

On Language Attitudes and Language Endangerment: The Dampo Language of Ghana in Perspective

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Abstract

The Dampo language, spoken in the North-Western part of the Bono Region of Ghana is a highly endangered language. The language has a remaining aged fluent speaker base of about three people, and a few other natives who have some basic knowledge of its vocabulary. Dampo has lost its vibrancy to the Nafaanra language, whose speakers are believed to have migrated from the neighbouring country of Ivory Coast. Nafaanra is currently not only the language of everyday usage in the Dampo community, but is also the first language of most of the native Dampo people. This paper discusses the results of a survey of 100 local respondents in the Dampo community about their attitudes towards Dampo and their views on the causes of the degeneration of the language. 66 respondents identified as native Dampos while 34 stated that they were Nafaanras. All the native Dampos

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recounted that while they have a positive attitude towards their language despite its current state, they bemoan its non-transmission to them by their older kinsmen. Intermarriages between Dompos and Nafaanras, which further led to the subjugation of the language, emigration of fluent speakers to other communities, lack of interest on the part of the younger generation to learn Dampo, and the language being used as a secret language to tattle about others, are among some of the reasons given for the decline of the language.

Keywords: Language attitudes, Language endangerment, Dampo, Dampofie, Ghana.

Résumé

La langue Dampo, parlée dans la partie nord-ouest de la région de Bono au Ghana, est une langue très menacée. Il ne reste qu'environ trois personnes âgées qui parle couramment ladite langue, et quelques autres autochtones qui ont une certaine connaissance de base de son vocabulaire. Dampo a perdu son dynamisme au profit de la langue Nafaanra, dont les locuteurs auraient émigré du pays voisin de la Côte d'Ivoire. Nafaanra est actuellement non seulement la langue d'usage quotidien dans la communauté de Dampo, mais est aussi la première langue de la plupart des peuples indigènes de Dampo. Cet article examine les résultats d'une enquête menée auprès de 100 répondants locaux de la communauté de Dampo sur leurs attitudes envers Dampo et leurs points de vue sur les causes de la dégénérescence de la langue. 66 répondants ont déclaré être des Dompos autochtones, tandis que 34 ont déclaré être des Nafaanras. Tous les Dompos autochtones ont raconté que, bien qu'ils aient

une attitude positive envers leur langue malgré son état, ils déplorent sa non-transmittance pour eux par leurs parents plus âgés. Les mariages mixtes entre Dompos et Nafaanras, qui ont conduit à l'assujettissement de la langue, l'émigration des locuteurs parlant couramment ladite langue vers d'autres communautés, le manque d'intérêt de la jeune génération pour apprendre Dampo, le langage utilisé comme langage secret pour en dénigrer d'autres sont parmi les raisons données pour le déclin de la langue.

Mots clés: Attitudes linguistiques, danger pour la langue, Dampo, Dompofie, Ghana.

Introduction

Every language that is currently fighting for survival was once cherished and actively used by its speakers. Speech communities face varied pressures; while some may unwillingly succumb to external military, economic, religious, cultural and political pressures (Sallabank,2010) and shift to using dominant languages, other language speakers may, through their personal outlook of their own language, switch willingly to using a language they deem more prestigious. All in all, the onus still lies on the speech communities to weigh the merits and demerits of having a unique identity or being submerged under another group. The speakers of the Dampo language of Ghana have over the years shifted to using Nafaanra, the dominant area language. Only a few Dampo speakers remain at present. These speakers are elderly and, having realized the disservice done to their ancestral language, are now resisting the extinction of their language by helping with its documentation and revival.

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Introduction to Dompofie and language endangerment

Dompo¹ refers to both the language and its speakers. Other names used to refer to the Dompo language and speakers include Ndompo, Ndmbo (Blench, 2007:1), Dumpo and Ndambo (Batibo, 2005). The Dompos live in an enclave known as Dompofie 'home of the Dompo'. Dompofie is in the North-Western corner of the Bono Region of Ghana. A map reference of 8° 09' N, 2 22' is given in Painter (1967). Dompofie is part of the Banda traditional area which is an area nestled within a range of high hills directly south of the Black Volta bend (Stahl, 1991). The Dompos claim they are the earliest inhabitants of the area (Goody, 1964; Stahl, 1991).

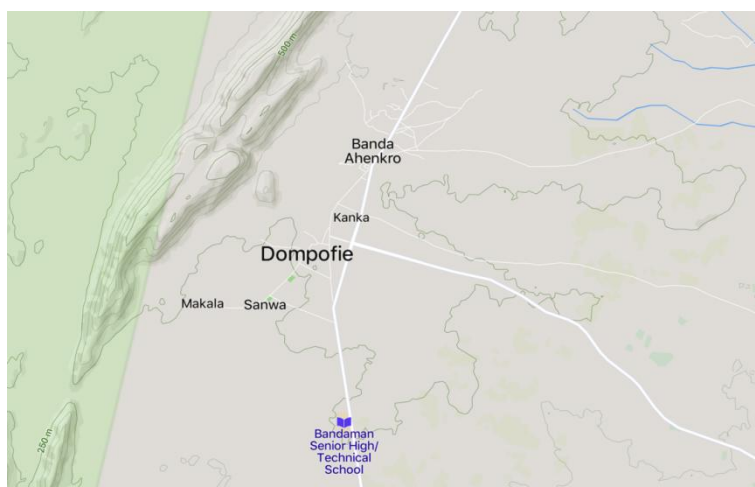


Figure 1: Map of Dompofie² nestled between other surrounding communities

¹ The ISO 639-3 code for Dompo is doyp while the Glottolog code is domp 1238.

