

# Accounting for *Vox Populi*

## Adjusting the Cost-Benefit Model of Language Planning by Incorporating Network Analysis in the Ghanaian Context

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### ABSTRACT

*Language planning is a formal or informal problem-solving administrative activity which “advocate[s for] either expanding or restricting the resources of a language” and is aimed at total adoption of a language-use strategy on a national level (Haugen 1966a; Kloss 1969; Haarman 1990). This activity has often relied on a cost-benefit analysis structure to choose and eventually implement an official language on a national level. This work investigates such choices made during the independence period in Ghana and advocates for editing the cost-benefit strategy going forward by incorporating network analysis to provide government leaders with a cohesive sociolinguistic valuation of alternatives for their consideration.*

### KEYWORDS

*Ghana; Ghanaian; Language Planning; Indigenous Language; Cost-Benefit Analysis; Rational-Choice Model; Network Analysis; Nationalism; Colonial Legacy; Language Policy; Language Problems; Kwame Nkrumah; Pan-Africanism; Sociolinguistics*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ghana, the first independent nation in Sub-Saharan Africa, came into the forefront of global politics at a time when the ideologies surrounding what it meant to be a nation were fundamentally changing, at the height of the Cold War. In Africa newly independent nations emerging into the modern world faced the challenges of being self-sufficient while also shrugging off the remnants of colonialism. An aspect of this emergence was language planning, which chooses the linguistic vehicle(s) not only to carry the country forward, but also to define national identity. Language planning (LP) is a formal or informal problem-solving administrative activity which “advocate[s] for] either expanding or restricting the resources of a language” and is aimed at total adoption of a language-use strategy on a national level (Haugen 1966a; Kloss 1969; Haarman 1990). The Ghanaian context provides an interesting venue for a case study because English was maintained as the national language post-independence, and investigating the ways in which this choice has shaped the popular valuation and application of this language in Ghanaian society from our current historical distance will illuminate ways in which LP models can be edited to better control for not only unanticipated social factors, but also desired social outcomes.

## 2. HISTORICAL FRAME

On March 6<sup>th</sup> 1957, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president, ascended the world stage and called for a unified, self-governing Africa. Nkrumah’s policies presented a mixture of models<sup>1</sup>, aimed at promoting a Ghana at liberty, an archetype for burgeoning free Africa’s adoption. Nkrumah, the Osagyefo (meaning *redeemer* in Twi), envisioned a unified, unburdened Africa, free from the fetters of the market and what he called neo-Colonialism (Asirifi-Danquah 2007). Pan-Africanism was renowned Trinidadian nationalist George Padmore’s philosophy (who Nkrumah aided as personal secretary at the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress), but it was Nkrumah who presented it to the world in an active sense; “What Nkrumah did was to give flesh to the skeleton” (Atta 2014). Inspired by the non-violent methods of Gandhi, harnessing the rage and hope sweeping the colonized peoples of the imperial world, Nkrumah began promoting a campaign for Gold Coast (lat-

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<sup>1</sup> Much research into Nkrumah’s legacy investigates political motivations (capitalist and socialist) during his presidency; whatever his leanings, he is upheld as a hero by Western idealists, Socialist statesmen, and Ghanaians for his successes, and for his forward thinking which astutely predicted the economic and social setbacks that Ghana, and Africa, faces today.

er “Ghana”)’s outright independence<sup>2</sup> called “Positive Action” (Birmingham 1998).

Post WWII, in the interest of promoting economic stability, the British government sacrificed some control over its holdings throughout the world, shifting day-to-day operations in colonies to local leaders, but in Africa the situation differed because of the immense revenue generated by prized and abundant commodities (Birmingham 1998). In other West African colonies, the British government educated “a local élite” who could lead with a debt to the crown, as a manipulable administrators (Birmingham 1998), but once the UGCC became functional, the colonial administration thought it best to offer Gold Coast its own constitution, creating a commonwealth<sup>3</sup>.

