

The Storytelling Tradition at Larteh, Ghana: Implications for Language Vitality

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines storytelling practices in a triglossic community, Larteh, in South-east Ghana, West Africa. The three languages which are in use co-exist in a triglossic relationship; each language plays defined roles in the language community. It has been observed that there is a growing gap between storytelling ideologies that link the practice to processes of cultural reproduction/intergeneration language transfer, storytelling has particular significance for language revitalization in the language community. This article demonstrates how a shift in the storytelling practices of the people is negatively impacting language transmission and how the revival of the practice could positively impact the revitalization of the Lɛtɛ language.

Keywords: Language, Larteh, Revitalization, Storytelling.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that at least, half of the world's languages will become extinct in the next hundred years. What this means is that on the average, a language is dying about every 2 weeks. Many of such languages under threat are those that lack a standard written form, a notable characteristic of minority languages (Batibo, 2005). The language of focus, Lɛtɛ, falls under this category of languages. It is a Kwa language of Ghana, belonging to the Niger-Congo group. Specifically, it is a South-Guan language, and akin to all Guan languages, with the exception of Gonja, it does not possess an official orthography (Dakubu, 1988). The death of a language means the loss of a dense cultural heritage and the unique cultural wisdom of a group of people (UNESCO, 2003). It is therefore imperative to devise strategies for preserving minority languages. Some initiatives that have been proposed include language documentation, new policy initiatives and new materials to enhance the vitality of these languages. This paper examines storytelling as an art which could serve as a resource for language revitalization. It assesses storytelling among the Larteh people of Ghana, who are a minority ethnic group in Ghana with a minority language, Lɛtɛ, and the need to preserve this aspect of their culture as a strategy for language maintenance. Storytelling performances play a "manifest" and "latent" function in society. Some of the manifest functions of storytelling performances are to entertain, teach morals, maintain languages and to help in relaxation. In addition to these "manifest" functions, storytelling performances play other "latent" functions such as helping the next generation grasp the language of their people better, teaching about the flora and fauna of the environment and indigenous professions of the people.

Data for this paper were collected through recordings of storytelling sessions among young and elderly storytellers at Larteh in 2013, with follow up interviews in 2020. We also relied on data from language use surveys conducted in the language community in 2011 (Bello, 2013) and 2012 and 2014 (Akrofi Ansah, 2014). The survey, among other findings, revealed the loss of language use domains to English and Akan, which hitherto were reserved for Lɛtɛ, an observation which is a concern for language documentation and preservation scholars (Batibo, 2005). This paper adds to knowledge about language documentation strategies which involves harnessing the language community by introducing their storytelling traditions which have mostly been ignored or mentioned in passing and the implications of further erosion of their language in this domain on their storytelling traditions and language. The remaining parts of the paper have been ordered as follows: the language, the art of storytelling, storytelling among the Lɛtɛ, the methodology, theory for analysis, findings and analysis and conclusion.

II. THE LANGUAGE, Lɛtɛ, AND THE COMMUNITY

Larteh is situated on the Akonno Hills of the Akuapem Ridge (Figure 1). Akuapem Twi is the dominant language spoken by the people on the Akuapem ridge, yet in addition to the Akuapem Twi, some Guan languages like Kyerepon and Lɛtɛ which are dialects of the Guan language continue to be spoken in some towns of the Akuapem state (Kwamena Poh, 1972).

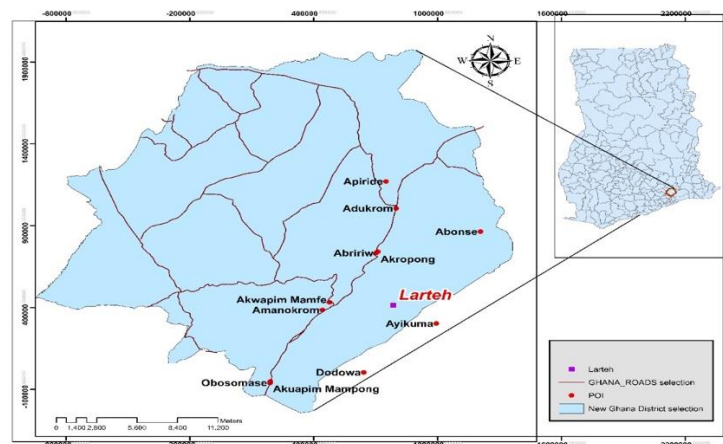


Fig. 1. Larteh and neighbouring towns. Source: Remote Sensing & GIS Laboratory, University of Ghana.

