

Pushing back linguistic time in the Trans-Volta:
movement, assimilation and loss

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The ambition of this paper is to reconstruct what the linguistic map of the Ghana-Togo mountain area might have looked like in the past, before the appearance of Akan and Ewe speakers in the area in the large numbers present since the 19th century at least. As the map appears today, it is not at all obvious whether the languages we are calling the Ghana-Togo-Mountain Languages (GTML) were once more widespread, had more or fewer speakers in the past, or whether they are entirely spoken by groups of people who fled disturbed conditions elsewhere to seek shelter in the mountains and were originally spoken in quite different places, as some have thought. Nor is it obvious that these problems can actually be solved, but I hope to at least throw more light on them.

I will not attempt to consider the area north of the Adele area (around Dutukpene, Kadjebi on the Ghana side) in any detail. North of about 8°10' N is what we might now call the north Guang heartland, which is indeed relevant to the problem of the map to the south, but I will take it for now that Nchumuru, Gichode and their close relatives have been in that approximate location for a long time, although it is also possible that they or at least much of the population that now speaks them have arrived west of the Volta during the past several centuries. When the Guang leader Atara Finam (or Firam), who ruled a broad area south of Nkoranza, was defeated by several Akan states circa 1680 it is said that he was driven across the Volta "with his thousands" (Daaku 1979: 80).

North of Adele are the Eastern Grusi languages, a branch of the Grusi division of Central Gur. According to Manessy the Grusi language group as a whole expanded outwards from the area now occupied by the Eastern Grusi languages, which extends from Delo and Bogon (Chala) on the Ghana-Togo border eastwards to Kabiye in Togo (Manessy 1999: 10-11). If Manessy's argument is correct, Eastern Grusi languages have been in more or less their present position for two thousand years. I also pay relatively little attention to the area south of Ho. However I want to stress that these limitations are mainly to make the task more manageable – ultimately the whole area is bound together by a complex history of migration related to competition for land, to empire-building, and resulting assimilations.

There is a problem with the time frame to be aimed at. The earliest written documentation seems to be mainly from the 1880s, by people looking to extend the areas of control of missions (Basel and Bremen) and colonial governments (British and German). G.E. Ferguson (a British colonial servant of Fante extraction) indicated that a Guang language was still the language of Atebubu in 1890 (Arhin ed. 1974: 9). The Basel Mission pastor David Asante (1886) made a few observations in the Buem area. German records, mainly from missionaries, seem to be the most extensive for our purposes. German authors from the beginning of the 20th century refer to Ashanti invasions in 1869 as a crucial factor in the configuration of the population of the area (Heine 1968: 36, 40). However they also make it clear that Akan activities in the

previous century had made a major impact on language patterns. And before that, incoming northern Ewe groups settled in their present territory by the end of the 17th century (Gavua 2000: 5). It is probably not realistic to try to reconstruct a period when neither Akan nor Ewe expansion was a factor, because a) there is no reason to think the area has been stable at any time in the recoverable past, b) the accounts of origins available are not sufficiently detailed, and as we shall see cannot possibly be, and c) people who speak (or spoke) Guang languages, especially the Nkonya, and other linguistic groups now living in the Akuapem hills and on the Accra Plain are very much involved in the recoverable history of the area, and their movements were certainly affected by developments among the Akan and Ewe and beyond. I shall therefore not attempt to construct a map that freezes any particular period, but rather try to deduce which languages spoken in the area cannot be said to have been brought in from anywhere else, which languages arrived or developed after these languages were already in place, and how their locations on the ground and also relative to each other may have changed. We will also consider evidence that several languages once spoken in the area have become extinct. It is also well to keep in mind that although migration necessarily enters the picture, we must clearly distinguish the languages from the people who spoke them. Failure to make this distinction has vitiated the work of some scholars (eg. Eglewogbe 1992). The speakers of a language three hundred years ago are not necessarily the biological ancestors of those who speak its daughter language today, and in this case they very often in fact are not. The task of this paper is to look beyond the accounts of migrations of people, to deduce what languages they spoke, and what has happened to those languages since.