With this new-found autonomy, many administrative decisions needed to be made, including whether to sustain the English language post-independence or deviate from its influence and elevate one or more Ghanaian languages to national status. Notwithstanding the usefulness of English’s “ethnic neutrality,”<sup>4</sup> the use and propagation of English became inseparable from Nkrumah’s plans for rapid industrialization<sup>5</sup> (Huber 1999). English is the language of capitalism. And Africa arrives late to the industrial, economic, and technological revolutions, creating a distance from the theaters of modernity. For a high-functioning continent to be developed, a leader had to consider that the calls for modernity “impose a constraint on the language policies of African nations” (Bamgboşe 1991). It was necessary for Ghana to secure a place on the world stage by presenting stable and viable administrative organization to the United Nations (Nkrumah 1963). Because of this, Ghana’s leaders were hesitant to show signs of divergence from a Western government model, and were thus perhaps unwilling to officially promote multilingualism. The Nkrumah administration had to put forth a face of civility if the fledgling nation hoped to be taken seriously, not only as an autonomous unit, but also as the head nation of a union of African states (Birmingham 1998). Ghana also had to project an ease of travel and cross-country communication to swiftly lure investors for profitable, large-scale infrastructure and business

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<sup>2</sup> Nkrumah quickly broke away from the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) because of their conservative, wait-and-see approach to dealing with colonial administration, and on June 12, 1949 he inaugurated a new political network, the Convention People’s Party (CPP), the party which backed his presidency several years later (Nkrumah 1963).

<sup>3</sup> For Gold Coast, becoming a commonwealth created a formal mechanism for representation and participation by native Ghanaians in their governmental processes within the existing English system. The 1951 constitution gave Gold Coast a Prime Minister (Nkrumah) who was able to act legally and globally in the expressed will of the people.

<sup>4</sup> Bamgboşe takes issue with the notion of English’s “neutrality”, stating that “language is only a convenient scapegoat on which the real causes of divisiveness are usually hung” (1998) (see also Haugen 1966b)

<sup>5</sup> See Nkrumah’s manifesto *Africa Must Unite* for an illustration of the theoretical underpinnings of this bent on rapid industrialization by way of education.

projects (*Black Power* 1992). All of this required English in print, in policy and in public practice. The English medium, effectively, became strategic; it is how the modernity game is won.

Pan-African leaders across the globe embraced print media as a vehicle for political change and issue awareness, and Nkrumah followed in this tradition, publishing many pamphlets, establishing news outlets, and promoting creative projects in the English language (Polsgrove 2009). The maintenance of English as the general print language in Ghana was pragmatic because mechanisms were already in place to widely and rapidly disseminate information in it (Bamgboṣe 1991). Once the government, any government, is communicating with a “mass reading public,” there is a certain necessity of continuity in language (Anderson 1991; see also Haugen 1966b). Were an administration to splinter its publications to fill each language niche, (a particular challenge within Ghana, which encompasses striking linguistic diversity<sup>6</sup>) it would find the task cumbersome enough to halt all momentum<sup>7</sup> (Bamgboṣe 2013). English became and remains the national language of Ghana, and this choice was solidified by the administration through public policy.

### 3. LANGUAGE PLANNING AND COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Ayee (2000) evaluates in general terms the success and failures of macro-level public policy in Ghana. He holds that for any policy to be successful in Ghana specifically or Africa universally, it must be “transformational,” meaning that it must be outward-faced, aimed at long-term goals. Ayee does include a single, important absolute: “The leader should be committed to the development of the entire society over which he or she rules, ensuring that formulation and implementation of policies aim at enhancing the quality of life of all the citizens.” If a government is not approaching policy from an informed, equitable, responsive, appropriate standpoint, then the results will never yield benefits for the maximum (Ayee 2000). In his estimation, the well-intentioned approach to policy is more important than the policy’s outcome. Discovering intention is impossible without a statement from the policy maker which unequivocally outlines the motivations, considerations, and goals of a workable plan *before* it is put into action. The majority of circumstances do not provide us with the luxury of assessing clear statements of objective; Ghana’s are no exception. Observation of program outcomes, however, is certainly possible, and Thorburn states that *a posteriori* assessment is the best approach, because

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<sup>6</sup> Today, over 130 recognized languages in a nation the size of Montana, some dialects being supported by less than 100 speakers. (Lewis et al. 2016)

<sup>7</sup> See also Anderson (1991, specifically p.43) for thoughts on linguistic unification.

reviewing the choices made, and their effects over time, is the only way good planning models can be developed (1971).

