

# Patterns of Language Shift: The Case of Gbagyi Anthroponymy

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## Abstract

This study explores the onomastics, particularly the anthroponyms of Gbagyi, following the researcher's assumption that new naming practices have emerged in Gbagyi community as a result of westernization, Christianity, urbanization and globalization. This article aims to explore the pattern of language shift in Gbagyi from an onomastic perspective. Both primary and secondary data were used and analyzed descriptively. This enabled us to offer objective observations on the shifting phenomenon in Gbagyi. This study provides empirical evidence to show that an inquiry on naming system of a language like Gbagyi provides significant insights into the nature and pattern of language shift as well as language maintenance. This study establishes that changes have emerged in naming practices of Gbagyi resulting into a language shift phenomenon in the language. Also, this study suggests that the pattern of shifting in Gbagyi was started by the Hausa language but is now also being influenced by the English language. We suggest that naming in Gbagyi should be encouraged among the Gbagyi speakers as a maintenance strategy for the language in order to halt the prevailing shift phenomenon. We strongly recommend that, in order to ensure maximum success in this correctional course, a comprehensive semantic/ pragmatic description of the Gbagyi anthroponymy may come handy, reason is that a better grasp of the deep meaning of the names would serve as a strong motivation to the name-givers and name-bearers in Gbagyi community towards using their native names.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, maintenance, onomastics, anthroponymy, motivation.

## 1. Introduction

Language is simply a conventional system of habitual symbols which a speech community considers as its cultural heritage. It is what a group of people use to convey their experience and worldview, such that they are uniquely identified by it. Spolky (1999) avers that language serves as a marker of ethnic identity and symbol of group identity. In a similar thought, Okorie (2008) recognizes language as the fundamental aspect of a people's identity with which they are known. The language is a dynamic living mechanism for human communication which can be better analyzed in space and time; largely characterized by such sociolinguistic phenomena as language evolution or change, language endangerment, language shift or language death. More often than not, more than one language may exist in a particular society and as a result the languages find themselves in contact with one another. Multilingualism or bilingualism, borrowing, language endangerment or language shift and language death are the likely sociolinguistic consequences of such a language (contact) situation.

What then is language shift? As the central concern of this study, language shift (otherwise referred to as "language displacement" Brenzinger, 1998) is a social process where speakers of a particular language abandon their native language to speak a new one. It is a gradual yet progressive transmission from one (local, minority) language to another (major) language. This is said to take place with a correspondingly gradual shrinking of the social spheres or domains in which the (local) language was originally used (Kauffman & Thomason, 1988). Little wonder, Nawaz et al (2012) explain that language shift is the initial step of the cause of language death; therefore, it may also be referred to as language death (especially when the shift is total), as it results to total disappearance of the language. One early sign of language shift is the decrease in number

of the speakers of a language to the older speakers, while the social domains of the language also reduces to only home, and the younger generation becomes less proficient in the language (a clear case of current Gbagyi situation).

Language shift may be voluntary or as a result of pressure (Batibo, 2005). Nettle and Romaine (2000) obviously share in this view, submitting that often times, language shift occurs as a response to pressures of various types – social, economic, political, etc. From the West African perspective, language shift occurs chiefly as a result of language contact. Igboanusi (2009) identifies two major contact types: contact between West-African indigenous languages and ex-colonial languages, and between various West-African indigenous languages.

Studies show that the determining factor to the survival of any human language is the language attitudes of its speakers. Research on language attitudes has provided insights and deepens our understanding of what underlies the particular ways in which speakers of a language respond to their language and other languages in their environment the way they do. This is because, their attitudes reflect on the various choices of languages they make in communication. No wonder, Fasold (1984) attests that language shift or death and language maintenance are long term collective results of language choice, such that language shift occurs when a community decides to give up a language in favor of another one, while language maintenance occurs when the same community collectively decides to continue using the language it has traditionally been using. This implies that when speakers collectively begin to choose a language in domains that were hitherto reserved for the old one, it may be an indication that language shift is in progress (Kauffman & Thomason, 1988).

A rich body of works on language shift and maintenance graces the existing literature of sociolinguistics (e.g., Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter, 1977; Kahane & Kahane, 1979; Gal, 1979; Dorian, 1980; Timm, 1980; Lebason, 1980; Fasold, 1984; Mitiki, 1996, etc.). Interest in the field of language endangerment and language shift has continued to grow for over sixteen years, following Fishman's (1991) publication titled "reversing language shift." In this landmark contribution to the field of shift/maintenance, Fishman maintains that, for a shift to be reversed, "face-to-face small-scale social life must be pursued in their own right and focused upon directly". The present study responds to this call by examining language shift within the framework of Gbagyi onomastics.

