



UNIVERSITY  
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# The contested role of English in West Africa: Ghana

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University of York

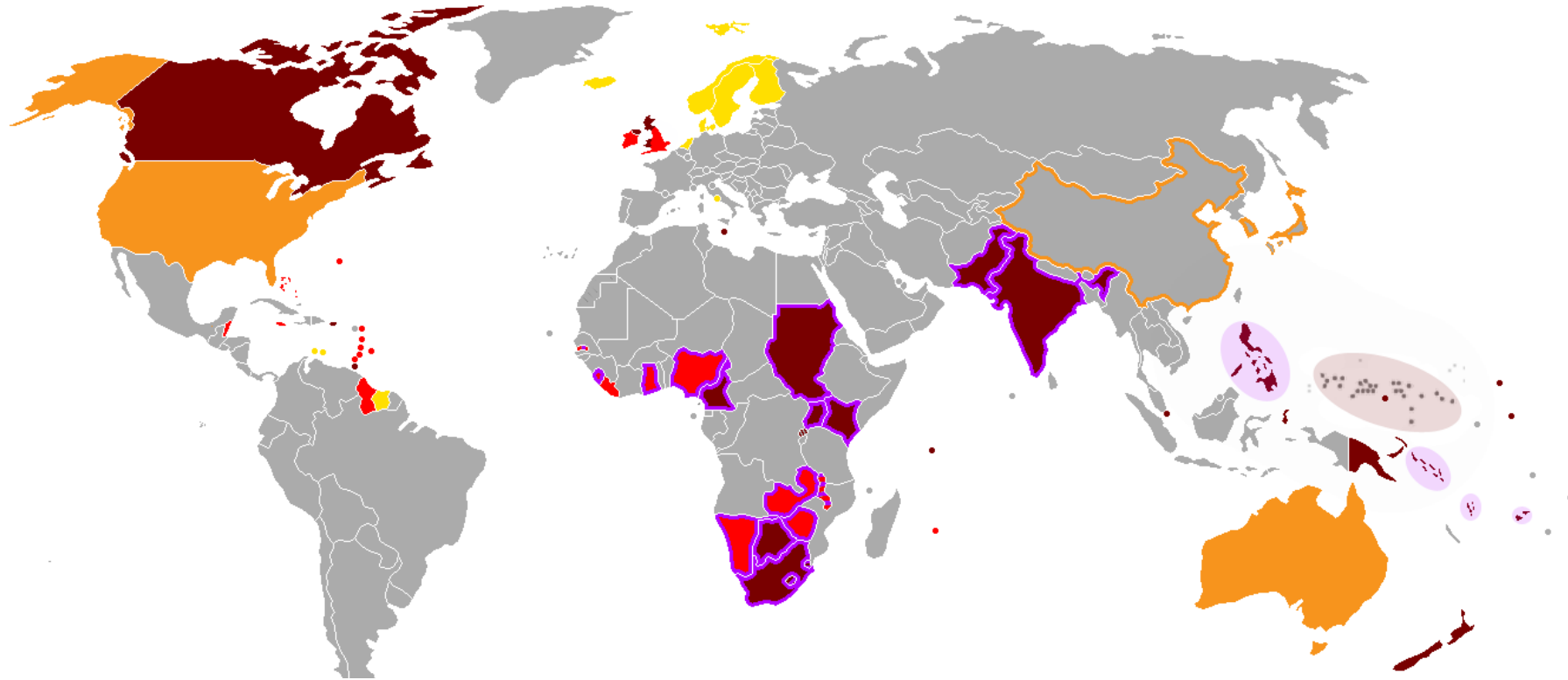
**Humanities Research Centre**  
Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**

# Aims for this talk

- Look at how a European colonial language, English, became entrenched in one part of Africa – the former Gold Coast – over some 300 years
- Examine how English has become nativised through its use in a new environment
- Look at how English is still contested
  - Non-compatible arguments about power, identity and pragmatism still surround the use of English