The historical background

Several datable (or approximately datable) events are important in this story. I now give a brief outline of events which undoubtedly had an impact on it, to give some kind of provisional chronological framework within which the various assimilations and displacements took place. After that I will consider what is known or deducible about the spatial history of each language.

According to some authorities the Guang began to move down the Volta from "the Gonja area" toward the coast around 1200 AD.¹ (All dates are from Owusu-Ansah and McFarland 1995, unless otherwise indicated.) Farther north, in the course of the fifteenth century the Dagomba, Mamprusi and Nanumba states were formed, a fairly violent process carried out by invaders, which undoubtedly exerted pressure on people to the south. Another source of pressure would have been the Mande conquest of Gonja and foundation of the empire of that name, which began around 1550. In 1620 the Gonja attacked Dagomba at Daboya, resulting in the Dagomba moving their capital to Yendi, and in 1713 the Gonja conquered Yendi Dabari. Although these events took place quite far from our area, they would certainly have created refugees, and movements of people, so that if people had not started moving earlier we may assume that in the 16th and 17th centuries they were doing so.

In the Akan-speaking states of the south of today's Ghana, initial expansion was in the western part of the area. By 1646 however the Akwamu, based near Nsawam in the

¹ No source is given, and we may take this dating with a grain of salt, especially since it is not certain that such a movement ever happened.

south, had conquered the Guang of Akuapem, and then expanded into the Accra Plain. In 1701 they crossed the Volta, advancing into Dahomey, and in 1707 they defeated the northern Ewe, advancing to Ho and Kpandu. Meanwhile however other Akan states were expanding, and in 1730 the Akyem and others defeated Akwamu and forced that state across the Volta to its present location at Akwamufie. The Akyem in turn were defeated by Asante in 1742, and within two or three years Gonja and Dagomba had also become tributary states of Asante. It is relevant that these states all had to pay Asante an annual tribute of slaves.

The Nkonya people are said to have arrived in the Wurupong area about 1730, and in 1750 they and neighbouring groups conquered a relatively powerful people there called the Maako. Also about this time a Kwawu kingdom was formed north of Buem which had a strong influence in the area until it was defeated by a Buem-Nkonya-Akpafu coalition in 1850.

In 1764 the Asante army crossed the Volta but was defeated by Oyo and Dahomey. However this did not end Asante's incursions. In the fall of 1868 the Asante army invaded Krepi (northern Eweland), and took Anum and Ho in June 1869.²

By the late 19th century, various European powers were vying for control over the area. In 1884 the Germans announced that Togoland, which included most of the present Volta Region of Ghana as well as the Republic of Togo, was their protectorate, and the British agreed on the border in 1886, which was modified again by the Heligoland Agreement in 1890. British rule was gradually extended in what became the Gold Coast. In 1890 Atebubu recognized British protection, but in 1893 it was invaded by Asante. The British occupied Kumasi in 1896, and again in 1900 when defeat in the Yaa Asantewaa War effectively ended the threat from Asante. In August 1914, the Germans surrendered Togoland to a combined British and French force, and the area was divided between those two countries.

Migration and assimilation

In the following discussion I use mainly information about migration history from Heine (1968), with additional information from German missionary writers including Seidel (after Plehn), Funke, Westermann and Debrunner. These writers were also Heine's principal sources, together with French sources principally Bertho and Cornevin and additional material collected by himself. Rattray collected oral traditions in the area about 1915/1916, which I understand is to be found in the Ho Archive,³ and Heine includes a paper by Rattray on the Akpafu⁴ in his references, but I have not been able to consult this material. I thus introduce no new data, but rather attempt a new arrangement and interpretation of these sources.

