

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE SECTIONConference on the Teaching of Ghanaian Languages

by G. Ansre*

One of the most important activities of the Language and Literature Section of the Institute this term has been the organisation of a meeting entitled a Conference on the Teaching of Ghanaian Languages in the Schools and Higher Institutions of Ghana. This conference took place from the 5th to the 8th of May.

The idea to have such a meeting was first contemplated by the Research Fellows of the Section. Invitations were then sent to the Linguistic Department and other interested individuals of the University to attend a preliminary meeting at which the motives and aims of the conference were explained. A planning committee was elected with Mr. Bimie as secretary and G. Ansre as convener. Other members were Mrs. Sutherland, Professor Ellis, Dr. Apronti, and Mr. Chinebuah.

Aims: The main objective of the conference was to bring together persons who had to do with educational policy, those who could advise on language policy and the linguists actively engaged in language research and teaching in our universities to discuss means of arriving at a clear and realistic policy on the teaching of the indigenous Ghanaian languages in the educational institutions of the country. For a number of years now, it had been felt that the indigenous languages were not being given adequate attention on the curriculum of our schools. The question of their use as media of instruction was not the issue. Rather, as subjects of study, they were being ignored at certain levels of the educational system. The quality of teachers as well as textbooks has been in need of great improvement. There has been lack of correlation between what is being

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done in our university departments and institutes on the languages on the one hand, and on the other, the opportunities for preparation for the students to take advantage of these facilities in the primary and secondary schools. We have known that this was due predominantly to a lack of a definite policy and plan for the role of the teaching of the indigenous languages in our education. Worst of all is the fact that a mentality has been emerging, which feels ashamed of the mother tongue and considers it inadequate for academic study.

The conference was planned as the first in a series of such meetings and workshops to help correct the above deficiencies.

Invitations were sent to representatives of the Ministries of Education, Information and Social Welfare and Community Development. The Bureau of Ghana Languages, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the State Publishing Corporation and the West African Examinations Council were also invited. Various organisations of teachers and educationists, and individuals who could make significant contributions to the fulfilment of the aims were also asked to attend. A number of invitations went outside the country and these guests were kind enough to attend, using funds that they themselves had obtained. There were also a number of observers from within and outside Ghana.

Activities: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana, the Rev. Professor Baeta, gave a reception on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, to welcome the delegates and observers on the evening of the 5th of May. On the morning of the 6th, the Commissioner for Education, Dr. Modjaben Dowuonah, opened the conference with an address which clearly welcomed the aims and objectives of the meeting.

The following are the list of papers read and the names of the contributors:

Dr. G. Ansre : The Need for a Comprehensive Policy on the Teaching of Ghanaian Languages.

- Prof. J. Ellis : The Study of Ghanaian Languages in the Universities.
- Dr. E.O. Apronti and Mr. A.C. Denteh: "Minority Languages".
- Mrs. E.T. Sutherland : Text Books.
- Mr. I.K. Chinebuah : The Examination of Ghanaian Languages.
- Dr. L.A. Boadi : The Content of a Course in the Mother-Tongue.
- Miss J. Ure : The Teaching of Language in Use in a Multi-lingual Society: A Proposal for a Bridge Course.
- Dr. F.A. Irele : The Teaching of Literature in West Africa.
- Professor J. Berry : The Teaching of Ghanaian Languages Abroad.
- Dr. J.S. Kennedy : A Bilingual Approach to Theatre Development in Ghana.

There were also two symposia: Policy and Practice in the Study of Ghanaian Languages, during which representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Bureau of Ghana Languages spoke and led the discussion, and Curriculum and Examinations, during which the main speakers were representatives of the Heads of Secondary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges and the West African Examinations Council.

Below are the resolutions passed at the final session of the conference.

