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«*English koraa yɛde Twi mixe!*»

Is the Variety of Akan Spoken by Ghanaian Immigrants in Italy Developing into a Mixed-Code?

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Abstract

This paper illustrates the results of qualitative analysis of a sample of face-to-face interactions and of formal interviews (a total of 27 hours of recordings) involving a selected group of Ghanaian immigrants in Northern Italy. A distinguishing feature of the variety of Akan spoken by the above-mentioned immigrants is the systematic insertion of English 'chunks' (e.g. single words or phrases), which do not appear to fulfill any pragmatic or discursive function. Community members show a considerable degree of awareness in this respect and display ambivalent attitudes towards this 'mixed' variety of Akan, which appears to be spoken not only by those immigrants who speak it as a lingua franca (and who may not have completed the corresponding language acquisition process), but by Akan native speakers as well. It is argued that the variety of Akan spoken within the Ghanaian community in Bergamo is currently going through a transitional process that leads from code-switching to the development of a *mixed code*, as illustrated in Auer (1999).

Keywords: Akan-English code-switching, Language contact, Immigrant communities, mixed-code.

1. Introduction

The immigration process from Ghana to Italy began towards the end of the 1970s, but it gained some consistency only in the following decade. It is an interesting example of immigration flow from a country with hardly any previous historical, linguistic, or cultural ties to the destination state. Ghanaians in Italy almost doubled in the last decade. In January 2010, the Ghanaian citizens recorded in Italy amounted to roughly 44,000 individuals;(Note 1) however, given the large number of undocumented immigrants, the figure is probably underestimated. The Ghanaian community in Bergamo and its province is presently composed of around 1800 individuals. (Note 2) The data attest to a traditional migratory pattern, characterised by the arrival of single men, who are later followed by other members of their families. The immigration into Italy of entire families is quite uncommon, for many couples choose to leave their children in Ghana during the whole period of their residence abroad, so as to be able to settle down, find a full-time job and make the best (in terms of working opportunities) of their experience as immigrants.

The practice of leaving the younger members of the family in the home country makes the Ghanaian community in Bergamo a rather peculiar social group, mainly composed of first-generation immigrants of working age who have been living in Italy from a minimum of a few months to a maximum of nearly twenty years (for more details, cf. Guerini, 2006, pp. 53-60 and Guerini, to appear).

On considering the Ghanaian community from an occupational point of view, it turns out that the majority of its members are employed in small-size to middle-size local companies in the textile sector, as well as in the service industry. In general, Ghanaian immigrants work as employees in private enterprises rather than as freelance professionals; official data, however, inevitably disregard a significant degree illegal work carried out by those immigrants who have not yet been able to regularize their visa status. Most Ghanaian women have got a full-time job that enables them to provide a major contribution to the family's economy. Illiterate women normally work as maids or nannies in private houses, whereas women with a higher level of literacy tend to hold the same occupations as those held by men in the community.

The present paper illustrates the results of qualitative analysis of a sample of face-to-face interactions and of semi-structured interviews (a total of 27 hours of recordings, collected between September 2001 and October 2002) involving a selected group of Ghanaian immigrants living in the province of Bergamo. (Note 3) The languages shared by the immigrants involved in the research are: *i)* Akan (a language belonging to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo phylum, in its various dialect forms), *ii)* English and *iii)* (a learner's variety of) Italian. Proficiency in other Ghanaian indigenous languages depends on the geographical origin of the immigrants, and a variety of Akan (alongside English) is normally employed in informal interactions involving speakers of different native languages.

All the informants declared that they learnt a Ghanaian indigenous language as their first language at home, in a spontaneous way. I will refer to these indigenous languages as the immigrants' native language(s) (see Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008, for a profile of Ghana's

sociolinguistic ecology). All the immigrants interviewed also reported a certain competency in Akan, the indigenous language spoken, either as a native or as a second language, by the majority of the Ghanaian population (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008, p. 142). The role of Akan as a language of inter-ethnic communication remains fundamentally unaltered in the immigrant setting, where it functions as a community lingua franca.

Among the languages shared by the Ghanaian immigrants, English—the language of the former colonial administration and the only official language in present-day Ghana—is perceived as the highest prestige variety. Proficiency in English is tied to the ideas of well-being and economic development commonly associated with life in a Western country and tends to be considered as a key requisite for occupying the most remunerative positions both in Ghana and abroad. English is generally perceived as the only language worth being literate in, though the necessity to obtain a certain proficiency in Italian is also acknowledged.

All the informants interviewed also displayed a certain competency in Italian, in most cases, a learner's variety of Italian. Their proficiency appears to be influenced by a number of individual factors (e.g. the quality and quantity of input exposure, the possibility to attend language courses for foreigners or the length of stay in Italy) that I cannot discuss in detail here. Suffice to say that Italian is a highly elaborated prestige language (a *fully-fledged language* in the sense of Kloss, 1967), which is regularly used in a variety of institutional and formal domains, but also in everyday conversation. Hence, a minimum competency in Italian is essential to function independently and productively in the host community.

In this paper it is argued that the variety of Akan spoken within the Ghanaian community in Bergamo is currently going through a transitional process that leads from code-switching to the development of a *mixed code*, as illustrated in Auer (1999). After providing a brief account of the theoretical framework adopted in this study (Section 2), I will focus (Section 3) on a distinguishing feature of the variety of Akan spoken by Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo, i.e. the systematic insertion of English words or phrases which do not appear to fulfill any discursive function. The analysis of a few excerpts drawn from a sample of face-to-face interactions and semi-structured interviews involving a group of first-generation Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo will show the main structural properties of the variety of Akan under discussion. The speakers' complex and often contradictory attitudes towards the same variety will be explored in the following section (Section 4). In section 5 I will argue that the development of this mixed variety of Akan can be traced back to the sociolinguistic ecology of the immigrants' country of origin. The incipient nature of the development described in this study will be discussed and summarized in the concluding section (Section 6).

2. Language Alternation Strategies in a Conversational Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in this case study is based on the conversation analytic approach to the study of bilingual interaction elaborated by Peter Auer in 1984, and then revised through the publication of a number of subsequent works (e.g. Auer, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c). This approach presupposes that the analysis of empirical data enables the researcher to

describe the linguistic strategies that multilingual speakers employ in order to communicate in a clear and efficient manner—that is, in order to exploit all the languages included in their individual repertoires.

Due to space constraints, I will not be able to discuss Auer's approach in detail. Suffice it to say that the code-switching occurrences attested in my sample fulfill both discourse-related functions, i.e. functions related to the organization of the ongoing conversation, and participant-related functions, i.e. functions depending on the speaker's linguistic competences or preferences. In my corpus, discourse-related switches predominate, accounting for 73% of all switches (525 out of 715) (cf. Guerini, 2006, p. 101). The languages involved are, for the most part, the three linguistic systems shared by all the community members, i.e. English, Italian and Akan (Twi). (Note 4)

Table 1. Breakdown of the functions fulfilled by discourse related code-switching occurrences (cf. Guerini, 2006, p. 128).

