An Account Of Lɛtɛ Language Context

Mercy Akrofi Ansah

Abstract

In this paper we present the context or the environment in which Lɛtɛ is currently spoken, rather than the structure of the language. In presenting the context of the language, the paper sheds light on the extent to which Lɛtɛ language context contributes to its status and use. Other interesting aspects of the language context the paper discusses are the migration history of Larteh; the linguistic neighborhood of Larteh; the interaction of education, culture and religion at Larteh; and its social organization. Lɛtɛ (Kwa: South Guan) is a less–studied language spoken in only one town, Larteh, in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Its linguistic neighbours are mostly Akan–speaking towns. The vitality status of Lɛtɛ is pegged at 6a, and described as vigorous (EGIDS). However, literature on African linguistics indicates that available studies on the language are inadequate. The limited amount of literature on Lɛtɛ has focused on aspects of its grammar and social life, and has not considered the interrelationship of the two. Consequently, the paper makes use of primary data derived from a Lɛtɛ language use survey, and secondary data to bring out that interdependence. We adopt an approach in anthropological linguistics: 'language and thought' in our discussion'. According to the UNESCO 2003 framework which was used to assess the vitality of the language, the language needs maintenance. We conclude that the context of a language and its dynamics could have significant impact on its status and use.

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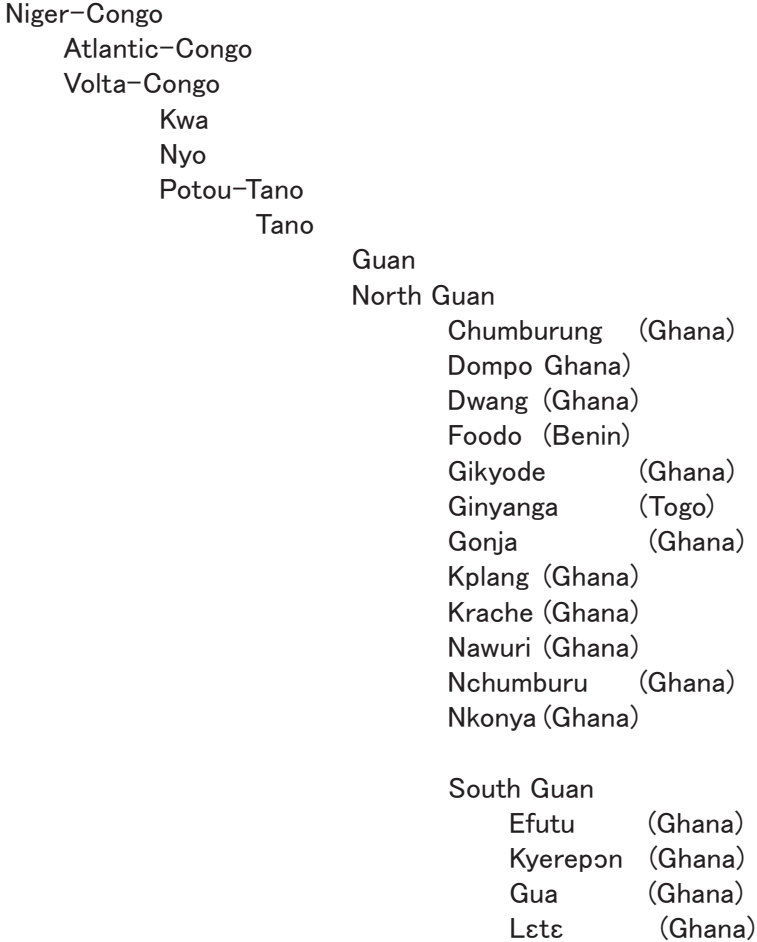
Résumé

Nous présentons dans le présent article, le contexte ou l'environnement dans lequel le dialecte Lɛtɛ est parlé actuellement, plutôt que la structure de la langue, ceci dans le but de mettre en lumière la mesure dans laquelle le contexte du dialecte Lɛtɛ contribue au statut et à l'usage de ce dernier. L'article présente d'autres aspects intéressants du contexte linguistique dont l'historique de la migration du peuple Larteh ; le milieu linguistique de la ville de Larteh ; l'interaction de l'éducation, la culture et la religion dans la ville de Larteh, ainsi que l'organisation sociale de la ville. Le dialecte Lɛtɛ (Kwa : Guan du Sud) est une ≪ langue ≫ moins étudiée et parlée dans une seule ville qui se nomme Larteh, dans la région Eastern du Ghana. Les voisins linguistiques de cette ville sont pour la plupart des villes de la langue Akan. Le statut de vitalité du dialecte Lɛtɛ est de 6a, décrit comme étant vigoureux (EGIDS). Cependant, les écrits sur la linguistique africaine indiquent que les travaux de recherche sur le dialecte Lɛtɛ sont insuffisants. La littérature disponible sur ce dialecte se concentre sur des aspects liés à la grammaire et à la vie sociale, sans tenir compte de l'interrelation des deux. De ce fait, l'article exploite les données primaires d'une étude sur l'usage du dialecte, ainsi que des données secondaires pour faire ressortir cet aspect d'interdépendance. Nous appliquons dans cet article, l'approche linguistique anthropologique dite ≪ langue et pensée ≫. Selon le cadre UNESCO de 2003 qui a servi de base d'évaluation de la vitalité du dialecte Lɛtɛ, ce dernier a besoin d'être maintenu. En conclusion, on pourrait dire que le contexte d'un dialecte et la dynamique de celui-ci pourraient avoir un impact significatif sur son statut et son utilisation.