Therefore, it is instructive to note at this point that the common goal of a research on language shift is to explicitly contribute to language maintenance (Garcia, 2003:23). Little wonder, it is said that language shift and maintenance are two sides of the same coin, such that "a good understanding of language shift processes is seen as a prerequisite for language maintenance effort and as improving the language's chances of survival." One of the most surviving interest in the study of language shift has been to identify causes of or reasons for language shift: a number of conditions have been identified by various scholars as what causes a particular group of people to give up on a language (These are discussed in section (2) of this paper). We observe, however, that what applies to a speech community as the cause of shift may not necessarily be relevant in another community. As such, the investigation of this phenomenon in individual languages is a worthy and necessary contribution in order to ascertain peculiarities that may characterize different languages and communities.

West-Africa, as observed by Igboanusi (2009) is linguistically the most heterogeneous sub-region in Africa, accounting for more than half of Africa's 2000 languages. As a result, there is a high tendency for speakers of indigenous (minority) languages in Nigeria to shift to the ex-colonial and indigenous dominant languages as means of social empowerment and economic security. In spite of this fact, studies focusing on language shift and maintenance in West Africa are almost absent in the sociolinguistic literature. In 2009, the special issue titled 'sociolinguistic studies', comprising a collection of articles on language shift phenomenon in West-Africa was put forward as an attempt to fill this research gap. Unfortunately, even therein, no case was made for Gbagyi in this issue. Therefore, there is the fear for the tendency that Gbagyi language may disappear if its speakers decide to shift totally to other languages, and this (as well as the desire to fill this research gap) serves as a major driving force for the present study.

Onomastics, according to Bright (2003) is the study of proper names. It is said to be a vast, interdisciplinary branch of scholarship, including philosophy, ethnography, anthropology, linguistics, history, etc. (a comprehensive account of different aspects of this field of study is found in the international handbook of onomastics edited by Eichler, 1995). Onomastics in the broadest sense, is concerned with all different kinds of proper nouns, however, place names (toponyms) and personal names (anthroponyms) have until recently drawn the most attention. Personal name is one of the indices that usually give people away in encoding their ethnic identity, culture and nationality (Mensah, 2015). Haviland (2013) maintains that the naming ceremony marks the child's transition from a state of nature to culture and subsequently, full acceptance into the community. Although personal naming is universal as all societies have names which their members recognize as characteristics of the society, the act of naming can vary greatly depending on the society and time.

Therefore, the assignment of a name or names to a child places the child in a societal group bearing the culture in question. A name is a person's social, cultural and legal identity. In his book, Alford (1988) asserts that people's responses to the question 'who are you' are most likely to be a recital of their names, and with this response, people mean that their names symbolize their identity. Hence, we draw conclusions about people's gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, social position and, perhaps even religious belief based on the preconceived notions about their names. The 'name factor' influences our behavior and attitude towards people as well as our expectations of their attitude towards us. This is why what one is called really does matter (Hagström, 2012).

Blount (2015) contends that naming systems are basically of two kinds: the open and closed systems. He adduces that in open naming system, considerable latitude exists in name choice, while the fixed system is largely characterized by some strong constraints. Noting, however, that there are actually no totally open systems, because cultural constraints always apply. For instance, unlike the United States which uses open naming system, Iceland, like Germany, Denmark, Finland, is said to use fixed naming system. Blount avers that Iceland has a governmentally approved list of names (with cultural bearing) for males and females: the only names used for the Icelandic citizens.

Contemporary ideas and tendencies of the study of onomastics as well as its prospects and visions probably best unfold at international congresses. For instance, Blažienė (2018) appraises that in 2017, Debrecen (in Hungary) hosted the 26<sup>th</sup> international congress of onomastic science which drew around 250 onomasticians from across the globe with very broad range of topics. Particular attention has been paid to anthroponyms and toponyms from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, but generally, topics are determined by country-specific geographic and linguistic peculiarities as well as the fashions dictated by the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For instance, the names of tunnels of the well-developed railway network are most relevant to the Japanese researchers; Brazilians are concerned with the names of bridges in São Paulo; Swedes study fashionable daily nicknames; Finns focus on the names of fast food, while Estonians are preoccupied with zoonyms (cattle names). However, it appears that the essential change in the information system has influenced the observed paradigm shift in the study approach. In Africa, particularly West-Africa, more attention is paid to proper names under the conditions of language contact, multilingualism and bilingualism (e.g., Mensah, 2015).

Onomastic works in West-Africa which seem to have appeared much earlier, examined the structures of names in Igbo (Ubahakwe, 1981), Yoruba (Oduyoye, 1982) and Ibibio (Essien, 1986), and more recently, works such as Obeng's (1998); Essien's (2000); Offeng and Mensah's (2015) have appeared in the West-African sociolinguistic literature. It is observed that because names could constitute compounding structures, phrases, clauses or sentences, a good grasp of them can give some insights into the grammar of these languages. This explains why majority of the existing studies evaluate personal names from the structural or grammatical perspectives, but the present study (about the first presentation of Gbagyi naming system) interrogates personal names among the Gbagyi from the sociolinguistic viewpoint. This is because, we understand that the study of naming practices is able to uncover possible risks of language shift or language death. (Empirical works are reviewed in section (2) of this paper).