Discourse related code-switching occurrences		
- Expressive function	160	(30.6 %)
- Change of participant constellation	155	(29.6 %)
- Contrastive function	79	(15.0 %)
- Parenthetical remarks	48	(9.1 %)
- Topic shift	30	(5.7 %)
- Repetitions	26	(4.9 %)
- Phatic function	16	(3.0 %)
- Quotations	11	(2.1 %)
Total	**525**	(100.0%)

Empirical data show that some conversational activities—as the introduction of a new topic, the change of addressee or reporting the speech of another speaker, and the like (cf. table 1 above)—favor the selection of a language contrasting with the language of interaction. In this sense, discourse-related code-switching contributes to the organization of the ongoing interaction and to the resolution of communicative problems that might lead to an interruption of the conversation, or possibly, to misunderstanding. When employed with this purpose,

code-switching functions as a contextualization strategy (Auer, 1984, p. 18), (Note 5) i.e. it is intentionally performed as a way of contextualizing a new verbal activity.

On the other hand, code-switching may also be used to allow the participants to communicate their respective linguistic preferences and/or competences (*participant related code-switching*). This type of code-switching includes language negotiation sequences through which the participants in an interactive episode try to negotiate which linguistic system, among those included in their respective individual repertoires, should be selected as the language of interaction.

Language preferences are not necessarily related to speakers' respective language competences, but may be explained in terms of shared conversational norms, i.e. they reveal the speaker's assumptions as to which language is most suitable to be employed in a given communicative situation or speech event. Still, an imbalanced bilingual competence is the reason for most reformulations. These are used by speakers whenever they give up the language of interaction and switch into the code they are more proficient in (or the addressee is most proficient in), so as to convey the message with sufficient accuracy (cf. table 2 below).

Table 2. Breakdown of the functions fulfilled by participant related code-switching occurrences (cf. Guerini, 2006, p. 106).

Participant related code-switching occurrences	
- Language negotiation sequences	163 (85.8 %)
- Language preference	14 (7.4 %)
- Reformulations	13 (6.8 %)
Total	**190** (100.0%)

It is necessary to point out that, although code-switching is by definition a *functional* language alternation strategy, (Note 6) some code-switching occurrences cannot be attributed to a single local meaning: they may fulfill two (or more) functions at the same time, none of which prevails over the others, since both functions are equally important. For instance, code-switching may be resorted to in order to mark the introduction of a new topic, but also to propose the language in which the speaker would like to carry out the interaction. The first one is a typical discourse-related function, whereas the latter reflects an individual preference, and is therefore participant-related.

3. From Code-Switching to the Development of a Mixed Code

In this paper, I would like to focus on a distinguishing feature of the variety of Akan spoken by Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo, i.e. the systematic insertion of English words or phrases, which do not appear to fulfill any discourse-related or participant-related function, and that as a

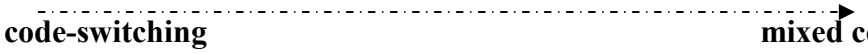
consequence, following Auer's model, cannot be classified as code-switching occurrences. (Note 7)

Long-term participant observation within the Ghanaian immigrant community in Bergamo enabled me to notice that most community members are well aware of this linguistic behaviour, which is generally stigmatised and attributed to the diminishing ability to speak "good Twi", i.e. to communicate by means of rigorously monolingual utterances, without resorting to English insertions. Interestingly, this "kind" of Akan appears to be spoken not only by those immigrants who use Akan as a second or vehicular language (and who, as a consequence, may not have completed the acquisition process of a language differing from their mother tongue), but also by those individuals who learned Akan as a native language and who consider themselves as belonging to the Akan ethnic group (see the information contained in the Appendix accompanying this work). In other words, imperfect learning does not seem to play a role in the development of this kind of Akan, which cannot be characterized as a learner's variety.

Indeed, the analysis of the empirical data collected throughout my research suggests that the Akan spoken by the Ghanaian immigrants living in Bergamo is presently undergoing the transition process—described in Auer (1998c) and (1999)—that leads from prototypical code-switching to the development of a mixed code. In the following paragraphs, precise documentation of this claim will be presented and discussed in detail.

3.1 Empirical Evidence and Theoretical Implications

The point of departure of Auer's work is the elaboration of a continuum of language contact phenomena, the main purpose of which is to describe the various conversational strategies involving the juxtaposition of two (or more) linguistic systems in discourse or within a single utterance. At one end of the continuum he places all locally meaningful code-switching occurrences, either fulfilling a discursive function, i.e. discourse-related, or expressing the speaker's linguistic preferences and competence, i.e. participant-related. The opposite extreme is occupied by those cases in which the juxtaposition of two linguistic systems does not appear to have any local meaning or function, a phenomenon that Auer labels *mixed code*. (Note 8) A noteworthy aspect of this continuum is that it "seems to represent one possible path of development in the course of time" (Auer, 1998c, p. 16). In other words, there seems to be a tendency for code-switching forms to lose their local meaning and develop into a mixed code—even though the presence of this phenomenon (i.e. the mixed code) does not exclude the other, i.e. does not exclude the speakers' use of code-switching in order to fulfill local discursive functions.



(functional; rhetorical/stylistic device) (not functional; group identity marker)

Figure 1. The continuum from code-switching to mixed code in Auer (1998c and 1999).

The very fact that the two language contact phenomena are placed along a continuum entails that the transition from one prototype to the other, i.e. from code-switching to a mixed code, occurs through a sequence of intermediate phases sharing some common features. In other words, during the process leading to the development of a mixed code, "the older CS [code-switching] pattern and the newer LM [language mixing] pattern coexist" (Auer, 1999, p. 319). Needless to say, such transitional phase(s) presumably extend over long periods of time, (Note 9) for the tendency to juxtapose elements belonging to two (or more) linguistic systems without having any discursive function does not exclude the possibility of speakers' resorting to code-switching occasionally, as a contextualization cue in order to convey discursive local meanings. Besides, as Auer (1999, p. 324) acknowledges, both stages of language contact phenomena may be observed synchronically within the same speech community, among different groups of speakers or in distinct communicative contexts.

To turn to the data contained in my sample: in extract (1) the informant named Emmanuel has just begun administering a self-evaluation questionnaire to his friend and fellow countryman James. (Note 10) They are travelling on a crowded bus, sitting side by side, without other potential interlocutors, and only Emmanuel, who has agreed to collaborate in the research, is aware that their conversation is being recorded.

(1) [6A – On the bus] (Note 11)

\JA\ *Na ayi yi wo-re-*FILL*i a-yɛ den?*

and thing DEM 2SG-PROG-fill PRF-be what

'What is the purpose of filling this thing [the questionnaire]?'