² <https://mapcarta.com> Bono Region, Banda. (Accessed: 26 September 2024)



Figure 2: District map of Banda³

Dompo is believed to be an isolate (Blench, 2007; Dimmendaal, 2011). This classification stems from the last of three assumptions given in Blench (2007) which suggests that Dompo may be a language of unknown origin, relexified from Gonja and other languages. This notwithstanding, some phonological, lexical and social evidence presented in Manu-Barfo (2020)⁴ suggests that Dompo is possibly more related to the North-Guang languages rather than being an isolate.

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³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banda_District_\(Ghana\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banda_District_(Ghana)). (Accessed: 6 March 2017)

⁴ The author's PhD thesis was sponsored by La Trobe University Postgraduate Research Scholarship (LTUPRS) and La Trobe University Full Fee Research Scholarship (LTUFFRS). I am very grateful to my supervisors Prof. Stephen Morey, Dr. Lauren Gawne and Prof. David Bradley for their guidance and support. I would also like to thank my main Dompo consultants Mr. Kosi Mila, Madam Abena Kuma and Mr. Emmanuel Dwirah. May the souls of my departed consultants, Mr. Kofi Nakpa, Madam Afua Nimena and a Dompo native, Madam Mariama Sina rest well.

Dompo has also been labelled as belonging to the North-Guang language group (Painter, 1967; Simons & Fennig, 2018; Güldemann, 2018). Dolphyne & Dakubu (2015) allude to Dumpo or Ndmpo being spoken in and near Buipe and having an enclave Dumpofie in Banda Ahenkro. They also indicate that Dumpo is a variety of Gonja though it could have been a distinct language at one point. Further investigation of this claim (see Manu-Barfo, 2020) reveal that Dumpo, spoken in Dumpofie is a distinct language and different from Ndempu which is a rather a dialect of Gonja.

Earlier linguistic works on Dumpo include Painter's (1967) 100 words, transcribed animal names in Cansdale (1970) and Blench's (2007) description, classification and wordlists in the language. Stahl (1991, 2001) and Stahl & Anane (1989) describe the history and lifestyle of the Dumpo people. Additionally, Manu-Barfo (2020; 2019) give a detailed description of the history, culture and language of the Dumpo people.

The primary reason for the decline in the status of the language is that the Dumpo speakers have adopted Nafaanra, a dominant language spoken in most of the neighbouring communities. The speakers of Nafaanra are believed to have migrated from Kakala in the neighbourhood of Jimini near Bontuku in the eastern part of the Ivory Coast (Ameyaw, 1965). They initially settled around Dumpofie and over a period, some speakers also settled in Dumpofie. Nafaanra is a Gur language and is part of the Senufo language group of Ivory Coast and Mali (Jordan, 1980; Simons & Fennig, 2018).

The language(s) that people acquire shapes their world view. Language identifies us as unique members of a group and aides to effectively communicate with members of a given society (Batibo, 2005). The importance of language can thus never be over emphasized. This notwithstanding, several languages are still being lost by the day. The attrition rate of languages, most especially so-called "indigenous" languages, is extremely worrisome. The world is home to 7,168 living

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languages (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig:2023). Out of this number, there are genuine fears a vast majority of these languages will be lost. Nettle & Romaine, 2000, p.2), for instance, report that “about half the known languages of the world have vanished in the last five hundred years”. In Grenoble’s, 2006, p.137) words,

recent studies have revealed that 50% of the world’s languages are losing speakers and by the end of this century, a full 90% of the world’s languages will disappear entirely, replaced by more widely spoken national or global languages

This implies that several languages will transition to minority language status. Zeroing in on African languages, Brenzinger, Heine, & Sommer (1991) maintain that, unlike in other parts of the world where colonial languages have largely replaced local languages, in Africa, other indigenous or sub-national languages present the most pressing threat to minority African languages. Consequently, despite being home to about 2,000 (25%) of the languages of the world (Crystal, 2000; Dimmendaal & Voeltz, 2007), Africa appears to be the continent that will suffer the most language attrition, since it is also the continent with the greatest number of endangered languages (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998).

A language is considered endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in increasingly reduced communicative domains and stop transmitting it from one generation to the next (UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages, 2003). Batibo (2005:62) describes an endangered language as one “threatened by extinction”. Additionally, in their 2022 study of global predictors of language endangerment, Bromham et al highlight population movement because of greater road density and the average number of years of schooling (indicating that formal education can contribute to language diversity) as salient factors that

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contribute to language endangerment. Apart from their eventual loss which is problematic in itself, other challenges surface when languages are endangered and on the path of extinction. These include the loss of linguistic and cultural diversity and the loss of rich cultural heritage. Additionally, both Piirainen & Sherris (2015) and Gorenflo et al (2012) hint at the connection between linguistic diversity and global biodiversity; thus, linguistic loss leads to the loss of the knowledge of flora and fauna, ultimately detrimental to the natural ecology. Gorenflo et al (2012) further argue that the loss of habitat due to human impacts from an industrialized global economy has direct ramifications on languages and their associated cultures. These are some of the most impactful consequences when languages are lost.