Mots clés: Lɛtɛ, Larteh, contexte, histoire, culture, éducation, religion, état de vitalité

Introduction: Language identity

The paper presents the context or the environment in which Lɛtɛ is spoken, rather than the structure of the language. In presenting the context of the language, the paper sheds light on the extent to which Lɛtɛ language context contributes to the status and use of the language. Lɛtɛ is a South-Guan language of the Kwa branch of Ghanaian languages, under the Niger-Congo phylum (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Genetic affiliation of Lɛtɛ

Niger–Congo
    Atlantic–Congo
    Volta–Congo
        Kwa
        Nyo
        Potou–Tano
            Tano
                Guan
                North Guan
                    Chumburung   (Ghana)
                    Dompo Ghana)
                    Dwang (Ghana)
                    Foodo (Benin)
                    Gikyode   (Ghana)
                    Ginyanga   (Togo)
                    Gonja   (Ghana)
                    Kplang (Ghana)
                    Krache (Ghana)
                    Nawuri (Ghana)
                    Nchumburu   (Ghana)
                    Nkonya (Ghana)

                South Guan
                    Efutu   (Ghana)
                    Kyerepɔn (Ghana)
                    Gua   (Ghana)
                    Lɛtɛ   (Ghana)

http://www.ethnologue.com/

      The name of the language, Lɛtɛ[1], is synonymous to the name of the town where the language is spoken. However, in the literature and among non-speakers, both the language and the town are known as Larteh. Eberhard, Simons & Fennig (2019), offer *Gua* as an alternative name, but as Figure 1 shows, and by the testimony of the speakers, *Gua* is another South Guan language, and not a variant name of Lɛtɛ. Lɛtɛ speakers are bilingual, with Lɛtɛ

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1   In this paper, Lɛtɛ refers to the language, whereas Larteh stands for the town where the language is spoken

as their first language, and Akuapem Twi, an Akan[2] dialect as the second language. Commenting on the bilingual status of Guan speakers, Stewart (1972: 83) reports that 'Except in the case of Gonja (North Guan), it seems that most speakers of Guan languages speak a second language as a lingua franca'. The use of Akan (Akuapem Twi) as a second language may be explained by historical reasons (Kwamena-Poh 1974; Gilbert 1997) and geographical factors (see Figure 2), and also as a result of the language-in-education policy of Ghana (Anamoah-Mensah 2004). Larteh is isolated from other Guan-speaking groups, and surrounded predominantly by Akuapem Twi-speaking towns such as Mampong, Obosomase, Mamfe, Akropong and Amanokrom; consequently, there is a high degree of contact at various levels with their Twi-speaking neighbors. Guan speaking towns like Abiriw, Adukrom and Apirede seem to be farther away from Larteh. It is also interesting to note that south of Larteh are Dangme-speaking towns such as Ayikuma and Dodowa (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Larteh and surrounding towns
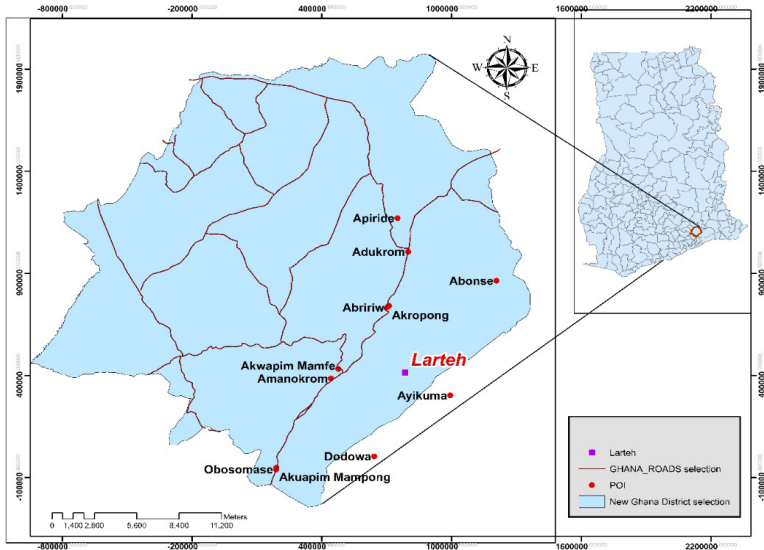
Source: Remote Sensing & GIS Laboratory, University of Ghana

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2   The Akan language constitutes a group of dialects; notable ones are Akuapem, Asante, and Fante.

Johnson (1973) describes an interesting language-use phenomenon in Larteh whereby the *Akantsane* clan, who are believed to be of Fante[3] origin are reported to speak Fante as their L2, unlike the rest of the community who speak Akuapem Twi as L2[4]. This characteristic of older clan members may be attributed to the history of migration as Guan communities migrated southwards, settling temporarily with the Fante along the western coast of Ghana, and acquiring aspects of their culture. However, some members of the community who were interviewed hinted that the practice was hardly noticeable in their day (Report from Lɛtɛ Language Use Survey 2012). In table (1), we summarise the identity of Lɛtɛ.

Table 1: Lɛtɛ identity

Name:	Lɛtɛ[5], Larteh
Genetic affiliation:	South Guan; Kwa; Niger-Congo
ISO 693-3 code:	Lar
Glottolog code:	lart1238
Number of speakers:	74,000 (Ethnologue)
Location:	Latitude 5.94; Longitude -0.08
Vitality rating:	EGIDS 6a (vigorous) (Eberhard, Simmons & Fennig 2019).
AES status:	not endangered

Source: http://www.ethnologue.com/

In the ensuing sections, we discuss methods employed in data collection, and the theoretical approach we adopted for our study. We then cite cross-linguistic studies, paying close attention to one based on an East African language, Gorwaa, a South Cushitic language spoken in north-central Tanzania. We further discuss 5 facets of life at Larteh, focusing on their impact on language status and use. Aspects of life we discuss are the history of migration; linguistic neighborhood; the interdependence of language, education and religion; linguistic culture and social organization. The final section is devoted to concluding remarks.