Christianity was introduced on the Akuapem ridge by the Basel missionaries whose language policy was to develop and use the local languages. Akuapem Twi was adopted as the literary standard for use in church activities in Larteh, relegating Lete to the background (Kwamena-Poh, 1972). They used Akuapem Twi in their evangelical mission work and produced church and religious literature in it. They also introduced Akuapem Twi in schools and eventually reduced the language to writing, with an official orthography and writing conventions. Ghana's official language and lingua franca is the English language which is also a compulsory subject in schools. Akuapem Twi is the language of communication, education, religion and trade in Larteh. Lete language is not written, it has no official orthography, and it is not used in any official function. In a triglossic community, three languages are in use, with their precise functions (Johnson, 1975). This is perfectly illustrated at Larteh. Brokensha (1966: 25) sums up the multilingual situation in Larteh in the following words:

Three languages are in common use in Larteh; Guan (*Lete*), Twi and English. Guan is generally the domestic language. At school, children learn English and also have lessons in Akuapem Twi because Lete is not taught at any school. Twi to some extent occupies the position of a prestige language. The people of Larteh call their language Lete but in the literature, Larteh is used for both the people and their language.

Language surveys conducted in recent times suggest that the three languages: Lete, Akuapem Twi and English are still in use. However, Akuapem Twi seems to be infiltrating domains which hitherto were dominated by Lete (Akrofi Ansah & Agyeman, 2015; Bello, 2013).

III. THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Storytelling is an important oral tradition that is common in Ghana (Kwakye-Openg & Gharbin, 2017). Allen and Krebs (2007:16) define storytelling as "the transmission of imagination, weaving our complex connections with each other." For them, we tell stories "to share, to teach, to bond; stories are our life force; stories are our existence". Collins also sees storytelling as "relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture". For him, stories are "socially constructed accounts of past events (Collins, 1997:7). De Wit (1979:3) not only regards storytelling as an ancient art, but as an oral art born of the experiences of men and women as they first became aware of themselves, their outer world, and the strange inner world each person saw with the eyes of the mind and could not help sharing with others. Older people have acquired knowledge in their youth. Many of these experiences were traumatic. They do not want their children to repeat the same mistakes and become victims in life. In this instance, De Wit believes that storytelling can act as a warning for future generations, cautioning them not to fall prey as their forefathers had done.

Storytelling is a form of oral narrative performance and like other speech acts, is a communicative system in which a social discourse takes place principally between a narrator/performer and an audience (Sekoni, 1990). His statement is affirmed by Opoku-Agyemang (1999), and she extends her argument saying "the tale may be seen as a social leveler in the sense that during the performance of the tale, barriers that would separate the sexes, classes, and age groups in other social contexts are broken." This makes storytelling a domain in which individuals in a variety of social roles are free to comment and make known their creative prowess in a society. In almost all communities, whether rural or urban,

storytelling serves a plethora of functions: social, mythopoetic, pedagogical, recreational, artistic, and aesthetic functions (Finnegan 1970; Okpewho 1992). Allen and Krebs see storytelling as so important that they describe it as “the very basis of human intimacy” (Allen and Krebs, 2007:18).