Some general factors that facilitate the endangerment of languages and their subsequent shift to more dominant ones include social, economic, political and cultural issues. When the language of a dominant group, usually perceived as more socially beneficial, becomes more acceptable to a minority group for use in multiple domains, while restricting usage of their own language, the minority group to a large extent succumbs to social pressures to shift to the dominant language. This is the situation in which minority languages across the globe find themselves. Agyekum (2009) posits two kinds of language shift; intra-national and international. He advances that intra-national language shift involves speakers of other languages using an indigenous language which has attained the status of a lingua franca in a geographical area, such as Akan in Ghana, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria and Wolof, Mandinka and Malinka in Senegal and Gambia (Agyekum, 2009; Igboanusi, 2009). International language shift indicates a shift to a language that is foreign to a country. The ex-colonial languages such as English and French used in many African countries fall into this category.

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A language whose status commands other language users to shift to using it wields economic power. It serves as the medium through which economic activities are conducted. Such a language ensures economic stability and raises the social status of those who use it. Machinyise (2018) cites the Lamba ethnic group on the Copperbelt Province of Zambia as shifting to using the Bemba language which offers more prestige socially and economically. Similarly, Kedrebéogo (1998) refers to the Koromba language community of Burkina Faso who are shifting from their language, Koronfe to Moore.

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Some government policies place certain languages at an advantage over others. Majority languages enjoy usage in political discourse and representation in schools, print and mass media. Every aspect of the culture of a dominant language group may attract minority groups to acculturate, or to adopt the dominant culture in which they are immersed (Lum, 1995). To effectively understand and navigate the rules of the culture of a majority group, their language must be learnt. This may lead to the neglect of minority languages and their own cultures. Obeng Gyasi & Edegbija (1999) assert that some African languages of wider communication which yield political and economic power such as Douala and Fulfulde in Cameroon, Hausa in Nigeria and Niger, Akan in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, Bambara in North-Western Africa, Wolof in Senegal, Sango in Central African Republic, Lingala in the Congo, Swahili in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, Zulu and Xhosa in Southern Africa serve as languages which are used beyond their spoken areas by other language groups. The culture of the speakers of these dominant languages are thus accessed by members of other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, Batibo (2005) also outlines three broad categories of common indicators of endangered languages. These are attitude related, language use related and language structure related. He argues that the first category relates to speakers of a language wavering in their loyalty towards their

language and consequently becoming indifferent towards its transmission to the next generation. When this occurs, they are said to have developed negative attitudes towards their language. Additionally, attitudinal issues deal with how language groups view their languages and their use as well as their motivations for preserving or abandoning them. These attitudes play a huge role in deciding whether a minority group will shift from using their language or be loyal and committed to it when they face pressures from majority languages. Brenzinger et al. (1991) note that a change in the self-esteem of a speech community always informs their decision to abandon their own language. They add that, very often, it is the minority group's younger members that considers their language as inferior and thus strive to attain the language and social identity of the dominant group. They give the example of the young Yaaku group of North-Central Kenya who have adopted the Maasai language.

The second category entails the inactive transmission of the language, coupled with the use of the language in very few, mainly primary, domains. Furthermore, the speakers of the language reduce drastically because of the language shift to the dominant language. Lastly, language structure related indicator implies the language being simplified in its structure, such that its lexicon is reduced and the language can no longer be used in discourse for effective communication. In this paper, I argue that while the current Dompoo speakers show genuine pride in their language, their inactions have led to their being aligned with the first two indicators.

Sociolinguistic Survey Interpreted through UNESCO Factors

Narrowing the factors on language endangerment discussed in the section above to the Dampo language, it is safe to say that the language is highly endangered and could become extinct in the very near future. Using results from a sociolinguistic survey I conducted through a questionnaire,⁵ I discuss and evaluate the degree of endangerment of the Dampo language through the list of factors proposed by UNESCO (2003) on Language Vitality and Endangerment. The factors are listed below, followed by a discussion of each point.

- a. Intergenerational language transmission
- b. Absolute number of speakers
- c. Proportion of speakers within the total population
- d. Trends in existing language domain
- e. Response to new domains and media
- f. Materials for language education and literacy
- g. Language attitudes and policies
- h. Community members' attitude towards their own language
- i. Amount and quality of documentation

⁵ The questionnaire for this research took a period of three weeks to administer. 100 participants made up of 70 females and 30 males took part in this research. I went from house to house and interviewed participants who were willing to share their ideas on the topic. I went with a Nafaanra speaker just in case some of the participants did not speak Twi well enough, and I also could not understand them if they were to speak Nafaanra. When there were any language barriers, the Nafaanra speaker I went with, did well to interpret everything the participant said in Nafaanra to me in Twi and I recorded the participant's answers in English. The interview took a time frame of between 15–20 minutes depending on how expressive the participant was. The questions were largely qualitative in nature with the main aims of investigating what the participants knew or thought had happened to the Dampo language, the reasons they thought the language got endangered and their attitudes towards it and the languages they speak. The other questions can be found in the questionnaire provided in the appendix.

a. Intergenerational language transmission

The transmission of a language from one generation to the next is one of the most important factors in determining the vitality of a language (Brenzinger, 2007; Fishman, 1991). Dompo falls in category 1 (critically endangered) and 2 (severely endangered) of the six degrees of language endangerment given in relation to intergenerational transmission stated in UNESCO (2003, p. 8). Category 1 indicates that,

The youngest generation are in the great-grand parental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interaction. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it since there may not be anyone to speak with.