# English in the world



Functional and official English language map, see also [en:List of countries where English is an official language](#):

official

co-official

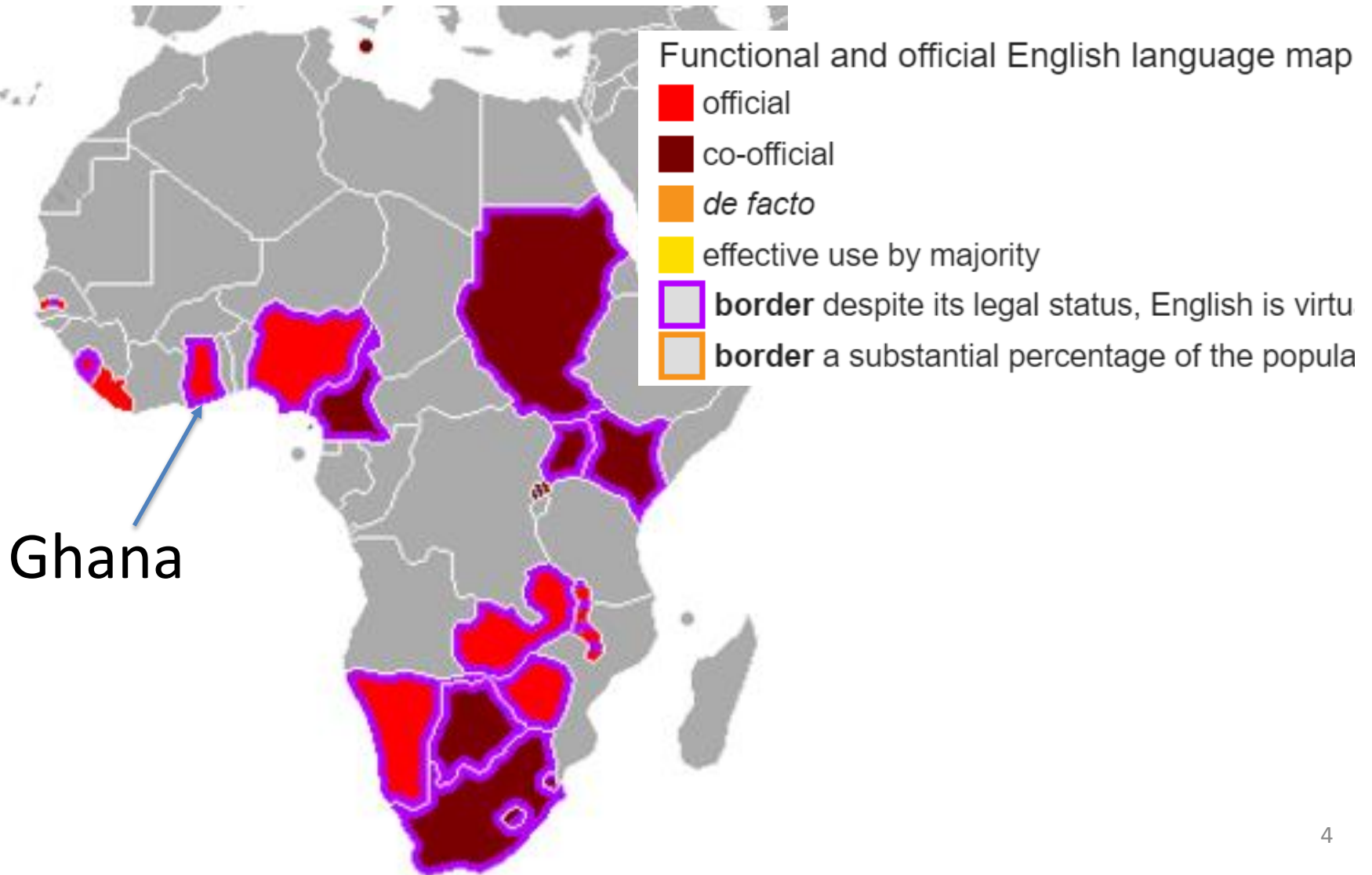
*de facto*

effective use by majority

**border** despite its legal status, English is virtually not spoken (10 % or less of the population speak fluent English)

