Research Article

Language Shift and Maintenance: A Case of Ahanta Language

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Abstract
This paper adopts mixed method research design which aims to study the factors responsible for the shift of Ahanta language to the other contact languages such as Fante and English. It also seeks to suggest systematic ways of maintaining the Ahanta language from hitting language death. The paper adopted Batibo's (2005) causality–based theory as underpinning theory to do a rigorous analysis of the phenomenon. With this in mind the researcher is set to test the hypothesis of language shift on Ahanta language, identify factors that are responsible for the shift of Ahanta speakers, and if possible, how their language (Ahanta) could be maintained for posterity to come meet the language alive. Sociolinguistic data was collected from forty natives of Ahanta who have lived in Ahanta communities for the past fifteen years through open-ended questionnaire, participant and non-participant observation. The paper concluded that 'language shift' as a phenomenon is prevalent among the Ahantas and that Fante as a contact language is used alongside the Ahanta within the Ahanta speech communities which in effect had created diglossia within Ahanta communities. The paper suggested at the level of maintenance that natives of Ahanta should develop positive attitude towards Ahanta and also to sensitize natives on the repercussions on failure to pass Ahanta language to the younger generation. The paper recommends Auburger's proficiency resistance model by using strict diglossia situation as well as encouraging natives of Ahanta to be in united front in making Ahanta a dominant language within their speech community.
Keywords: Language Shift, Language Maintenance, Sociolinguistics, Contact Language, Diglossia, Speech Community.

Introduction

The term language shift is a 50–year old term within the field of linguistics often created to the American linguist Joshua Fishman, yet there is hardly any unified view about its definition and conceptualization. Since its earliest appearance in published works, it has continued to feature as a popular topic in sociolinguistic analysis (Bodomo *et al.,* (2009) citing Fishman, 1964; Veltman, 1983; Fishman, 1991). Language shift is the process by which a speech community in a contact situation (consisting of bilingual speakers) gradually stops using one of its languages in favor of the other. According to Batibo (2005: 87), language shift is the abandonment of one's own language in favor of another due to voluntary or as a result of pressure. The pressure according to Batibo may be as a result of demographic superiority, socio-economic attractions, political predominance or cultural forces. Language maintenance on the other hand refers to the situation where speech community continues to use its traditional language in the face of a host of condition that might foster a shift to another language. The Ahanta language is reported to be threatened within its speech community such that members speak a second language, Fante, which is a dominant language in southern Ghana, very fluently (Ghana Broadcast Corporation 12, September 2018, 12:00 News).

It has been indeed observed that before one would hear speakers of Ahanta language speaking their native language, one would have travelled to the old folks of Ahanta or the indigenous Ahanta's before. An attempt to critically study and examine language shift and maintenance constitute a basis of coeval with regards to linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. In recent times language shift and maintenance have become key issues to researchers. This is due to the fact that language which is an important tool, has either out lived its significance or died out. Some languages have either been termed as endangered or died out due to its

speakers who have consciously neglected their language and have taken hostage of another due to the prestige attached to those contact languages they have shifted to. Generally, sociolinguists consider language of a particular speech community as undergoing shift when the codes under consideration are being replaced by other languages. The strategic effort to reverse the shift and retain structural and functional power of the native language is what is referred to as language maintenance.

Location and Size of Ahanta Communities

The Spectator on Saturday, November 24, 2012, states *"Ahanta means the land of twins"*. As at how Ahanta became known as the land of twins is not certainly known since there are other meanings or accounts which seem more accurate and convincing than this one. It could be linked to the fertility of Ahanta women and multiple births which was very predominant then on Ahanta lands then. Some indigenous cultural practices around that time also saw births of twins as a taboo and for Ahanta to welcome the birth of twins is likely to earn her the title land of twins which I think we should pride ourselves with it but if we are to situate the land of twins account properly, then it precedes the migration of Ahanta's from the Bono kingdom which occurred in 1229. Ahanta is also believed to have come from the Fante word "hata" which matches with "yinda" in Ahanta language which means to dry or warm oneself after being wet or cold but geographically, the true definition of Ahanta is the land between Pra and Ankobra rivers. The stretch of land between these two rivers is how far and wide the once prosperous and flourished kingdom of the Ahanta's covered. Our forefathers lived here in greatness and in supremacy particularly those of us who come from royal homes. Ahanta belong to several Congo-Niger languages such as Igbo in Nigeria, Edo in Benin and all the Akan languages stretching across the South of the Sahara Desert from Togo to Côte d'Ivoire. It is one of the sub units of several Kwa languages across the forest belt of Sub-Sahara Africa.