The Rational Choice (RC) model arose in economics as a useful, analytical tool for applying cost benefit analysis to cultural goods (Thorburn 1971). Applied to questions of language planning this model argues that for the choices made in LP to be successful, we must consider language as a commodity in its own right. The basic valuation “behind the cost-benefit calculation is that...Language is an instrument to achieve certain results and is, therefore, to be looked upon as a resource” (Thorburn 1971). Yet, language does not act like a resource on the ground, it is not developed or traded, promoted or valued in veins which lend themselves to quantification. This is why proponents of this approach have admitted that, “It is not possible, however, to make a cost-benefit analysis of language planning in general” (Thorburn 1971; Jernudd and Da Gupta 1971; Rubin 1971). Thorburn and Jernudd suggest that it is perhaps most productively applied in observing the outcomes of planning from an informed, post factum perspective in order to adjust future implementation of the model.

To aid in such post factum decision making—in consideration of the challenges of calculating the future impact of a commodity invisible yet integral to the market and the measurement of this plan’s success—Thorburn (1971) has provided us with steps to use for valuation of language in a planning framework. These steps are designed to walk a planner through the RC model, weighing the “consequences of output” between elevating or maintaining a national language (NL) (i.e. Twi) versus a language of wider communication (LWC) (i.e. English). Considering the choice of language through reflection on these consequences provides scope and weight to a language planner’s argument, and an administration’s decision.

Nkrumah did not have access to an RC model of LP as such, but we can assume that he consulted advisors<sup>8</sup> who proceeded with a similar process to a greater or lesser degree. LP involves a choice made “within the limits... of [national] resources” (Jernudd and Das Gupta 1971). These choices present challenges that must be overcome with effort and attention paid to the “kind[s] of goals that the government allows to dominate their decision” (Haugen 1966; Jernudd and Das Gupta 1971). For the nascent Ghana under Nkrumah’s leadership these goals were undoubtedly economic solvency, international participation and respect, and political stability.

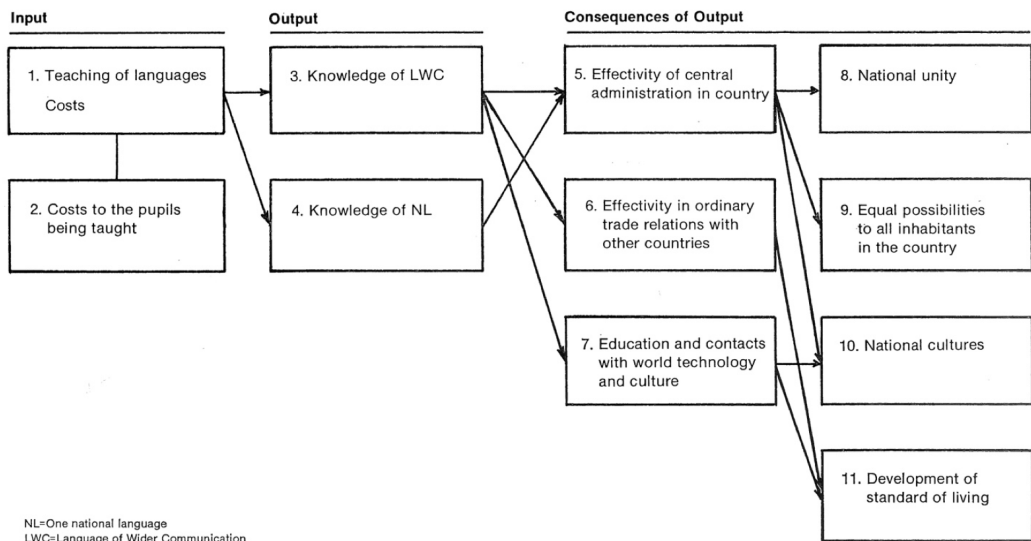
By making English the national language, Ghana followed what is known as the Zero Alternative, or no-change scenario (Dzamshie 1988). I would ar-

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<sup>8</sup> His personal papers (see Akussah 1994) indicate these meetings took place, but this author has recovered neither minutes, notes, or records which yielded details of deliberations, nor official citation of new (or maintained) government-sanctioned language initiatives. (Jernudd and Das Gupta 1971 specifically reference a trend of this type of lack of direct evidence on p.201)