**border** a substantial percentage of the population can read and write English, but cannot speak it

# English in Africa

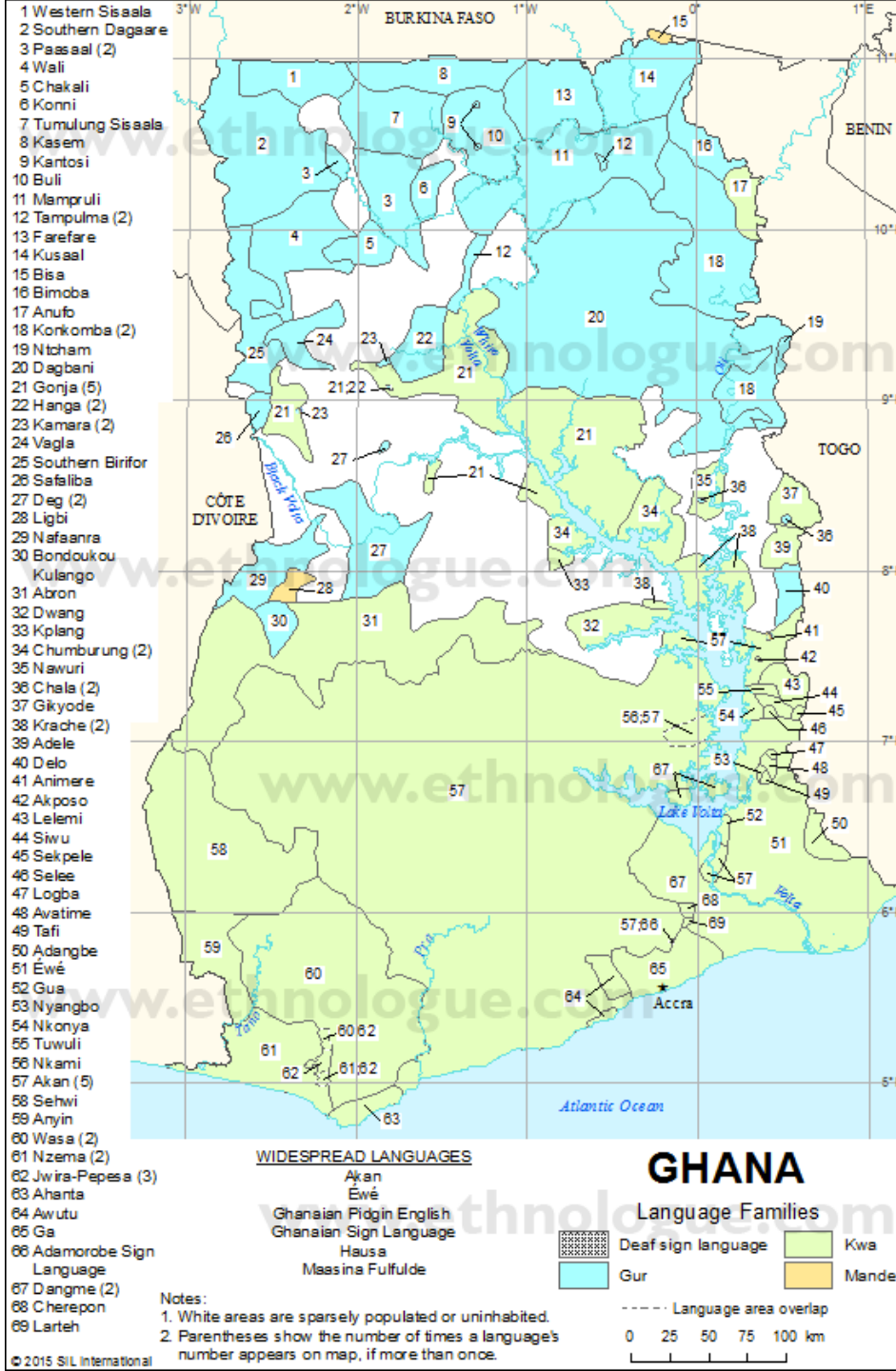




# Regions of Ghana



# Languages of Ghana



# Ghana

- 79 languages distributed across a population of 25 million
- English is medium of instruction in all schools
  - a local language may be used in Primary 1 – 3
- English used by government, the law courts, the press and commerce
- Most people regularly use two or more African languages
- Literacy (in English) at 77 per cent among the young
- **English** is a major *lingua franca* alongside **Ghanaian Pidgin English**, **Hausa** (trade and military language which is also the language of the Hausa in Nigeria), and **Akan** (the language spoken natively by half the population)

Ghanaian high school students send video messages to teenagers in the Netherlands, 2009

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kNdpFfmKOQ>





Akan stool, often used ceremonially

# Ghanaian English

## **Reduplication may be used for emphasis:**

- *I must do some small small jobs today*
- *Things are going on small small* (i.e. moving slowly)

## **Vocabulary – new words to describe Ghanaian institutions and culture**

- *Enstoolment* The installation of an Akan chief. The ‘stool’ element refers to the associated ceremonial stool
- *Outdooring* The ceremonial presentation of a new-born child to the community after seven days

## **Vocabulary – new meanings for old words**

- *Brutal American film* (‘Exciting’)
- *Tea Milo* (brand of malt-based hot milk drink), or other hot drink

# Ghanaian English

## Idiomatic usage

- *My junior brother*  
“My younger brother”
- *I’m coming*  
“I’ll be back in a minute”
- *I’ll flash you*  