This paper, therefore, investigates the phenomenon of name borrowing in Gbagyi (in its multilingual environment) in order to unearth the pattern of language shift that is presumed to be taking place in Gbagyi, as an investigation on borrowed names would serve as the window to the language shift situation in Gbagyi. This is an attempt to halt or reverse the shift and to inspire future research efforts.

## 2. Literature Review

It is unwise to attempt an exhaustive review of literature on language shift. Garcia (2003:37) rightly notes that an exhaustive review of the literature on language shift and maintenance is humanly impossible, given “the amount of activities in the field”. We will, therefore, mention some studies on the subject matter by way of illustration. Gleaning from the rich body of works on language shift, one of the most reoccurring issues in research on language shift, as Gafaranga (2010:243) observes, is to ascertain that language shift is taking place, and if it is, how it can be saved. Researchers have focused on the “determinants” (Gal, 1979) of language shift and factors most often cited include economic factors, institutional support and ideological factors. Other reasons/causes of language shift have been suggested, for instance, Niwaz et al, (2012) explain that “language-shifting is a complex and affected phenomenon, motivated and stimulated by accumulative force of historical, cultural, economic, social and psychological factors”. Put in simpler words, factors causing language shift range from cultural, social, political, and historical to psychological factors.

De Clerk (2002:222) asserts that language shift occurs when a linguistic minority comes in contact with a language which offers greater political and economic rewards or carries higher prestige. For example, the shift from Hungarian to German reported by Gal (1979) was due mainly to economic changes which had taken place in the small village of Oberwart. Gal (1979) explains that the shift coincided with “familiar post-war process of urbanization and industrialization of the countryside.” Also, a practical example of the factors causing language shift is recorded in Masruddin (2013), who informs us that socio-linguistic factors of bilingualism and language attitude as well as demographic factors of age and mobility are the trigger of language shift in Wosunese to English. Another instance is cited in Mitiki (1996), wherein he observed that bilingualism is one of the major causes of language shift in Chilomwe, in that the use of Chilomwe is said to be decreasing considerably as its speakers (who are bilinguals of Chilomwe and Chichewa) are shifting to Chichewa (towards monolingualism).

Another factor recorded in the literature to be causing language shift is religion. Although it is argued by some scholars (e.g., Maslow 1943, Nawaz et al, 2012) that the influence of religion (as one of the major elements shaping a society) on an overall social canvas is relatively feeble, present researcher supports other scholars’ (e.g., Igboanusi, 2009; Omoniyi, 2009), position that religion is a strong motivating factor of language shift, especially in the West African setting. For instance, Hausa, one of the sacred languages of the Christian religion (especially among the minority groups in the rural settings) is the preferred language used by the said groups in most social domains including the church or other religious gatherings. As a result, this has taken over the domains where their native languages were hitherto used. Furthermore, school language and government pressures have been identified as other factors causing language shift (Kahane & Kahane, 1979; Dressler & Wodak-Leodolter, 1977). Governments usually accord certain languages official status so that they are used in school and all government business. This consequently make speakers of other languages bilingual to enable them participate meaningfully in the life of the country whether socially, politically or economically.

Mitiki (1996) submits that other causes of language shift include the level of prestige for the language being shifted to and the size of the population of speakers who shift. He further explains that if a language enjoys a higher prestige, speakers of other languages may abandon their languages in favor of the prestigious one. A smaller population of speakers of a language is more likely to shift to the language of the numerically bigger group (Dorian, 1980; Huffine, 1980). While all the identified causes of language shift have been widely studied, Mitiki rightly observes that there is yet to be any significant success in using any combination of these factors to predict when language shift will take place. And that a factor applicable to one community has not necessarily been found applicable to another. There is, therefore, the need for the study of individual speech communities in order to ascertain what specific factor(s) is applicable to what community. Igboanusi

(2009) maintains that reasons for language shift within the context of West Africa are language policy and language-in-education policy (which favor ex-colonial languages and the dominant languages but not minority languages), intermarriages (which necessitate shift in the direction of socio-economically favored group), religious belief and suppression (which encourages the use of Hausa in Northern Nigeria and Niger, for example), internal migration, socio-economic and political factors, low status of many West African languages (and restricted domains of use) and language attitudes.

As interest in language shift has been revived by continuing research into, and public concern with language endangerment (Mufwene, 2002), two arguments on language shift in Africa exist in the literature. On the one hand, some scholars (e.g., Abdullaziz & Osinde, 1997; Childs, 1997; Githiora, 2002; Makoni et al, 2007; Spitulnik, 1988, Swigart, 2000) claim that language shift is towards urban vernaculars rather than English. On the other hand, some other scholars (e.g., Batibo, 2005; Nettle & Romaine, 2000) argue that what constitutes threat to the continued vitality of indigenous Africa languages is the English language. However, Igboanus (2009) who appears to agree with both schools of thought, submits that three patterns of language shift are distinguished in West African languages: 1) shifting from indigenous to ex-colonial languages (English, French, etc.), 2) shifting from minority languages to dominant West African languages (Hausa) and 3) shifting from minority languages to regional lingua franca (Yoruba in the south west, Akan in Ghana). These views would be further evaluated using Gbagyi to either further support or refute either of the positions based on the evidence that the study will present.