I begin with the languages in Heine's KA group / Branch II, for convenience and because they seem to be the languages for which there is the least evidence that they

² This event, not surprisingly, was remembered in the traditions collected by missionaries forty years later. Informants tended to attribute to it flights from incursions by Asante and other Akans that must have occurred much earlier.

³ Information thanks to Lynne Brydon.

⁴ Rattray, R.S. 1916. The iron workers of Akpafu. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 46: 431-5.

might have arrived in the mouths of immigrants. I then look at traditions connected with speakers of the NA group / Branch I, then Guang, and finally some languages that have become extinct, or nearly so.

Migration and assimilation: Heine's KA Group

From north to south (more or less) the Group II languages are: Animere, Kebu, Kpɔsɔ, Ahlo (Ago), Tuwuli, and Avatime. There is no information on Animere in the sources, apart from an old wordlist, but fortunately the paper presented by A. Ring at this workshop has clarified the situation considerably. According to his report, the language is now spoken only by a few elderly people in the northern of the two areas marked as Animere-speaking on Heine's map. Formerly however it was spoken in the area between the Wawa and Asukawkaw rivers, directly east of Kunda. Within living memory it was spoken in Kunda (the southern of the two areas marked as Animere-speaking by Heine) and apparently also in Kekiyebe (Kajebi), Ampeyo and Pampawie near the border with Togo, but it has now disappeared from these places, and the people whose ancestors spoke it now speak Akan. In the area where it is still spoken the people are said to be shifting to Gidɛrɛ, the language of the Adele (Heine 1969).

There is apparently no tradition that points to an exotic origin for Kebu, but the community has absorbed immigrants from many places, including Ewe escaping from Notsie, Anyanga (Guang-speakers) from farther north near Blita, and Ntribu (speakers of Delo, an Eastern Grusi language, also farther north). We shall see that absorption of considerable numbers of people from elsewhere is a recurrent pattern.

There seems to be a difference of opinion on Kposo [-kpɔsɔ] (Heine 1969: 68). One theory is that the people's original home is Apesokubi in what is now Ghana, and that they spread eastwards because of overpopulation. The other is that the present area in Togo is the original one. It seems to me that both could be true, and that the main bulk of the population at some point shifted a few miles eastward into an area they already used. Seidel (1898: 257) says they were once 25 km further south, and that they were on bad terms with the Kebu (p. 264). However Debrunner (1962: 110-1) argues convincingly that Kpɔsɔ was the original language of Apesokubi (which he says means "Kpɔsɔ grasslands" in Kpɔsɔ), and that the Akpɔsɔ farther east originated from there. Today, according to discussions arising in this workshop, the Akposo people in Ghana are cut off geographically from the Akposo of Togo, although they have been established in Ghana for a very long time, since before the separation.

It seems that the Ahlo [-go] formerly adjoined the Kposo, on the hills slightly to the east of their present location. According to Seidel (1898: 254) they were once at Muatšɛ, from where they went to Gbele (Kpele) at a village called Le – now Ewe-speaking, but the names suggest a connection with a group that eventually joined the Dangme.⁵ If it is true that the Kposo moved slightly eastwards, and then at a later date spread out, there was probably a time when they and the Ahlo in their old locations were not actually contiguous. But in any case it appears that in the earliest

⁵ Akro-Muase was one of the two leaders who brought the Krobo to Krobo Mountain (Huber 1963: 17). Kpele is the name of the Ga national cult, thought to have been brought to Accra by the Gbese, who were earlier associated with Larteh. Le is a variant pronunciation of La, one of the major Ga-speaking divisions, which was Dangme-speaking before some sections joined the Ga (see Dakubu 1997).

recoverable past, the Animere, Kebu, Kposo and Ahlo languages were aligned in a column from north to south, with a slight bend westwards for Kposo – not very different from the present, but with less expansion eastwards.

