

THE FRENCH LANGUAGE: ITS RELEVANCE TO THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF GHANA; PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Ghana's geographical location in West Africa, coupled with its membership of international communities has necessitated the need for every aspiring Ghanaian to learn to communicate in French, besides English. The ability to communicate in French will not only be an added advantage to Ghanaians seeking job opportunities on the international market but will also promote friendly and cultural ties between Ghana and her surrounding Francophone neighbors. Despite many years of concerted efforts by governments of Ghana and the French government to promote the French language, only 3 percent of Ghanaians can speak various forms and levels of French. This situation is attributed to the perception people have about the French language and the implementation of some education reforms that preclude high enrolment for French at the Senior High Schools. To achieve the required level of literacy in French, more decisive effort is required on the part of Ghanaians as well as the Government and its development partners in education.

Keywords: Francophone, communication, government, International, language.

LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE ET SA PERTINENCE PAR RAPPORT À LA SPÉCIFICITÉ DE LA SITUATION GÉOGRAPHIQUE DU GHANA ; PERSPECTIVES ET DÉFIS

Résumé : La spécificité de la situation géographique du Ghana dans l'aire d'Afrique de l'Ouest, à laquelle s'ajoute son adhésion à des communautés internationales incombe à tout Ghanéen cherchant à se réaliser d'apprendre à se communiquer en français, en plus de l'anglais. La capacité de pouvoir se communiquer en français sera non seulement un atout supplémentaire pour les Ghanéens à l'affût des débouchés sur le marché extérieur, mais servira également à élargir le cercle d'amitié et à renforcer les liens socio-culturels entre le Ghana et les pays francophones limitrophes. Malgré de nombreuses années d'efforts de concertation entre les gouvernements ghanéens successifs et leurs homologues

français aux fins de promouvoir l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de la langue française le bilan affiché en fin de compte est de plus mince. Ainsi 3% seulement des Ghanéens arrivent se communiquer en français sous différentes formes et niveaux. Cette tendance est attribuable à une certaine perception figée se traduisant par manque d'engouement pour la langue française à laquelle s'ajoute un infléchissement sur la politique de l'éducation nationale. Lequel fait barrage à un taux élevé d'inscription en français dans les lycées. Pour atteindre le niveau d'alphabétisation escompté en français, des efforts plus décidés sont requis de la part des Ghanéens ainsi que du gouvernement et de ses partenaires au développement dans le domaine de l'éducation.

Mots clés : Francophone, communication, gouvernement, international, langue

Introduction

In the early 1960s, the leaders of the newly independent states of Africa recognized the need for a continental union to promote the unity and economic growth of the Continent. This necessitated the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) in 1963 and subsequently, the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), and now Southern African Development Community (SADC) founded in 1981 and the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) launched in 1989. Ghana has remained an active member of ECOWAS since its formation. Linguistically, the entirety of the continent was left divided into seven foreign languages, notably Arabic, French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, German and Italian. However, considering the very high linguistic diversity on the continent with estimated 1500-2000 indigenous languages, even the most nationalistic and pragmatic newly independent African leaders did not dare to abandon these foreign languages which were inherited from their colonial masters. This is because the language of communication and instruction in a multilingual society is a matter of concern to stakeholders. As Ouadraogo (2000) affirmed, "Education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual situation" p.89. So instead of adopting the local languages, they maintained the status quo; promoting and adopting the foreign international languages as official languages for their newly independent states. ECOWAS, like most other recognized RECs is largely constituted by Anglophone and Francophone member states. The dominance of these two blocks obviously raises the issue of communication as member states be they of the mother Union (AU) or of a regional community, speak different international languages. In seeking to address this linguistic barrier, the AU by its constitutive Act, adopted Arabic, English, French and Portuguese as its working Languages (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_the_African_union). This underscores the need for Africans to learn to communicate in at least one more of the specified working languages besides the official language of their country of origin. This observation is even more relevant when it