“I’ll ring you, but you call me back straight away”

## Culturally determined usages – an example

### – *You are invited ...*

- **Scene:** British visitor on a long-distance bus, sitting next to a Ghanaian stranger ...

## Inscriptions on vehicles and shops

- *Time tells* (with time, the owner will prove his worth)
- *Burger Boy* (the owner of the car had his car shipped from Germany)
- *Nyame Wo Ho* (Twi; ‘God exists’)

# Ghanaian English

- Ghanaian English is creative, using the resources of the English language
- It is *indigenised*
- It interacts with Ghanaian languages
- It reflects the country's own cultures and values
- But, as we'll see, this is not always accepted either by government or by ordinary people





CULTURAL CENTRE'S BOOKSHOP





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Fried Rice with Chicken or Gizzard,  
Indonesian etc.  
Banku and Tilapia

services:  
NAMING, PARTY,  
WEDDING Etc



Courtesy  
of Ari  
Sherris



**CHRIST IN YOU VENTURES**  
DEALERS IN: WHOLESALE AND RETAIL  
OF SOFT DRINKS, DRESSMAKING ETC.

Courtesy  
of Ari  
Sherris





DO NOT GIVE UP BEAUTY SALON FANYOGO FOR SALE

Courtesy  
of Ari  
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**Kill Insects!  
Enjoy Nice Smell!**

Kum Ntontom Prekol



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**TO THE GLORY OF GOD**

**THIS BUILDING, CONSTRUCTED UNDER  
THE VISIONARY LEADERSHIP OF**

**PROF. ABOAGYE MENYEH,**

DEAN (2001-2004) AND PROVOST (2004-2010)

**WAS COMMISSIONED BY**

**THE CHANCELLOR**

**OTUMFUO OSEI TUTU II**

( ASANTEHENE )

**ASSISTED BY**

**PROF. K. K. ADARKWA**

( VICE CHANCELLOR )

**ON MONDAY 28TH JUNE 2010**

College of  
Science &  
Technology,  
Kwame  
Nkrumah  
University  
of Science  
and  
Technology,  
Kumasi