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3   The Fante are found in the Western and Central regions of Ghana. They speak an Akan dialect called Fante.
4   Speakers of Lɛtɛ (L1) speak Akuapem Twi as their L2.
5   The name of the language under study is variously known in the literature as Leteh, Larteh, Lɛtɛ and Latɛ. In this paper, Lɛtɛ is the adopted name for the language, and Larteh stands for the town where the language is spoken.

Methods and Data sources

This paper utilizes primary and secondary data. The collection of primary data for the study spans 2011–present. The paper therefore draws on data from field activities that have been undertaken within a number of periods. Interview transcripts, audio recordings of conversations and language survey reports provided invaluable pieces of information on major aspects of the context of the language. The survey was conducted to investigate the pattern of language use in Larteh through observations and interviews conducted in the language community. In all, with the help of five research assistants, about 125 Lɛtɛ speakers, aged 10 years and above were interviewed. Furthermore, the author observed language use in eleven domains. In Table 2, we provide a summary of patterns of language use in the said domains. Afterwards, an assessment[6] of the vitality of Lɛtɛ is discussed in terms of UNESCO's nine factors for assessing language vitality and endangerment (LVE) (Brenzinger 2007).

The most recent data collected are on linguistic culture, gathered in 2019 in the language community, Larteh. Interviews were held with Lɛtɛ song composers and adult speakers (75–80 years) who were knowledgeable in oral genres in Lɛtɛ: proverbs, folktales, riddles and poems. Furthermore, secondary sources were consulted for information on linguistic neighborhood and the migration story.

Transcripts of interviews were analysed and details used for this paper. An archival deposit of samples of materials collected has been created; all of these are openly accessible at UGSpace (see References). The archival deposit continues to be enriched with new material on the grammar and other aspects of the culture of the people of Larteh.

An approach in Anthropological linguistics, 'language and thought' was adopted for the study. The discussion is therefore premised on Maiwald (1999) which was inspired by Hoijer (1954). It draws on tenets of 'the problem of language and thought' put forward by Hoijer (1954) and expounded by Maiwald (1999). The discussion in the paper is therefore undergirded by the following tenets: the system of language is part of the system of culture; culture changes more rapidly than language; culture is the source of some linguistic change; if one aspect of culture changes, its systematic nature will lead to a change of other aspects of culture, e.g. language.

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6   For the scope of this paper, this is not a detailed study on the vitality of Lɛtɛ; a more thorough assessment needs to be conducted to confirm the grading.

Drawing on the preceding tenets, we posit that although changes are noted in the various facets of life at Larteh, impact on language status and use has, however, been gradual and relatively slower; indeed, it could be said that culture changes more rapidly than language (Maiwald 1999).

Related literature: Language contexts of some of the world's less-studied languages.

In recent times, linguists who are committed to the description and documentation of less–studied languages of the world have recognized the relevance of the larger contexts of those languages to their status and function. Some of the accounts that have been published include Drude (2020); Gawne (2017); Hölzl (2021); Manzano (2021) and Ridge (2018). Languages whose contexts they have described are Aweti, spoken in Upper Xingu, Mato Grossa, Brazil; Syuba, also known as Kagate and spoken in Nepal; Longjia, an extinct Sino–Tibetan language which eventually was eclipsed by Mandarin; Inati, a language from the Pancy island in the southern Philippines; and Vatlongos spoken in Southeast Ambrym in Vanuatu, Oceania.

The authors present overviews of language contexts, focusing on aspects of life in the speech community and their impact on language use and status. Facets that have been investigated include natural resources and faith; education; societal and political organization; kinship and marriage and speech genres like songs, proverbs and storytelling. For each facet of life in the speech community, the authors trace traditional patterns, contemporary patterns and linguistic ramifications. A common observation is that rapid societal changes have impacted the use of language and their status. Although the studies cited are genetically unrelated to African languages, and more so to Lɛtɛ, the authors dwelt on themes that are relevant to similar studies in other parts of the world.

Literature on the contexts of less–studied African languages is scanty. In the case of Lɛtɛ, the language under discussion, we can cite a few anthropological studies on the people of Larteh: Brokensha (1966) is a study in cultural anthropology, whereas Johnson (1973, 1975) are sociolinguistic studies on Larteh which discuss language use, bilingualism and trigglossia. Harvey (2019), as a work situated in an African language context, is of particular interest to our discussion. Focused on Gorwaa, a South Cushitic language, spoken in north–central Tanzania, Harvey provides an overview of the larger context in which Gorwaa is spoken. The facets he engages are natural resources and faith; education; societal and political organization; kinship and marriage and speech genres.

Furthermore, he notes some effects of rapid societal changes on Gorwaa. The introduction of new farming methods and technology; electricity;

cash based trade; mobile phones and computers, for example, has brought new semantic domains with the need for new terms which can only be obtained in Swahili. Speakers, especially the younger generation, are therefore shifting to Swahili for everyday use. In the case of Lɛtɛ, the shift in this regard, is rather towards English, and not another indigenous language. In Tanzania, the language-in-education policy favours English and Swahili; no school allows the use of local languages for teaching or as taught subjects. Instances of Gorwaa writing are therefore uncommon. In Ghana, there are selected indigenous languages[7] which serve as languages of instruction and taught subjects at the basic level of education; Lɛtɛ is not included. With respect to language attitude among Gorwaa speakers, there is a sharp divide: older speakers in rural areas are enthusiastic about using the language, whereas younger speakers regard the language as being less useful in their day-to-day life. Unfortunately, the younger speakers are embarrassed speaking Gorwaa, and they would rather use an exonym, *Mbulu*, to refer to it. This attitude is in sharp contrast to that of speakers of Lɛtɛ who are proud of their language, and would be happy to see it in print (LLUS 2012). The status of any language to a large extent hinges on the attitude of its speakers towards their language; a negative attitude impacts negatively on its status and use (Batibo 2005). In the case of Lɛtɛ, the positive attitude expressed by speakers is motivational for its description and maintenance.