comes to regional as well as continental and inter-continental affairs. To buttress this point, Ward (1994) asserts that the adoption of a foreign language commences as soon as it is consciously acknowledged that its use does not in any way imply the surrender of a country's sovereignty to the foreigner. Indeed, Ward's assertion is in consonance with the reality as the so called imperialist languages have become an important aspect of our national heritage and for all intends and purposes, have been playing a significant part in our national and international communication. For instance, the first president of Ghana Dr. Kwame Nkrumah perceived English proficiency as the hallmark of education so he reviewed the policy on teaching Ghanaian language only to include English policy in Ghanaian schools. Although future proponents of Ghanaian languages policies proposed a modified transitional bilingual education, it does appear that the policy of using English only as the medium of instructions in our schools gained credence and still persists up to date (Ando-kumi, 1994). In today's globalized village, both the geographical location and geopolitical position of Ghana in the sub region demand that Ghana's educational policy imbibes the study of French in its curriculum. In fact, French must not only be taught in Ghanaian schools but it must also be made a second official language in the country as she is surrounded by Francophone countries: Ivory Coast to the west, Togo and Benin to the east and Burkina Faso and Mali to the north. This unique geographical location of Ghana coupled with her international relations make it even more crucial for every aspiring Ghanaian to learn to communicate in French besides English.

1. Methodology

This study adopted a purely qualitative research design because of its usefulness in descriptive survey and generalization. The descriptive survey describes situations, phenomena, attitudes, behaviors beliefs and opinions of people. To achieve these objectives, I relied mostly on secondary data for documentation; a number of existing literatures and websites, especially those related to la Francophonie and a report on the state of teaching and learning of the French language in Ghana, submitted to the Embassy of France to Ghana by a research team, Associate For Change (AFC). I also made use of a combination of language theories notably; Language Power (LP) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. Language Power measures the learner's level of competence acquired in a second language in both oral and comprehension skills. The theory of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) which was first propounded by Stephen Krashen distinguishes between language acquisition and language learning. According to him, just like first language acquisition, the acquisition of a language is achieved subconsciously while learning involves a conscious process which culminates with knowledge of a language (Krashen, 1982). Although linguistic theories generally explain the acquisition of languages, in effect, no single theory can offer a holistic explanation to the entire process of second language acquisition (Gistaki, 2009). The purpose of this work is first of all to underscore the importance of French to the individual and the country as a whole. Second, to highlight some efforts made or being made by the Government of Ghana to promote French

in the Country and last but not least, to look at problems that impede the learning of French in Ghana and suggest solution to them.

2. The Dominance of English and French in Sub-Sahara Africa

In spite of the relevance of the seven international languages on the continent, in practice English and French constitute the most widely adopted and spoken international languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. In West Africa for example, with the exception of Cape-Verde and Guinea Bissau that have Portuguese as their official language, the remaining fourteen countries speak French or English. French also happens to be second to English as mother tongue in the European Union and French is also the second language of most Francophone Africans (La Francophonie, 2006-2007). However, the different administrative and linguistic policies coupled with the old age traditional rivalry of the two colonial giants have made a significant impact on the administration structures and language policies of their former African colonies. Interestingly, although in principles the British and the French were notorious bed-fellows of colonialism, in practice they often seemed to be at variance with each other. For example, the French on the one hand say, “partir à l’ anglais (to take an English leave) to mean ‘leaving without permission’. The English on the other hand say “take a French leave” to express the same meaning. On their administrative policies, the British and the French adopted the indirect and the policy of assimilation in their respective colonies. Indirect rule designated a system of African governance through indigenous chiefs and elders. The French policy of assimilation in contrast was a more centralized policy aimed at transforming the African into a replica French man. The administrative language policy of the two colonial masters thus contrasted with each other as the British language policy was more of a policy of cohabitation. It was not surprising therefore that all the French colonies with the exception of Guinea opted to keep French as the language of instruction in schools as soon as they attained independence in the early 1960s. In contrast, all the British colonies apart from Sierra Leone and Zambia continued to embrace the use of their native languages in their first cycle schools (Garnier & Schafer, 2006).