\E\ *ɛ-yɛ* THESIS *a wɔ-de* RESTRUCTURE *wɔn* EDUCATION *daakye*

3SG.N-be thesis REL 3PL-take restructure their education in.future

'It is for a thesis for restructuring the education system in the future.'

\JA\ *ɛ-bɛ-yɛ den*

3SG.N-FUT-be hard

'It will be difficult.'

\E\ *Ampa!*

indeed

'Indeed!'

\JA\ *ɛnneɛ ɔ-a-yɛ adeɛ*

then 3SG-PRF-do thing

'If so, the person has done well.'

\E\ *ɔ-a-de Ghana a-yɛ* CASE STUDY

3SG-PRF-take Ghana COMP-be case study

'She has used Ghana as a case study.'

[…]

\JA\ *Wo-a-wie* QUESTIONS *no?*

2SG-PRF-finish questions DET

'Are you through with the questions?'

\E\ *Mhm-*

\JA\ *Ebi wɔ akyire*

some be.located.at back

'There are some at the back-'

\E\ *A-ka* TWO PAGES

PRF-remain two pages

'There are two pages left'

\JA\ *Yɛ-n-yɛ no ntɛm!*

1PL-OPT-do 3SG.OBJ quickly

'Let's do it quickly!' (OPT = optative)

Despite the speakers' intention of proceeding with the interview, after a few turns, a particular topic, which greatly concerns both Emmanuel and James, catches their attention: a new law governing the issuing and renewal of staying permits to immigrants living in Italy for business reasons:

(2) [6A – On the bus]

\E\ *Wo-a-te* NEW LAW *a* *ɛ-ba* *no?*

2SG-PFR-hear new law REL 3SG.N-come DET

'Have you heard about the new law?'

\JA\ *Daabi*

no

'No.'

\E\ *ɛ-yɛ* contratto a tempo determinato *no.* *Na* EVERY TWO YEARS *biara*

3SG.N-be contract PREP time limited DET and every two years each

wo-RENEW *no.*

2SG-renew 3SG.OBJ

'It's a short term permit (contract). You renew it every two years.'

\JA\ *ɛ-yɛ* TOUGH LAW

3SG.N-be tough law

'It is a tough law.'

\E\ *ɛ-n-yɛ* *papa*

3SG.N-NEG-be good

'It is not good.'

\JA\ *ɛ-n-yɛ* EASY *oo!*

3SG-NEG-be easy EMPH

'It is not easy at all!' (EMPH = emphatic particle)

\E\ BUT *wɔ-n*-SIGN-*ɛ*

but 3PL-NEG-sign-PRF

'But they have not endorsed it to become law (i.e. sign).'

\JA\ LAW *no* *ɛ-n-yɛ* *adwuma*

law DET 3SG.N-NEG-do work

'The law will not work.'

[…]

\JA\ LAW *deɛ* *obi* *na* *ɔ-hwehwɛ* *ɛmmara seɛ* *ɛ-tu* *aban*

law FOC someone EMPH 3SG-look.for law bad 3SG.N-uproot government

'When somebody passes a bad law, it overthrows the government.'

\E\ *ɛ-tu* *aban,* *ɛ-yɛ* TRUE

3SG.N-uproot government 3SG.N-be true

'It is true, it overthrows the government.'

\JA\ BECAUSE FOREIGNERS *na* *ɛ-yɛ* *adwuma* *paa* *ara*

because foreigners EMPH 3SG.N-do work very indeed

'Because it is foreigners who do most of the jobs.'

\E\ AMERICA *ɛ-n-yɛ* *obiara* *kurom,* *nso* FOREIGNERS *na* *a-kyekyere*

America 3SG.N-NEG-be anybody country yet foreigners EMPH PRF-make.up

'America is nobody's native country, those who have made it are all foreigners.'

\JA\ *ɛ-yɛ* *nokware*

3SG.N-be true

'It is true.'

\E\ *Wo-kɔ* LONDON, HOLLAND, *nyinaa* *saa!*

2SG-go London Holland all so

'If you go to London, Holland [and so on], it is the same!'

\JA\ EUROPE *nyinaa* *ara* FOREIGNERS *na* *a-kyekyere!*

Europe all indeed foreigners EMPH PRF-make.up

'All Europe has been made by foreigners!'

\E\ PROBLEM *ne* PAPERS

problem COP papers

'The documents are the problem.'

\JA\ GERMANY-*foɔ* *a* *ɛ-kɔ-ɔ* AMERICA *no* *a-nu* *wɔn* *ho*

Germany-ETH.PL REL 3SG.N-go-PST America DET PRF-mingle their body

'Those who went to America from Germany regretted it.' (ETH = ethnic noun)

\E\ *Adɛn?*

why

'Why?'

\JA\ *Wɔ-se* *ɛḥɔ* *ɛ-yɛ* *ɛden*

3PL-say there 3SG.N-be hard

'They say it is hard over there.'

\E\ *Baabiara* *ɛ-n-yɛ* EASY!

anywhere 3SG.N-NEG-be easy

'It's not easy anywhere!'

First of all, notice that the Akan spoken by both interlocutors contains several English words and phrases (e.g. QUESTIONS; NEW LAW; EASY; FOREIGNERS, to mention only a few) which cannot be said to fulfill any local function—and that some scholars would accordingly classify as nonce borrowings. These forms also lack the discursive strength that would be necessary in order to call into question the language of interaction, i.e. Akan.

The choice of English, however, cannot be interpreted as a strategy to fill in lexical gaps, because the corresponding Akan lexemes do exist, and Emmanuel and James must be aware of their existence: they are both native speakers of Akan and they have been living in Italy for roughly ten years, too short a period to have created a loss of language skills. The insertion of English 'chunks' is not flagged—i.e. it is not preceded by hesitations, pauses or short side comments by which the speakers apologize for the momentary gap in their lexical competence—so there are no clues justifying an interpretation in terms of (lack of) lexical proficiency. Moreover, both Emmanuel and James occasionally use the corresponding Akan words within

the conversation itself (see, for instance, *nokware* 'true', coming three lines after TRUE; but also LAW and *ɛmmara* 'law', occurring in the same utterance, in extract 2 above). In a few cases the switching takes place within the word, as with *wore*FILL*i* 'you are filling'; *wɔn*SIGN 'they have not signed'; GERMANY*foɔ* 'Germans'. Note, however, that in all cases the forms, which some scholars would classify as integrated borrowings, consist of English stems to which one or more Akan derivational and/or flexional affixes have been added.