While the first statement in the quote above is true in the case of Dompo, the second statement is not. Five of the about six remaining speakers of Dompo recorded in Manu-Barfo (2020) were in the category of great-grandparents. The language is not used for everyday interaction and is restricted to occasions such as festivals and ritual performances. Contrary to the point made in the second statement, the older people remembered most aspects of the language, and this culminated in the production of the grammar of the language. Additionally, the four speakers who provided data for the grammar of the language spoke it amongst themselves when the need arose.

Category 2 suggests that “the language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children”. All aspects of this category apply to the Dompo language. The remaining speakers of

Dompo are grandparents and older. The youngest speaker⁶ of the language, who passed in 2021 at age 53, was the only speaker of the parent generation. He rarely spoke the language to his five children until after 2016 when the documentation of the language started. It took the start of this project to serve as an eye-opening experience for the remaining speakers. They realized their mistake in not being intentional about the transmission of the language to the younger generation. They made some efforts to remedy the situation, but it was a short-term solution to a problem created over several generations ago.

In practice, intergenerational transmission of the Dompofie language has been ineffective for a very long time. For it to have been effective, one would expect that the younger generation after the oldest remaining speakers of the language, for example the grandparents, parents and children, would not only know some aspects of the language but could also, to some extent, communicate in the language with the oldest speakers. This is, however, not the case. The survey revealed that out of 100 residents of Dompofie who responded to the questionnaire, 66 people identified as native Dompofies. The age groups of the respondents were between 10–100. This is illustrated in figure 3 below.

⁶ The years 2021 and 2022 were tough on the Dompofie community. The Dompofie community lost the youngest speaker of the language, Mr. Daniel Kofi Nakpa. Madam Mariama Sina one of the oldest speakers of the language also passed on. Madam Afua Nimena, the oldest female speaker passed away in April 2022. These deaths are a huge blow to future projects on the language because these speakers have been very instrumental in the documentation project on the language.

Age Group

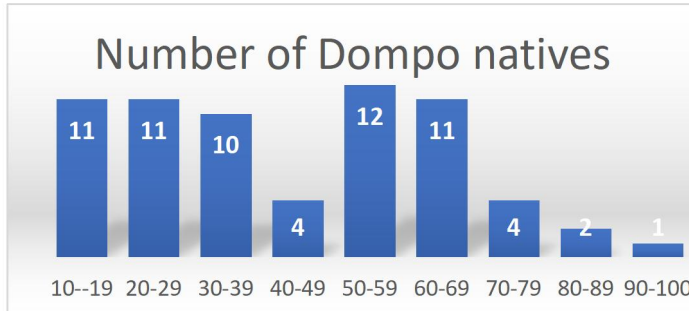


Figure 3 Number of Dompofie natives in the various age categories

With regards to acquisition of the language, out of the 66 Dompofie natives, only 3 acquired Dompofie as a first language. 2 others have Nafaanra as a first language and Dompofie as a second language. This is illustrated in Table 1 below. The rest speak Nafaanra⁷ as a first language and Akan (Twi)⁸ as a second language. Some inhabitants may also have as part of their linguistic repertoires, Kulango, Mo, Ligbi, Jula, French and Dagomba. These languages may have been acquired through resettlements or areal proximity to the speakers. Nafaanra has, over the years, served as the language of everyday usage in Dompofie. The older Dompofie natives have been transmitting it to the generations after them, who have acquired it as a first language to the peril of their own native language. As stated earlier, Dompofie is currently used only by the few remaining elderly speakers on occasions such as festivals when homages are paid to the ancestors and during funerals, puberty and

⁷ Majority of the inhabitants in Dompofie, including the Dompofie natives, speak Nafaanra as a first language.

⁸ Twi or Asante Twi is one of the dialects of the larger Akan language. It is used as a lingua franca in the Southern part of Ghana and has been described by Ethnologue as a defacto national working language. In this case, it is the second popular language after Nafaanra that most of the participants speak.

marriage ceremonies of some native Dompas when songs are sung in the language.

Table 1: First language acquisition of Dampo, Nafaanra and other languages of acquisition

Age group	Number of people who acquired Dampo as a first language	Number of people who acquired Nafaanra as a first language	Other languages spoken
10–19	–	11	Twi, English
20–29	–	11	Twi, English, Dagaati, Kulango
30–39	–	10	Jula, Twi, French, Mossi, Anyi, Ligbi, English
40–49	–	4	Jula, Kulango, Twi,
50–59	–	12	Dampo, Twi, French, Jula, Ligbi.
60–69	–	11	Twi, Kulango, Hausa, Jula, English
70–79	1	3	Nafaanra, Dampo, Twi, Kulango, Ligbi, Jula
80–89	1	1	Nafaanra, Dampo, Kulango, Mo (Deg)
90–100	1	–	Nafaanra
Total	3	63	

