

THE MADINA PROJECT, GHANA
(LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN MADINA)

by Jack Berry*

MADINA is a fast-developing suburban settlement situated on the Accra plains some ten miles northeast of Accra on the Accra-Dodowah Road and some two miles north of the University of Ghana, Legon. The historical background to the founding of Madina in 1959 by Muslims from Northern Ghana and elsewhere, and its subsequent development as a 'mixed' suburb with residents of many different ethnic and widely different occupational and educational backgrounds, is rather adequately described in a recent publication of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, to which readers of this paper are directed: Madina Survey, Quarcoo, Addo, Peil, Legon, 1967.

The Madina Project of my title is, however, a second, sociolinguistic, survey undertaken jointly by the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana and the Department of Linguistics, Northwestern University. Its field director is Dr. Gilbert Ansre, a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute and a leading Ghanaian Linguist.

The original decision to conduct a sociolinguistic survey of Madina, taken by Professor J.H. Nketia and myself in discussions held at Legon late in 1966, was influenced largely by evidence presented in the Quarcoo-Addo-Peil report which seemed to guarantee from the outset a situation of some considerable interest.¹

For some time the Department of Linguistics at Northwestern had been seeking an opportunity to experiment in a meaningful way with such surveys, especially to acquire experience in organizational

*Prof. Jack Berry is Professor of Linguistics in Northwestern University, Evanston, U.S.A.

matters for which there were no precedents, such as training of personnel to administer questionnaires and field tests, budgeting, etc. The Ghanaian linguists, for their part, were acutely aware of the urgent need for such surveys in view of the new interest in local languages which was being expressed on all sides but, especially, by educationists, in demands for an official statement of language policy at the national level. (These demands have since been formalized in the 15 resolutions of the recent planning conference held in Legon in May, 1968).

At the October 1966 meeting it was agreed that rather than seek outside support a beginning could be made using the limited financial resources available to fund a small pilot sociolinguistic survey. The survey could, presumably, be justified later not only in terms of the data collected but also on the grounds that it had provided valuable experience for mounting such surveys in the future and had created a trained cadre to administer them. And should increased funds become available it might well serve as the prototype of a series of similar smaller and larger scale surveys in different parts of Ghana that could be useful for comparative purposes.

The choice of Madina for the pilot survey was determined largely by the need for economy. In the case of Madina a survey in depth at reasonable cost was feasible because of the small size of settlement (total population was around 2,000) and its proximity to Legon (2 miles) which made for easy access and low transport costs in conducting the survey and maintaining effective control and supervision of it. Further, the real possibility that Madina could be re-surveyed easily at regular intervals proved very attractive.

The Madina project is still very much a matter of research in progress; Phase I has only recently been completed. The following notes, however, may have some interest as a preliminary report on the project itself and the data so far collected.

The immediate goal of the survey as it is defined in the records of the preliminary discussions between Professor Nketia and

myself is quite simply a description of the "language situation" in Madina, using the term "language situation" as is now the common practice to refer to the total configuration of language use including such data as: how many and what kinds of languages are currently spoken in Madina, by how many people and under what circumstances; and the attitudes and beliefs about languages held by the residents of Madina. We have assumed from the start that a full-scale description of the language situation in Madina along these lines will have intrinsic interest for linguists and other social scientists working in Ghana.

As to overall research design, I have described this in some detail in a paper delivered to the Twentieth Anniversary Conference of the Programme of African Studies, Northwestern University, in September of this year. It is hoped this paper will shortly be available in published form as part of the Proceedings of the Conference; meanwhile duplicated copies may be had on demand.

Briefly, the survey is phased as follows. A first questionnaire has already been administered to nearly all residents of Madina (2,000+ respondents). From this questionnaire which was essentially in the nature of a "fishing expedition", the basic linguistic-demographic information we were seeking has been obtained. In addition, however, the few, open-ended questions on language attitudes included in the questionnaire have elicited responses of considerable interest, suggesting areas for future intensive investigation. These questions were:

1. Is there any language which you do not know which you would like to know? Why?
2. Is there any language you know which you would like to know better? Why?

3. is there any language you speak which you do not like to speak on certain occasions? Why?
4. What language(s) do you like? Why?
What language(s) do you dislike? Why?
5. What do you think will be the main language spoken in the future in Madina?
Accra-Tema?
Ghana?