Asantehene:  
the king of  
the Asante



## SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES DURBAR

ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS SHOULD  
ENDEAVOUR TO ATTEND THE SOL DURBAR  
SCHEDULED TO BE HELD ON **15<sup>TH</sup> JULY, 2015**,  
AT THE **MAISON FRANCAISE CONFERENCE**  
**ROOM. TIME IS 08.00 PROMT.**

THE DURBAR WILL BRING TOGETHER  
FACULTY, STAFF, GRADUATE STUDENTS  
AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT IN THE  
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES. THE DURBAR IS  
INTENDED AS AN INTERACTIVE PLATFORM  
FOR FACULTY, STAFF AND STUDENTS TO BE  
APPRISED OF THE PROGRAMS AND  
ACTIVITIES OF THE SCHOOL OVER THE PAST  
YEAR AND FOR THE COMING YEAR. IT WILL  
BE FOLLOWED BY A COCKTAIL AT THE  
UNIVERSITY GUEST CENTRE.



# Durbar, Akim Tafo, July 2013











The chief's  
spokesmen, or  
*okyeame*.

This was  
(mis)translated by  
the British as  
'*linguist*'.

# Some history

- English had a foothold on the Gold Coast from 16<sup>th</sup> century
- Castle at Cape Coast (next slide) had an English school from mid-18<sup>th</sup> century
- 19<sup>th</sup> century more schools, paid for by British authorities and by missionaries
  - Grant-in-aid depended on the use of English
- English would ‘become the classical language of all the tribes and people ... and thus enjoy a direct introduction to its extensive literature’ (Wesleyan pastor, Rev. Freeman, 1841)





Cape Coast Castle

# Is it all that great having English as an official language?

- A view among academics is that English is a barrier to communication, and so Ghanaians and other Africans should focus more on communicating in African languages.
- Context: a Ghanaian and a Nigerian were having a bit of trouble understanding each other in English, so the Nigerian said:
  - "English came to us and English will one day go back to the original owner."

# English vs. vernacular education

- In the pre-Independence decade, the colonial authorities toyed with the idea of introducing mother-tongue education:

‘It may well be that children will be able to read and write English at the end of the primary school course better if they have first been taught to read and write in the vernacular’ (HMSO 1953)
- But this was abandoned, with no change post-Independence in 1957
- Competence in English was part and parcel of the formation of a Ghanaian elite, with rapid upward mobility

# Medium of instruction

- Currently, a Ghanaian language may be the medium of instruction in Primary 1, 2 & 3
  - English taught as a subject
- From Primary 4, this switches:
  - English medium
  - Ghanaian language(s) taught as school subject (if at all)
- Practice varies a great deal across the country
  - Private schools mainly Anglophone from Primary 1
  - Big variation in resources
  - Problem of languages with small numbers of speakers
- Complaints that pupils in Primary 4 can't understand basic English





## Complementary Basic Education Programme

The Government of Ghana with the assistance of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and USAID is implementing a Complementary Basic Education programme (CBE) in collaboration with non-governmental organisations. The Government's CBE programme seeks to provide out-of-school children with literacy, numeracy and life skills in order to access primary education. The Ghana Government has adopted and expanded the CBE programme across the country in order to meet the Millennium Development Goal two (MDG2) - universal primary education.



### HOW DO CBE CLASSES WORK?

CBE offers a flexible approach that accommodates out of school children between the ages of 8 to 14 to attend classes in poor rural and hard to reach areas of Ghana. The classes are taught in local language by well-trained Facilitators (mostly Senior High School graduates) from the communities. They provide the opportunity to disadvantaged children especially girls, to equip them with literacy and numeracy skills in the mother tongue. Classes are usually held in the afternoon to allow children to support their parents with household and farming tasks in the morning. Following the completion of the CBE cycle (nine month period), the children are tested and then integrated into the primary school system.