The data in Table 1 above shows that the transmission of the language as a first language was less effective from the age group of 60–69 and below. The youngest speaker of Dampo fell between the age bracket 50–59. He acquired Nafaanra as a first language in Banda Ahenkro, the district capital of the Banda district and one of the populous areas where Nafaanra is spoken. After moving to Dompofie in his teens, he learnt Dampo from the oldest male speaker, mainly during their time farming together. Two interesting patterns worthy of note have to do with language acquisition. Firstly, apart from the oldest female speaker between the age group 90–100, who was bilingual in Dampo and Nafaanra, most of the natives between the ages of 20–89 spoke additional languages apart from Nafaanra and Dampo. Many of them were women who had at some point in their lives emigrated from Dompofie to seek greener pastures in neighbouring towns. They picked up the languages of the areas they settled in. Secondly, while the natives in the age range 10–19 were still too young to emigrate to other areas, their language acquisition patterns showed that they acquired Twi as a second language after Nafaanra. This is further evidence of Twi's status as the fastest rising lingua franca in Ghana. They are also the main age group to acquire English as an additional language from the school system, given that most parents in Dompofie are putting in extra efforts to help their children attain some level of education. A language revitalization project I started together with the remaining speakers of the language in July 2018 saw members of the age group 10–19 availing themselves the most to learning the language. This means that though intergenerational transmission of Dampo may not be possible, the younger generation, once given the necessary opportunity, may acquire certain basic aspects of the language.

b. Absolute number of speakers

Blench's 1991 research on the language (published in 2007) is the only known previous work that has given an estimate of the number of Dompofie speakers. He records 60–70 people who had some command of the language and an additional 10 people who could remember some words. Thirty-one years later, the number of Dompofie speakers approximates to about three. This contrasts with the majority Nafaanra speakers whose number is estimated to be around 20,000 spread throughout the Banda region (Garvin, 2019). Thus, Dompofie speakers have become the minority group in a community which bears their name. This has essentially resulted in the shift from their language to Nafaanra.

c. Proportion of speakers within the total population

The 970 individuals recorded in 2000 as the ethnic population of Dompofie by *Ethnologue* (Lewis, Simon & Fennig, 2015) may have captured some native Nafaanras as well. Similarly, the 2010 population census which recorded 364 inhabitants in Dompofie, consisting of 168 males and 196 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014) and the census I conducted in 2017 which indicated 676 locals in Dompofie, comprising 189 adult males, 214 adult females and 273 children might have done same. My survey of Dompofie speakers captured six remaining speakers. This number has further reduced with the deaths of three of the remaining speakers in 2021 and 2022. Though the total number of only native Dompofie speakers in Dompofie may not be accurately known, evidence from the data in Figure 3 reveal that very few of those who consider themselves Dompofie natives speak the language or have some knowledge of basic aspects of the language. This number is just a drop in the ocean compared to that of the Nafaanra speakers to whose language and ethnicity the Dompofies are fast shifting. Consequently, the low numbers of Dompofie speakers over the

years has led to limited opportunities for interactions where Dompó could be adequately used. For instance, Dompó is not actively spoken during important occasions such as marriage, naming, and puberty ceremonies, and during funerals and festivals because people in attendance do not understand the language.

d. Trends in existing language domains

UNESCO (2003) notes that where language is used, with whom and which range of topics it covers, goes a long way to sustain the vitality of the language and enhances its transmission. Dompó falls under grade 1 (highly limited domain) in terms of the domains and functions of language use. This indicates that,

The non-dominant language is used in very restricted domains at special occasions, usually by very few individuals in a community, e.g. ritual leaders on ceremonial occasions. Some other individuals may remember at least some of the language.

This accurately captures the Dompó language's current situation. Dompó is used very rarely. During their annual yam festival, the remaining speakers speak only Dompó during the performance of rituals that pay homage to their ancestors. After the rituals, the celebrants sing Dompó songs while they process from the area where their shrine⁹ is located to the

⁹ The Dompós have a shrine of their foremost ancestress, Nyine Wurache. For many years the shrine had been in a wooden structure adjacent the house of the oldest male speaker, Mr. Mila. He and Madam Afua Nimena serve as the custodians of the shrine. It has recently been moved to one of the rooms in the home of Mr. Mila. Except for him, Madam Nimena and a few other older Dompó natives, I believe no other persons know what the shrine looks like.

baobab tree¹⁰ where they believe their foremost ancestress sunk into the ground and manifested herself as the tree. When rituals are held in Dompoto to appease the gods in the event of any crime committed by an indigene, the oldest Dompoto speaker performs this ritual in Dompoto. ‘Ritual language’ is one of the domains a language is maintained in before its eventual loss. Kedrebéogo (1998) notes that the Koronfe language is used mostly in ritual ceremonies although the speakers are shifting to Moore. This thus supports the fact that religion is an essential part of language maintenance. Ansah (2014) also notes that during traditional ceremonies, the Leteh language is the primary choice for its speech community. Other languages may, however, be used in other domains. Some Dompoto songs are also sang during marriage, puberty and funeral ceremonies. These songs are sung by the Dompoto women who, although they can sing the songs, do not know their meaning. A few Dompoto natives can still recollect some word lists, especially numerals from 1 to 10 and some greetings. They also remember some basic question and answer pairs such as ‘how are you’ and its response.

e. Response to new domains and media

As the community expands in terms of development and infrastructure, it becomes necessary for the languages of the community to also broaden their domains of usage. Some of the domains include schools, work, media (broadcast and internet). Often, the majority languages enjoy the expansion into these domains. The minority languages remain relegated to the very few domains to which they are restricted. This stifles their development and further serves as a catalyst for

¹⁰ The Dompotos believe the magnificent baobab tree located in their community is their foremost ancestress Nyine Wurache. Their history has it that she sunk into the ground at that spot. Seven days later, the tree started germinating. The Dompotos believe the tree connects them with their ancestors and thus consider the tree very sacred.