The Ahanta land is mainly located in the Ahanta West District, it is situated at the southernmost point of the country and the entire West African sub-region and lies between latitude 4º.45"N and longitude 1º.58"W. Its location has therefore paved way for fishing activities which serve as a major source of income for residents of many rural communities such as Adjua, New Amanful, and Cape Three Points which are found along the coast. The district's proximity to the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis enhances its commercial activities as it is about 15 minutes' drive from the capital of the Western Region, Takoradi; about 25 minutes' drive from the administrative capital, Sekondi and approximately 25 kilometres from the central business district of Takoradi. There are 123 communities with the Ahanta vicinity with Ahanta Agona as the district capital (AWDA, 2010).

Decentralization and Governance

The Ahanta West District was carved out of the Sekondi–Takoradi Metropolitan Authority, now the Sekondi–Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) in 1988 as a result of the Decentralisation policy. The district was therefore among the 110 districts created in Ghana due to its population size. Having been made an autonomous district, the district assembly was charged with the oversight responsibility for the development of the area in accordance with the Local Government Act, 1993 (Act 462). The district is divided into six area councils which are further subdivided into 36 electoral areas represented by assembly 48 members and unit committees and made up of 52 members, comprising of 36 elected and 16 appointed members (AWDA, 2013). The establishment of the area councils is to facilitate grassroots participation in development and governance processes. However, resources required to ensure that they function as mandated are not adequate. For instance, some of the area councils are not operating basically due to lack of office accommodation and logistics (AWDA, 2010). This raises concerns for rural development since the structures required to ensure the achievement of the goals of the decentralization program exist only in name.

Problem Statement

In the current sociolinguistic studies, the term language shift and language death are used as metaphors. Batibo (2005) believes language shift occurs when speakers ignore their language intentionally or under pressure, in favor of another language which then takes over as their means of communication and socialization. Language shift also occurs when speakers of a specific language develop negative attitude towards their language. There are a lot of factors which leads to language shift. The Ahanta language belongs to the Guan language family which is spoken by the people of Ahanta of the Western Region. The Ahanta's share a close linguistic contact with the Fante speakers and the Nzema speakers on the coastal belt of Western Region. An empirical observation done in some Ahanta communities revealed to the researcher that the Ahanta language is confronted with high influx of language contact which has forced speakers of Ahanta language to be multilingual speakers. Notwithstanding the positive effect of multilingualism, the Ahanta's

seem to place less attention to their native language which had sparked a linguistics phenomenon known as 'language shift'. The researcher observed that almost all his Ahanta friends who are in resident of the various Ahanta communities are very fluent in the Fante and English language respectively. No wonder 2020 Ghana population census confirms this claim by saying "*almost all Ahanta's are competent speakers of Fante language".* This makes the Ahanta speakers to alternate Ahanta and Fante languages irrespective of its distinctiveness. Since the native speakers of Ahanta are also competent speakers of other languages they do what is termed "*linguistic overlap"*. Linguistic overlap is a situation whereby a multi lingua person uses two distinct codes within a specific speech event. The reasons to the language shift of Ahanta could be historical or other linguistics factors. The competing language of Ahanta is gradually gaining much strength over the native language within the Ahanta enclave, this has caught the attention of the researcher to embark on research to test his hypothesis on language shift and to suggest some systematic ways to maintain the Ahanta language from being endangered.