Throughout the conversation, which lasted for about an hour, code-switching is occasionally resorted to, especially in the form of intra-sentential code-switching occurrences fulfilling an expressive function, i.e. emphasizing part of the utterance, such as the beginning or the end of the speaker's turn, as illustrated by extracts (3) and (4) below:

(3) [6A – On the bus]

\JA\ *Na ɔ-te Borɔfo?*

and 3SG-understand English

'Does she speak English?'

\E\ *ɔ-te Borɔfo paa!*

3SG-understand English very

'She speaks good English!'

\JA\ *ɛneɛ ɔ-a-yɛ adeɛ*

then 3SG-PRF-do thing

'Then she has done well'

\E\ [laughs]

\JA\ OTHER ITALIANS *deɛ wɔn-te kakra kakra*

other Italians FOC 3PL-understand little little

'The other Italians [that I have met] understand it just a little'

(4) [6A – On the bus]

\E\ THE BEST *ayi no sɛ wo-tena kuro biara mu kyɛɛ,*

the best thing DET COMP 2SG-stay town any inside for.a.while

wo-firi *mu* *a* *na* *wo-kɔ* *wo* *kuro-m*

2SG-come.from inside REL EMPH 2SG-go your town-inside

'The best thing [to do is], after a couple of years in a foreign country, to go back home.'

The presence of code-switching occurrences proves that, at this stage, it is probably premature to state that a mixed code is present; nevertheless, the process leading from code-switching to the development of a mixed variety is evidently under way.

4. Speakers' Attitudes and Language Awareness

Speakers' attitudes are seemingly complex and contradictory: this kind of Akan is not regarded as "a variety in its own right" (like English or Italian), but rather as a "corrupted" variety of Akan originating from speakers' inability to formulate exclusively monolingual utterances. On the one hand, the insertion of English items is attributed to their users' declining ability to speak "good" Akan; on the other hand, the production of exclusively monolingual utterances is occasionally laughed at, and dismissed as an antiquated and old-fashioned way of speaking, because of which the speaker may be labeled disparagingly as "colonial", as *akuraseni* (literally, 'villager') or *teteni* ('ancient, antiquated'), as illustrated in extract (5) below. This suggests that native speakers of Akan are generally aware of the process under way, and indirectly acknowledge that the only people who still have the ability to speak Akan without resorting to English are to be found in older (and linguistically most conservative) generations. This awareness is evident in the following conversation:

(5) [Interview with Lydia & Zita]

\Z\ LOOK, LIKE US, IF WE ARE SPEAKING IN TWI AND/ IF YOU SPEAK ONLY TWI/ ONLY TWI, THEY WOULD SAY THAT YOU ARE COLONIAL!

\L\ YES!

\Int\ I SEE

\Z\ THAT YOU ARE terù! THAT YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO SCHOOL=

'That you are a peasant!' (Note 12)

\Int\ I SEE

\Z\ =AREN'T YOU ASHAMED? ONLY TWI, *woyɛ akuraseni!* BUT IF YOU SPEAK THE ENGLISH WITH THE TWI … *ehi, ɔyɛ awuraa oo!* SHE IS A LADY, *ɔte Borɔfo!*

'Only Twi, you are a villager! … ehi, she is a lady! She is a lady, she speaks English! […]

\Int\ THIS MEANS THAT IN THE VILLAGES PEOPLE SPEAK BETTER TWI=

\Z\ =IN THE VILLAGES THEY SPEAK PURE, PURE TWI!

\L\ BUT IN THE TOWN, THE YOUNG ONES=

\Int\ =SO, IF YOU WANT TO HEAR PURE TWI, YOU HAVE TO GO TO THE VILLAGES?

\Z\ YES! YOU ASK THE OLD [LADIES

\L\ [THE OLD PEOPLE, *ɛhee!*

'The old people, yes!'

\Int\ AND IS IT THE SAME WITH NZEMA (Lydia's native language)?

\L\ *ɛhee,* EVERYWHERE IN GHANA!

'Yes, ...'

A number of studies investigating language attitudes and language awareness have demonstrated that attitudes do not necessarily determine the way people react to a given language variety, and that in many cases there appears to be a seeming inconsistency between professed attitudes and observed (linguistic) behaviour. As Colin Baker notes in her classical study, "Overtly stated attitudes may hide covert beliefs. Defense mechanisms and social desirability response sets tend to come in-between stated and more secret attitudes" (1992, pp. 12-13). Hence the apparent lack of consistency in speakers' attitudes may simply be a reflection of the (still) unsettled nature of the transition under way. Indeed, in the transitional phase that we are taking into account, speakers may find themselves divided between the "older" monolingual speech pattern—involving the occasional use of code-switching in order to fulfill local discursive functions—and the "newer" language-mixing pattern, the incipient emergence of which may be perceived as a threat by some purists, worried about the gradual "corruption" of local languages.

On the other hand, the tendency to view English as a symbol of high education, social status, and prestige is far from uncommon (cf., for example, some of the contributions collected in the volume edited by Simpson, 2008), and it is certainly not restricted to the African context. The following episode, reported by Sarah Thomason, is revealing of an attitude that bears a striking similarity with the attitude documented in extract (5): "Ad Backus (p.c. 1999) reports, for instance, that bilingual adult Dutch speakers often insert English words into Dutch morphosyntax in conversation because talking in this way is considered trendy, and the percentage of English words in such conversations often approaches total replacement of Dutch vocabulary" (2007, p. 55) (Note 13). Contrary to Thomason's opinion, however, I do not believe that the insertion of English words and phrases is the result of a 'deliberate' (i.e. a conscious) choice made by Akan speakers. In fact, speakers seems to be quite unaware, and only when the attention is explicitly drawn on their speech, they concede that the ability 'to

speak good Twi' is actually languishing.

In my sample, monolingual speech is indeed extremely rare: the pervasive insertion of English items in Akan utterances is an important communicative device at the disposal of Ghanaian immigrants in Bergamo, and tends to be employed in casual, informal interactions (cf. extracts 6 and 7 below).

(6) [7A – Interview with Iulie]

\I\ *Mama, wo-se ayi no wo-hunu no wɔ he?*

HNR 2SG-say thing DET 2SG-see 3SG.N.OBJ be.located.at where

'Where did you see the thing [the dress]?' (HNR = honorific address form)

\JO\ MARKET, *ɛ-ne ne* SHOES *nyinaa*

market 3SG.N-COP its shoes all

'[At the] market, together with the shoes.'

\I\ *Na mpaboa nso yɛ* WHITE?

and shoe also be white

'Even the shoes are white?'

\JO\ *Aane, ne nyinaa yɛ* WHITE

yes its all be white

'Yes, it is all white.'

\I\ STORE *bi wɔ ha ɛbi wɔ hɔ*

store INDF be.located.at here some be.located.at there

'There is a store here which has it too.'

\JO\ BUT *ne nsa no yɛ* SHORT?

but its sleeve DET be short

'But is it a short-sleeved [dress]?'