RESOLUTIONS

1. Conference recommends that an association of teachers of the Ghanaian languages be formed.
2. Conference would welcome a decision by the Ministry of Education to:
 - (a) make the teaching of the Ghanaian languages compulsory in the Teacher Training Colleges.
 - (b) examine Ghanaian languages externally at both Primary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges.

It is recommended that the government should implement such decisions within 4 years at the most and in this event, (with government financial support) the Department of Linguistics and the Institute of African Studies, in consultation with other interested bodies, will undertake to provide in-service training courses for the relevant personnel.

3. Conference requests the Ministry of Education to detail at least one Principal Education Officer to oversee the teaching of the Ghanaian languages at the primary and post-primary level.
4. Conference resolves that in the teaching of the Ghanaian languages in schools, more attention than formerly should be paid to oral literature.
5. Conference urges that some time be given at the post-primary stages to a unified study of the use and structures of English and Ghanaian languages, and that language and literature specialists sponsor the production of a suitable anthology. Conference welcomes the beginnings already made on this at Legon.
6. Conference welcomes the decision of the West African Examinations Council to request the Ministry of Education to set up a specialist committee to examine the present 'O' level G.C.E. syllabuses and examination papers in the Ghanaian languages. Further, Conference urges the Ministry of Education to request the West African Examinations

Council to introduce the examining of Ghanaian languages at 'A' level and to extend the terms of reference of the above committee accordingly. Conference also welcomes the willingness of the Institute of African Studies and the Department of Linguistics at Legon to assist in devising new syllabuses at this level.

7. Conference urges that all necessary steps be taken forthwith at University College, Cape Coast and the Advanced Teacher Training College at Winneba to train teachers to teach Ghanaian Languages and literatures in the schools and colleges at all levels.
8. Conference urges that every effort should be made to establish a Department of Ghanaian Languages and Literatures, in addition to the Department of Linguistics and the Institute of African Studies at Legon. In the mean time and as a first step, a Chair of Ghanaian Languages and Literatures should be established in the Institute of African Studies, Legon.
9. Conference welcomes the proposal for a language Centre at Legon and urges that the applied linguistics of the Ghanaian Languages be included in the responsibilities of the Centre equally with English. In any case, steps should be taken to promote applied linguistics of the Ghanaian languages throughout the university institutions of Ghana.
10. Conference requests that the Bureau of Ghana Languages and the Institute of African Studies at Legon work in closer association and that the possibility of a merger be explored.
11. Conference notes that the textbooks in existence in the Ghanaian languages are inadequate. High priority must be given to:
 - (a) the updating of existing textbooks
 - (b) the collation of both written and oral material which is readily available and which will

facilitate the production of new textbooks.

12. Conference urges that more official and semi-official pamphlets should be printed in the indigenous languages so as to acquaint the people with a wider range of "non-literary" language in the various Ghanaian languages.
13. Conference requests that the government appoint a committee to review the number of 'official' Ghanaian languages taught in the Schools and the number of languages examined at the 'O' level in G.C.E. and to see whether that number should be increased.
14. Conference strongly recommends that the Ministry of Education in the light of these resolutions and the deliberations of this conference issue a firm policy statement on the teaching of the Ghanaian languages.
15. Conference resolves that maximum publicity be given to the deliberations of this conference with a view to stressing the continuing importance of the indigenous languages in Ghanaian society and education.
16. Conference records its thanks to the University of Ghana, Legon and especially to the Department of Linguistics and the Institute of African Studies for organising this conference and for their hospitality during the conference.

The press, radio and television gave wide and intensive coverage to the conference and both the organisers and participants felt that it was a great success. The full proceedings of the conference are at present being printed by the State Publishing Corporation and will be published by the Institute of African Studies.

As a follow-up of this conference, the organisers have planned the first Workshop to take place during the New Year School between the 27th of December, 1968 and the 10th of January, 1969.

We are deeply grateful to the Institute for the financial support and encouragement we have received, and to all those who contributed to making this first conference a success.



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