### WHY CBE PROGRAMME?

In spite of the impressive increase in primary education enrollment over the past two decades, a significant number of Ghanaian children are still unable to attend primary school, particularly in the rural deprived areas. Many children from these communities especially in Northern Ghana are required to participate in domestic chores, agricultural or other work which often prevent them from attending primary school. The CBE programme is currently working with key programme stakeholders to provide over 200,000 children with the opportunity to access literacy/numeracy classes and transition to primary education over the next five years. As of 2015, over 78,500 children have been enrolled in the Government's CBE programme.

The broad policy goals and objectives of the CBE programme are as follows:

- To provide the disadvantaged children with the opportunity to have access to primary schooling.
- To increase gender equality and participation in basic education.
- To extend and improve CBE especially in deprived communities.
- To improve the quality of teaching and learning outcomes of pupils in CBE learning centres/schools.
- To improve and strengthen community ownership and management of CBE learning centres/schools.

In partnership with Government of Ghana, UKAID and USAID



# USAID/DFID- funded literacy initiatives in local languages

## Complementary Basic Education Programmes

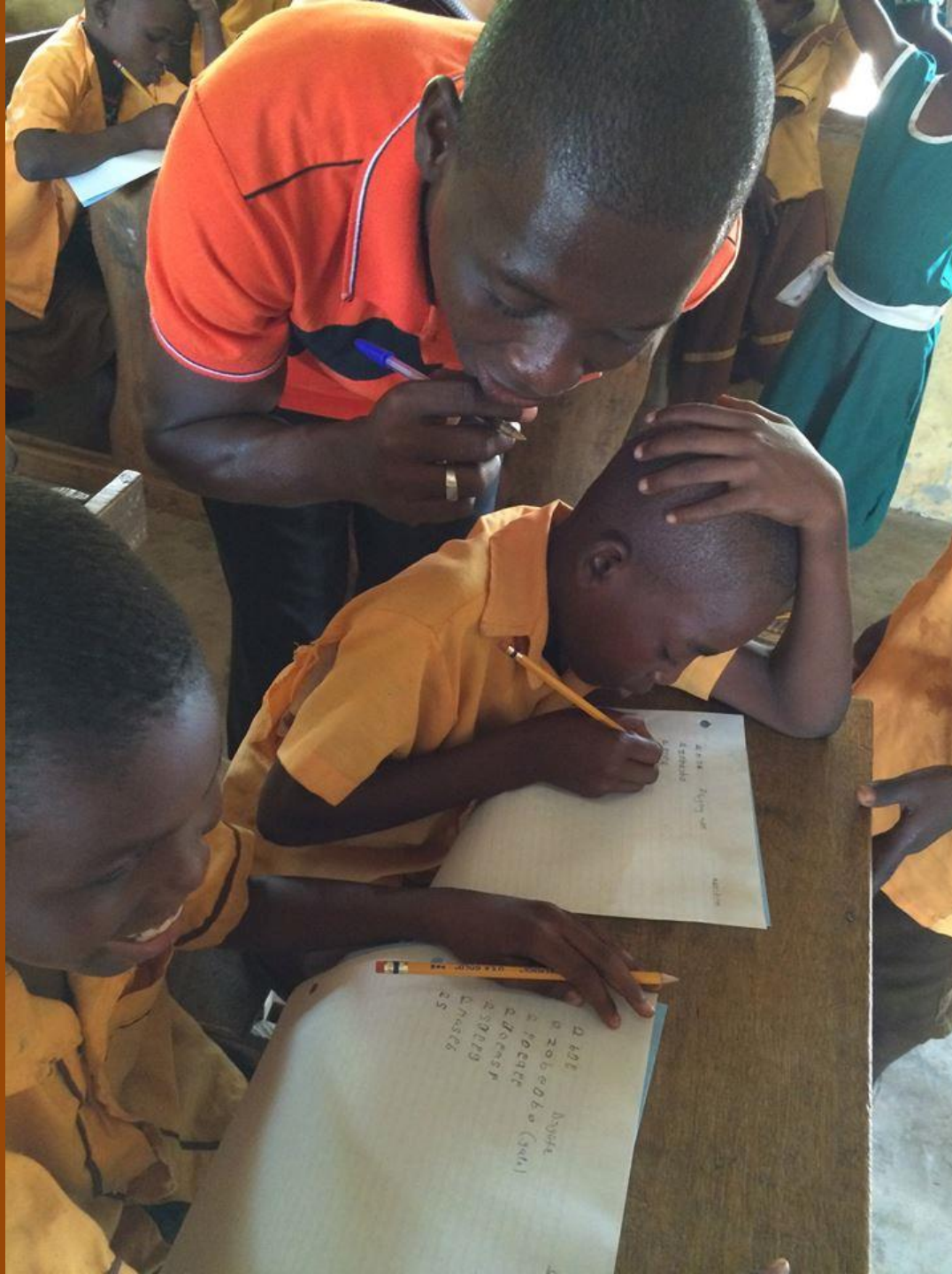


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# The Safaliba project

- Safaliba is spoken near Wa, Upper West
- Project director: Ari Sherris (Texas A&M)
  - Small-scale funding (not USAID/DFID)
- 7,000 speakers
- Until recently no written form
- Grassroots literacy with local facilitators (next slide)



Courtesy  
of Ari  
Sherris



# Policy changes and debates

# Academic research on Medium of Instruction in Ghana

- **Agbozo, E. G. & Yevudey, E. (forthcoming).** Language Education and Language Policy in Ghana: Linguistic Realities in the Classroom. In *Applied Linguistics Review*, BAAL Language in Africa special issue on 'Developing languages in Africa: social and educational perspectives'.
- **Ansah, N. G. 2014.** Re-examining the fluctuations in language in-education policies in post-independence Ghana. *Multilingual Education* 4(12). 1-15.

- 17<sup>th</sup> October 2015, all change!