At this time of writing, the results of the computerization of the data are not available but it is possible to make certain observations with some assurance. These represent views arrived at independently by three investigators during the preliminary examination of the questionnaires in the coding process.

The survey clearly established that:

- 1) Over 80 different languages are spoken natively by the residents of Madina.
- 2) There are very few monolinguals in Madina (less than 4% of all respondents admit to knowing only one language).
- 3) The majority (over 70%) of respondents claim competence in 3 or more languages. Respondents' claims of competence in second and third languages prima facie seem reasonably conservative. This statement, though purely impressionistic, is based, *inter alia*, on the evidence of the frequency of responses indicating a desire to improve knowledge of some language; responses indicating reluctance to speak a language for

fear of ridicule by native speakers, and responses indicating awareness that the mother tongue is the only one properly understood. It is intended in Phase II to test by the usual methods, the respondent's own assessment of his proficiency in second and other languages.

- 4) There is little evidence of language shift in individuals. For nearly every respondent, the mother tongue is still the first language. There is strong loyalty to it. In no case was the mother tongue listed as a language disliked and very frequently it was cited as the one preferred, often explicitly because it was the mother tongue. ("It is simply sweet and besides it is my mother tongue and anyway it is the only one I understand properly").
- 5) Nevertheless, there appears to be an 'acceptance' of the multilingual situation. Only a very few respondents indicated an unwillingness to learn new languages ("I don't have time to learn other languages"). The majority expressed a desire not only to learn new languages but to improve their knowledge of others in which they already had some competence.
- 6) The languages which by far the most respondents wish to learn or to improve their partial knowledge of are Twi, English and Hausa. These languages are most often mentioned as being "liked" and least often cited as "unpleasant" or "disliked". Twi, English and Hausa were also considered the most likely to become the main languages of Madina and of Ghana.

The languages evaluated positively and negatively and the reasons given for these evaluations pattern significantly. Only a few languages were disapproved of by a significant number of respondents:

Ga (in almost every instance on grounds of 'profanity'); Nzema (for widely different reasons); Kotokoli and, less frequently, some of the languages of Northern Ghana especially Dagbani, (on 'aesthetic' grounds and 'manner of greeting'); and others as cited in the following table. Conversely, certain languages received almost universal approbation: English, French, Arabic, Hausa, and with somewhat more exceptions, Twi and Ewe.

The reasons given for wishing to learn or to improve performance in various languages also pattern, e.g. for economic and social advancement, for use in business, for purposes of travel, for religious reasons and for more effective communication. A number of respondents stated that they wished to learn a language so as to know when its speakers were insulting or plotting against them.

The responses elicited by the questions about language attitudes were grouped for coding purposes as shown in the following tables. Typical answers are cited for each category.

T A B L E I

I like X because _____

I dislike X because _____

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| A | 1) "I don't know-- I just like it." | 1) "I just hate that language." (Brong) |
| | 2) "I like to hear it." | 2) "I just hate to hear it." (Twi) |
| | 3) "I want to learn it." | 3) "I feel irritated when I hear it, even on the radio." (Dagbani) |
| B | 1) "It is my mother tongue and sounds the most sweet to me." | |
| | 2) "It is my own language." | |
| C | 1) "It is beautiful when the old men speak it, with nice rhythm and intonation." (Adangme) | 1) "It disturbs my ears." (Kru) |
| | 2) "It sounds sweet." | 2) "These languages prick my ears; they will be hard to learn on account of their sounds." (Nigerian languages/Nzema) |
| | 3) "I like the way it is spoken." | 3) "It is <u>just horrible</u> to listen to it." (Nzema) |
| | 4) "The intonation is sweet." | 4) "It sounds ugly." (Nzema) |
| | 5) "It is spoken rapidly." (French) | 5) "It sounds hard." (Nzema) |
| | 6) "It is interesting and sounds nice." | 6) "It sounds queer; it doesn't look like any language." (Nzema) |
| | 7) "It is rich in idiom and dialects." | 7) "It doesn't sound nice at all; in fact it confuses me." (Dagbani) |

I like X because _____

- 8) "It is sweet in the ear." (French)

D

I dislike X because _____

- 8) "I don't like the tone." (Dagbani)
 9) "It sounds like howling." (Frafra)
 10) "Nigerian languages are noisy." (Nigerian languages)
 11) "They speak on the tongue." (Kabre)
 12) "The words don't sound clearly." (Kabre)
 13) "They always sound like quarreling." (Kotokoli)
 14) "It is spoken with too much violence." (Ga)