Harvey (2019) describes the Gorwaa society as patrilineal and patrilocal. He, however, contends that with rapid societal change, this is changing. It is observed that with migration on the ascendancy, people move out into urban centres where mixed marriages are contracted. The linguistic repercussion is language shift, especially when one of the spouses is not a speaker of Gorwaa. For most families, Swahili becomes the language of communication in the home at the expense of Gorwaa. Similarly, for a long time, mixed marriages were not encouraged with the people of Larteh (Brokensha 1966). Although in recent times, the trend is changing (LLUS 2012), spouses who speak Lɛtɛ make special effort to teach their children to speak the language, regardless of where they live. This has somewhat slowed down the rate of language shift.

The contexts of Lɛtɛ and Gorwaa differ in a number of respects; linguistic implications are therefore likely to differ. In the ensuing sections, we present

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7   The 10 selected indigenous languages of Ghana, also known as 'government-sponsored languages' are Akan (Asante, Fante, Akuapem) Nzema, Kasem, Gonja, Gurene, Ga, Dangme, Dagbani, Dagaare, Ewe.

some major facets of Larteh life, bringing out what pertained according to Brokensha (1966), and relate it to information that has been gathered from 2011–present. Although we note considerable changes in the various facets of life, the linguistic impact has been gradual, and at a slower rate than societal changes, an observation which corroborates that of Maiwald (1999). The paper will therefore add invaluable knowledge of how different language contexts influence language use and status.

Vitality status of Lɛtɛ

Lɛtɛ has been assigned to level 6a on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons 2010), meaning the language is unstandardised and in vigorous use (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2019). Furthermore, according to the Agglomerated Endangerment Scale (AES), Lɛtɛ is not endangered (Glottolog)[8]. Given that Lɛtɛ exists in the shadow of a more dominant language, Akan (Akuapem Twi), this section of the paper discusses its vitality based on a Lɛtɛ language use survey (LLUS) conducted from September 2011– February 2012.

Studies on language use in Larteh have disclosed that three languages are in use in the community: Lɛtɛ, Akuapem Twi, and English (Akrofi Ansah 2014, 2015; Bello 2013; Brokensha 1966; Johnson 1973, 1975). Furthermore, Johnson (1975) on language use in Larteh concludes that the community is characterised by triglossia[9], a linguistic situation which seemed quite stable. It can however be anticipated that with changes in various spheres of life over the years, patterns of language use have undergone significant changes. This is confirmed by the LLUS of September 2011–February 2012 at Larteh which utilised a random sample of about 125 Lɛtɛ speakers of 10 years and above. Patterns of language use investigated revealed that (Table 2) three main languages are used in Larteh: Akuapem Twi (L2), Lɛtɛ the native language (L1), and English (the official language of Ghana). There are Dangme-speaking communities to the southern part of Larteh, thus it is common to encounter traders communicating in Dangme on market days at Larteh. It must be noted that for each domain, the most dominant language is listed first.

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8 glottolog.org/glottology/language Accessed: 2020-10-18
9 A language situation which is characterized by a somewhat division of communicative functions among three languages, a vernacular and two other languages which are superimposed.

Table 2: Summary of patterns of language use

Domains of language use	Language (s)
Home	Lɛtɛ, Akuapem Twi, English
School	Akuapem Twi, English, Lɛtɛ
Church	Akuapem Twi, English, Lɛtɛ
African Traditional Religion	Lɛtɛ, Akuapem Twi, others
Traditional ceremonies	Lɛtɛ, Akuapem Twi, English
Market	Akuapem Twi, Lɛtɛ, Dangme
Documents (including electronic and print media)	English, Akuapem Twi
Communal life	Lɛtɛ, Akuapem Twi (age 50+) Akuapem Twi, Lɛtɛ, English (age 10–49)
Oral Literature	Akuapem Twi, Lɛtɛ
Transport	Akuapem Twi, Lɛtɛ
Literacy material	English, Akuapem Twi

In all of the domains investigated, Akuapem Twi was identified as the most popular. There is no domain where Lɛtɛ is exclusively used, rather, the two languages, Lɛtɛ and Akuapem Twi was often used interchangeably. English, the third language, was used in official settings only, namely, at church and school. Furthermore, in documents which reported on the language, English was often used. In the ensuing section, we discuss the vitality of Lɛtɛ on the basis of the LLUS findings; this will be done within the UNESCO (2003) framework for assessing language vitality and endangerment.

UNESCO (2003) proposes nine factors for assessing the language vitality and endangerment of a language. Factors 1–6 are major evaluative factors for 'language vitality' whereas factors 7 and 8 border on 'language attitudes and government's language policies'. The last factor, 9, is about 'amount and quality of documentation'. With the exception of factor 2 which deals with 'absolute number of speakers', which is quite impossible to determine, a language is assessed against each of the factors on a scale of 1–5. A ranking of 1 means that the language's performance with regard to the factor is low, whereas a ranking of 5 indicates that the language is doing well with regard to that factor.

For instance, with regard to Factor 1: intergenerational language transmission, if a language scores 1, it means that the language is critically endangered. It is an indication that the language is used mostly by the grandparental generation. On the other hand, if it scores 5, then it is deemed as safe; the language is used by all ages, from children up to adults. It is noteworthy that in applying the framework, all the factors need to be considered before an assessment of a language's vitality may be determined.

Factor 1: Intergenerational language transmission.

According to UNESCO (2003), a language must receive a grade 5 to be considered safe; the language must be used and transmitted from one generation to another generation. From the survey results, Lɛtɛ is graded 4 on the scale which means, unsafe. Whereas older folks, 50 years and above made efforts to communicate with younger speakers in Lɛtɛ at home, amongst speakers of 10 years and above, the pattern was different; children preferred to speak Akuapem Twi amongst themselves at home. Previous studies on Lɛtɛ language use reported a communal lifestyle where it was common to find grandchildren sharing home with grandparents, and being nurtured by the latter which supported language transmission to children (Brokensha 1966; Johnson 1973; 1975). More recent studies have however shown that the communal lifestyle is giving way to a more individualistic lifestyle. If this trend should continue, then language transmission would suffer.