- The Minister of Education, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang, announces that English will cease to be the medium of education. Ghanaian languages will be used instead.
- The move is widely supported by Ghanaian academics, though questions are raised about preparation and resourcing.
- Scepticism in some quarters that the move is mainly to meet a condition of foreign aid.

# Let's look at the arguments

- Two contrasting news sites:
- <http://thisisafrica.me/ghana-plans-to-remove-english-as-a-medium-of-instruction-in-schools/>
- <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghana-to-change-English-as-medium-of-instruction-388207>

# thisisafrica.me

- International (Africa-wide) news site



# Mixed messages: identity

- [Akau Malek Alier](#)
- This minister is talking. Go ahead darling. You are amazing. We must recognize and cherish our language like most European do. Your language your identity.
- [Meccasia Owsu](#)
- Exactly. As an African American I can definitely agree with you. Your language is your identity. We don't have one. An old slave owners last name, no language, no culture, no sence of belonging ANYWHERE. The less European ways you pick up the better.
- [king Asante-Yebo](#)
- Any such attempt must be preceded by a continental agreement of common African language, else we would be tearing into further pieces, an already divided continent...

# Too many languages and too few resources

- **Judith Ofori**
- An unrealistic proposal... which language is going to be adopted.... this professor woman, did she write and go and defend her thesis and viva in Twi, Ga, fante, Hausa, Dagbani, Frafra, Ewe ... the list goes on. Ghana has too many languages and too much tribal sentiments ..... Do we have the resources to develop, translate all science, maths, geography into the 10+ national languages... We are competing in a global market, how does she compare Ghana to Korea in its development agenda?

# This policy will lead to Babel

- **Gideon Smart**
- She is a professor today because of her local language, right? She wants to destroy Ghana's education system before the end of her tenure, bravo! Ride on.  
When a Ghana academic travels to Nigeria for presentation then an interpreter would be needed, what a sense of backwardness.  
Meaning when a Ghanaian professor comes to South Africa to lecture, He will communicate his ashanti language with the Zulu students in Durban. Wow! Quite Interesting!  
Going by this ideology, Africa will naturally become another TOWER OF BABEL IN THIS 21st CENTURY.