Furthermore, a number of researchers have investigated the importance of language attitudes and ideologies in language shift (e.g., Kulick, 1992). An instance of language shift caused by language attitude is cited in Mitiki (1996), where at some point in time in the past history, the Lomwe suffered humiliation by the majority linguistic groups of Yao and Nyinja when they migrated to Malawi; as a result, the Lomwe speakers considered their language as a hindrance to their social and economic success and, therefore, refused to speak it, and gradually shifted to Yao and Nyinja. Also, while it is said that positive attitude to a language is a stronghold of language maintenance and negative attitude a cause of language shift, many studies have reported language shift despite community members' claims of attachment to their language and cultural identity (Slavik, 2001; Papapavlou & Pavlou, 2001; Lanza & Svendsen, 2007). In such cases, scholars (e.g., Lanza & Svendsen, 2007) have used the utilitarian view of language as the explanation for language shift in such communities. A practical example is cited in Okoro (2018:8), who in her research found that despite the quest for modernization and the sweeping effect of globalization, Igbo people confess to and exhibit positive attitudes towards their language.

From the wealth of studies that lie in the literature, some works have greatly inspired the present study with relation to naming systems, particularly the works of Makoni et al (2007) Omoniyi (2009) and Mensah (2015), because they focus on the naming practices in the African and West African culture. What follows immediately is a brief review of these works.

In their study entitled "naming practices and language planning in Zimbabwe", Makoni et al (2007) sought to address a number of questions, one of which was to explore whether or not there is a form of language shift manifesting in the naming patterns in Zimbabwe. They focused on personal names and naming practices in Zimbabwe from 1960 to 1980. Results of their study provide empirical evidence to show that "naming gives significant insights into language planning, language ideology, language shift..." Also, the authors report that non-standard English has greatly impacted the naming practices in Zimbabwe between the 1960s and the 1980s, resulting from a continued use of non-standard varieties of English. Furthermore, the researchers state that the promotion of English in this community has motivated the spread, not of Standard English, but of non-standard varieties of the English language, especially in the area of naming. Makoni et al, therefore, conclude that there is indeed a form of language shift in the area of naming in the Zimbabwe community.

Omoniyi (2009) is one of the articles in the special issue of 'sociolinguistic studies' which was put forward to document research on language shift and to draw attention to the extent of this phenomenon in West Africa, with the view to halting or reversing it. Omoniyi, out of the seven contributors in this issue is referred to in this study, reason is that the present researcher considers his work the most relevant to the present study. In his research, Omoniyi locates language shift in West Africa, ranging from personal names,



popular culture to place names. The study also considers changes in the internal geopolitical configuration of states since independence. He, therefore, concludes based on his findings that language shift occurs from traditional names to imported religious ones which are perceived to be superior. With regard to the place names, the author observes the reflection of anglicized spellings or colonial landmarks.

Mensah (2015) examined the phenomenon of personal name borrowing in three linguistic groups, along the Cross River basin, particularly, Agwagune, Ejagham, Lokaa (minority groups), Efik (a dominant group in Cross River) and English. Mensah's work chiefly seeks to show the interrelationship and direction of influence between the personal names in the donor and recipient languages. The author observes that names, like other lexical items, are borrowed amongst these groups as a consequent of contact. He explains that, on the one hand, English names are borrowed into Efik language; that since the period of colonialism, these English names have been widely accepted and used amongst the Efik. On the other hand, Mensah reports that the (minority) languages of Agwagune, Ejegham and Lokaa are said to be borrowing names from Efik, a dominant language of the Cross River. The paper concludes that although name borrowing in Ejagham has been found to effect Ejagham language shift and maintenance, borrowing has been found to be beneficial and profitable to the Agwagune and Lokaa, in such ways that; it strengthens their socio-economic, political and cultural ties with the donor (Efik) language people. The author finds further that, the diffused identity of Ejagham (and Efik) on their children leads to weak ethnolinguistic attachment to their home culture, but leads to strong appeal to the Efik culture and language, which helps to strengthen ethnolinguistic vitality, promote cross-cultural attitudes and identity development. Mensah. Therefore, concludes that although the double identity is a subtractive force among the Ejagham, given the influence of contact with Efik, the diffused identity is an affective force in Agwagune and Lokaa people.