IV. STORYTELLING AMONG THE LɛTɛ

We reiterate that, storytelling pervades almost all societies in Ghana. Among the Akans, it is known as *anansesem*, *gli* among the Ewes, *anaanu asanei* among the Ga and *tɛɛ* among the Larteh. According to the elderly Larteh speakers who were interviewed, in the past, storytelling was told in the evenings, after a hard day’s work or at a funeral wake keeping. The Larteh are said to have a special liking for palm nut soup so much that it is said that when a person from Larteh sees palm fruit, they refer to it as soup. Such a person would say: *kye otwu* meaning “look at soup”. It is therefore no surprise that in the past, what informed one that a story was going to be told in the evening was the preparation of palm nut soup with snails. This was normally eaten with *fufu*¹, a staple among the Larteh. After the meal had been taken for supper, the members of a household gathered for a time of storytelling. While stories were being told, ripened plantain was roasted and eaten. This roasted plantain was considered as dessert. Stories were also told at funeral wake keeping ceremonies for the dead. These stories were also told with plantain being roasted and eaten by the people keeping wake. Singing and dancing play important roles in storytelling among the Larteh. These songs were sung to further a story or to arrest boredom. Singing and dancing during storytelling is not unique to the Larteh. Noss (1977), writing on the use of songs in storytelling among the Gbaya in Central Africa says,

Song, dance, and music are indispensable in storytelling, and performances without these elements are considered drab. But one should distinguish here between the intranarrative African folklore song, which is an integral part of a tale’s plot, sung by a character in the tale, and song spasmodically injected by the audience to arrest boredom. The intranarrative song may be performed by a character in dramatic moments, either as a dialogue device, to delay action, achieve a magical feat, highlight agony, or mark relief. Owing to the importance of song in narration, a performer among the Gbaya may apologize in advance if his tale has no song (Noss, 1977:138).

Yankah (2004), writing on folktales makes a similar assertion when he says,

Even when there is no song in a tale’s plot, any member of the audience, in certain cultures, may petition the narrator and lead a song to arrest boredom. The song interjected may have no thematic relevance to the tale at hand, but like the intranarrative lyric, it enlists total participation by petitioner, narrator, and the rest of the audience. Songs in folktales have simple choruses and lend themselves easily to communal involvement, drumming, and dancing. This compels total immersion by the entire congregation, who may provide background rhythm by clapping or beating on improvised instruments (Yankah, 2004: 271).

V. METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper were collected through recordings of three storytelling sessions at Larteh. The storytellers have been grouped into two: the elderly storytellers (aged 50-90 years) and young storytellers (aged 8-30 years). This is because there was a wide age gap among the storytellers. The elderly storytellers comprised of one male and three females. To contrast their art with that of the younger generation, the audience, who were made up of people between the ages of eight and thirty years were also invited to tell stories. In all, ten young people were willing to tell stories. Twenty stories were recorded in all: ten from the elderly storytellers and ten from the young storytellers. The storytelling performance of the old and young storytellers is compared in order to arrive at conclusions for this paper. All the storytellers, both adults and children, were interviewed after the storytelling sessions for their views on storytelling among the Larteh. Since LɛTɛ is not a written language, in places where examples have been given in this paper, Akuapem Twi orthography has been used. In addition, data on the status and use of LɛTɛ were obtained from language use surveys carried out in the language community in 2011 and 2012.

¹ Fufu is a staple in the homes of Southern Ghana. It is a preparation of boiled cassava and plantain.

VI. THEORY FOR ANALYSIS

The term social aesthetics is used by Khan (2009) to refer to the whole gamut of socio-cultural conventions, patterns, and practices that embody the appreciation and production of cultural norms and practices, as well as entertainment and social interaction among individuals or communities. This paper examines the social aesthetic paradigms of storytelling among the Larteh and considers the ways in which as a result of the erosion of these social paradigms, the art of storytelling is dying in the Larteh society, thereby affecting the vitality of the language. In applying this theory to this paper, our emphasis will be on the aspects of social aesthetics that impinge on artistic variation and creativity in storytelling and on processes of active audience participation in the delivery and interpretation of oral performances. The implications of active oral artist and audience participation for language revitalization will also be examined.