Objective of the Study
This research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1) To study the language used in Ahanta speech community.
2) To investigate how frequent the Ahanta natives speak Ahanta language.
3) To find out whether Ahanta's have a second language.
4) To recommend measures to maintain the Ahanta language.

Research Questions
To achieve the purpose of this paper, the following questions were answered by the researcher in order to serve as springboard for this work:

1) Is Ahanta language spoken in the community?
2) How frequent do native speakers speak the Ahanta language?
3) Do Ahanta speakers have any second language?
4) What measures could be put in place to improve the Ahanta language?

Significance of the Study
This paper would be very helpful to:

1) Sociolinguist who would carry any research on language shift.
2) It would serve as a guide to any further research on Ahanta.
3) It suggests some factors that are responsible for language shift in Ahanta.
4) It would be significant to all Ahanta language researchers.

Study Limitation
This research could be carried on any other language but in the case of this paper it is applicable to Ahanta language.

Literature Review
The review of the literature is of immense impact on the research work. This is because every research has to be linked with what has been done on the area that is being researched into. It is undeniable fact to say that every research work has to identify an area which needs to be filled. This area that has been filled makes the work complete, even with that, some scholars can still identify a gap to be filled. Researchers undertake research to confirm an existing idea, or refute it.

The researcher found interest in Ahanta language and also passionate to find out why the speakers are not motivated in speaking the Ahanta language but rather Fante. He selected the Ahanta communities in this study to find out how the shift from Ahanta language to Fante, and to suggest ways to help revitalize the Ahanta language for posterity's sake. Many scholars such as Fishman (1991), Fasold (1984), and Romaine (1995) among others have worked on language shift and maintenance. The shift of language always refers to the situation of language contact, where the minority groups leave their language slowly, and have to use another language regularly.

Furthermore, due to language shift, one of the codes loses its speaker's strength while others gain more speaker strength (Maricar 2013, citing Dorian, 1981; Fishman, 1991; Fasold, 1984; Romaine, 1995). In other

words, the language that has been used as a means of communication and socialization is taken over by other languages so that there is a decrease or reduction in the realm of language use (Batibo, 2005). Thompson (2001) did a study on language contact which reveals that the, "Intense pressure from a dominant group most often leads to bilingualism among subordinate groups who speak other languages, and this asymmetrical bilingualism very often results, sooner or later, in language shift.

Language Shift and Maintenance within a Speech Community
As it has been said already, language shift occurs when a particular speech community stops using her language and stick to another language which they think is more prestigious than their native language. There is evidence of the above communities exhibiting such sociolinguistic phenomenon. It is empirically proven that language shift occurs due to some factors. These factors can be sourced from within the community itself or from outside. Similarly Grimes (2002) outlines the factors of language shift among others caused by parents who force their children to learn a language that is considered prestigious by the idea that a child is only able to learn a language well, the use of a second language as the language of instruction in schools, a national language policy that is likely to cause some speakers choose to use the national language which is likely to cause some speakers choose to use the national language as a mother tongue and industrialization, economic change, and governance.

Speech Community
A speech as "a form of social identity and is used, consciously or unconsciously, to indicate membership of different social groups (Yule, 2014). A community can be explained as a group of people having the same goal and who share common sentiments. A speech community can be explained as the group of people who are conscious about the languages and other practices that they hold on to and then pass down to the next generation. A speech community is a group of people who share a set of norms and expectations regarding the use of language (Yule, 2014). What this means is that language is the greatest tool to identify someone who belongs to a speech community. According to Morgan (2004:4), a member can be part of a speech community by being conscious by a way of language choice, variation and discourse that represent generation, occupation, politics, social relationships, identity and more. We cannot talk about the concept of speech community without the use of language and the people who speak it. For the purpose of this paper, the researcher will use Ahanta speech communities. Ahanta form part and parcel of Guan speaking communities which is located at the coastal area in Western Region.