In spite of these differences, thanks to the tactical diplomacy of the two rival colonial masters, English and French survived and gained root in Africa. They have become as important to Africans as they are to the rest of the world. In December 1998, at a summit in St Malo the then UK and French foreign ministers, Robin Cook and Hubert Vedrine the then foreign ministers for England and France respectively, championed a new Anglo-French diplomatic drive in Africa. The two ministers made a successful joint visit to two African countries; Ghana and la Cote d’ Ivoire to symbolize a new policy of cooperation rather than rivalry in Africa (La Politique Africaine, 2002).

3. The Relevance of French to Ghana

According to the institutional website of ECOWAS (www.ecowas.int/), its prime mission is to promote economic integration in all fields of economic activities. As citizens of member country of ECOWAS, Ghanaians need to be bilingual in English and French in order to draw on the advantages of good neighbourliness and take advantage of job vacancies within the Sub-regional market. As well as this, it would promote mutual trust and cultural ties between Ghanaians and citizens of other member countries in the sub region as the ability to speak French, as Mensima (2020) asserted, “makes one more adaptive and more accommodating to other cultures in Africa and the world at large” (p1). French is also necessary for officers in the immigration, customs and the police service in their foreign relations. The ability to speak very good French has brought a great benefit to many people the world all over, most prominently the late Kofi Anan whose fluency in French was a major factor that influenced his appointment to the post of U.N. Secretary General. In April 2009, during a national campaign to make French the second national language of Nigeria, various commentators waded into the debate on the importance of French to the African most populous nation. While the English language on the one hand was recognized as the language of science and technology, the French language on the other hand was categorized as that of diplomacy. As the world has become a global village and hence largely interdependent, with effective communication being the leading or most important position of diplomatic agenda, it is now imperative for west African Anglophone countries to learn to speak and write French, considering the high number of francophone countries in the region (<http://allafrica.co/stories/200904160039.html>). In the same vein, a mastery of the French language opens the door to working with international organizations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Being the most widely learned foreign language after and also the only language that is taught alongside English in every country in the world, French is spoken all over the world. The ability to speak it makes one polyvalent and therefore increases one's opportunities home and abroad. Many international companies state a working knowledge of French as an added advantage to some special positions in the company. French is also the language of most famous international cuisines, Fashion and cinema. For instance, chefs all over the world have to be familiarized with French recipes to be able to meet international standards. The Cannes International Film Festival (Festival International du Film) becomes the epicenter of film activities of the world each year where the best film directors and actors are awarded with the prestigious Palm d'Or. It is considered the most prestigious film festival in the world (Lim, 2012). In sports, French still remains the official language used to announce winners and medals of all the sporting events at the Olympic Games. Apart from the economic influence of French, an appreciable number of the world's greatest literary works are written in

French. In fact, France can boast of the highest number of noble prizes for literature than any other country. Moreover, France is blessed with great philosophers such as Voltaire, Camus, Pascal, Sartre, Descartes, Gide, Montesquieu, and La Fontaine. The ability to read and write French be it for academic purposes or for pleasure will enable one to access books written by these renown authors in their original versions. In addition to these, learning French from English can be relatively easy because both languages have similar structures and are believed to have originated from Latin and Germanic languages. However, about 40% of English Vocabulary comes from French. Here are some ten examples:

1. Laissez- faire. An economic or market system devoid of government intervention.
2. Tête à tête. Face to face
3. Attaché “attached”. A person assigned to a diplomatic post.
4. Dossier. A personal file
5. Crèche .A daycare center or nursery
6. Foyer. An open hall which is often used by the people in an establishment
7. Bureau. An office or an office desk
8. Au pair. An individual who is hired by a family to clean or engage the children.
9. Avant- garde a novelty in creativity
10. Chargé d'affaires . Someone who works in place of a diplomat or an ambassador.

Indeed, French vocabulary is practically spread out over many Indo-European languages across the world. French therefore is the appropriate language to learn if you intend learning romantic languages such as Italian, Romanian as well Spanish.