Finnegan (1970:15) says that “In oral literature, the bare words cannot be left to speak for themselves.” Social aesthetics is essential for the collective participation of both the oral artists and their audiences in the delivery of an oral art form as a performance. Inasmuch as material culture complements the social aesthetics of the performance, the concept of social aesthetics as used here derives from sociability mechanisms such as communal entertainment and collective artistry through the use of multimedia and paralinguistic resources (gestures and other body movements), as well as other shared generic conventions of performance. As Okpewho (1992:45) says,

It is in storytelling performances that we see the maximum use of innovation and manipulation. In most narrative traditions across the African continent, the storyteller simply has the bare outlines of the story and is expected to make the appropriate adjustments to the details in accordance with the interests of the audience. But the storyteller does more. To make the narration more vivid and convincing, the performer must accompany the words of the tale with the appropriate face and body movements to illustrate such things as fear, anxiety, delight and the behaviours of various characters in the tale.

VII. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This paper builds on Mariama Bello’s “Assessing language vitality and language endangerment of *Lete* (Larteh)” which was conducted in 2013. Even though her research was on language endangerment and vitality, she looked briefly at storytelling among the Larteh. In her research, she found out that storytelling was for relaxation and entertainment and stories were told in either Akuapem Twi or Larteh. She also found out that the structure of storytelling among the Larteh followed a similar pattern as Akan storytelling with the major characters found in other southern cultures of Ghana playing a prominent role in Larteh stories. The stories also had a beginning, a main story, interlude and an ending. She added that “Among the Larteh people, a storyteller starts a story by saying:

ɛsɔ tɛɛ! (Have/receive/take a story) (if the story is a *Lete* story)

Response: *ɛne sɔ* (we receive it/we are ready)

After the response, the storyteller proceeds to tell the story in Akuapem Twi or *Lete* but most of the stories were in Akuapem Twi. The proportion of stories in Akuapem Twi to *Lete* is about four to one (that is four Akuapem Twi stories to one *Lete* story). In the course of the story, there is an interlude (*mmoguo*) a song sung to relieve boredom. According to one old lady, most of the stories told in Larteh are in Akuapem Twi, but normally anyone can translate these stories into *Lete* language. From this confession and the content of the stories gathered, the language of most stories in Larteh is Akuapem Twi though there are stories in *Lete* (Bello, 2013:80).

Bello (2013) got her information from the royal family of Larteh. For our research, on the day we travelled to the town to do our recordings, word had spread through the town that researchers from the university were coming to do some recordings. This was because our consultant had informed them that we wanted stories which should be told in *Lete*. What had caused the spread of the news was that most people in the town had forgotten how to start a story in *Lete* so some people had gone consulting others they felt were more competent on how to start a story in *Lete*. As a result, by the time we arrived in the town to record the stories, most of the old people in the town knew that a story was started by saying “*ɛsɔ tɛɛ*” and the response was “*ɛne sɔ*”. Despite the spread of the information, some elderly storytellers found

themselves starting stories with *abrabra oo* (in *Akuapem Twi*) a number of times and were reminded to restart the story with *ɛso tɛɛ* by their contemporaries. When one considers the differences between the stories told by the older generation and those told by the younger generation, a lot of insight is gained on the future of storytelling among the Larteh people.

The most obvious observation was the inability of the young storytellers to tell a story in *Lɛtɛ*. These children, despite growing up in the town and having the ability to understand the language, could not speak the language, but they were all fluent in English and *Akuapem Twi*. This was not surprising as Akpanglo-Nartey and Akpanglo-Nartey (2012) in their research on some endangered languages of Ghana reveal that the Guan language is an endangered language in the Volta, Eastern and Central regions. They attribute the threat of the language and that of other languages to the location of these Guan speakers close to major urban centers which do not speak Guan languages. It is further reported that "...the closer a language community is to the major urban centers, the more likely it is to be endangered. It is further noted that the language in education policy of the Ghana Government is contributing to the loss of Ghanaian languages" (Akpanglo-Nartey & Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012:1). Their findings are also corroborated by Bello (2013) which studies language vitality among the Larteh and draws the same conclusion. With the vitality of the language threatened, one would expect the adulteration of the culture. As the Ghana Cultural Policy says, "It shall be recognized that the mother-tongue is a vital aspect of cultural identity and vehicle for the expression and transmission of cultural values" (Ghana Cultural Policy:2004, 30). As the Ghana Cultural Policy hints, the loss of the *Lɛtɛ* language will result in a loss of the cultural identity of the Larteh people since there will be no vehicle for transmitting their cultural values. This is affirmed by Tsunoda (2006: 162) who says, "a people's language contains knowledge of ceremonies, mythology, environment, technology, language skills, songs, and linguistic artifacts. Therefore, we can say that language embodies the totality of a people's past, present and future. Any interference with the language of a people leads to a loss of some important aspects of the knowledge base of these people." Harrison (2007:7) also believes that languages are repositories for cultural knowledge which implies that the loss of languages means the loss of treasures within these languages. The inability of the children to speak the *Lɛtɛ* language, coupled with their inability to tell stories in *Lɛtɛ* is therefore a loss of an important aspect of their storytelling tradition as without the language as a vehicle for transmitting the Larteh culture, the identity and culture of the people cannot be adequately expressed through their stories.