\I\ *Na awɔ nni mu?*

but cold NEG.be.located.at inside

'But isn't it cold?'

\JO\ *Oh, daabi! ɛdan mu hɔ yɛ hye*

EMPH no room inside there be hot

'Oh, no! It is hot in the room.'

(7) [10A – A new arrival from Ghana]

\G\ BOY *bi wɔ Bergamo, ɔ-a-di* FIVE YEARS *wɔ ha*

boy INDF be.located.at Bergamo 3SG-PRF-eat five years be.located.at here

nso ɔ-n-te hwee!

yet 3SG-NEG-understand nothing

'There is a boy in Bergamo, he has spent five years in Italy, but he doesn't understand [the Italian language]!'

\IV\ *ɛwɔm saa!*

anyway so

'It is true, anyway!'

\RI\ *Me koraa, ma-nya* THREE YEARS *me-te kakra*

1SG EMPH 1SG.PRF-get three years 1SG-understand little

'As for me, I have been here for three years, but I do understand a bit.'

\G\ *Wɔn kasa no n-yɛ* STRAIGHTFORWARD!

their language DET NEG-be straightforward

'Their language isn't straightforward!'

\RI\ *ɛ-n-yɛ den*

3SG.N-NEG-be hard

'It is not difficult.'

\G\ *Wo-yɛ* SURE?

2SG-be sure

'Are you sure?'

\IV\ *ɔ-n-yɛ* PREPARED *sɛ* *ɔ-bɛ-sua!*

3SG-NEG-be prepared COMP 3SG-FUT-learn

'He (the boy living in Bergamo) isn't prepared (i.e. ready) to learn!'

The fact that this kind of Akan reflects spontaneous, colloquial speech is also evident in the text of some popular Hip Hop songs produced by a number of Ghanaian artists and musicians over the last few years. A similar analysis was carried out by Adejunmobi (2004), who argues that one of the most distinct features displayed by the songs that he has taken into account is indeed a "mixture" of Twi, English and other Ghanaian languages, a feature which, in his view, reflects the multilingual conversational mode of both the performers and their audience, who would feel unable to identify with (either Akan or English) monolingual speech:

> Ghanaian Hip Hop music known as Hip-life is generally sung in Twi, the local lingua franca, often interspersed with statements in English and other Ghanaian languages like Ga. Ghanaian Hip-life singers like Obrafour and Mr. Oduro combine English and Twi, while another Hip-life group, Buk Bak, combine Ga, English and Pidgin. This mixing of languages reflects the larger trend towards the assimilation of diverse cultural styles that appears to be a hallmark of music performances for urban youth audiences in Africa (Adejunmobi, 2004, p. 167).

The fascination that this kind of "stylistic mixing" is capable of exercising over the younger generations and its significance as identity marker is acknowledged by most of the Ghanaian immigrants that I had the opportunity to question about the issue. It shows up, for example, in the following comment from a forty year old native Akan speaker, that I was able to record during one of the meetings recently organised in order to celebrate Ghana's 50th independence anniversary:

> During Ghana's 50th independence anniversary celebrations organised by Ghanaian residents in Brescia [in Northern Italy, about 50 kilometers from Bergamo] a lot of Ghanaian Hip-life & High-life artists were invited to grace the occasion. I noticed that some of their songs are a mixture of Twi and English, which are popular among Ghanaian immigrants not only in Italy, but in other European countries as well. Songs like "*Cinderella*" or "*ɣdɔ ntira*" by Ofori Amponsah are an eloquent testimony to this fact. Ghanaian youngsters are fascinated by mixing English with the Twi language whenever they speak in all spheres of life (Emmanuel Yaw Fosu, p.c. October 2007).

It is also apparent from the excerpts quoted above that this 'mixed' variety of Akan is not stable (the very term 'variety' is employed here for lack of a better alternative), the amount of English insertions differs significantly from speaker to speaker, from communicative situation to communicative situation, but it is not tied to individual speakers. It is a shared communicative pattern—indeed, the unmarked communicative pattern, as far as my sample is concerned.

It is intuitively evident that the development of a mixed code is the consequence of a language contact situation which necessarily extends over long periods of time. Accordingly, I assume that the incipient emergence of a 'mixed' variety of Akan is unlikely to be the result of the language contact situation recently emerging in a migratory context, but can be traced back to the sociolinguistic ecology of the immigrants' country of origin. In the following section, evidence is provided in support of this claim.

5. Earlier evidence of Akan-English language mixing

A first confirmation of this assumption is contained in the work edited by John Spencer (1971), a collection of essays which is considered to be a classic as far as the investigation of the varieties of English spoken in Africa is concerned. In this publication, Gilbert Ansre, author of the essay entitled "The influence of English on West African languages", states:

> Another way in which English has been observed to influence the West African languages is the way speakers who are bilingual in English and a West African language *insert varying 'chunks' of English into their performance of the West African language*. […] The size of the pieces of English found in this type of utterances varies from a single morpheme to whole sentences, and it is not immediately clear *whether the speaker is speaking English or the West African language*" (Ansre, 1971, p. 147, my emphasis).

In order to exemplify the above-mentioned claim, Ansre (1971) reports a series of utterances that he collected from spontaneous conversations involving bilingual speakers of English and a West African language. The data include the following utterances, from speakers whom Ansre identifies as native speakers of Akan:

(8) *Sɛ wɔ-bɛ*-REPORT *wo ma me bio a, me-bɛ*-DISMISS

if 3PL-FUT-report 2SG[OBJ] give 1SG[OBJ] again COMP 1SG-FUT-dismiss

wo WITHOUT FURTHER WARNING!

2SG[OBJ]

'If you are reported to me again, I shall dismiss you without further warning.'

(9) CAR *no kɔ* FAST *dodo*

car DET go fast too.much

'The car goes too fast.'

(10) START*i* FAN *no* *ma* *me*

start fan DET give 1SG[OBJ]

'Start the fan for me.'

Despite their unquestionable fragmentary nature, these utterances reveal a series of features which may be compared to those included in my sample, such as the recurring presence of English words and/or phrases that do not appear to fulfill any discursive local function. Furthermore, in a similar way, the choice of English cannot be imputed to the necessity to fill lexical gaps, since Ansre himself points out that "if the speaker of each of these languages did not want to have the English items in these utterances he could have said it all in the West African language in question" (1971, p. 145).

Myers-Scotton (1993) reports comparable data from an English-Shona bilingual community in Zimbabwe, and an English-Swahili one in Kenya. Myers-Scotton argues that the simultaneous presence of elements belonging to different languages (Note 14) within an utterance is indeed so frequent in both communities that it could be described as an unmarked conversational pattern—a phenomenon that, according to Myers-Scotton, appears to be more common in urban centres than in rural areas. She also observes that

> . . . each switch in unmarked CS [code-switching] does not necessarily have a special indexicality; rather, it is the overall pattern which carries the communicative intention. In such switching, speakers engage in a continuous pattern of using two (or more) languages; often the switching is intra-sentential and sometimes within the same word. The other types of switching do not show the same to-and-fro nature […] (Myers-Scotton, 1993, p. 117).