Theoretical Framework
This paper adopted the Batibo's (2005) causality–based theory as underpinning theory to do a rigorous analysis of the phenomenon. Batibo (2005) posits that causality based theory is a well-known model, the Gaelic-Arvanitika model (GAM). This model established by Sasse (1992), originated from two case studies. One was on the Arvanitika language of Greece and the other was on the East Sutherland variety of Scottish Gaelic. Batibo argues that the model is based on three types of phenomena relevant to the process of language shift. The first is the entire range of extra linguistic factors: cultural, sociological, ethnohistorical and economic.

The second phenomena are termed by Batibo as speech behavior. This refers to the use of variables that are determined by social parameters, such as language choice, choice of register, domains of use, language attitude. Since the political and social conditions are primary in speech community, the phenomena of external setting have a strong impact on speech behavior of the Ahanta's. The term type of phenomena according to Batibo (2005) involves structural changes resulting from the pressure and speakers' response to it. These changes could be found in the sound system, morphological structure. Syntactic rules of the language threatened by extinction. This set of phenomena is referred to the model as structural consequences. The causality theory adopted by Batibo gives a clear definition to what happens to Ahanta language and its speech community. The concept of language shift in the case of Ahanta takes its roots course from the above-mentioned phenomenon highlighted by Batibo (2005). The intruding language or the competing language of Ahanta is Fante, this is as a result of linguistic factors, such as language contact, cultural, socioeconomical activities, Speech behavior and speakers' response. The causality theory is suitably adopted to carry sociolinguistics research titled 'language shift and maintenance a case of Ahanta language'.

Methodology
The paper adopted a mixed method as a design. Mixed method research design is chosen because the paper incorporates both quantitative and qualitative approaches in presenting its findings and analysis. The researcher through interview, participant and non-participant observation collected data for this paper.

Study Population and Sample
The study population consists of native speakers of Ahanta language in residence within the Ahanta enclave. Forty Ahanta natives who are in resident in various Ahanta communities were purposively sampled for this research. The researcher purposively sampled forty people from the two main senior high schools found within Ahanta jurisdiction, these schools are St. Mary's Boys Senior High School, Apowa and Baidoo Bonsu Senior High School, Agona Nkwanta. The sample size consists natives who are students and teachers who had lived on Ahanta land for the past fifteen years. In order to avoid bias and gender issues, the researcher administered research questionnaires to fifteen males and twenty-five females who met the sample criteria for the study.

Data Analysis
Data analysis was carried out in accordance to the research objectives of the study. SPSS was used to do regression analysis of the data in order to provide answers to the research questions of the study.

Data Analysis and Presentation
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1. Gender distribution of respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	15	37.5
Female	25	62.5
Total	40	100

From the above distribution, it shows that 15 respondents representing 37.5% were males whiles 25 respondents representing 62.5% were females which implies most of the females had a great interest in this research study.
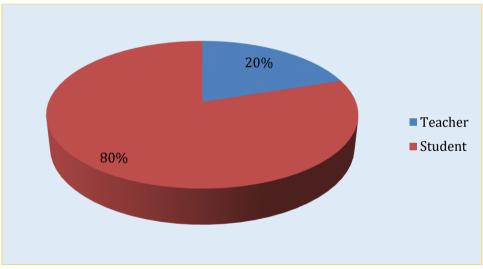

Figure 1. Occupation/profession distribution of respondents.

From the data represented above, 32 native speakers of Ahanta language representing 80% of the respondents are student whiles 8 representing 20% of the respondents are teachers who are natives of Ahanta with higher qualifications, this shows that all respondents are well educated and therefore indicates the authenticity of this information collected as all respondents are educated and therefore understood all questions presented to them.

The data mentioned in table 2 depicts those 3 respondents representing 7.5% are natives of Kwesiminstim, 2 representing 5% each of the respondents are natives of New Amanful, Kejabil, Ahanta Aboadze, and Hotopo respectively. 5 representing 12.5% of the respondents are natives of Beahu, 1 representing 2.5% each of the respondents are natives of Yaakor, Busua, Discove, Aketenchie respectively. Also, 10 representing 25% of the respondents are natives of Apowa, 6 representing 15% of the respondents are natives of Agona and 4 representing 10% of the respondents are also natives of Ewusiejoe all these towns are Ahanta lands. This confirms that the research was strictly carried on Ahanta communities. Which make it very broad irrespective of the sample size selected.