The inability of the children to embellish their stories with examples was also noticed. In telling stories, the adults used various examples to drive their story home. For example, in telling a story about how spiders always hide at the corners of buildings, an eighty-five year old woman, told a story of how Ananse, his wife and children cultivated a big farm which had a lot of foodstuffs in it. On some days, they harvested cocoyam and plantain from the farm. On other days, yam and palm fruit were harvested. The next day, they could harvest maize, cocoyam, and cassava. They also harvested these foodstuffs with some cocoyam leaves, tomatoes, garden eggs and pepper. One day, when Ananse's wife, *ɔkɔnɔre* Yaa, went to the farm, she realized that someone had harvested a lot of the foodstuffs on the farm. She became very worried as day after day, she realized that she would go to the farm to find out that more food had been harvested. On some days, a lot of cassava had been harvested; on other days, a lot of plantain had been harvested. The next day, she would find out that a lot of yam had been harvested and the next day a lot of maize had been harvested. She therefore decided to hide on the farm one night. At dawn, to her surprise, she saw her husband, Kwaku Ananse, tiptoeing and harvesting a lot of foodstuff on the farm and hiding them at a secret hideout. That day, he harvested some yam along with some tomatoes, pepper and plantain. After observing her husband for a while, she screamed "ei!! My husband, is that how we do things? We have all worked hard to cultivate this farm and you have schemed to eat the food alone." Out of shame, Ananse ran to hide at the corner of the roof of a house. That is why Ananse (the spider) is always seen hiding at the corners of buildings. The use of various examples of foodstuffs that could have been harvested from the farm makes the story easy to follow by the children who were her audience. All the examples of foodstuff given are foods which are cultivated at Larteh and used in meal preparation, therefore, by citing those examples, the children could enjoy the story better. She could have told the story by simply stating that Ananse and his family cultivated a big farm and Ananse schemed to enjoy the produce of the farm alone without bringing in the examples of things that were stolen along with the foodstuff he was caught harvesting. These embellishments served to make her story more interesting and to make it easier for her audience, who were mostly children, to follow her story. By doing so, the children learnt some new vocabulary, the names of foodstuffs in *Lɛtɛ*. The inability of the children to embellish their stories with examples also reflected a loss of one of the storytelling traditions of the Larteh as these embellishments do not only make it easier for the audience to follow the story, but also add colour to it.

As already mentioned, in "oral literature, the bare words cannot be left to speak for themselves." As Okpewho (1992:48) says, "In many oral performances, the words spoken are only part of a general

spectacle designed to please both the ears and eyes.” One of the ways in which meaning is added to the words is through the imitation of the movement of animals and actions of characters in the tale. Okpewho furthers his argument on the significance of dramatic movements by saying,

In the oral performance, the words are frequently given this physical demonstration and, in many cases, depend on this demonstration for their effectiveness. For instance, in describing a fight between two combatants, an oral narrator is apt to tell us of the action of one or the other: he stabbed him and stabbed him and stabbed him. Part of the background to the repetitiveness of the statement comes from the fact that the narrator repeatedly jabbed his or her hand (or perhaps head) while making the statement” (Okpewho, 1992:48).