Tuwuli (Bowiri) on the other hand is west of Igo (Ahlon), with other ("NA" group) languages intervening. It seems that earlier the community was confined to the eastern part of its current area, and only expanded westwards during the 20th century, after the Asante were conquered by the British (Heine 1968: 61). This group too assimilated a considerable number of incomers. The "old" clans, Bakoe and Kpaletso, say they came from the earth, but other clans claim to have originated from the other side of the Volta, Akuapem and today's Central Region (Moree). They had merged with the original clans, and presumably adopted their language, by 1750 at the latest (Heine 1968: 59).

The Avatime-Nyangbo-Tafi language is located to the south of the others and separated from them by Ewe speakers. Of these three closely related dialects Avatime has the most speakers today. The Tafi are the only group who seem to be autochthonous, or at least to have been there before the others arrived. On the other hand Funke (1909: 166) reported that they came from Anum in "Srabi-Gabi" on the other side of the Volta, which suggests that the Tafi too assimilated others.⁶ Avatime is definitely a variety of the language adopted by an incoming group, as their name for themselves implies (Funke 1909: 287). They met an autochthonous group called the *Baya*, and so they call the language *Siya*, but they call themselves by an entirely different name referring to their arrival. The incomers came from the south, originally west of the Volta, and say they left the Accra Plain at the same time as the (Dangme-speaking) people who went to Agotime as a result of wars on the Accra Plain, in the mid-18th century or a little earlier.

The Nyangbo people are also said to have come from further south, west of the river, but separately. Ajena near Akosombo is mentioned (Heine 1968: 53). They wandered a bit before they occupied the southern part of Tafi land, not particularly peacefully (Seidel 1898: 203). Thus it seems that Nyangbo and Avatime are dialects of *Siya* that originated as varieties spoken by second-language speakers. We might expect that if the Tafi are the original community they should call themselves *Baya*, but in fact they call themselves *Bagbo*. Perhaps they are only one division of the earlier language community, or perhaps they also adopted the language from an earlier population, that has left no traces. Both the Nyangbo and the Tafi are said to have lived for a time at Mt. Agu (Debrunner 1962: 112). This group of dialects is thus not only geographically separated from the others discussed so far, it was particularly strongly affected by incomers beginning at least 300 years ago, who are responsible for the current dialect division. It is also the only one that may have originated elsewhere, although I don't think Funke's remarks can be taken as indicating this, since the Tafi themselves, if indeed they all came from the south-west, may have acquired the language and assimilated its original speakers.

To generalize, one is struck by the relatively large numbers of migrants from widely different source areas that have shifted to these five languages. This must have increased the size of the linguistic communities, but by what degree it is hard to judge,

⁶ According to W. Peacock (to appear) Gabi is another name for Nkami, a Guang language very closely related to Nkonya, spoken west of the Volta.

since some incoming groups may have been very small, and the communities have probably waxed and waned several times over the centuries.

Migration and assimilation: Heine's NA group

I now turn to the languages of Heine's NA group / Branch I: Basila, Adele, Buem, Siwu, Santrokofi, Likpe, Logba. These languages seem to be genetically distinguishable from the foregoing, and quite closely related to each other. Whether or not they form a distinct genetic group, they are quite clearly related to the Tano group, and were classified by Stewart (1989: 221) as belonging together with Tano (which includes Akan and the Guang languages) to a larger Potou-Tano group, which explicitly excluded the KA languages. This is no doubt why earlier writers have thought of them as intermediate in some undefined way between Akan, Guang and other Kwa languages.

Basila is the most far-flung of all the languages in this grouping, outside the GTML area. Heine reports (1968: 24, mainly after Person) that the language community has extremely mixed origins, but that there is a clan, Akime, identified as the original speakers of the language. He also quotes Bertho as suggesting that they originated further south and west, refugees from Asante. I suggest either "Asante" has overlaid much earlier incursions by expanding Akan states, or this does not include the entire population, or both. If it is indeed closely related to the other NA languages and the Potou-Tano group, however, the language itself must have moved north-eastwards at some time.