4. Efforts to Promote the French Language in Ghana

Over the years, concerted efforts have been made by successive Governments to facilitate the teaching and learning of French in Ghana. Realizing the importance of French and other international languages to Ghana, the first president, of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah established the Ghana Institute of Languages (GIL), currently, a branch of University of Media Arts and Communication (UMAC) in 1961 to cater for the foreign languages needs of Ghanaians as well as Africans and those in the Diaspora. The Institute therefore comprised the School of Bilingual Secretary (SOS) and the school of Translators (SOT). This also fell in line with the president’s vision for continental unity. The GIL’s aim was spelt as follows: “To teach modern Languages and advise Government on Language matters as a way of promoting Pan-African integrated economic development and world relationship between Ghana and other countries” (www.gil.edu.gh/web/objective.phd)

To achieve this objective, the education policy of Ghana was designed to include French right from the Basic schools through secondary to tertiary institutions. The Mount Mary’s French teacher training college in Somanya was established in the 1970s to train French teachers for the various institutions in Ghana. In recent years five more institutions notably, Wesley training college, Cape Coast; St Louis training college, Kumasi; E.P training

college, Amedzofe; Gbewaa college of education, Bawku; ,Bagabaga training college, Tamale and Enchi training college have been upgraded and equipped to train more French teachers to cater for the ever increasing demand for French teachers in the country. Again, in August 2008, the then vice president of the republic of Ghana Mr. Aliu Mahama admonished Government officials and military personnel on the pressing need to be fluent in French. According to him, this initiative falls in line with Ghana's effort to promote the teaching and learning of the French language so to improve communication and diplomatic ties between Ghana and her Francophone neighbours. (<http://new.myjoyonline.com/education/200809/20389.asp>). On his part, Major General Augustine Blay, the then Chief of the Defense Staff advised personnel of the Ghana Armed Forces to take their French lessons seriously so that they will be able to speak French for an enhanced international cooperation. (<http://www.modernghana.com/print/250554/1/soldiers-ordered-to-speak-french.html>)

In an effort to boost the French language and further foster diplomatic relation with France, Ghana became an associate member of Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (l'OIF) in 2006. The word "Francophonie" was coined by the French scholar and geographer Onesime Reclus in 1880 to refer to the global community of not only French speaking people but also countries which have a prevalent presence of political and economic ties with France (francophonie.org). L'OIF has since its inception, evolved into a global organization whose multiple branches collaborate with its member states in the field of science, economic justice and culture. Owing to Ghana's diplomatic ties with France, the French Government in conjunction with the Ministry of Education has been providing assistance of all forms to our Educational institutions especially in the teaching and learning of French. French Government aid is mainly in the field of French language teaching through the resource centres for the studies of French established in all the ten regions of Ghana. In recent years, the French Embassy in Ghana has begun providing computer-aided language centres in Ghana in order to assist students in learning French, with the University for Development Studies'(UDS) French language centre being the latest to be inaugurated on the Tamale campus in March 2018 (The Daily Graphic, March 28, 2018). French training support to date, both home and abroad, has covered about 1,500 teachers at all levels of our education including university lecturers and instructors (CREF). As part of efforts to cooperate in higher education, the third Ghana-France Higher Education Conference was held in Maison Francaise located on the campus of Kwame Nkrumah University of science and Technology in Kumasi and in attendance was the then vice chancellor of KNUST, Prof William Otoo Ellis and the Director of L'Institut Francais du Ghana. During the occasion, the French Embassy inaugurated the newly constructed Campus-France office to usher in another era of French studies in the Ghanaian tertiary institutions. (www.knust.edu.gh/news/newsitems/knust-inaugurates-campus-france-kumasioffice)

In July 2010, the French Government introduced a year abroad programme called "Programme d'assistants de langue anglaise en France". This programme allows the Ghanaian

students to immerse themselves in the French Language and introduces the Ghanaian culture to French pupils and students. It also offers the student the opportunity to benefit from the first professional teaching experience alongside with French language teachers for a period of 7 months (October to April) every year. The assistant's role is to support the teachers he or she is assigned to, to improve pupils' communication skills and to deepen their knowledge of a different culture. The monthly remuneration is between 784 and 800 euro (Campus French).