Cancel (2004) makes a similar argument when he says, “Oral performance is the means by which numerous genres of verbal arts are externalized through the interaction between performer(s) and audience(s). There is no verbal art outside of performance. Storytelling, singing, formal orations of any type exist only in people’s minds until they are spoken, shared. The techniques employed by performers and the context within which the performances occur comprise the dynamics of oral performance” (Cancel, 2004:632). The physical demonstration of the actions of characters in stories is another thing that was observed among the old storytellers among but was missing in stories told by the young storytellers. In a story by an elderly storyteller, the effect of dramatization was portrayed. In the story, Ananse told his friend that he had lost his mother so the friend should accompany him to the funeral. Before the funeral day, Ananse ordered for kenkey with hot pepper and fish at the funeral for himself. When Ananse and his friend got to the funeral grounds after walking for many days, Ananse went to eat the kenkey and fish without inviting his friend to the meal. After eating the meal, Ananse came out of the kitchen with a bulging stomach and started singing.

see sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead
See sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead
see sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead
See sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead
see sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead
See sisensensi see see mena awuoooo
see sisensensi see see my mother is dead

The singing was accompanied by the storyteller putting the hands on her head as a sign of mourning and wiping of her eyes to wipe away imaginary tears like Ananse did. As the song was being sang, the audience, mainly children, imitated the storyteller by repetition. By this the children practiced pronunciation of some *Lele* vocabulary. After Ananse was done with the song, the friend told Ananse that he would never accompany him anywhere again. The dramatization of Ananse’s mourning song adds more meaning to the words of the mourning song and enables the storyteller to have the desired impact. As Okpewho says, “oral artists use more than their mouths to express their words; to consider the effectiveness of the words, therefore, we should examine the usefulness of those accompanying resources where such information is available or can be deduced” (Okpewho, 1992). Cancel (2004:634) also supports this idea when he says,

Although the term oral performance suggests a verbal activity, there are important nonverbal techniques employed by performers. These are termed by some “histrionics”, composed in part of gestures, mime, or the general acting out of portions of a narrative. Indeed, it is these very elements that create the greatest difference between a text of an oral performance and the actual event. Much can be communicated by the tone of voice given a particular piece of dialogue, or the acting out of activities in a tale.

The absence of the use of “histrionics” by the young storytellers therefore made their stories less appealing, like The *Larteh* eating their *fufu* without their preferred palm nut soup.

As mentioned earlier, language plays an important part in the identity of a people. In telling their stories, the old women used words such as *ɔkpaw*-hunter, *keeteebi*-rubbish dump, *obrodwo tosa*-roasted

plantain, in addition to names of animals such as *okreni*-fowl, *akpare*-hawk and *wé*-snake, but the children could not understand these words. The children could however identify some of these animals when their names were mentioned in Akuapem Twi. With constant demands for the meaning of words along with the inability of any of the young storytellers to tell a story in Lɛtɛ, one old woman got exasperated and sang a song targeted at the children.

Dwonsɔkruwa yɛna akeeteebi!

the urine/chamber pot is gone to the rubbish dump

Ebedentwu ooooo!

it can't be carried

Dwonsɔkruwa yɛna akeeteebi!

the urine/chamber pot is gone to the rubbish dump

Ebedentwu ooooo!

it can't be carried.

To add to her exasperation, as soon as she finished singing, the children asked for the meaning of the song. After telling us the meaning of the words, she sang another song in Twi accompanied with clapping:

mo aniwa afura ei!

You are blind

mo aniwa afura ei!

You are blind

mo aniwa afura ei!

You are blind

mo aniwa afuraaaaaaaaaaaaa!

You are very blind

mo aniwa afura.