Factor 2: Absolute number of speakers

It has been noted in the literature that the determination of absolute number of speakers could be problematic, especially in Africa (Lüpke 2009, 2015). This is mostly confused with population statistics which could result in over or underestimation. In the case of Lɛtɛ, for instance, there are reports of conflicting figures which could stem from sociolinguistic factors, among others. For instance, the population of Larteh is estimated at 8,310 (GPHC 2000) and 10,175 (GPHC 2010)[10]. Eberhard et al (2019), on the other hand, peg the population of Larteh at 74,000 which does not specify the number of people who actually speak Lɛtɛ. An estimation of language speakers is however pegged between 10,000 and 1 million (Eberhard et al 2019). The issue with small numbers of speakers is that small speech communities are more likely to lose their language if there is a natural disaster such as floods and earthquakes; especially in the instance of any external aggression such as wars, small language communities stand no chance of surviving. Small speech communities are therefore more susceptible

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10   Ghana Population and Housing Census (GPHC).

to language death. Notably, apart from the discrepancies in the population figures, none of the figures represents the number of speakers of Lɛtɛ. This, in any case, is difficult to determine because there are Lɛtɛ speakers who reside outside the speech community, and within the town, there are immigrants who do not speak the language. This factor is therefore not scored.

Factor 3: Proportion of speakers within the total population.

The number of speakers in relation to the total population of a group is a significant indicator of language vitality, where "group" may refer to the ethnic, religious, regional, or national group with which the speaker community identifies. It is believed that the higher the percentage of speakers, the greater their influence in the transfer and use of the language. This factor is also not easy to grade, because that is somewhat informed by absolute number of speakers. Nonetheless, the LLUS results indicate that the majority of the people who live in Larteh spoke the language. Given that the speech community is peri-urban, it may be estimated that about 80% of the residents are speakers of Lɛtɛ. The estimation is based on the fact that Larteh is about 55km from Accra, the capital city of Ghana, and thus it is possible that there are residents who commute to the city to transact business and return home; the percentage of language speakers in the speech community could therefore be high. Lɛtɛ is scored 4 in this respect, because from the survey, about 80% of the residents speak the language.

Factor 4: Trends in existing domains

We recall that in our language use survey (LLUS, Table 2), it was found that Lɛtɛ is not exclusively used in any of the domains. For example, with regard to documents, religious activities and formal education, the language is relegated to the background. It was also observed that in the community, adults aged 50 and above mostly used Lɛtɛ in their interactions, whereas children aged 10 and upwards who were often found engaged in out-door games like football, often interacted with their peers in Akuapem Twi when playing, adding a few phrases of English, and engaging in a kind of code-mixing where Akuapem Twi dominated.

Language assessors believe that ideally, a vibrant language must be used in all domains, because a language gains vitality if it is used in a wide range of domains. It is noted that the number of domains where Lɛtɛ is used is dwindling; Akuapem Twi is making its way into domains which hitherto were dominated by Lɛtɛ, for example, traditional domains (Akrofi Ansah 2014). Moreover, the

language for documentation is English language; consequently, Lɛtɛ is scored 3.

Factor 5: Response to new domains and media

Lɛtɛ is not used in new domains, for instance, social media, television, radio and the print media; Lɛtɛ is therefore inactive, and rated zero. A language is dynamic if the language is used in all new domains (UNESCO 2003).

Factor 6: Materials for language education and literacy

Lɛtɛ is unwritten and does not possess an official orthography. The little existing literature on the language has therefore been written using the Akuapem Twi orthography which is what the speakers are familiar with. According to our LLUS, the language is mostly used in unofficial domains such as homes and traditional settings: funerals, naming and marriage ceremonies, and annual festival durbars with chiefs (Akrofi Ansah 2014). In schools and churches, and official gatherings, Akuapem Twi is used as a lingua franca. In Larteh, bilingualism is the norm; the language serves as the L1, whereas Akuapem Twi is the L2, and for the educated, English is a third language. There is no official orthography available to the community; Lɛtɛ is therefore scored zero in that regard.

Factor 7: Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use

A government's policy regarding its linguistic resources, especially language, has far-reaching effects on the vitality of the said language. The language-in-education policy of Ghana since independence in 1957 has been in a state of flux, emphasizing and de-emphasizing Ghanaian languages (Owu-Ewie 2006; Owu-Ewie & Eshun 2019). Currently it seeks to promote indigenous languages in the first three years of elementary education, for which the government of Ghana has selected eleven languages (of about 75) for instruction from Kindergarten to Basic 3; thereafter, they are only taught as school subjects while English serves as the language of instruction up to the tertiary level (Anamoah-Mensah 2004). Lɛtɛ is not included in the selected 11 indigenous languages; the situation may therefore be described as one of passive assimilation, scoring 3 on the scale. As there is no clear policy for minority languages, Lɛtɛ is overshadowed by Akuapem Twi, a more dominant language, which is preferred in the public domain.

Factor 8: Community members' attitudes towards their own language.

The attitude of a speech community to their language is critical to its development and maintenance. The results of the language use survey indicate that Lɛtɛ speakers possess and exhibit a positive attitude towards their language. During

the language use survey, when the question: 'would you want to see Lɛtɛ in print?' was asked, about 98% of the respondents expressed that desire. Most members of the language community therefore support language maintenance. The factor may therefore be graded 4 on the scale.