According to Heine (1968: 32), the Adele in the Ghana part of their area say they originated from the south near Accra, specifically the Osu Lagoon, whence they fled after being attacked by "Juaben", presumably Akyem. This makes them one of the several groups fleeing north and east from the wars west of the Volta in the middle of the 18th century. However they did not bring the Gidɛrɛ language with them. As they spread through their present territory, especially to the east, they met a group already there who worked iron, and it is likely that, as Heine says, they absorbed these people, simultaneously shifting to their language.

The next four languages, which are geographically continuous and contiguous, are genetically closely related, although not mutually intelligible. Some distance directly south of Adele, beyond Kebu and Kposo as well as what are now Akan speaking areas, they are in the area many writers seem to have uppermost in mind when discussing the "TR culture". The Buem language is the furthest north. Buem is a geographical name and also denotes a political union created in the 19th century to oppose Asante. As a language it consists of two major dialects, Lelemi and Lefana. According to Heine (1968: 27) nothing definite is known about the earlier history of the people, and he quotes wildly differing claims, pointing to arrivals from the north and/or the west. Neither Westermann nor Seidel has anything to say about it, and, unfortunately, nothing about the origins of the dialect differentiation, which might give a clue.⁷

⁷ At the Workshop some remarks were made on this topic – I would appreciate fuller information.

Bordering Buem to the south is the language known as Akpafu-Lolobi (the Ewe names) or Siwu-Siwui, the names of its two major dialects. Some of the people are historically smiths, and according to Heine (1968: 43) those who claim this heritage say they came from the earth, ie. are autochthonous, although there is also a suggestion that they were originally a little farther north. This linguistic community is also an amalgam of incoming people from many directions. Some families claim to originate from Atebubu, which as indicated above once spoke a Guang language and was invaded several times by Asante. Others say they came from further south, in the area that now speaks Avatime, while others moved eastwards from the Wurupong area, which is now Nkonya speaking, and yet others say they once lived in the present Kposo area. Since the language is clearly genetically closely related to its immediate "NA" neighbours, it is likely that all these incomers were assimilated into a language group already in more or less the present location, although it may well have expanded south and westwards. Again, there is no information on the origins of the dialect differentiation, except that the Lolobi arrived later, so that the linguistic territory expanded southwards. Nugent's comment that "Given that the Akpafu and the Lolobis are closely related, and speak a common language, we can assume that the same [Akpafu never lived anywhere else] is applicable to the latter" (Nugent 2005: 33) is manifestly untenable, as general principle and historical fact.

The people known as "Santrokofi", who speak Sɛlɛɛ, also have traditions that some of them came from Atebubu, and some from the hills to the north-east, but their main tradition is that they came "out of the earth", and it is not likely that the community has moved in the past few centuries (Heine 1968: 38).

Similarly, there is no evidence that the language of the Likpe was once spoken elsewhere, but some families have a tradition of coming from Atebubu. Although the language of the Logba (Ekpana) is quite closely related to these four, the community that speaks it is located to the south adjacent to Siya (Avatime). There seems to be a general agreement that the Avatime, who as we have noted were incomers themselves, were there before the Logba. Heine (1968: 30) suggests that the Logba fled south following wars in the Nkonya area around 1750. We will return to this topic.

Migration and assimilation: Guang

Goody (1963: 185) proposed that the distribution of Guang languages on the map suggests movement between north and south, mainly southwards, and that the area roughly between Krakye and Salaga was likely "the main area of concentration". In the same article however he also suggests that varieties of Guang including the precursor of Gonja may also have been spoken to the west of Salaga before the Mande invasion, implying that a number of varieties were displaced or eliminated by Gonja expansion. His discussion invokes thoroughly out-dated linguistics, but these conclusions seem reasonable.