- 1) "A lot of words are used to convey little meaning." (Guang)
 2) "They have long words and they are ugly too." (Ijaw/Kru)
 3) "They prolong the words too unnecessarily especially when they are greeting themselves." (Dagbani)

E

- 1) "They are too ceremonious." (Kotokoli)
 2) "Their way of greeting is crude." (Kotokoli)
 3) "Their greetings are too long." (Kotokoli)
 4) "Their way of greeting offends me." (Kotokoli)
 5) See "D" (3)

I like X because _____

F

- G
- 1) "I know it best."
 - 2) "It can be easily handled." (Twi)
 - 3) "I know all the intricacies of it and have grown to like it more." (Ga)
 - 4) "I understand it better than any other language."

- H
- 1) "It is a widely spoken and popular language." (English/Twi/Hausa)
 - 2) "I can speak to many people." (English)

- I
- 1) "I like the people."
 - 2) "I enjoy Twi music." (Twi)

J

I dislike X because _____

- 1) "They like abusive expressions too much." (Ga)
- 2) "Even the children use profane expressions publicly." (Ga)

- 1) "All languages I can't understand are crude."
- 2) "Ewe is crude; it is too difficult to learn." (Ewe)
- 3) "It is so crude that I couldn't pick it up after many attempts when I was in public service." (Nzema)
- 4) "It is difficult to understand even after my two years among Kru-speaking people." (Kru)
- 5) See 'C' (2)
- 6) See 'C' (7)

- 1) "I don't like it at all and it is not widely spoken too." (Nzema)
- 2) "It is irritating/crude; besides it is not widely spoken." (Nzema/Dagbani)

- 1) "Basari people are untidy/dirty, so their language doesn't interest me." (Basari)

- 1) "Guang is a bad luck language, even Okomfo Anokye said it." (Guang)

T A B L E 2

I want to learn X because _____

Although I know X I don't speak it because _____

- A
- 1) "I just want to know it."
 - 2) "I want to be able to speak it."
 - 3) "I just find it interesting."
- B
- 1) "I like the way it is spoken."
 - 2) "It sounds pleasant."
 - 3) "I like it. I find it sweet."
 - 4) "It is an international language and also polished." (French)
- C
- 1) "People who speak English are respected." (English)
 - 2) "To impress people." (English)
- D
- 1) "To get a better job." (English)
 - 2) "To write reports and sign papers." (English)
 - 3) "To be able to speak more easily to my employer and customers."
 - 4) "Ewes are many at my place of work and I must be able to communicate with them." (Ewe)
 - 5) "To transact my business; to help in my trade."

I want to learn X because _____

Although I know X I don't speak it because _____

- E 1) "To pass exams; for academic reasons."
(English/French)
- F 1) "Arabic is used in my religion." (Arabic)
- G 1) "It is widely spoken in Madina/Ghana."
(English/Twi/Hausa)
- 2) "It is an international language."
(French)
- 3) "It is widely spoken and popular."
(English)
- H 1) "So I can communicate with people who speak it."
2) "So I can communicate with many people; so I can express myself."
3) "So I will have no language problems when travelling; so my movements won't be restricted."
4) "I am surrounded by Ewes." (Ewe)
- 5) "After all, Ga is the language of this place." (Ga)
- 6) "Most people speak Hausa in Madina." (Hausa)
- 7) "So I can understand my children if they speak it." (English/French)
- I 1) "I may one day visit a French-speaking country."
(French)
- 2) "I might go to East Africa some day." (Swahili)

I want to learn X because _____

Although I know X I can't speak it because _____

J 1) "I want to add it to the languages I know."

2) "There is nothing wrong in knowing many languages."

K 1) "So I can know what people think and say about me or detect when I am being insulted." (Ewe)

2) "So that when an Ewe talks about me I can check her."