Table 2. Distribution of respondent's hometown.

Hometown	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Kwesimintsim	3	7.5
New Amanful	2	5
Beahu	5	12.5
Yaakor	1	2.5
Busua	1	2.5
Kejabil	2	5
Ahanta Aboadze	2	5
Apowa	10	25
Agona	6	15
Ewusiejoe	4	10
Hotopo	2	5
Discove	1	2.5
Aketenchie	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Native Language Distribution of Respondents

It is evident from the present study that, there is mixture of tribes with different languages and cultures in resident on Ahanta land yet natives of Ahanta believe Ahanta language continue to be the native language within the Ahanta enclaves as shown from the previous data on the respondent's hometown. The folks of Ahanta are aware that there is a language called Ahanta which is spoken on the Ahanta land by her natives.

Table 3. Distribution on the frequent use of the native language.

Frequent use	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ahanta	17	42.5
Fante	18	45
Others	5	12.5
Total	40	100

The above distribution proves that the Ahanta language is not widely spoken by the natives who are aware that there is a language called Ahanta. The data above gives clear indications that out of the 40 respondents, 17 natives consisting 42.5 speak the Ahanta language fluently and 18 natives consisting 45 speak Fante language and 5 consisting 12.5 percent speaks other languages on the same Ahanta land. This implies that there are other dominant languages spoken in the Ahanta speech community. It appears to the researcher that from the interviews guide given to respondent Fante language seems to outweigh the Ahanta language on the same Ahanta land.
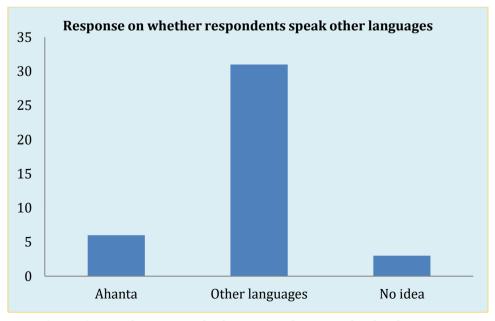

Figure 2. Distribution on whether respondents speak other languages.

The data mentioned in the figure above shows that though the natives of Ahanta land hold in high esteem their language, values and culture, the natives are also allowed to learn and speak other languages because of linguistic contact and the cosmopolitan nature of Ahanta land, so they can make communication easier for others as well by learning other languages. Also, due to the world's advancement through education people are always ready to learn so not to be limited in case they find themselves elsewhere either than their native lands. The natives try to speak Fante and English language since it's the medium of communication in schools and also perceived English speakers to be people of high class. Fante is used as medium of instructions from kindergarten to primary 3 and English as a subject and vice versa from primary 4 to the end. This is one of the major contributing factors apart from linguistic contact for the dominant use of Fante language on Ahanta land.

Table 4. Distribution on whether Ahanta is spoken at home.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	18	45
No	22	55
Total	40	100

It is observed from the frequency table 4 above that, 18 people representing 45% of the respondents speak the Ahanta language while 22 representing 55% of the respondents also speak other languages like Fante and the English language at home because Fante is used as the second language of the Ahanta's. It is observed that, Fante language is dominating Ahanta language on their own land. This is because the natives who appeared not using the Ahanta language at home are influenced by the nature of Ahanta land. The research proved to the researcher that the people of Ahanta started using Fante as their second language because of economic factors, the Ahanta land is mainly made of fishing and farming communities. And those who come to trade are mainly Fante speakers so in order to make communication and business easier, the Ahanta people started learning the Fante language.