Factor 9: Amount and quality of documentation

For a language to be deemed vibrant, it must possess well documented, transcribed, translated and analyzed materials such as dictionaries, comprehensive grammars, extensive texts and abundant annotated high-quality audio and video recordings (UNESCO 2003). Lɛtɛ does not possess all of those; the available scanty materials on the language are written in English. There are also theses, dissertations, journal articles and book chapters on the language, some of which have been deposited in the University of Ghana institutional repository (UGSpace). Documents existing on Lɛtɛ are inadequate; there are no audio and video recordings on the language, for instance; it is therefore rated 1. The vitality of Lɛtɛ may be summarized as follows in Table 3.

Table 3: A summary of vitality assessment of Lɛtɛ

Factors	Rating
Intergenerational language transmission	4 – declining with time; unsafe
Absolute number of speakers	difficult to determine; not scored
Proportion of speakers within total population	4– nearly all speak the language
Trends in existing language domains	3 – domains dwindling
Response to new domains and media	0 – no new domains and media
Materials for language education and literacy	0 – no orthography and materials for language education and literacy
Official status and use: governmental and institutional language attitudes, policies	3 – no official status and use
Community members' attitudes towards their own language	4 – community attitude to language is positive
Amount and quality of documentation	1 – Theses, Long Essays; short word-lists; no audio and video recordings, inadequate documentation

Although the survey of language use was conducted within 2011–2012, results obtained are still relevant. The findings are further corroborated by Bello (2013). The dynamics of language are gradual, although one may observe changes in the patterns of language use, the patterns do not get rooted until a long time (Trudgill 2000). On the whole, the ratings suggest that there is the need for language maintenance. Speakers' positive attitude to their language is motivational for such an exercise to be undertaken.

The Story of Migration

People groups possess numerous documented and undocumented sources of migration histories. According to Kwamena-Poh (1972, 1986), after the fall of the Ghana Empire[11] in the late 11th century, the forefathers of the inhabitants of present-day Ghana[12] were scattered and migrated in ethnic groups in search of safety and peace from intruders. The Guan communities are believed to have been the first to settle in present-day Ghana as a result of pressure to move southwards, because of the Almoravid invasions of the empires of medieval Ghana, and the religious wars of Askia Mohammed of Songhai. In addition, the search for new and fertile lands may also have motivated the movement as the northern parts had become more populated, and arable land had become scarce.

The first of the Guan groups to migrate was the Kyerepɔn (South Guan); the Lɛtɛ came later, perhaps not long afterwards. According to Kwamena-Poh (1972: 33–36), a possible route of migration might have been south-eastwards from the Volta valley through the grassland region of present-day Togo and Benin to the coast, where they met groups of Ewe and Dangme who had already settled there. The Lɛtɛ people finally settled on the Akuapem ridge where another Guan speaking group, the Kyerepɔn, had already settled in about 50 towns. It appears that the Lɛtɛ group may have come into contact with other Kwa languages like Ewe and Dangme, with implications[13] for language contact phenomena. There are some lexical items in Lɛtɛ which are believed to have been borrowed from either Ewe or Dangme for example, *agbeli* 'cassava'.

Linguistic Neighbourhood

Larteh is in the South-east of Ghana, on the Akono Hills, which cross Akuapem south-east to north-west. It is bordered in the north by the Mamfe-Akropong

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11   The old Ghana empire occupied present-day southeastern Mauritania and western Mali.

12   Present day Ghana is located on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa. It is bordered to the north- west and north by Burkina Faso, east by Togo, south by the Atlantic Ocean and to the west by Côte d'Ivoire.

13   It is believed that the labial-velar sounds in Leteh, /kp/, /gb/ are vestiges of contact with Dangme. Likewise, lexical items like agbeli 'cassava' could be due to contact with Ewe.

road; in the south by the Shai Hills, in the east by the towns of Abonse and Apirede, and in the west by the Apopoano Hill near Dodowa (Figure 2). The closest neighbors are Akuapem Mamfe and Akropong where Akuapem Twi is spoken, and Dodowa and Ayikuma, where Dangme is spoken. The closest Guan community is Abiriw, about 10km away, where Kyerepɔn is spoken. These language groups interact through inter-marriages, celebrations of traditional festivals, trade, and education. Consequently, on a typical market day at Larteh, the multilingual skills of the traders are utilized, and also during traditional festivals, it is common to find people from neighboring communities lending support. Short distances between Larteh and neighboring towns allow children to enroll in schools outside Larteh, further exposing them to other languages. Furthermore, the use of Akuapem Twi as the language of instruction at the lower primary level makes it mandatory for school children in Larteh to pay attention to Akuapem Twi. Contact with English and Akuapem Twi has resulted in borrowing[14], code-switching and diglossia.

Language, Education, and Religion

Language, education, and religion are interdependent in many West African communities (Woodberry 2012; Nunn 2010). This is largely due to missionary work which started off by translating Bible material into major indigenous languages, and establishing schools as part of the missionary agenda. The introduction of Christianity into Ghana, for instance, influenced formal education and language in significant ways. The Basel Mission established the first basic school in Larteh in 1858 with 12 children (Brokensha 1966). Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of schools which has directly resulted in an increase in the exposure of speakers of Lɛtɛ to Akuapem Twi. In December 2021 the number and types of schools are:

Table 4: Schools at Larteh, 2021

Type/Level	Total	State-owned	Private
Pre-school	10	5	5
Junior High School	9	5	4
Senior High School	9	5	4

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14   Lɛtɛ has borrowed from English and Akuapem Twi. English loanwords into Lɛtɛ include sùkúù 'school'; prɛ́tɛ̀ 'plate'. Some Akuapem Twi lexical items have been found to co-exist with Lɛtɛ equivalents in the lexicon of the latter. Examples are aware 'marriage', sɔ́hwɛ́ 'test' and many others cited in subsequent sections of this paper.

Most children attend up to the junior high level, thus enhancing their competence in Akuapem Twi, the medium of instruction at the basic level, and a subject beyond that level. During an observation session as part of the LLUS, it was noted that school children speak both Lɛtɛ and Akuapem Twi among themselves during recreation periods.