1) "To know people who are speaking ill of me." (Ga)

2) "I am a traveller. Ashantis are renowned for killing strangers. I may be able to escape if I overhear any danger pertaining to my life." (Twi; also Ewe)

L

1) "I fear to speak Ewe in public because I may mispronounce and be laughed at." (Ewe)

2) "I don't speak it in front of Twis because I am not confident of my ability." (Twi)

3) "People laugh (when I speak Larteh)" (said by a native Larteh speaker)

It is hoped to implement Phase II of the survey in the near future. In this phase the investigators will address themselves in greater depth to the socio-cultural aspects of the language situation in Madina. The interview schedule prepared by Miss Minkus of Northwestern University (a copy of which is appended to this paper) will be administered to a sample of the population of Madina. In selected cases it is intended that this questionnaire be supplemented by intensive interviewing which will introduce other questions as appropriate. Also included in this phase will be testing of language competence; differential ability in various languages will be assessed both impressionistically by native speakers and, for smaller samples, more rigorously by the use of standardized language proficiency tests.

Phase III as it is envisaged at present is essentially one which provides for studies of language use by situation along the normal lines of anthropological investigation by participant-observation techniques. But these and other follow-up studies already being planned are better treated as the subject of another separate paper.

- d) Do you understand it when spoken on radio?
 - e) Do you understand speeches and sermons in X?
 - f) Do you understand jokes in X - i.e. do you know what people are laughing about?
 - g) Are there any situations in which you don't understand X or don't understand it as well as a native speaker?
- III.
- a) Do you count in X?
 - b) Do you dream in X?
 - c) Do you ever talk to yourself in X?
 - d) Do you pray in X?
- IV.
- a) Can you read X?
 - b) What do you read in X?
 - c) Do you read in X more often than in any other language?
 - d) Do you read X better than you read other languages?
- V.
- a) Can you write X?
 - b) What do you write in X and to whom do you write in it?
 - c) Do you write in X more often than in any other language?
 - d) Do you write X better than you write other languages?
- VI.
- a) When did you first learn X?
 - b) From whom did you learn it?
 - c) Where did you learn it?
 - d) How did you learn it?

e) Why did you learn it?

VII. a) When you were first learning X, to whom did you speak it?

b) Whom do you speak it to now?

c) How often do you speak it?

d) Where do you speak X?

e) When was the last time you spoke X? To whom did you speak it? Why did you speak X rather than some other language?

VIII. a) Are there times you would rather speak X than your native language? Why?

b) Are there times you would rather speak X than any other language? Why?

c) Are there times you pretend not to understand X? Why?

d) Are there times you don't like to speak X?

e) Do you speak X to your children?

f) Do you want your children to learn X? Why?

g) Do you like X? Why?

Are there things you don't like about X?

h) Do you think X should be used in broadcasts on the radio? Should it be taught in the schools?

i) Do people generally like X?

Are there some who don't?

Why don't they?

4. Are there other languages you don't speak but which you know a bit - e.g. know a few words of?
5. Are you now learning any other languages?
For each language -
 - a) From whom are you learning it?
 - b) How are you learning it?
 - c) How often do you speak it?
 - d) Why do you want to learn it?
6. Are there any other languages you do not know but would like to know?
For each language -
 - a) Why do you want to know it?
 - b) Do you plan to learn it? (1) soon
(2) someday
7. a) Are there any languages you know which you are trying to improve your knowledge of?
 - b) How are you doing it?
 - c) Why do you want to?
8. Are there any languages which you would not want to know? Why?
9. What language(s) do you like best? Why?
10. What language(s) do you like least? Why?
11. What language(s) do you enjoy speaking most?
12. a) What language(s) would you like your sons to know? Why?
 - b) What language(s) would you like your daughters to know? Why?

13. What languages do you speak to your spouse? What is your spouse's native language?
14. a) Are you teaching your own language to anybody?
b) Have you taught it to anybody?
15. a) Do you want other people to learn your language?
b) Would you want it to become the national language or one of the major languages of Ghana?
16. Are there people who don't like your language? Why don't they?
17. a) Are you proud that you know Y number of languages?
b) Do people praise you for knowing more than one?
18. Of all the languages spoken in Ghana which would you least like to know? Why?

Name, sex, age, occupation, residence, marital status, how long in Madina, places of residence before Madina and period of time in each, years of schooling, religion.

The interview is to be conducted in the native language of the respondent using standardized questionnaire schedules printed in the major Ghanaian languages.

The interviewer should write down all responses verbatim in the language of the interview. He should add his own comments concerning the respondent's hesitance or enthusiasm about answering any specific question, whether questions were answered quickly or after a pause, if the respondent had difficulty understanding specific questions, who else was present during the interview, where the interview took place, the respondent's general attitude towards the interview and the interviewer, etc.

Helaine Minkus.