# OK, but don't split the nation

- **king Asante-Yeboa**
- The observation of Ghana's Minister of Education, Prof. Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang, is a step in the right direction. However her idea will help to disintegrate or fragment Ghanaians rather than unite; so I differ in opinion with her. I favor adopting at least an indigenous (African) language, or say 2 or 3 languages that would be more commonly accepted among Ghanaians with other African countries in the general picture.
- This is one of the recipes for the longterm advancement of our race.

# ghanaweb.com

- A local, Ghana-based, news website

# Ghanaweb comments page

- <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Ghana-to-change-English-as-medium-of-instruction-388207>



Comment to Article		Post	10-17 03:32
POOR COMPARISON		GHNANAIAN	10-17 03:32
Stupid thinking		Jalil adanko	10-17 04:03
POTENTIAL TO DAMAGE INTERNATIONAL EQUALI		DP 1500 i.	10-17 04:54
It Won't Happen		HolyGhost	10-17 07:18
It would be a terrible mistake		MATHS	10-17 08:10
Our English Is Bad As It Is!!		True Talk	10-17 09:10
Why hs GHANA so many Foolish Professors?		Samansaman	10-17 09:14
Another idiot of a minister!		Baba	10-17 09:38
Her hair style alone says it all!		Kofi Sammy	10-17 09:59
THE WOMAN IS COMPLETELY MAD		TARANTULA	10-17 12:16
Our problem is corruption		Senior Wisdom	10-17 16:04
BULLSHIT		Saint Ghfuo: CHALLENGE YOURSELF	10-19 08:35
I disagree		Prince	10-21 00:28
FIRE THIS WHORE IMMD		tariq	10-17 17:32
STOP THE MAHAMA&NDC STUPIDITY		MUSA	10-17 17:34
SHE WAS UNDER PRESS TO SAY STH		Boss	10-17 19:14
Re: Another idiot of a minister!		naakoto1	10-20 16:08
Re: Why hs GHANA so many Foolish Professors?		Sankofa	10-18 00:50
maths		Eric Mintah - London	10-17 12:31
@ Eric Mintah		MATHS	10-17 15:41
SUBJECT TEXTBOOKS		MAAME YAA	10-19 14:10
STUPID WOMAN		Joel MacCutchen	10-17 09:51
LET US EXPERIMENT WITH ASHANTI REGION		CITIZEN ONE	10-17 10:49
let us experiment with ashanti region		Eric Mintah - London	10-17 11:42
Re: let us experiment with ashanti region		danny	10-17 12:00
		HolyGhost	10-17 16:03

# Issues

- What is a mother tongue?
- Multilingualism in the rural areas
  - Local hierarchy of languages
  - Some languages only a few thousand, or even hundred speakers
- Multilingualism in the cities
  - Large-scale migration
  - English

# March 2017 – any change?

- By Cecilia Diesob, GNA
- **Accra, March 1**, GNA - Mr Peter Essien, the Acting Director of the Bureau of Ghana Languages (BGL), has called on the government and stakeholders to focus on monitoring the local language policy in Education.
- Speaking in an interview with the Ghana News Agency, Mr Essien emphasised the need to adhere to the policy in order to strengthen national unity and patriotism.
- He said lack of supervision had encouraged most private schools to disregard the policy of teaching and learning of the 11 Ghanaian languages selected by Ghana Education Service (GES) to be imparted at the kindergarten and lower primary levels before the gradual introduction of the English language to the children.
- 'Ghanaians are quick in making policies which are not often implemented as they should be and the mother tongue (L1) policy is not exempted,' he noted.



# Cause for optimism

- Ghanaian languages are very much on the agenda
- English proficiency is increasing
- Literacy (in English, but also Ghanaian languages) is improving



Thank you!