In February 2003, during his state of the Nation's address to Parliament, the then president of Ghana, Mr. J. A Kufour launched a special initiative on distance learning of French for students and Ghanaians who wish to learn French. He noted:

Mr. Speaker, mastering of the French language is of such practical necessity. It should be put on the priority. I can testify to this myself. Mr. Speaker, from constant embarrassment I come face to face with while I move round the Sub-region. There are many times I wish I could do without translators in this era of ECOWAS. I do not wish this handicap on any Ghanaian children.

(President J. A. Kufour, state of Nations address to parliament, February 2005).

The ex-president's words are self-explanatory enough to serve as a wake-up call to every Ghanaian who is handicapped in the French language to take up the learning of French seriously. Certain individuals such as madam Florence Vanderpuye a former French teacher and president of Alumni France-Ghana have always been ardent advocate of French language learning in Ghana. According to her, in addition to learning French in a French speaking ambience, it needs constant oral practice and self-confidence. She is now a proponent/ambassador of the French language in Ghana who goes to both public and private schools persuading students and pupils to learn French for their own benefit.

5. Factors impeding the teaching and learning of French in Ghana

Since language has always been the fundamental medium through which human activities are conducted, it goes without saying that the ability to communicate effectively is the cardinal aim of every language system. According to Dennis (1996) current pedagogical programmes throughout the world are still battling with how to teach the learner to communicate fluently or effortlessly in an international or second language. Most learners face difficulties because existing language teaching methodologies do not necessarily guarantee their ability to speak the designated second language fluently. The consequences of this global language learning hurdle is that learners do not attain the requisite level of proficiency in the language in spite of numerous attempts at modifying language instruction policies and reforms. Non-native speakers of a secondary language need to be capable of effortlessly interpreting or processing words just as in the case of native speakers. In order to surmount this problem Krashen (2003) distinguished between the acquisition of language and learning of language. He posited that whereas the acquisition of language is a subconscious process, learning a

language is a conscious one which requires time and efforts. In essence, all language learning policies should integrate both the LA and the SLA theories in order to achieve the desired level of language competence among learners. Despite many years of concerted efforts by the Government of Ghana and the French Government to promote the teaching and learning of French, a lot more needs to be done in these areas to achieve this objective. This was brought to the fore during a discussion between the then deputy Minister of Education and the various divisional directors in the Ministry. (French Embassy, 2010). Research have shown that the Ministry of Education under whose purview the teaching and promotion of the French language falls has never had a clear cut policy for the French language. What appears to be policies are in fact, stopgaps directives on teaching and learning French (Chachu & Kpoglu, 2020, Nutakor, 2019). A Section of Ghanaians also accused the country of lack of sincere commitment to the teaching of French, ‘You can claim that Ghana will become a bilingual, but if there is no budget to teach, what can we do? asked, Daniel Sowah (www.echosdughana.com 2019). In November 2010, Associate For Change (AFC), a research body submitted its final report on the state of teaching and learning of French to the French Embassy in Accra. The report revealed among other things that in terms of both educational policies and teaching methodology, “... there have been limited promotion of the teaching and learning of French across the country and [hence] very few students were opting for French” (pp20-21).

At the Senior High Schools (S.H.S.) for instance, Business and Science students who excelled in French in their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and would have liked to pursue French to the highest level are painfully cut off from doing French due to their course contents. It was also revealed that weak foundation in both English and French coupled with the three years short duration of the S.H.S programme makes the option of French unattractive. Moreover, inadequate appropriate materials such as language laboratories and the appropriate teaching aids in most Ghanaian learning institutions, driving language instructors to improvise course materials for French lessons, especially in the basic schools. Instructional programs rather emphasize on mere retention or recital of words in lieu of a well-structured oral practice (Kramsch, 2006). Hence, the inadequacies in oral expressions courses designed for an international language and appropriate course content account largely for the lack of oral communication competences (Burroughs, 2008). Even now, from the Alliance française, learning French largely comes down to reciting obsolete poems and passing boring French exams. (Ando-kumi, 1994).