However, the present study observes that Mensah failed to clearly describe the sociolinguistic effect of name borrowing (from English) amongst the Efik people. And given the foregoing review on names, it is observable that a number of studies of African naming practices exist in literature, but they are almost exclusively focused either on semantics, pragmatics and etymology or on their grammatical or structural implications. These studies barely examine the implications that naming may have for language shift (this is the main thrust of the present study). Also, it is instructive to note here that although Gbagyi is one of the greatly endangered minority languages, belonging to the lowest category in Nigeria, there has been no study on Gbagyi language shift and maintenance in the sociolinguistic literature of Africa's languages. This is about the first presentation on Gbagyi naming practice, hence the present study is a timely attempt to fill the research gap, using personal name conceptual framework as the technique to explore the phenomenon of language shift in Gbagyi, as an attempt to averse a possible loss situation in the language.

### **3. Methodology**

This study is based mainly on empirical materials gathered from both secondary and primary sources. The secondary data comprise pupils' names which were randomly selected from the primary school registers in classes 1 to 6. While the primary data were names of old speakers as well as younger speakers comprising younger name-givers and adult and teenage name-bearers of the Gbagyi communities, between the ages of 71 and 78; 35 and 50; 15 and 30 years, respectively. The primary data were gathered through oral interviews carried out with the (35) randomly selected participants in the comfort of their homes majorly for names collection. These population sample was classified into 3 categories: 7 older speakers (of 71 to 78 years), 11 younger speakers (name-givers of 35 to 50 years) and 17 teenage and adult speakers (name-bearers of 15 to 30 years). However, these names data could not provide insights into the influence behind the name-givers' choice of these names, as well as the attitudes of the name-bearers towards their names and the language(s) of the name. Therefore, supplementary data were further elicited from the participants to determine the causal factors that underlie the name-givers' language choice in the naming practice, as well as to understand the attitudes of the name-bearers toward their names and the language(s) of the names. Therefore, following questions were posed to the participants to enable us to explore the potential for language shift and to ascertain the pattern or direction of the shift in Gbagyi naming practices.

- a) To the name-bearers:
  - i. What are your names?
  - ii. what are the languages of your names?
  - iii. if two, which of them is most used?
  - iv. which of the names would you rather be known by; why?
- b) To the name-givers:
  - v. what are the names of your children and in what languages are the names?
  - vi. Why did you give them such names and in such languages?
  - vii. Which of them is mostly used?
  - viii. Would you consider name change if given the opportunity?

#### **4. Gbagyi Sociolinguistic Situation**

Gbagyi belongs to the Nupoid sub-group of Benue-Congo family (Blench, 2013). Gbagyi is densely spoken in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, particularly in such states as Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kogi, Niger and the Federal Capital Territory. It is one of the Nigerian languages with a large population of nothing less than 8,000,000 (Filaba, 2012:1); supposedly one of the major Nigerian languages (after Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba). However, out of the three major categories of Nigeria languages, Gbagyi belongs to the third and last class, the lowest category which is grossly inadequately researched on, under-documented and under-developed. Gbagyi has two major dialect groups namely; Gbagyi-Nge and Gbagyi-Nkwa. Linguistic description of Gbagyi has been treated below a considerable level of interest over the years. Some few works exist in the literature (e.g., Hyman and Magaji, 1970; Shekwo, 1988; Rosendall, 1992; Galadima and Aboki, 2014; Blench, 2013, Dalhatu, 2017 etc.), yet, none of these works have gone beyond the traditional (peripheral) structural description of Gbagyi. And there is barely any scholarly attention devoted to the sociolinguistic aspects of Gbagyi. This has greatly impacted the maintenance and linguistic vitality of Gbagyi.

Gbagyi is one of the languages that is greatly endangered; one of the reasons is its vast mixture with the so-called major indigenous languages in Nigeria, especially Hausa (which is considered to command more regional power and of higher prestige), and English (the national official language). These languages, who belong in the first and second positions of Nigerian languages have caused the suppression of Gbagyi and the discontinued intergenerational transmission of the language, resulting to lack of proficiency of the language amongst the younger speakers. Also, being a minority language, Gbagyi is disadvantaged in terms of economic, social and political security. This has greatly affected the speakers' attitude towards their language, causing a shift from Gbagyi to Hausa and English. Another worrisome issue associated to Gbagyi is that its speakers' numerical strength continues to weaken with each passing moment. This may be as a result of the school and government pressures which cause the Gbagyi, especially the younger speakers not to use Gbagyi in all domains (except the home). These considerations are the pointer to the fact that Gbagyi is in great danger of extinction unless drastic measures are put in place, the first step of which is to scientifically ascertain the factors that trigger endangerment or shift in the language so as to proffer the most appropriate ways to reserve this danger (a case taken up by the present study).

The present study is, therefore, of great value to the survival of Gbagyi and its speakers, since it is said that the loss of a language constitutes a threat to the survival of its speakers, because it is in the use of a language that the speakers find a sense of identity (Mitiki, 1996:2). The choice of personal names is informed by the fact that "African languages' personal names provide details about what the namers felt was important" (De Klerk & Bosch, 1995), and most importantly, provide insights into namers' attitudes toward the language of the names (Makoni et al, 2007). This is because, bearer's attitude towards the language of their names is crucial in understanding the possible cause of language shift.

