for the entire population in the Sekyere Afram Plains District.

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