**Table 1 – Steps of the RC model (Adapted from Thorburn 1971)**

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF VALUATION
1. Teaching Costs	Increases in education spending
2. Learning Costs	Price per hour of work devoted to language learning
3. Knowledge of LWC	Valuation manifests through consequences of output
4. Knowledge of NL	See 3
5. Effectiveness of Central Administration	Number of civil servants who cannot understand government's core documents
6. Trade Relations	Use economic markers to forecast the two alternatives
7. Connection to technology and world cultures	Enumerate the study abroad, higher educational, and foreign contact opportunities to forecast the two alternatives
8. National Unity	Most variable over time. Use other indicators to project in 5 year slices
9. Equal Opportunity	Evaluate advancement opportunities within the central administration
10. National Culture	Forecast cultural development for the two alternatives
11. Standard of Living	Forecast for the two alternatives



**Figure 1 – Thorburn’s Rational-Choice Flow Chart for LP (1971)**

gue that any politician from a densely multilingual nation using Thorburn's model would choose the LWC, because, as seen in Figure 1, promoting a NL cannot reach Step 11. Jernudd and Dzamshie agree that macroeconomic standards (upon which the RC model is built) tell administrators to keep the LWC (1971; 1988). Further, Thorburn's model is inherently flawed because it hinges on choosing a language based on an assessment of its value, a value which "manifests itself" through the subsequent "consequences of output," which he admits are difficult to quantify in monetary terms (Thorburn 1971). In this scheme, these markers are the only forecast a politician may use to consider their choices. If choosing an NL provides no direct route to Steps 9, 10, and 11, what politician would limit their people to a life without sufficient education, international prowess, or a high standard of living? Further, Aye (2000) would consider this choice reflective of unethical leadership because the NL would select a future which does not provide desired outcomes for the citizenry. We cannot say these realities are due entirely to linguistic factors, but we can say that this model is rationally biased towards the continuation of an LWC. That said, it is difficult to rationalize a better model. And it does provide post factum language planners with some tangible markers to delineate and assess intervening factors which have traditionally thwarted success.

#### 4. PLANNING *POST FACTUM*

Fortunately, we *are* poised on this side of history, and able to engage the kind of post factum assessment that Jernudd proposes. We can look for ways of reducing uncertainty in the outcomes of language policy by casting the RC model as "supportive rather than definitive" (Jernudd 1971). Time always works against us because it is difficult to unravel the past and future factors which contact the policy (Jernudd 1971). Planning in and of itself always aims at "non-linguistic ends" (Cooper 1989), and one set of complicating factors that we can underscore in previous planning attempts are governmental motivations. Because a governing body always has broader, national considerations which will warp its view of language problems, the government's view is inherently complicated; the model's view (as such) is inherently theoretical, it is blind to the life it seeks to value. Further, "Relatively few language-planning decisions can be implemented by fiat" (Cooper 1989). For these reasons, it is best that these uncertainties are accounted for through a non-governmental, micro-level qualitative assessment of language in the interaction of public and private domains (Jernudd 1971) to develop a more accurate valuation of language alternatives (steps 3 and 4 in the RC model). I would argue that the most useful assessment on this level begins with initial network analysis, a "systems study" approach, geared towards assessing on-the-ground communicative interaction and applying information about

these communicative networks to future planning efforts (Jernudd 1971). Language planners, then, will be able to use the RC model's output markers to forecast core concerns about language and language use as opposed to potential success, efforts which can lead to the development of the type of policy Ayee (2000) calls for.

In beginning to consider LP from a network analysis standpoint, it becomes clear that for LP to be successful, it must fully incorporate prestige planning—a crucial, and often overlooked step<sup>9</sup>. Prestige planning<sup>10</sup> is focused on building in the people “a positive, psychological representation” (Mesthrie 2009) of the language chosen by policy makers (Haarman 1990). Jernudd claims that, “In order for an official language decision to be of benefit to a nation, people would have to feel uniformly solidary with such a decision” (1971). Looking at policy in retrospect will reveal areas where this solidarity failed to adequately develop, either due to a lack of sufficient implementation (Haarman 1990) or intervening social factors (Thorburn 1971). In areas like Ghana, assessing daily language choices is a challenge, especially where each tongue is associated with a specific place, activity, or register; most Ghanaians exhibit a “localized trilingualism” (Bodomo 1996). Jernudd and Das Gupta hold that, “A linguistically adequate theory... cannot be implemented because... of ‘acceptability-obstacles’ in the speech community” (1971). Network analysis will be useful in this regard, allowing us to pinpoint not only where use of the official language is most pronounced, but also where a positive, psychological representation of the official language is missing or will radiate out to the corners of the socioscape (Anderson 1991), creating supporters across domains that the administration itself cannot reach. Cooper holds that the targets of LP research need to be communication networks, paralleling planning study with the study of language spread (1989). We must look “between sentimental and instrumental motivations, between ideology and communicative efficiency” to determine where what language is being used, by whom, and how they feel about it (Cooper 1989). Haugen (1966c) describes this somewhat figuratively, saying “The planner proposes, but the community disposes...Language habits, like floating icebergs, are mostly submerged. Their essential nature is still largely hidden from us, and planners who act on the assumption that they understand their nature risk