In church, Akuapem Twi is used for Bible reading, singing, preaching, and reading announcements. Lɛtɛ is not used by the clergy (including Lɛtɛ ministers), because the Bible and other liturgical books are written in Akuapem Twi (Akrofi Ansah, 2014). However, it was observed on a Sunday (February 26, 2012) after a church service at the Presbyterian Church that members interacted in Lɛtɛ.

In recent times, there have been attempts to put the Christian gospel in other formats; the Global Recordings Network (G.R.N.), for instance, has produced audio Bible stories and evangelistic messages in Lɛtɛ for speakers who are unfamiliar with English. However, according to investigator-speaker interactions, few Lɛtɛ speakers are aware of the project. Lɛtɛ is commonly used in traditional religious practices like libation, and interpretation of spirit communication through the fetish priest (/ess). It is noteworthy that in some of such communications, unknown languages are used. Lɛtɛ is therefore reserved for domestic use mostly.

Linguistic culture

Our LLUS (2012, 2019) revealed that songs, ritual texts, proverbs, folktales and poems, with the exception of recent song productions in Lɛtɛ, are all in Akuapem Twi. From about 2006, Alex Atakora, a subsistence farmer in his early thirties began writing and recording Lɛtɛ songs with themes relating to life issues. In an interview (November 14, 2019), he mentioned that recently, he had received invitations to perform songs in the language at funerals in Larteh and other neighbouring towns. Furthermore, Adom FM, an Accra radio station, had agreed to play his songs on one of their programmes; the arrangement is yet to be confirmed and implemented.

A community leader mentioned in an interview of approximately 20 minutes (November 16, 2019), that some Akuapem Twi proverbs have been translated into Lɛtɛ by Samuel Kwame Gyamfi, a radio presenter of Green FM, Accra (Table 5). When Gyamfi was contacted in a telephone interview (November 17, 2019), he confirmed it. He added that he had to translate the proverbs from Akuapem Twi to Lɛtɛ, because the elders he had contacted did not know any original Lɛtɛ proverbs.

Table 5: Lɛtɛ proverbs (Akuapem Twi translations)

Akuapem Twi	Lɛtɛ	English translation
sɛ nnua nyinaa tene a, anka yennya asosɔw dua	*sɛ oyi pɛɛ twukrɛ anka ebeenyɛ adɔwde oyi*	If all trees were straight, there would be no tree for carving digging tools
sɛ aguare anwo nyinaa na efi okunafo	*abiɛsɛ menwuri pɛɛ a mo ka twu okunafo*	The dampness of the bathroom is caused by the widow
Aboa ɔkwaku se ne suman ne n'aniwa	*Abobi osiente ye mo suma gyi mo asibi*	The monkey claims that his eyes are his lucky charm
sɛ ɔkwan ware a epue wɔ aboboano	*ɔkpɛ mkpa a ekpurɛ bo aboboano*	No matter how long a journey is, it ends at the doorstep
wɔnnae a wɔnso dae	*ɛbɛde a, ebeku odede*	One cannot dream without sleeping

In recent times, Lɛtɛ speakers have made attempts to compose poems in the language, but these remain in draft form, in need of revision (Interview with Samuel Kwame Gyamfi, November 16, 2019). Furthermore, an ongoing project on storytelling in the Larteh community has revealed a decline in the activity; not only has the practice become dormant, but, more disturbingly, Akuapem Twi is used to tell the stories (Adjei & Akrofi Ansah, ongoing). This state-of-affairs implies that the Lɛtɛ language has given up some of its domains of language use to Akuapem Twi. This would gradually affect the status and use of the Lɛtɛ language.

The Larteh society is patrilineal. Fathers name their first male children after their fathers. This becomes the middle name of the young son, followed by the father's surname which also happens to be his (father's) middle name. Children are commonly named after the father's parents or their siblings, and in rare circumstances, a father may honour his wife by allowing her to name a child after one of her relatives, or she may make a special request for that privilege. Larteh people believe that children grow up to resemble their namesakes; they are therefore careful about whom they name their children after.

In special circumstances, children are given 'strange names', being objects that are unwanted and without much honour. This happens when

children are born after parents have lost a number of children previously, and in order to make the new baby detestable or unattractive to death, they are given 'strange names' so that they will survive. It has been noted that some of the 'strange names' the people of Larteh use resemble those found within neighboring towns which speak Akuapem-Twi, for example, *Oyinka*, meaning, 'let this remain'; *Begyina* 'come and stand/stay' and *sumina* 'garbage'. Every Lɛtɛ child also bears a name depending on the day of the week they were born, and their gender (Table 6). Day names of the people of Larteh are similar to those of Akuapem, and generally all the Akan groups in Ghana.

Table 6: Lɛtɛ day names

Day	Male	Female
Monday	*Kwadwo*	*Adwoa*
Tuesday	*Kwabena*	*Abena*
Wednesday	*Kwaku*	*Akua*
Thursday	*Yaw*	*Yaa*
Friday	*Kofi*	*Afua*
Saturday	*Kwame*	*Ama*
Sunday	*Kwasi*	*Akosua*

An example of a male child's name would be: Kofi Amoa Bamfo; and that of a female, Ama Anima Owusu, the order being day name; given name; and father's name/surname. The naming pattern is akin to that of the Akuapem, a practice which is by no means influenced by contact with Akuapem culture. Naming of children has been somewhat influenced by formal education, colonialism and Christianity. It is common to find children bearing foreign names (for example, Catherine, Edward) or biblical names (for example, Elizabeth, Sarah) as their first name if the parents are educated or practising Christians. The foregoing attests to Akan and foreign influence on the naming practices of the people of Larteh.