Distribution on Whether the Ahanta is Spoken at School
The language policy in Ghana states that mother tongue must be used from kindergarten to primary 3 and English taught as a subject and vice versa from primary 4 to up wards. The first language or L1 used in Ahanta is Fante so how can Ahanta language would be spoken in schools even at the beginning of education. Yet 27 respondents wish they would be allowed to speak and taught their native languages while 13 respondents out of the 40 respondents respectively also think it should not be allowed at all. This gives clear indication that, those 13 respondents are natives who cannot understand or speak the Ahanta language hence the language must not be used in formal education at all.

Table 5. Distribution on whether the native speakers speak Ahanta at all gatherings.

Language	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ahanta	13	32.5
Other language	27	67.5
Total	40	100

The distribution above shows a greater percentage of the respondents don't speak the native language because the majority of the people are not competent speakers of the Ahanta language and during gatherings there are a lot of people from different speech communities who also have to effectively communicate without any barrier. The above distribution portrays the exact happenings of Ahanta people. They alternate Ahanta with Fante language, this means every Ahanta can speak Fante very well, that is why almost in all their social gatherings the major languages used are Ahanta and Fante respectively.

Summary and Conclusion
Pauwels (2004) argues that in a situation where a language is being successfully maintained, the domains of L1 will remain the same, the transmission of the language to the younger generation will be active and as perfect as possible, the number of speakers will remain relatively stable and the speakers will maintain a strong allegiance to their language.

Language maintenance is very easy when it comes to nonlinguistic speech community but in some circumstances where natives try as much as possible to maintain and salvage their language from dying or endangering. It is realized from the study that language maintenance in the case of Ahanta, is not well strategized and structured in the sense that the computing dialect being Fante which had allowed to create

diglossia on Ahanta land shouldn't have assumed such dominant role within Ahanta speech communities. The native speakers should have been aware of the sociolinguistics phenomenon 'language shift' and guide against the tidal influence of Fante and English languages on Ahanta. The Ahanta's should have adopted Auburger's proficiency resistance model (1990) by creating stability in Ahanta language with strict diglossic situation. The natives of Ahanta should have been in a good position to make Ahanta a dominant language within their speech community. Also, regular reinforcement on the immigrants on Ahanta land; thereby natives having positive attitude towards the Ahanta language and passing it on to non-natives who have come to stay with Ahanta's. Researches have proven that there are other languages which have managed to maintain themselves in Africa. Such maintenances happen when speakers of such languages develop positive attitude towards a language and increase its public usage.

The Ahanta's tend to use Ahanta and Fante respectively in their social gatherings which in a way has created a sociolinguistics phenomenon known as diglossia, such a situation tends to give Fante language more strength to compute Ahanta language on its own native land. Since the Ahanta language is the native language within the Ahanta speech community, it should only be used in their social gatherings to portray their true identity and culture which would reinforce their linguistic ability to embrace the Ahanta language in exhibiting their heritage. Speaker's attitude towards their language is a key factor in language maintenance (Pauwels, 2004). The attitude of the Ahanta's toward their language is a contributing factor to the shift suffered by Ahanta language. This study has proved that majority of Ahanta's are not highly motivated to use the Ahanta language even in their own house hold and in other gatherings. Ahanta language must be indirectly and directly inherited by posterity and this can be possible when speakers of a language are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to exhibit their linguistics repertoire within a community of practice. The attitude which is portrayed by the adult class of Ahanta speech community is being transferred to the younger generation, this is due to the fact that majority of Ahanta parents feel reluctant to even speak the Ahanta language with their own children at home which in its long run affects the status of the language. The study shows that the natives themselves feel at ease in speaking Fante due to language contact, language behavior and economic factors have been the main determiners of the shift happening in Ahanta language, for that matter its speakers try to shift from Ahanta to Fante or English if highly educated. They mostly speak Fante language with the assumption that not all people on Ahanta land are Ahanta's and that comprehension might be problematic. The Ahanta's also alternate Fante and English language with Ahanta in terms of difficulties or short of lexical items in Ahanta. Majority of the Ahanta's mix codes, code pair or code switch to Fante which makes Fante language very competitive on Ahanta language.

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