language shift and ultimately, death. Domo, in this sense, is not used in any existing domains that will encourage its transmission. Consequently, its usage in any new domain is null. The dominant language, Nafaanra, is used in all spheres in the Domo community and in almost all the surrounding communities. It is used in public spaces such as markets, churches, during festivals, funerals and naming ceremonies. It is sometimes used as the medium of interaction in schools¹¹ when concepts may be better explained in the native tongues of the students. The Bible has been translated into Nafaanra by the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) for easier accessibility by the speakers. There is also an online dictionary on Nafaanra which was supported by GILLBT under the Nafaanra language project (Jordan, Attah, & Anane, 2018). These are some of the privileges that dominant languages enjoy that make them more powerful.

f. Materials for language education and literacy

Prior to some form of written works on Domo, the speakers maintained oral traditions. The foremost linguistic works on Domo include Painter's (1967) 100 words, transcribed animal names in Cansdale (1970) and Blench's (2007) description, classification and wordlists in the language. Stahl (1991, 2001) and Stahl & Anane (1989) describe the history and lifestyle of the Domo people. A comprehensive descriptive grammar of the language was completed in 2020 (Manu-Barfo:2020). I further compiled a learner's manual which contains images of

¹¹ The language in education policy in Ghana stipulates that the mother tongue of a child be used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to Primary 3. English is to be taught as a subject during this period. English takes over exclusively from Primary 4 as the medium of instruction (Ansa 2014: 8). It is, however, common for teachers in small communities to resort to using the language of the community to elucidate concepts that the students find difficult to understand in the English language. This may happen across all levels.

animals and body parts and topics such as greetings, kinship terms, sentences and their meanings in Dampo, among others. This manual is to be used by members of the community and others who are interested in gaining insight into the language. I have further collated two sets of illustrated¹² folktale books containing five folktales each, narrated by the remaining speakers of the language. These efforts are to enhance literacy in the language and to encourage the younger generation to acquire some aspects of the language. In terms of accessibility of written materials, Dampo can be placed in grade 2 which stipulates that,

Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not part of the school curriculum (UNESCO 2003, p. 12).

In effect, the written materials that have been provided on the language can be accessed by those who can read and write. Very few Dampo indigenes fall in this category. For those that do not, these materials in the language play an emblematic role. They symbolise the hope of a threatened language community with the knowledge that their language is vital and worthy of respect and usage.

g. Language attitudes and policies

Over the years, the language policies of Ghana have favoured English and a few indigenous languages (see Owu–Ewie 2006; Ansah & Agyeman 2015; Ansah 2014). According to *Ethnologue*, 83 living languages exist in Ghana (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2023). Out of these, 73 are living indigenous

¹² Funding for the illustrations of the folktales was provided by the Social Research Assistance Platform of La Trobe University.

languages while 10 are living non-indigenous languages. 10 are institutional, 55 are stable, 8 are endangered and 1 is extinct. Owu-Ewie (2017), however reports that 11 languages are government sponsored and have been selected to be used as media of instruction in schools. These languages are also in use in the media. Dampo is one of Ghana's critically endangered languages; indeed, its status on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption scale (EGIDS) may be described as nearly extinct. This implies that the language is in its dying stages with "the only remaining users being members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language" (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig, 2020). Minority languages such as Dampo have no governmental support or recognition. Earlier and continuing work on the language have been efforts of private individuals with support from other sources apart from the government.

h. Community members attitude towards their own language.

Members of a particular speech community may have varied dispositions towards their language. If the language transcends the speech community and is used by others, they may realize the value it holds and guard it to become more prominent. On the other hand, if members of a speech community do not place value on their language and it loses its worth, they are most likely to abandon it entirely. In the case of Dampo, its decline is a combination of several factors which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Despite the challenges Dampo is facing, its speakers seem to have a positive perception of the language. One of the questions in the questionnaire administered was on attitude towards Dampo. More than half of the 34% of people who identified as Nafaanras viewed Dampo as a language they would have loved to speak. They claimed that since it is the language of the community they have become a part of, they should have

some knowledge of it. All the 66% native Dompō respondents maintained that they hold the language in high esteem because it is the language of their ancestors. Most of them deplored their inability to acquire it because of the lack of its transmission. From these sentimental viewpoints, one may conclude that the shift from Dompō to Nafaanra by the Dompō speakers might not have been a case of negative attitude or low self-esteem towards Dompō. On the contrary, the Dompōs are proud of their ethnicity and culture. They are quick to point out their autochthonous status whenever it is suggested that they are part of the Nafaanra group. Unfortunately, amidst pressures from the dominant Nafaanra language, the inability of the few Dompō speakers to consciously transmit the language to the younger generation has led to its near extinction.

i. Amount and quality of documentation

Blench (2015) notes that prior to his description, classification and wordlists of the Dompō language, the only known works were Painter's (1967) 100 words and some transcribed animal names in Cansdale (1970). He added that Dompō was thought to be an extinct language. His work on the language thus shed more light on its status and encouraged extensive work. The documentation and grammar writing project on Dompō started in 2016 and was completed in 2020. The project's outcomes include recorded wordlists, transcribed, translated and annotated audio and video recordings of natural speech. An online dictionary is also in progress. The more tangible outcomes are a comprehensive grammar, a learner's manual and two illustrated folktale books.