Social organization

Social organization at Larteh has not seen much change since it was first documented (Brokensha 1966). Larteh is one of the 17 towns which constitute the Akuapem North District; it is about seven kilometres from Akropong, the district capital, and divided into two halves: *Ahenease* in the south and *Kubease* in the north. Each half is ruled by a chief, who organizes the community, and there are sub-quarters, named *bɔrɔn*, with leaders called *nnedi* or *asɔfo* 'priests' (Table 7). The chief of *Ahenease* is the 'left-wing' chief or the *Benkumhene*,

of the Akuapem traditional area, and the representative of the left-wing on the Akuapem Traditional Council.

Table 7: Larteh borɔn 'sub-quarters'

Ahenease	Kubease
Agyebide	Adabiri
Awurade	Abiade
Agyamkpode	Ahimso (including Akpemusu)
Adomfode	Akremede I
Akremede	Akremede II
Adabiri (including Akobide)	Agyamkpode
Asode	Asantede
Atsekpede and Agyedede	Akantsane
Atsokyede	Abode
Akumide	Amansode
Aninkɔde (including Abugyode)	Ahiankode (including Kpana)
Anyadede (including Asekude)	Agyimansu
Abegyede	
Agyankɔde	

The sub-quarters are primary social administration units; note that borɔn is an Akan term with no Lɛtɛ equivalent. In addition to the borɔn are two 'mission quarters', both located within Ahenease, called Gyaman (Germany) and Engresi (English), established by early missionaries to accommodate Christian converts who needed to be shielded from traditional influences and responsibilities considered to be at variance with Christian beliefs. At the mission quarters, the converts were taught to read and write Akuapem Twi, rather than Lɛtɛ; these converts were the first bilinguals. The people of Akantsane (Table 7) are

reported to speak a variant of Fante[15], different in a number of respects from Akuapem Twi, while the people of *Asantede* (Table 7) from the word, *Asante*[16], speak a dialect of Akan which resembles Asante. It is observed that most of the *bɔrɔn* names end with /–de/ which means, 'sleep' or 'a dwelling'. The various terms may therefore be translated as dwelling places of the entities denoted by the various prefixes; thus we have for instance, the dwelling place/abode of the *Anyade (Anyade–de)*; *Abegye, (Abegye–de) Asante (Asante–de)* and so on. In the case of *Abiade* for instance, *abia* means 'stools' and it is known as the *bɔrɔn* which houses the royal stools of *Kubease*, the second major group in Larteh. The name of the *bɔrɔn* may therefore be translated as 'abode/dwelling of stools'; which is where the royal family of *Kubease* resides. Similarly, *Awurade*, the quarters of the royal family of *Ahenease*, means 'the dwelling/abode of chiefs'; *awura* meaning 'chiefs' and 'de', dwelling place/abode. My informants hinted that Lɛtɛ speakers have retained the names of the *bɔrɔn*; they have not been acculturated by *Akuapem Twi* in any way.

Within each *bɔrɔn*, houses are built in a cluster, reflecting a communal lifestyle. In the past, each household included grandparents, parents and children who shared common meals, prepared by one person (Brokensha 1966). This arrangement contributed to intergenerational cultural and linguistic transfer and interdependence, with children acquiring Lɛtɛ from care–giver grandparents. Although the concept of the *bɔrɔn* still exists, it is obvious that the communal and interdependence lifestyle is diminishing. This is because, now, Lɛtɛ people who are trained to work in the formal sector migrate to the city to work. These people prefer to migrate with their children, rather than to leave them with their grandparents, a new trend which is likely to affect intergenerational transfer of culture, especially, language. Some parents, however, still try to send their children to Larteh for vacation, to facilitate their learning the language.

In the past, parents contracted marriages within the town for their children, resulting in endogamy. Brokensha (1966) reported that about 88% of all marriages were contracted within Larteh, with the remainder having one spouse from an Akuapem town. This pattern of marriage is still preferable among the people, because it is anticipated that in a family where both parents came from Larteh, the language will be transferred more easily to the children, thus promoting language transmission. On the other hand, where a wife came from a different ethnic group, the children were more likely to acquire their mother's language.

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15   Fante is one of the three major dialects of Akan. The rest are Akuapem and Asante.
16   Asante is one of the main dialects of Akan; the term also stands for the people who speak the dialect.

Results of our LLUS (2019) indicated that migration to the cities have brought about mixed marriages which could affect intergenerational language transfer. However, one interviewee was optimistic that in their family, their children were learning to speak Lɛtɛ regardless of their mother whose LI was Akuapem Twi. It is however observed that even when the effect of the mixed marriage is obvious, the change with regard to language acquisition is not as noticeable as one would expect. It is anticipated that children who are born within exogamous marriages would not be as loyal to Lɛtɛ culture as those born within endogamous marriages.

Conclusion

The paper has presented the context within which Lɛtɛ currently operates. It further discussed the effect of the evolving language context on its status and use. The paper corroborates Maiwald's (1999) observation that change concerning a language is slower than changes that occur in the language context. Lɛtɛ is spoken in a single town, Larteh, in south east Ghana, and does not possess an official orthography, and so literature that exists on the language has been written using the Akuapem Twi system. Its immediate linguistic neighbors are non-Lɛtɛ speakers. Consequently, the sociolinguistic system of Larteh shows influences from mostly Twi-speaking neighbors. The extended family system which encouraged a communal lifestyle, and fostered cultural and linguistic transmission is practically non-existent now, largely as a result of urbanization. From the discussion of the various aspects of the language environment, we conclude that the context is evolving. Although the language remains vital, conditions for future language shift exist, and it is imperative that thorough documentation and description of language structure and use be carried out. From the foregoing, it is apparent that changes in the context of Lɛtɛ are making significant impact on its status and use.

Acknowledgements

out research on language use at Larteh, 2011–2012. The following people deserve special mention as language and culture consultants: Alex Atakora (song composer), Samuel Kwame Gyamfi (poet), the late Florence Owusu-Bamfo, the late Kwame Darko; the late Solomon Simmons Asamoah; Akosua Dentaa and Rev. Dr. Hanson Akrofi Ansah.

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