## 5. The Present Study

Analysis in this study was based on empirical materials gathered from primary and secondary sources. Data comprise names retrieved from the primary (1 to 6) school registers, and oral interviews conducted with both older and younger speakers of Gbagyi, as well as the name bearers. This was to enable us to understand the (motive for) language choice of the name-givers and the language attitudes of the name bearers.

### 5.1. Data Analysis

Data in this section were obtained through series of oral interviews with three categories of Gbagyi speakers: the elderly parents, the younger parents and the teenage name-bearers. The interview with the elderly speakers was to collect data about their names and to ascertain the language of their most used names. The younger speakers, who doubled as name-givers were interviewed in order to collate their names and to understand and explain their motivation for the language choice in naming their children. While the teenagers were interviewed also to collate their names and ascertain their attitudes towards their names and the language(s) of the names. Data from the (3) categories are presented in tables (1, 2, 3) below.

Table 1: Elderly Gbagyi speakers (71 to 78 years)

S/no	Name	Language of name	Most used
1	Tanko Zzagaje	Hausa + Gbagyi	Hausa
2	Knagyina Baba	Gbagyi + Hausa	Hausa
3	Zhiwodo Atuwa	Gbagyi + Hausa	Gbagyi
4	Aganyi Magakni	Gbagyi + Gbagyi	Gbagyi
5	Joshua Zakwoyi	Hausa + Gbagyi	Gbagyi
6	Fenu Zakwoyi	Gbagyi + Gbagyi	Gbagyi
7	Zayewonyayi Pakachi	Gbagyi + Gbagyi	Gbagyi

A total number of seven (7) participants in the category of the elderly speakers were interviewed in order to examine and ascertain the language of naming in the period of the 1940s. Data in table (1) show that names were given in the languages of Gbagyi and Hausa. We observe, however, that the language of the majority of the names was Gbagyi, while less than half of the names were given in Hausa. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that the naming language used amongst the Gbagyi as at the 1940s was predominantly Gbagyi, with a lower rate of the use of Hausa language. We shall now examine the extent to which the use of Gbagyi (and Hausa) has either declined or continued in the subsequent generations since after the 1940s. Also, as shown in the table, out of the four who were given names in both Hausa and English, only two were popularly known by the Hausa names, while the remaining two, including the rest of the entire population sample were all known only by their Gbagyi names. Furthermore, our minds were drawn by one of the participants (Aganyi Magakni) to the fact that his name was anglicized by the Hausa speaking neighbors to 'Agani Magaji' to afford them easier or Hausa-like pronunciation. This made his names (which were originally Gbagyi) to be used as Hausa names and are so used till date.



### 5.1.1 The Younger Parents: Name-givers (35-50 years old)

This is another group of participants made up of younger Gbagyi name-givers in the Gbagyi communities. The information required from them included: their position in the family, the languages of the names they assigned to the name-bearers, the reason(s) for the language choice, the name mostly used and whether or not they would change the names, given the opportunity as well as what the language of the changed name would be. In table (2) below, results for this category are presented.

Table 2: Name-givers (35 to 50 years old)

S/no	Family position	Language(s) of the names	Most used	Motivation	Change name	language
1	father	English + Gbagyi	Gbagyi	Loyalty	No	-
2	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	westernization	No	-
3	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	westernization	No	-
4	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	westernization	No	-
5	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	westernization	Yes	Gbagyi only
6	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	Christianity	No	-
7	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	Globalization	To be decided by the bearer	-
8	Father	English	English	Christianity	No	-
9	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	modernization	Yes	Gbagyi only
10	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	modernization	No	-
11	Father	English + Gbagyi	English	Urbanization	No	-

Data in table (2) are used to determine chiefly the factors motivating language shift in the naming practices amongst the Gbagyi people. The data show that the father is the major (if not the only) name-giver in the Gbagyi communities and according to results from the interview, it is observable that English and Gbagyi are the languages of their children's names. However, the English name counterparts are the most used. Giving their reasons for naming their children in English (apart from the Gbagyi names), the name-givers indicated westernization, Christianity, modernization and globalization. On the question of if they were asked to keep just one name to be used as their children's name, majority of the participants insisted that they would rather retain the English names, while only two participants obliged to retain only Gbagyi names.

### 5.1.2 The Name-bearers (15 to 30 years old)

The fourth category of participants were interviewed in the course of this study to obtain information about their names, most used, languages of their names, and their language preference of their names. This was in order to ascertain their attitudes toward the languages of their names. Data is presented in table (3) below.