It is very likely that all of eastern Brong Ahafo as far as Takyiman was once Guang-speaking, before the Asante expansion northwards, and much of it still is, so that the apparent concentration of Guang languages east of Salaga may be a relatively recent phenomenon. The southernmost extension of this language continuum, which could

be less than a thousand years old in view of the close relationships and the kinds of movements and assimilations that have undoubtedly occurred, is Krakye, spoken in and around Kete Krachi. I shall not try to deal with its history. The Guang languages that concern us most are Nkonya and Anum. I don't say much about Anum either, because it is very closely related to Lɛtɛ (Larteh) and Ɔkɛrɛ (Kyerepong), and somewhat south of our main area of interest. Nkonya however is of central importance.

Snider classifies Nkonya as North Guang, together with Gonja and other languages to the north and in opposition to the Guang of the southern hills and coast across the river. Although Stewart had suggested that North Guang lost nasality of vowels after non-nasal consonants, an innovation which would leave Nkonya in South Guang, he dismisses this on the grounds that some of the South Guang corresponding nasal vowels are derived (Snider 1989: 39). Earlier scholars treated Nkonya as "Central", neither North nor South but more closely related to "North Central" ie. Nchummu, Krachi etc. than to Gonja and Gichode or to Anum and Larteh (see eg. Dakubu ed. 1988: 79). All of these would imply that if Nkonya is a relatively new arrival, it came from the north.

However, it has been suggested (by Peacock to appear) that there is other evidence, involving Nkami, a variety closely related to Nkonya (see note 6) that Nkonya is in fact South Guang. Also counter to a northern affiliation are strong traditions of arrival from the south, that the Nkonya moved eastwards with the Akwamu from Nyanawase (near Nsawam) in the first half of the eighteenth century, and then moved northwards after the founding of Akwamufie (Heine 1968: 38). Several groups of people speaking Guang languages were certainly present in the Accra Plain and on the Akuapem ridge before that time, and it is perfectly possible that some were allied with the Akwamu state organization and moved with it, but then later found it prudent to separate themselves. In that case however we would expect them to be speaking a southern dialect, or dialects. (Note that some of the Bowiri are also said to have come from Nyanawase and Adukrom, ie. Akwamu and the Akuapem ridge Guang community.) If Peacock is right concerning the classification of Nkonya-Nkami, then there is currently no evidence that a Guang language was spoken between Krachi and Anum before the 18th century.

We may mention here also the several reported cult languages of the Ewe-speaking area. According to Seidel, Plehn named two, Hebeso of Agu and the language of Gbele and Muatse. Debrunner (1962: 110) thought that the Ewe speaking people at Kpele ("Gbele") once spoke a "Togo Remnant" (GTML) language, but it is more likely to have been a Guang language. Kpele is also the name of the major Ga cult, which is certainly of Guang origin. Its songs were in a Guang language known to the Ga as "Obutu", until they became so corrupted, because not understood, that most of them have been recast in Akan. Seidel seems to indicate that Hebeso is a Gbe lect.

Disappeared languages

The current language of the area around Wurupong is Nkonya, but as we have seen, it may not always have been so, although the earlier location of the language (not the people) cannot have been far away. However the arrival of the Nkonya

people seems to have been crucial for the current linguistic map. Near Wurupong they met a people called the Maako, also called by some the Krobo. These people had dominated the whole area to the east, ie. Akpafu-Likpe-Santrokofi, but in 1750 they were defeated by a combined force of Nkonya, Santrokofi and Akpafu (Heine 1968: 39), and the Maako as a people were dispersed. It is reported that Akpafu and Nkonya sold Maako slaves to the Asante (Heine 1968: 40). There is a clan called Maako, presumably a remnant of this people, among the Akpafu, and the Nkonya, Santrokofi, Likpe and Buem also include clans or individuals said to stem from the Maako. According to Debrunner (1962: 115) the Maako living among the Nkonya and Akpafu were allowed to speak Siko once a week and for rituals, otherwise they had to speak the language of their hosts. He gives a few words in Siko that he was able to elicit from the last speaker, a "blind, weak old man with a shaking voice" whom he met in Akpafu-Todzi. They are extremely limited and not sufficient evidence for any deductions about affinities. It is claimed (according to Debrunner) that the Logba consist of Maako who fled south. If that is so we might suppose, as mentioned above, that the Logba language is a descendant of Siko, which was therefore quite closely related to its neighbours Buem, Siwu and Selee. However Debrunner thinks, on what grounds he does not say, that only small splinter groups of Maako might have joined the Logba (Debrunner 1962: 114).