Lack of French teachers at most public Basic Schools and the requisite vocational guidance could also be cited as problems that impede the teaching and learning of French in Ghanaian schools. (AFC, 2010). According to the Ministry of Education, about 6000 additional French teachers are needed in primary and secondary schools ([echosdughana.com](http://www.echosdughana.com)). Much as a great majority of Ghanaians laud the government for seeking to make French the second official language of Ghana, there are others who express contrary opinion about that initiative; for star rapper Okyeame Kwame, who is a strong advocate of the Twi language, it is bad enough

that our first language is another person's language, so making French the second official language is disrespectful to Ghanaian culture. For others, it is the archaic image of the French teacher that discouraged them from doing French when they were students. They recall with horror how their French teachers impatiently treated them when they made mistakes. Notwithstanding these criticisms, it must be emphasized that the benefit of including French in the education policy of Ghana can never be underscored since the acquisition of another international language either than English is of immense benefit to the speaker. It is therefore not surprising that reactions to Okyeame Kwame's comments were swift and countering. In fact, he appears to be the only one of his kind who threatens this path. Ghanaian highlife singer, Ethel Eshun, popularly known as eShun, an ally and admirer of Okyeame Kwame believes the latter's call was out of emotions and that he is not thinking about the future. She continued, "I love Okyeame Kwame but I think I will disagree with this one. ..If we really want to look at a great way to promote Ghana, we should consider French" (www.modernghana.com).

Conclusion

The importance of French to Ghana in particular can never be overemphasized. As stated earlier in this study, Ghana's unique geographical location, together with her membership of regional, continental and inter-continental affairs makes it all the more crucial that Ghanaians take the learning of French Seriously. As a matter of priority, Ghanaians should consider learning another international language especially French to take advantage of globalized work opportunities. At the individual level, being at least bilingual especially in English and French is an added advantage to one's professional orientation since the ability to communicate in these Indo-European languages opens the doors to multiple employments and business opportunities all around the Globe. In addition to these numerous benefits, being able to communicate in French broadens one's view of the world as there are millions of books and films written and composed in French whose contents can be tapped for educational and recreational purposes. In fact there is so much to gain from being able to communicate in French. This study, however, has revealed several factors that impede its progress right from the first cycle to the tertiary level of education. Promoting French to the projected target requires more decisive efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education and its partners as well as the individual Ghanaian:

First the Ministry of Education should revise some of its policies that appear to be counterproductive on the teaching of French and redesign them to achieve more positive results. For instance, the Ministry of Education could collaborate with the head of institutions to integrate French into the various course contents so that no student who wishes to continue with the study of French will be disadvantaged.

Second, apart from the three college of education that have been upgraded to teach French, the Government with its development partners in education should consider upgrading the Mount Mary training college to the status of a full-fledged university that specializes in the

running of various forms of French programmers. This will enable applicants, especially French teachers to upgrade themselves in their preferred courses and hence, build their capacity. In addition to these positive efforts, corporate institutions and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGO's) that operate in areas of education should be encouraged to partner with the Ministry of Education to provide the requisite infrastructure such as language laboratories and teaching and learning aids to the various French language institutions that need them.

The Ghana Association of French Teachers (GAFT) should be more proactive in championing the promotion of French. They should liaise with their mother Unions such as the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) to sponsor programmes such as "Parlons français" "let's speak French" and distance learning that used to run on our radio and television sets in the past. Their contents should be revised and rendered more interesting. This move will encourage people who for some reasons could not take regular lessons in French, to do so in the comfort of their homes. At the regional and district levels, local FM stations should be encouraged as part of their corporate or social responsibility to include French in their weekly programmes. For example, they should identify schools in their transmission areas and invite deserving pupils or students to host French programmes. This programme will encourage their colleagues to aspire to be like them and take their French lessons seriously.

Finally, the media both print and electronic should consider the promotion of the French language as part of their social responsibility and launch an anti-apathy campaign in order to encourage more Ghanaians to learn to communicate in French. When these recommendations are adhered to, it is hoped that more Ghanaians will learn and speak French.

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