It is evident that the 'switching' to which Myers-Scotton is referring shares several similarities with the recurrent insertion of English items displayed in the data that I collected. In order to appreciate the analogies between the two phenomena, it may be useful to focus on the following extract, by means of which Myers-Scotton (1993, p. 118) illustrates the above-mentioned observation:

(11) (Part of a conversation recorded at a shopping centre near a housing estate in Nairobi. The three participants come from three different ethnic groups; all are relatively well-educated young men. The Luo (L) is about 17 years old and is in form I (equivalent to beginning high school); the Kalenjin (K) is about 23 years old and is in form 4; the Kamba (M) is about 24 years old and in form 6. Swahili is the matrix language of this conversation).

L: *Mbona hawa* WORKERS *wa* EAST AFRICA POWER AND LIGHTING *wakaenda* STRIKE, *hata wengine nasikia washawekwa* CELL.

'And why on earth did those East African Power and Lighting workers

strike, even I've heard some have been already put in cells [in jail].'

K: *Ujue watu wengine ni* FUNNY *sana. Wa-na-*CLAIM *ati mishahara yao iko* LOW *sana. Tena wanasema eti hawapewi* HOUSING ALLOWANCE.

'You know, some people are very funny. They are claiming that their salaries are very low. They also say – eh – they are not given house allowance.'

M: *Mimi huwa nawafikiria lakini wao huwa na* REASONABLE SALARY.

'As for me, I used to think, but they have a reasonable salary.'

K: *Hujajua watu wengi* ON THIS WORLD *hawawezi kutoesheka. Anasema anataka hiki akipewa a-na-*DEMAND *kingine*.

'Don't you know yet that some people on this world [*sic*] can't be satisfied. He says he wants this and when he is given [it], he demands another [thing].'

L: … *Kwani ni ngumu sana ku-*TRAIN *wengine? Si ni kupata* LESSONS *kidogo tu halafu waanze kazi?*

'… Why it is difficult to train others? Isn't it just to get a few lessons and then they should start work?'

Myers-Scotton maintains that the development of mixed varieties like the one exemplified above, in which English and a local lingua franca are freely juxtaposed within the same utterance, is to be interpreted, from a sociolinguistic point of view, as the result of the speakers' need to simultaneously make use of both the languages in contact. This situation arises because both languages contribute to speakers' expression of their linguistic identity and actually define this identity more effectively than the adoption of a single language at a time, a conclusion which is in fact quite similar to the one formulated by Auer (2000):

> [Frequent changes in the language of interaction] may result in what could be called an *open state of language choice* (paraphrasing Goffman), and in the long run contribute to establishing a 'mixed variety', i.e. a new bilingual mode of interaction in which the alternation from one language to the other and back is an altogether unspectacular affair and thus loses its potential of functioning as a contextualisation cue for discourse-related purposes (Auer, 2000, p. 141, my emphasis).

This means that, given the appropriate sociolinguistic conditions, a progressive increase of code-switching occurrences may lead to the gradual decrease of their pragmatic strength, to the extent that the languages in contact appear to be in free variation. The final consequence of this linguistic behaviour is that speakers may no longer be aware of mixing different codes, but may

be convinced that they are speaking a single language (the language of interaction or matrix language, as Myers-Scotton defines it, i.e. the linguistic system providing the largest number of lexical and/or grammatical morphemes).

In order to support her view of code-switching as the unmarked conversational pattern in a number of African bilingual speech communities, Myers-Scotton (1993, p. 122) quotes a short passage from Forson's (1979, p. 127) doctoral dissertation, which focuses on English-Akan code-switching among Ghanaian bilingual speakers:

> Participants in normal Akan-English code-switching consider themselves to be speaking Akan. The discourse usually begins in Akan, and as it progresses, the speakers *freely use strands of English of varying lengths*. They normally are taken aback when their attention is drawn to the fact that they are 'mixing'. The same speakers might even protest the possibility of anybody 'speaking like this' if they came across a transcribed text with normal code-switching, probably their own utterances […].

A few pages ahead, Forson (1979)—a work in which I found an impressive amount of empirical data resembling those contained in my sample—adds the following observation: "Even though code-switching is a very widespread phenomenon among educated Akans, *attitudes towards it are generally negative*—ranging from mere toleration at best, to downright condemnation and sometimes a denial that the deniers switch (1979, p. 200, my emphasis). The empirical evidence that I was able to collect within the Ghanaian immigrant community in Bergamo seems to suggest that attitudes towards this linguistic behaviour are no longer as negative as they used to be during the 1970s, when Forson dissertation was accomplished. Indeed, a more favourable attitude towards the recurrent juxtaposition of English items in casual, informal speech is becoming increasingly apparent, especially in the younger generations—though the feelings of a number of speakers are still pretty ambivalent in this respect.

Forson's concluding remark is that this variety of Akan, characterised by the recurrent insertion of English items "of varying lengths" should be considered "a language in its own right – the third or additional tongue of the bilingual" (1979, p. 218).

6. Final Remarks

At this point, I believe I am in a position to suggest that by the 1970s the variety of Akan spoken in Ghana by English-Akan bilingual speakers was already undergoing the transition process that leads from prototypical code-switching to the development of a mixed code, as illustrated in Auer (1999). Such a process is presumably the result of the prolonged contact between English and Akan, a contact originated under colonial rule and continuing to the present, with inevitable consequences for the language variety with lower prestige, i.e. Akan.

On the other hand, the examples quoted in Ansre (1971), Myers-Scotton (1993) and Amuzu (2005) suggest that some other major African *lingue franche* in contact with English—such as Ewe, Swahili, Shona and Yoruba—may be currently undergoing a similar transition. A variety of Yoruba "deliberately peppered with English" has recently been described by Ogundele

(2009), who maintains that its occurrence in the Nigerian video-film productions is "intended to show that the speaker is very literate in the language [i.e., English] and belongs to one of the new professions, but the audience is meant to understand that he or she is speaking Yoruba throughout" (2009, p. 85). (Note 15)

In order to illustrate the process which leads to the development of a mixed code, Auer (1999) significantly choose a spontaneous interaction—reported in Blommaert (1992, p. 61)—between Swahili native speakers in Tanzania. Again, the juxtaposition of English and Swahili appears to "correspond to the "unmarked" way of speaking among the Tanzanian élites for which speaking "pure" Swahili seems to require special attention and effort" (1999, p. 320). Extracts illustrating the juxtaposition of English and Adangme/Dangme (one of the languages spoken in southern Ghana) are also reported in Nartey (1982).