It is not impossible that the Maako were somehow connected with the Dangme-speaking Krobo, who would have been in the area much earlier than 1750. A significant proportion of the Krobo undoubtedly came into their present location from farther north on the east side of the Volta. Their name for themselves is Klo, or Akro, but the Ga call them Krɔbo.

Also in the Togo Plateau area, at a hill called Mai-kube, the Akpafu met a people speaking a language called Simai. The people seem to have been totally absorbed by the Akpafu and their language has vanished. Another language that has totally vanished is Setafi, whose speakers seem to have been integrated into the Santrokofi following the destruction of their town. Debrunner (1962: 114) found no trace of their language. The name is suggestive of a connection with the Tafi – except that the Tafi themselves do not use that name.

On the eastern side of the area, in what is now Likpe territory, is a place called Bakua, also pronounced Bakɔ, which is the name of people said to be the indigenes. Before the incomers from Atebubu acquired the Sekpele language they met this group, apparently at the mountain at Todome. I do not know whether it is legitimate to identify the names Bakɔ and Maako - Debrunner connected them but thought the Likpe Baakwa clan only included a few individual Maako. However this does not match the tradition reported by Heine, apparently from his own fieldwork. If the identification is legitimate, this language might once have been spoken right across the area, perhaps at a time prior to Buem and Akpafu/Lolobi expansion southwards. The language of the Bakua/Bakɔ is also said to have been eliminated (Heine 1968: 36).

The same incomers in the same Likpe area met another group called the Bashio. Egblewogbe (1992: 45) quoting Nyinanse's (1984) research also mentions them, as Basio. Whether they spoke a different language is unclear, but as an independent

people they have disappeared, surviving only as a clan of this name at (Ewe-speaking) Agbozume (Heine 1968: 35).

Just north of Buem, around Tapa and Worawora, was spoken Boro, the only "disappeared" language of which we have a reasonable if sparse record. This language was dying in 1886 and gone by 1910, replaced by Twi (Asante 1886: 23; Seidel 1898; Westermann 1922). Seidel gives a list of a dozen words collected by Plehn, and Westermann provides names of six days of the week collected by Mischlich. It does not appear to have been closely related to any of its neighbours.

Finally, there may well have been more languages further south. Westermann (1932: 5) reported that the Ewe met "aborigines" at Mt. Adaklu (south of Ho), who were still cultivating rice there in the late 19th century. Who they might have been and what they spoke we do not know, but if they cultivated rice they were presumably not new arrivals. Debrunner (1962: 110) notes reports that the Ewe-speaking people at Woadze (ie., Wodze SW of Amedzofe and Have?) formerly were a "Togo Remnant People". He also mentions that Hornberger, a missionary travelling in the area in the 1860s, reported a language called Dzolo (presumably at or near Dzolo Kpuita and Dzolo Gbogame, SE of Amedzofe and Vane), which he thought was a Togo Remnant language. One gets the impression that "Togo Remnant" tended to mean any language that was neither a Gbe lect nor a Gur language nor Guang.