General discussion of the causes of Dompō's endangerment

As stated earlier, there are several factors that might account for the reasons languages might be in danger of disappearing. This section reviews the opinions of some respondents to the questionnaire on language attitudes conducted in September 2018. The questions were largely qualitative in nature with the aims of investigating what the respondents knew, or thought had caused the decline of Dompō and their disposition towards the language.

This discussion will first start with the opinions given by the participants who identify themselves as Dompōs. Some of the issues discussed in this section have also been explored in Manu-Barfo (2019). The review here is, however, more detailed.

All the respondents, including those who identified as Nafaanras, indicated that they knew the language was highly endangered and on the verge of extinction. The native Dompō respondents revealed that the language was not spoken to them in their younger years by their relations who could speak it. Although these relatives spoke Dompō among themselves, they did not make the effort to communicate with their children in the language. Instead, Nafaanra was the primary mode of communication. Three respondents, who are siblings and grew up in the same house, recalled how their grandparents would on some occasions switch from speaking Dompō to Nafaanra whenever the siblings were around. They thought this was probably a strategy used by their grandparents to dissuade them from learning to speak the language, a strategy they believe worked and is responsible for their inability to speak the language. In their opinion, their grandparents did them a great disservice. One said, “their unwillingness to teach us the language has left it in the state it is currently in; critically ill and almost dead”.

Four other Dompo natives also maintained that life is teaching the few remaining speakers a lesson. It is because they didn't effectively transmit the language that the language is almost extinct. One respondent added that he wishes some of the elders who consciously did not transmit the language were alive to feel the pain and shame they are feeling, because of their inability to sustain their ancestral language. He further opined that their forefathers thought they were being wise by not speaking Dompo openly for the Nafaanras to learn. That is, because their forefathers thought they were being outnumbered, they resolved to rather learn Nafaanra and be good at speaking it, while shielding their own language so the Nafaanras could not have access to it. They assumed the inaccessibility of Dompo to the dominant Nafaanra group would wield some power over them. Little did they know that several years down the line, their identity and that of their descendants would be on the verge of a complete wipe out.

The chief of the community and two other respondents also expressed their belief that the language slid into endangerment as a result of inter-ethnic marriages. Previously, native Dompos only married within the ethnic group, a custom strictly enforced by some stern Dompo kinsmen. They thought this kept the language intact as it was the only language the Dompos knew and spoke. However, as these strict kinsmen passed on, things became liberal, and the rules were broken. The Dompos started marrying from outside their group, mostly to Nafaanras. Polygamous marriages including non-Dompo women also became a norm. These claims were further buttressed by events shared by one native Dompo woman. She disclosed that both her parents spoke Dompo very well and could easily have transmitted it to their children. Her father, however, married a second wife. This new wife was Nafaanra. She was also brought to live in the same household with his first family. It happened that whenever her father and mother or her mother and other

neighbours were speaking Dompō, the Nafaanra woman would get offended and claim her co-wife was gossiping about her. The constant usage of Dompō in her house was therefore inhibited and subsequently led to its total abandonment. She added that while the Dompō language was being suppressed, the Nafaanra men and women were increasing in number through marriages and resettlement and their language gained more ground.

Furthermore, according to the chief, several Dompō natives who were very fluent in the language emigrated from the village and settled in other communities, both far and near. Some relocated because of marriage, while others left to seek greener pastures in these other areas. This could have also led to the language being endangered. He added that he was of the strong opinion that these Dompō natives might not have transmitted Dompō to their children.

Nine respondents also gave their contrary view to the ineffective transmission of the language by their relations. They claimed that their relatives had attempted to teach them Dompō. They disclosed that it was their own lack of interest in wanting to learn the language that prevented them from speaking it. They believed that one should not be forced to learn a language but should rather readily be alert and attentive to grasp the language. One person admitted that both parents used to speak Dompō, but because Nafaanra was the language of everyday transmission, he and his siblings did not deem it fit to pursue the learning of their own language. They terribly regret this because they foresee the loss of their identity if drastic measures are not taken to preserve the little that is left of the language.

Seven people recounted that the language began to be endangered when the native Dompō community started losing most of the kinsmen who could speak and transmit the language to the younger generation. They fondly remembered some men, Dabla and Nana Fofie who were very eloquent in

the language. Dabla for instance used to organise classes in Dompo for the children several years ago. Though the respondents could not recall the frequency of the classes, they indicated that children used to show interest in them. They, however, remembered with much regret that the classes could not continue because Dabla complained that the children were not serious about the lessons, claiming they made funny comments about some of the things he was teaching which put him off. He was thus not enthused to continue teaching the language.

Elaborating on the younger generation's attitude towards the language, my oldest male consultant also claimed that the young people of recent times do not respect the elderly and so do not want to sit with them to be taught the language. Furthermore, the young ones are not keen to go to the farm with the elderly anymore. Consequently, the opportunities which could have been used to teach the language are being wasted by the young generation. He further revealed that the youngest speaker of Dompō was able to learn Dompō by going to the farm with him. They did a lot of the teaching and learning on their long journeys to and from the farm and while working on the farm.

Adding another perspective, three siblings disclosed that their parents did not want to teach them Dompō when they were growing up. This was because they did not want them to understand the language. One explained further that whenever he and his siblings had done something wrong at home and their parents wanted to punish them, the latter made all the disciplinary plans against them in Dompō. The children could not catch on the plans because they did not understand Dompō. He recounted that whenever they felt their parents had forgiven them for their wrongdoing, that was when they rather got punished. Consequently, they believed that their parents thought if the children also spoke Dompō, all the plans they took against them would be thwarted. They

therefore preferred that the children did not know the language.