Table 3: Name-bearers (15 to 30 years old)

S/name	Name	Language(s)	Most used	Preference
1	Lami	Hausa	Hausa	English
2	Loveth Ayenajeyi	English + Gbagyi	English	English
3	Zacchaeus Toknucelon	English + Gbagyi	English	English
4	Peace Nwami6wi	English + Gbagyi	English	English
5	Cletus Akunyaje	English + Gbagyi	English	English
6	Helen	English	English	English
7	Esther Manai	English + Gbagyi	English	Gbagyi
8	Abigail Pabelo	English + Gbagyi	English	English
9	Elizabeth Snusugye	English + Gbagyi	English	English
10	Ladi	Hausa	Hausa	English
11	Victor Nasara	English + Hausa	Hausa	Gbagyi
12	Theophilus Baba	English + Hausa	English	Gbagyi
13	Precious Shekwosa	English + Gbagyi	English	Gbagyi
14	Karen Shekwosa	English + Gbagyi	English	English
15	Adayilo Faith	English + Gbagyi	English	English
16	Shekwosa Glory	English + Gbagyi	English	English
17	Precious Bokosayi	English + Gbagyi	English	English

According to data in table (3), we observe that majority of participants of this category bear two names from both English and Gbagyi languages, while only one bears only English name and two, only Hausa names, respectively. It is also evident in the data that although most of these teenagers bear both English and Gbagyi names, the English names are the only names by which the bearers are popularly known. Their Gbagyi name counterparts are only used at home by the parents. On the question of which of their (two) names they prefer, majority of the respondents indicated their English names, while only (4) of them chose their Gbagyi names. This clearly reveals that, the Gbagyi younger speakers exhibit negative attitudes towards their native language; they out-rightly indicated that they prefer to be identified by their English names, especially in school and other public domains.

## 5.2 Analysis of results: Data from the primary school register

A sample of pupils' names collected (from a primary school in Gbagyi community: Dnakwo LEA primary school, Bwari, Abuja) to investigate the naming practices among the Gbagyi is presented. These are names of Gbagyi children in the age group between 4 to 10 years as in table 4.

Table 4: Pupils' names (4 to 10 years)

S/no	Name	Language of name
1	Agbmada Philimon	Gbagyi + English
2	Shekwolo Allolo	Gbagyi + Gbagyi
3	Marvelous Allolo	English + Gbagyi
4	Goodness Samuel	English + English
5	Rachael Titus	English + English
6	Desire Dantani	English + Hausa
7	Confidence Joseph	English + English
8	Jude Hosea	English + English
9	Gift Barnabas	English + English
10	Joseph David	English + English

The names in table (4) were randomly picked to analyze the current naming practices among the Gbagyi. We observe that only less than 3% of the pupils bear Gbagyi names with just 1% in Hausa language, leaving over 90% to the English language. Most pupils bear English first and surnames, only two pupils bear Gbagyi first name and two, Gbagyi surnames. Also, one pupil bears an English first name and Hausa surname. This implies that the present most used language for naming amongst the Gbagyi is English.

## 6. Discussion

This study establishes that the Gbagyi language, like every other human language has a naming system, which has been in existence and in active practice amongst Gbagyi people. However, the Gbagyi naming system is observed in this study to have been infiltrated by a vast number of loan names from both Hausa and English languages. Results from our investigation based on the four categories of sample population, particularly data from the older population (within the ages of 71 to 78 years) informs us that, although it was yet to a minimal degree, name borrowing had commenced since in the 1940s. Majority of the Gbagyi people in this period were named only in Gbagyi, while very few were named in Hausa. More interestingly, the Gbagyi people (including those who had Hausa names) were generally best known by their native names only. This indicates that despite the borrowing from Hausa, the Gbagyi naming system was fully practiced amongst its speakers (despite their contact with and the hegemonic influence of the Hausa as the regional lingua franca in Central Nigeria, part of where the Gbagyi are found).

Also, we gather from data of the younger Gbagyi speakers who double as the name-givers, that by the later generation (in the 1960s), the English names had started to penetrate the Gbagyi naming system, thereby

replacing the Hausa names, in that more of Gbagyi and English names were used than the Hausa names. What the researcher finds more disturbing is the fact that rather than Gbagyi, English has become the prevailing language in the naming practices amongst the Gbagyi. And giving their reasons, the name-givers identified the school, religion among others as factors influencing their choice of English language in their naming tradition. For instance, they explain that the children's non-Gbagyi teachers and school mates find it difficult to pronounce the Gbagyi names, hence they alternatively and preferably address their children by their English names. Responses from the name-givers also reveal that the Gbagyi who are predominantly Christians, hold dearly their religious beliefs and hence consider it as a point of commitment to give their children baptismal names which they believe are best represented in the English language. This is why all the name-givers (except one) declined to let their children bear only Gbagyi names; they fear that the significant meaning of such Christian English names will be lost without the English language.