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<sup>9</sup> Prestige (Haarman 1990) is the most recent, and least discussed, member of the 4 canonical types of language planning: Kloss (1967) originally delineates corpus and status planning, Cooper (1989) incorporates acquisition planning.

<sup>10</sup> Occurs during the implementation stage of LP. Haugen (1983) outlines 4 stages of LP: selection, codification, elaboration, implementation, which exist in both social and linguistic domains. Given that Ghana went with the Zero Alternative, the selection stage involves no change, and codification and elaboration do not happen because English is already sufficiently codified and functional across domains, so the implementation stage becomes the focus of a *posteriori* evaluation and future planning effort in the Ghanaian context.



running afoul of the invisible nine tenths.” Haugen adds that “Public opinion research may actually have much to say about the possibility of launching linguistic changes” (1966c). Network analysis therefore can aid in identifying groups of individuals and smaller areas of society which, when looked at in the long term, can add the specifics needed to help fill the gaps in Thorburn’s model that cannot be quantified.

In January of 2014 I was the guest of a former international civil rights lawyer in Ghana. This man recalled his upbringing, from village to university to working in and through the UN. As he described language use in the Ghanaian courtroom he revealed that, while all official documents were kept in English, communication was entirely in Twi (a regional lingua franca). There are countless examples of the intersectional and diglossic realities of Ghanaian life<sup>11</sup>, but this specific individual example illustrates that, in years directly following independence, English enjoyed institutional support (and prestige in that regard), yet there had not been sufficient implementation; the language held no popular respect. We see here English regarded as a necessity needed to achieve a certain station, but not as a means for facilitation of efficient communication. This direct evidence—gained through micro-level participant observation—shows a complication of Thorburn’s step 5 (the efficiency of central administration). English was maintained through an RC model-type evaluation to, among other things, make government run smoothly, and while we cannot say it has *not* done so, fluency in the language does not seem to be essential for those running the country. It is, in effect, a mere keycard, possession of which allows access to the domains of power. Dzamshie tells us that “acceptable LP must fulfil two twin functions: the state must run efficiently and the citizens must have a feeling of oneness,” (1988) and in the case of Ghana one might question whether there has been successful implementation in this regard. This error creates barriers to progress instead of bridges; social mobility is limited by the avenue created to ensure it. Cooper states that language change and policy efforts usually occur after substantial social change (e.g. independence movements). With the benefit of hindsight, and in light of the lawyer’s anecdote, one could argue that the Ghanaian socioscape changed little post-independence—only the top echelons were reorganized in terms of power players, and even then, domain structures (and the languages associated with each) were unchanged. Those originally in institutional power—native English speakers—became those in commercial power, controlling the professional and academic highways out into the competitive world for average Ghanaians. This reality reifies the external value of English as the language of power and works directly against effective prestige planning vis-à-vis English.

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<sup>11</sup> Huber 1999, 137-8; Priebe 2006, 41-51; Bamgboṣe 1991, 14