Recent research exploring the outcomes of language contact throughout the African continent reveals that the development of mixed varieties *à la* Auer is attested in 'Francophone' Africa as well. This is true, for example, of the variety of "urban Wolof" investigated by Fiona Mc Laughlin (2008, 2009). As Mc Laughlin argues, urban Wolof differs from the Wolof spoken in rural areas in that "[it] exhibits significant borrowing from French" (2009, p. 73). Urban Wolof enjoys considerable prestige, for it tends to be associated "with modernity and the opportunity that urban life is perceived to offer" (2009, p. 74). And the parallel with the attitudes that I discussed in section 4 is striking:

> The linguistic counterbalance to urban Wolof is a rural variety that exhibits far fewer borrowings from French and which is know in urban Wolof as *olof piir* "pure Wolof", from the French word *pur* "pure". These two varieties, and especially the ways they are conceived of within the Senegalese linguistic imaginary, are the poles between which language ideologies and language attitudes are played out. […] For many speakers of urban Wolof negative and positive attitudes towards the language can be held simultaneously. There is a general respect for *olof piir* and admiration for those who master it, but at the same time the covert prestige associated with speaking urban Wolof makes it highly appropriate as the language of the city and *olof piir* highly inappropriate in the same context (pp. 73-74).

As for the data contained in my sample, the consistent presence of code-switching as a contextualization cue in order to fulfill both discursive and participant-related functions proves that the transition is still under way and that it is premature to state that a mixed code is present. Unlike most examples of mixed varieties provided by previous research on language contact—e.g. *Italoschwyz* in Switzerland (cf. Franceschini, 1998), *Yanito* in Gibraltar (cf. Moyer, 1998), *Sheng* and *Engsh* in Nairobi (cf. Abdulaziz & Osinde, 1997), to mention just a few—the lack of a folk name specifically attributed to this language alternation pattern is possibly an additional argument against the present existence of a mixed variety (see also Auer 1999, p. 318). (Note 16) The process will be complete when speakers no longer ask themselves whether the code that they are employing is Akan or English, but select it as the language of interaction, thereby choosing a mixed variety rather than monolingual speech as a means of expression of their multilingual identity.

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Notes

Note 1. Source: Italian National Statistic Institute (ISTAT), on-line data base Available at http://www.demo.istat.it (last accessed in December 2011).

Note 2. In December 2009, the official report of the Italian National Statistic Institute (ISTAT) placed the number of Ghanaian immigrants within the province of Bergamo at 1,779, with an almost equal ratio of men (968) to women (811). Available: http://demo.istat.it/str2009/index.html (last accessed in December 2011).

Note 3. The sample was collected by means of a hidden tape recorder and without informing the participants about the actual purpose of the research. This measure was deemed necessary so as to create a situation which was as natural and as spontaneous as possible. In order to avoid directing their attention to language use, all the informants were told that the objective of the research was to gather information about Ghanaian traditional culture. Participants were informed that their interactions were being recorded only after the collection of the data had been completed, and they all agreed that the tape-recorded material could be used for sociolinguistic investigation.

Note 4. Twi is the name of a non-native variety of Akan functioning as a lingua franca. The glottonym Akan, however, is hardly ever mentioned by its (uneducated) speakers: the language is normally referred to as Twi. In this paper, for the sake of simplicity, the term Twi will be employed as a synonym of Akan.

Note 5. This notion was originally introduced by Gumperz (1982, pp. 132-35).

Note 6. The adjective ‘functional’ implies that code-switching is always related to a change of communicative intention or a change of topic, of addressee, of footing, of discursive function,

and so forth. As a consequence, we may say that code-switching is always locally meaningful, whereas any switching to which no local meaning or function can be attributed will be considered as an instance of code-mixing.

Note 7. Accordingly, these type of insertions were not counted in tables 1 and 2.

Note 8. At a later stage (Auer, 1999), Auer replaces the term mixed code with the expressions *language mixing* and *mixed variety*; as a consequence, in the following paragraphs the expressions mixed code, language mixing and mixed variety will be employed as synonyms. In addition, Auer (1999) develops the continuum proposed in his 1998c work by adding a third language alternation phenomenon, one that he considers to be an additional stage in the grammaticalization process leading to the formation of a mixed code, and which he labels *fused lect*. The difference between mixed codes and fused lects is mainly a grammatical one; as Auer explains, "while LM [language mixing] by definition allows variation (languages may be juxtaposed, but they need not be), the use of one "language" or the other for certain constituents is obligatory in FLs [fused lects]; it is part of their grammar, and speakers have no choice. Thus, structural sedimentation (…) of ML into a FL presupposes a loss of variation and the stabilization of function-form relationships" (1999, p. 321). This added stage will not be discussed here, since in my data only the first portion of Auer's continuum of language contact phenomena (i.e. the portion describing the transition from code-switching to mixed code) is actually documented.

Note 9. Auer (1999, p. 319) describes the transitional phase in which code-switching and language mixing coexist as "quite prolonged". It is sensible to assume the existence of differences depending on the extent of bilingual proficiency or on attitudes towards language mixing within a given speech community, but more empirical data, concerning a wider range of language contact situations, are actually needed in order to be more precise in this regard.

Note 10. More information on the linguistic competences of each informant—who is indicated by the first letter(s) of his/her name—is offered in the Appendix (for further details, cf. Guerini, 2006); note that both Emmanuel and James indicated Akan as their native language.

Note 11. Note that each recording in the sample is given a short title (e.g. On the bus), that will be mentioned at the beginning of each extract; more details on the overall structure of the sample are offered in Guerini (2006, p. 99). I decided to adopt the following print styles in order to distinguish the different languages employed by the informants: small capitals (English), italics (Akan/Twi), underlined roman (Italian). The Leipzig Glossing Rules (revised version of February 2008, available at http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php) were followed in interlinear glosses.

Note 12. The lexeme *terù*, mentioned here by the informant named Zita, is an offensive form of address in the local *Bergamasco* dialect, literally meaning 'peasant' (from the *Bergamasco* noun *tèra* 'land'), a label that the local people generally apply to Southern Italians.

Note 13. See also Muysken (2010, p. 8) on similar concerns over "the level of proficiency in Dutch" in school populations as a result of language contact.

Note 14. A language alternation strategy that Myers-Scotton (1993, p. 1) labels 'code-switching', attributing a more general and extended meaning to this term than the one that I have assigned to it. Cf. note 6.