Furthermore, the results of our investigation on the name-bearers inform us that while both English and Gbagyi are used in the naming practices among the Gbagyi, the people are popularly known only by their English names (this affirms to the trend evident in the name-givers' responses). This is in tandem with the children's language preference for their names. We, however, record an exceptional case of a few respondents who indicated that though they are popularly known by her English names, they desire that their Gbagyi names are the most known and used. Based on the name-bearers' language choice for their names, we observe that the Gbagyi younger speakers exhibit negative language attitudes toward their native language. Negative language attitude, therefore, adds to the list of the factors triggering language shift in Gbagyi naming system. Again, it is evident in the secondary data obtained from the primary register that majority of the Gbagyi children (between the ages of 4 to 10) bear only English names, except one or two of them who bear either Gbagyi or Hausa names.

## **7. Conclusion**

Going by the above discussion, it is axiomatic that the process of language shift had begun in Gbagyi since in the 1940s, although this process appears to have been gradual, it is certain that a form of language shift progressively exists in Gbagyi, shifting first to Hausa with an extension to the English language. The Gbagyi names were in popular practice in spite of the contact of the Gbagyi people with the Hausa people in the 1940s, but by the 1980s and 1990s, the use of Gbagyi names had fallen drastically, and is being replaced by the use of Hausa and, especially the English names which has greatly penetrated the Gbagyi naming system. In the present times, shifting appears to be even more prevalent, resulting to the gradual, near-total disappearance of the Gbagyi traditional names in actual practice. Also, given the manner in which the Gbagyi people freely choose and use names from other sources other than their native language, we conclude that Gbagyi operates "an open naming system". A system characterized by little or no restrictions, in which case, its users are at liberty to adopt names from external sources according to the sociological or religious or even gender specifications.

This study concludes also that the shifting phenomenon which was first initiated by internal sociolinguistic factors of bilingualism and multilingualism is presently being sustained by residual effects of post-external colonialism. This study, therefore, attributes the shifting phenomenon in Gbagyi to the coercive power of westernization (especially, education), Christianity, urbanization, modernization, and negative language attitude as the consequence of the social phenomenon of contact. Therefore, the present study supports the enclitic school of thought proposed by Igboanus. This is because findings in this study affirms to the fact that the shifting in Gbagyi can be described in two patterns: the shift to an indigenous dominant language or a regional lingua franca (Hausa) and a shift to an ex-colonial language (English). The use of Hausa names amongst the Gbagyi people may not only be linked to Christianity, because such names were taken from the Hausa calendar, given to individuals based on their day of birth and according to the naming tradition of Hausa. Therefore, the Hausa names penetrated into Gbagyi through oral speech because of everyday cultural contact. On the other hand, we conclude that the more intensive penetration of English names in the anthroponymy of Gbagyi was through Christianity because of mass conversion and baptism of the Gbagyi people into orthodoxy. Therefore, the Christian names entered the Gbagyi anthroponymy during

the centuries of contact between Gbagyi and the English missionaries, hence most Gbagyi children are given names that convey their bilingual background and emphasize the naming tradition of the English. This follows that the names of Gbagyi children show discontinuation of Gbagyi tradition as the names point to an adoption to English naming tradition. This shifting towards the English names, therefore, reflects the importance of popularity or religion.

## 8. Recommendations and Future Research Directions

Since there is an exceedingly widespread tendency for people to change one name to two or more names, the present study suggests that name changing towards Gbagyi should be employed as the strategy for the Gbagyi people to maintain the naming system and reverse the shifting phenomenon in the Gbagyi naming practices. We emphasize that names can be dropped, added or altered; this is usually an indication that the names no longer reflect the bearer correctly or appropriately. Therefore, Gbagyi speakers may have to consider a change or alteration of their names to ensure the implementation of the use of their Gbagyi names in all domains, without hiding behind the excuse of difficult pronunciation, as even some of the English names are more difficult to pronounce than the Gbagyi names.

Also, while we recognize that one of the manifestations of language rights is the right to personal name (which allows individuals to choose names for self or children), we caution Gbagyi speakers on the fact that sometimes, the freedom to personal name choice may pose a threat for preserving the naming system of a language, especially, when the people continually chose personal names from a particular language other than their mother tongue (MT). The Gbagyi community members must covet language loyalty from other language groups, e.g., Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and learn to use their native names more than any other names.

There is also the need for collaborative efforts of interested linguists and anthropologists to further interrogate the endangerment and shift situation in Gbagyi from a more general point of view, in order to take an effective step towards averting the shifting situation. The researcher also recommends that possible resistant mechanisms should be worked-out as suitable to prevent further shifting situation in Gbagyi. The stakeholders in Gbagyi communities, guided by linguists and anthropologists equally need to educate the Gbagyi community members on the implication of giving up one of their major tools of identity (the naming system) in favor of another one. Also, there may be the need for a comprehensive semantic/ pragmatic description of the anthroponomy of Gbagyi, because a better grasp of the deep meaning of the names would serve as a strong motivating factor to the name-givers in the Gbagyi communities towards using Gbagyi names.

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