Cooper provides an example of a positive, psychological representation for new lexical variants created through prestige planning in the Feminist movement's reassessment of personal pronouns (1989). Though an isolated case, the proof is visible that targeted, affective, implementation can succeed in rapid and ubiquitous variant adoption across dialect, domain, speech community. Much of this success was driven by the historical moment—and the high visibility of the actors, as well as the density of the Feminist network. One could argue that such a moment existed during Ghanaian independence that Nkrumah and other leaders could have capitalized on in a similar way by making appeals to emotion and morality of speakers, underscoring explicitly the value of English and the benefit of leaving the educational and administrative domains intact, thereby overtly presenting the people with the rationale for the Zero Alternative. They could have made learning English equivalent to national pride, as opposed to civic duty, made it sexy, as opposed to a necessity for upward social mobility. Indeed, the prestige promotion approach has the negative effect of stifling the growth of indigenous language<sup>12</sup>, of cutting ties to Ghanaianess which the mother-tongue binds. Although, even without overt prestige implementation, this reality has come to pass, particularly among a wide swath of the younger generations who increasingly deploy English, but whose social mobility is nonetheless limited by English's presence in the socioscape. Looking for value in step 10's consequence of output we see that indigenous languages are, regardless, erased. Further we see that even though English is not essential for daily life, the valuation of it continues to increase as long as speakers flock to it<sup>13</sup> to the detriment of their own language<sup>14</sup>.

## 5. MOVING FORWARD

We have established that Nkrumah did not have access to the RC model of language planning; his efforts were before its time. Prestige planning as an overt stage and type had also not yet been worked out conceptually. Armed with hindsight, the RC model, and the ideas of prestige planning, this paper suggests adding the potential additional revelations to be gained from micro-level study and network analysis. We have seen that previously Thorburn's markers were the only RC forecast a politician may use to consider their

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<sup>12</sup> Vernaculars exist in an “unhappy state ... [due] to the absence of any clearly articulated and consistently applied language policy...” (Bamgboṣe 2013).

<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon has been well-documented in other settings, for example Gal's (1978) study of the shift from Hungarian to German in Oberwart, Austria.

<sup>14</sup> A choice costs “not just the expense in terms of dollars and cents, but the malaise of training one's children in a medium that is not their own, and of alienation from one's own past” (Huber 1966c).

choices. The approach proposed here will provide planners with a new valuation, one constructed apart from the governmental policy-making process and presented to leaders as a full, cohesive sociolinguistic valuation of alternatives for their consideration. This allows the RC model to become truly “supportive,” as Jernudd claims it should be (1971). Once a choice is made, the network analysis will provide further illumination of the way forward, highlighting areas where prestige implementation will be most effective, where it will be instantly accepted (Haugen 1983), zealously promoted, and sustained over time.

Language policy should not be considered behind closed doors. It infuses the daily lives of speakers. If taking the micro to macro planning approach, we must observe and then *involve* the people. A survey<sup>15</sup>—from 30 years ago—shows that the average Ghanaian citizen was aware enough of multiple codes to benefit from a community conversation on language. Ghanaians have the intellectual space to comprehend the consequences of policy changes because they see how language functions within and around each day and over time.

Language is intimate, so the policy maker who wants to steer their model into successful application must engage feelings, must appeal to speaker identity, or even the best model fails. We have seen this in the preceding pages where a good-enough model fails for lack of sufficient popular will. Other sources (Owu-Ewie 2006; Bamgboṣe 1991) show that over the last century, Ghana has implemented every education model possible, to no avail; the problems have remained the same<sup>16</sup>. One could argue that no one model has been applied consistently with duration adequate enough to have a measurable effect, but success of a language plan is less about time and scope than it is about participation of the populous. For language policy to be successful, the hearts and minds of the people must be engaged as well. No model to date has taken the crucial step of building a positive, psychological representation of the official language in the Ghanaian people. I would argue, however, that with observation and meaningful involvement of these people in the LP process, the structure of the resulting solution matters little; if they value the language of power, they will assist in its diffusion throughout the social network. The example with the lawyer shows how this can work. Going to Ghana and interviewing people will help, but not just any people, the ones who occupy the central, integral, domain nodes in the social network, will reveal the best ways to apply any outcome of the RC model—LWC or NL—with the widest positive acceptability. The idea of solving language problems is often placed on the backburner because “the effects of not taking action” are not immediately felt (Bamgboṣe 1991). This hesitancy is understandable when

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<sup>15</sup> Dzamshie 1988.

<sup>16</sup> The typical method of acquisition planning (Cooper 1989) and implementation (Haugen 1983; Haarman 1990) is through adaptation of the education system.

one considers the choices faced by a leader who must choose between bringing eighty percent of her population to literacy in a single, official language versus providing an equivalent number with reliable housing or sustainable agriculture. I have hoped to show in this work that these goals are not separate, that effective LP can and will tackle both when it involves learning from the past, applying sound sociolinguistic method, and accounts from the socially-networked patterns of daily linguistic interaction.

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