Five other respondents also asserted that they witnessed the Domo language being used as a form of secret language among those who could speak it. It was used to gossip about those who could not speak Domo. The respondents shared that though they did not remember the exact Domo word, they recalled that some Domo words were said to caution the gossips that the person they were talking about was approaching.

The views of the Nafaanras were also sought, with regards to the question of why they think the Domo language is endangered. Nine respondents were of the view that the language was not spoken to the hearing of others. They mentioned that the only times Domo was openly spoken were during their annual festival and when they were performing some rituals.

Additionally, twenty-three of the Nafaanra respondents confirmed that the Domo speakers did not transmit the language to their children. They stated that to a larger extent it was Nafaanra which was spoken everywhere and by everyone. They added that the Domo speakers had 'hidden' their language and some of them had only been exposed to the language through a joint effort between the remaining Domo speakers and myself to teach the children the ancestral language of the community.

One respondent also commented that he thought the Domo children were not sharp in grasping the language. If they were, they should have been able to grasp as much as was spoken by their kinsmen when they were alive. He thus concluded that the children who had the opportunity to grasp the language under these conditions and could not do so, did not pay enough attention. This observation parallels a comment by another Nafaanra respondent that he strongly believed the Domo language was not important to its

speakers and that's why they failed to transmit their language. He thinks that every language is important and more so, every speaker of a language should be proud of their language enough to speak it and transmit it to the young generation. This would enable the language to be kept alive, active and further encourage others to learn to speak it. In this vein, he believed the older Dampo generation and the current ones who still speak the language have failed terribly. He only hopes that they realize the negative path the language is taking and strategize to revitalize it.

Conclusion

Language and ethnicity have an intricate bond. Language is seen as a repository of ethnicity. Each ethnic group distinguishes itself by the language it speaks (Obeng Gyasi & Edegbija, 1999). Consequently, once a language is in danger of being lost, the ethnicity of its speakers suffers the same fate. The Dampos, as well as some Nafaanra speakers who witnessed the decline of Dampo over the years have outlined some of the reasons for the degeneration of the language. Firstly, there was lack of conscious effort by older Dampo to transmit the language to the younger generations. Additionally, the Dampos deliberately shielded their language from the Nafaanras because they wanted to wield some power over the latter group. The Nafaanras refer to the Dampos as '*kuulo*' which means coil in Nafaanra. They thus describe the Dampos as people who are secretive. Furthermore, the era where intermarriages was allowed enabled marriages between the Dampos and the Nafaanras. This period led to the increase in Nafaanra speakers in the Dampo community and a further subjugation of the Dampo language. Moreover, the constant emigration of some fluent Dampo speakers to other communities dwindled the speaker base of the language. Also, lack of interest on the part of the younger Dampo natives

inhibited their learning of the language. What is more, the language was used as a secret language to tattle¹³ about others who could not speak it. Finally, Dampo served as a “secret” language which was used by some fluent Dampo parents to their advantage.

The list of factors on Language Vitality and Endangerment proposed by UNESCO (2003) was used to discuss and evaluate the degree of endangerment of the Dampo language. It revealed that Dampo was critically endangered and on the verge of extinction. It had ceased to be actively transmitted several years ago and now has a remaining aged population of about three speakers. The language is only used rarely during certain celebrations and for ritual purposes. Secondly, the huge native speaker disparity between Dampos and Nafaanras have laid a good foundation for language shift to occur. It seems the Dampos have always been a small group and in the minority. This has thus placed them at a risk of adopting the language and culture of the dominant Nafaanra group. With regards to the attitudes of the Dampo speakers towards their language, it was revealed that the native Dampos hold their language in high esteem. This must have accounted for their unwillingness to share the language with the dominant Nafaanra group, whom they saw as a threat to their existence. The only positive outlook for the language and its future has to do with materials for language education and literacy. A comprehensive grammar now exists on the language. Additionally, a learner’s manual and two folktale books have been provided on the language. These materials can be used to support language revitalization efforts.

¹³ I acknowledge the view of one of the reviewers of this paper who opines that this usage of Dampo may be more of a perceived one than an actuality. The reviewer highlighted the incident of the Nafaanra co-wife believing others to be gossiping about her in Dampo when they may just have been chatting about some other thing.

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APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE ON LANGUAGE ATTITUDES

1. Age group: 10–20, 20–30, 30–40–, 40–50, 50–60, 60–70, 70–80, 80–90, 90–100
2. Were you given birth to in Dompofie? Yes No
3. If no, where were you given birth to/where did you migrate from?.....
4. How many years have you been living here?
5. What languages do you speak? In the home, market, school.....
6. Which one are you most fluent in?.....
7. Do you know of the existence of the Domp language? If yes, how?
8. What do you know or think has happened to the language?
9. Why do you think the language got endangered?
10. What is your attitude towards Domp and the language you speak fluently?
11. Would you have wanted to know how to speak Domp? If yes, why?
12. Have you heard people speaking it? Do you know a few words?
13. What do you think of the fate of the Domp language? Can it be revived?
14. How do you think the language can be revived?
15. Where do you know the Nafaanras came from?
16. How do you feel about your children not knowing how to speak the language?