Note 15. Another interesting testimony concerning present-day Nigeria is provided by Amuda (1994), who investigated Yoruba-English code-switching among educated native speakers of Yoruba. Amuda analyses a spontaneous conversation recorded during an Old Boys' Association meeting (the formal gathering of an alumni association located at Ile-Ife, 180 kilometres northeast of Lagos); during the meeting one of the members starts his address in English—which is supposed to be unmarked language choice in that context—but, after a few turns, interrupts and asks the chairman's permission to continue his speech in Yoruba. At this point, Amuda observes that "(…) his [the alumnus'] so-called Yoruba, for which he sought permission, was actually a mixture of both Yoruba and English. There are seventeen English words and two complete sentences in English in the twenty-one sentences that he used when he received permission to speak in Yoruba. From this moment, the medium of address at the meeting changed. Other members who had earlier spoken in English also started using mixed speech. None of the other participants used undiluted Yoruba" (1994, p. 127). Again, the 'mixed speech' to which Amuda is referring turns out to be remarkably similar to the recurrent insertion of English items displayed in my data.

Note 16. Incidentally, the only 'folk name' I happen to be aware of is the one coined by Laitin (1994), who refers to this mixed variety of Akan as "Ghanaian". As Laitin explains, "there is a speech form that relies heavily on Akan-English code-switching, and this form is evidently used far more widely than even its speakers recognize. In interviews, a number of speakers denied relying on it while using it extensively in those very interviews. The speech form plays an important role in interethnic communication and has no overtones of belonging to a particular group, despite its extensive reliance on Akan language. Furthermore, linguistic analysis of this speech form suggests its emergence as a natural language (cf. Forson, 1979)" (1994, p. 624). Although, admittedly, Laitin does not provide first-hand data of this 'speech form', his reference to Forson's doctoral dissertation suggests that his claims are based on Forson's well-known remark concerning "the third or additional tongue" of Akan-English bilingual speakers (1979, p. 218).

Appendix

Sociolinguistic profile of the informants

EMMANUEL (E): age 35 years. Native town: Kumasi. Mother tongue: Akan. Other languages: English, French, Khosa, Italian. Time spent in Italy: four years. In Ghana he attended school until he obtained a degree in Economics. Then he moved to Johannesburg (South African Republic) where he worked as a teacher, but a few months later he went back to Ghana and started working as an administrative officer. Now he lives in Clusone (Italy) together with his wife and his younger daughter. He is employed in a local food factory. He claims never to

have attended any Italian course for foreigners. He speaks Akan and English with his wife and with his Ghanaian friends; he watches English television programs and has regular contacts with the other members of his family who are still living in Ghana.

GEORGE (G): age 37 years. Native town: Navrongo. Mother tongue: Kasem (spoken by his mother) and Nankani (spoken by his father). Other languages: Twi, English and Hausa; limited knowledge of the Italian language. Time spent in Italy: five years. As a child he attended primary school for five years. Then he was employed as a domestic servant by an Italian family living in Ghana. When this family returned to Italy he joined them; he lived in Como (Italy) for four years, and he has had the opportunity to attend an Italian course for foreigners organised by the local administration. At the moment he lives in Clusone and works for a local cleaning agency. He has weekly contacts with his wife and with his two children, who are still living in his homeland.

JAMES (JA): age 45 years. Native town: Juaben (a few kilometers from Kumasi). Mother tongue: Akan. Other languages: English, Arabic (the oral variety spoken in Libya), Italian. Time spent in Italy: 11 years. As a child he attended school for ten years; after that, he started working as a mechanic. Before moving to Italy (in Azzano San Paolo, where he presently lives together with his wife and two children), he spent two years in Libya, where he had the opportunity to learn the local variety of spoken Arabic. He claims never to have attended any Italian course for foreigners. At the moment he is employed in a local food factory. He claims to speak Akan and English with his wife, whereas Italian is the only language he uses to address his children. He watches television programs both in English and in the Italian language.

IULIE (I): age 39 years. Native town: Kumasi. Mother tongue: Akan. Other languages: English, Italian. Time spent in Italy: 13 years. In Ghana she attended school until she obtained an elementary school teacher diploma. After working for a few years as a teacher in her homeland, she moved to Italy. At the moment she lives in Alzano Lombardo, together with her husband and three children. When her last child was born, she resigned from her job in a local textile factory. She claims to be used to speaking Akan, English and Italian with her family, but she watches only Italian television programs. She has frequent contacts with her relatives who are still living in Ghana.

IVA (IV): age 25 years. Native town: Accra. Mother tongue: Ga. Other languages: Twi, English; limited knowledge of the Italian language. Time spent in Italy: 5 months. As a child she attended school for fifteen years and she obtained a high school diploma. Later she moved to Italy in order to join her older sister, who lives in Clusone. She is employed as a factory worker in a local textile complex. She claims to be used to speaking Ga, Twi and English with her friends, and has regular contacts with her relatives who are still living in Ghana.

JOYCE (JO): age 33 years. Native town: Kumasi. Mother tongue: Ewe (spoken by her mother) and Akan (spoken by her father). Other languages: English and Italian. Time spent in Italy: 12 years. As a child she attended school for fifteen years; after that, she moved to Italy in the

hope to find a job. At the moment she lives in Bergamo, together with her husband and three children. She speaks Akan and English with her relatives, and she has regular contacts (telephone calls) with the members of her family who are still living in Ghana. Each year she spends roughly a month in Ghana in order to visit her family.

LYDIA (L): age: 25 years. Native town: Half-Assini (Western Region). Mother tongue: Nzema. Other languages: English, Akan, French. She has a limited knowledge of the Italian language. Time spent in Italy: almost 3 years. In Ghana she attended primary school, then she started working as a door to door hairdresser, together with an older sister. She moved to Italy with her boyfriend, a Ghanaian immigrant who is currently employed in a local cleaning agency. They share a small flat in Rovetta. She is still unemployed, probably because of her poor proficiency in Italian. From time to time, she works as a door to door hairdresser at the request of other West African immigrants living nearby.

RITA (RI): age 33 years. Native town: Accra. Mother tongue: Ga. Other languages: Twi, English, Italian. Time spent in Italy: 3 years. As a child she attended school in Accra, till she obtained a high school diploma. After that, she moved to Italy in the hope to find a job. She settled in Modena for about one year, working as a domestic servant for an Italian family. Then she moved to Clusone, where she was employed in a local textile factory. She shares a flat with her sister and a Senegalese young man, her sister's boyfriend. She claims to be used to speaking Ga, Twi and English with her family and friends, and she has regular contacts (telephone calls) with the relatives who are still living in Ghana.

ZITA (Z): age 31 years. Native town: Kumasi. Mother tongue: Akan. Other languages: English, Nzema. She has a limited knowledge of the Italian language. Time spent in Italy: 18 months. In Ghana she attended school till the age of 22; after that, she was employed as a catering officer in a local canteen. At the moment she lives in Clusone together with her husband and their 1 year-old child. Despite the efforts made to find a job, she is still unemployed, probably because of her limited knowledge of the Italian language. She speaks both Akan and English with her husband, and watches Italian and English television programs. She has regular contacts (telephone calls) with her relatives who are still living in Ghana.