Conclusions and observations

If one thing is clear, it is that the statement of one well-known Ghanaian academic that the many languages of Buem were "obviously brought to the area by refugees who continued to stream in from elsewhere many years after the end of the seventeenth century" (Dickson 1971: 28) is quite wrong headed. The general picture we get is that people have moved around a lot over considerable distances, but languages have moved only a little, and all were close to their present locations before the end of the 17th century.

As far as reconstructing the map is concerned, it seems that the furthest we can safely push it back is to the late 17th century. At that period, we have no firm evidence for the presence of Nkonya people or a Guang language on the Plateau. However the Simai language was spoken in the Plateau area, and since it was apparently associated with a hill called Maikube, and *kube* is "hill" in several Guang languages, perhaps Simai was Guang language. Buem and Siwu were slightly to the north of their present locations, and Boro north of both of them. The language of the Maako (Siko) was south of them, while Likpe (if indeed it was distinct from Maako) and Sele were confined to the eastern edges of their present territories, as was Tuwuli. Ahlo was also a little farther to the east. Some variety of Siya was probably in place down south, but the dialect splits may not yet have occurred and probably Logba was not yet there. To the north, Animere, Gidere, Kebu and Kposo were lined up more or less along what is now the international border, the last three occupying smaller areas than today.

By the end of the 18th century Nkonya was where it is today, and Simai and probably the language of the Bashio, if it was different, had either disappeared or been adopted

by other people under different names. While Siko apparently had not entirely disappeared it had been considerably reduced, and no language is now known by that name, unless we agree that the Sekwa dialect of Sɛkpɛle (Likpe) represents it. The defeat of the Maako in 1750 may also have been responsible for the appearance of Logba in its present location, and for the emergence of Likpe as we now know it. Buem and Akpafu had moved a few miles southwards. Animere at this time must have been under great pressure, perhaps already dispersed.

By the end of the 19th century Boro was extinct, and the map was taking its current shape as the various groups spread, mainly east and west, into the valleys. Language "X" at Mt Adaklu was also probably gone, and possibly several other languages in territories now Ewe-speaking. Animere had been reduced to remnants on the outer fringes of its former territory.

It is plain that the southern Guang and the Ga-Dangme have been part of this history. Wherever the original bearers of the Ga, Dangme and Southern Guang languages may have come from, many of the ancestors of present speakers certainly came from or passed through the Ghana-Togo-Mountain area, and ancestors of many speakers of several of the GTML languages came from the south – movement has not been in just one direction.

One consequence of all this is to highlight yet again the inaccuracy of the notion, widely accepted in Ghana, that an ethnic group consists of a people with a language and a body of inherited customs,⁸ or at least to undermine its historicity. Linguistic communities have repeatedly reformed, divided and formed again, with only minor consequences for the languages themselves. Under such conditions it is not surprising if memories of events in the linguistic community more than 250 years in the past are very hard to find – they probably happened to the ancestors of some other group.

It is striking too that linguistic assimilation has not always implied political domination, indeed often it has gone the other way – that is, a numerically and politically dominant group nevertheless shifted to the language of the indigenous people they dominated. This should not surprise us because there are many other examples – the shift of the Mande conquerors to Gonja is a classic one – but it goes somewhat against the grain of current sociolinguistic thinking which associates political domination with linguistic domination.⁹ Nugent (2005: 34) quotes Brydon that the Avatime say they poisoned the Baya men and married the women. Whether or not we should take this as literally true, it may reflect a common pattern, which would have resulted in children learning their mothers' language better than their fathers', if they learned the latter at all. Traditions of migration, on the other hand, seem to come mainly from fathers, especially in patrilineal societies, and to be politically motivated, another reason why ancient local traditions would be lost. The result is that the distribution of the languages on the map by and large reflects much older history than we are ever likely to get from oral traditions.

⁸ See for example the statement of Nana Otuo Siriboe II in GAAS/FES (2005: 29), also reported in the *Daily Graphic* of 21 June 2005, pg. 9.

⁹ At least, this is a feature of much of the current discourse on language endangerment.

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