You are blind

This immediate shift from Lɛtɛ to Twi is noteworthy, as it gives a clear example of the infiltration of Twi into the Larteh culture, even in storytelling. This old woman by referring to the children as “chamber pots which had been carried to the rubbish dump but could not be carried” was attempting to convey the hopelessness of the situation to her audience which was made up of elderly women, young adults and children. She found it difficult to fathom how people who had been born and bred in the town could not understand or speak the language. Owomoyela (2005) in his book *Yoruba Proverbs* gives a proverb which sums up the old woman's words. He says, “A stranger has eyes, but they do not see.” He interprets this as, “A stranger's eyes are blind to the intricacies of his or her new surroundings” (Owomoyela, 2005:103). In the case of this old woman, she was first of all comparing the children to strangers who had to be shown the way because they were blind to the intricacies of the Lɛtɛ language despite several years of living in the town. As a result, despite having a foundation in the language, they had no knowledge of the intricacies of the language. The old woman's song sums up the arguments of this paper that the future of the Lɛtɛ language and of storytelling among the Larteh is getting lost. Future generations of the Larteh will be blind to the language and to their identity and so will live in the town without their original identity. Those who travel will also travel without knowing their true identity.

“The oral performer must share the art, or there is no performance; and part of the sharing is in the response of the audience and the counter response of the performer” (Cancel, 2004:633). It was observed that while the elderly storytellers strived to involve their audience in their storytelling performance, the young storytellers did not include their audience at all. They simply told their stories and that was the end of it. The older storytellers, realizing that they had an uninformed audience, began to do what they expected their audience to do. They therefore interrupted their own stories with *tɛɛ gyi enufu, twu mo okosɛ* which means, “this story is a lie, tell it well.” This was accompanied by clapping. This is a sentence that is supposed to interrupt the storyteller when the audience realizes that the storyteller is over exaggerating, or the storyteller is not telling the story as they should. Because the audience did not know these things, the storytellers paused and passed those comments. To be more engaging, the elderly storytellers would interrupt by saying: *ka ɛne pɛɛ detwɔ*, meaning, we were all passing by. This was said to interrupt the story so a song could be sung to break boredom or liven up the place/audience/ for the activity/ performance to be more interactive or enhance the story. In one instance, one elderly storyteller said, *mikute mikute* (I'm passing through) to which the audience was supposed to respond *mikute mikute*, but despite repeating the response many times, on several occasions, the audience continued to respond: “*ɛne sɔ*”, “we receive it”, which is supposed to be the response to the opening formula of the story. The older storytellers also sang the intra-narrative songs alone as the audience did not know the songs. In

addition, the ways of clapping which accompanied the songs was not known by the audience so the old storytellers sang and clapped till the audience was able to join them in clapping to accompany the song. Songs to break boredom were also not known by the audience so the audience simply clapped along after they had mastered the rhythm that matched the song.

Another major difference between the stories told by the elderly storytellers and the young storytellers was in the kind of stories they told. The older ones mostly told etiological and didactic stories and often emphasized the morals in the stories when they were done with the stories while most of the young ones told stories of precocious children and stories that had a tinge of influence from African movies with precocious children. As a result, in these stories, Ananse was summoning spirits; he was being murdered and his ghost was chasing his murderers and all those who had done him some harm. The young storytellers also seemed to like the idea of punishment by eating someone's faeces, so anytime an animal offended another animal, the punishment for the offender was eating the offended animal's faeces. For example, in one story told by a young storyteller, the lion, who was king of all animals, asked the rat to prepare food for him. When the rat was done preparing the food, the lion told the rat to go and wash his hands in a river. Because rats walk on all fours, rat kept coming back from the river with dirty hands. All this while, the lion was eating the food, so on one occasion, as rat was coming back from the river, he caught a frog and hid it in his pocket. As soon as lion told him to go back and wash his hands, he threw the frog into the food. Since lion did not know what had been thrown into the food, he ran away. The rat ate all the food and eased himself into the bowl and poured red palm oil on it. He then called the lion to come back since it was only to scare him. Lion came back and ate the remaining food and after that, rat taunted lion that lion had eaten the rat's faeces. In another story, Ananse lived with an old woman who was very wicked. The old woman never gave Ananse some of the food she cooked. Therefore, Ananse got angry and decided to punish her. Each time the old woman cooked and left to wash her hands, Ananse would enter her room through the ceiling and eat the food. After that, Ananse would ease himself into the bowl and pour red oil on it. The old woman would eat Ananse's faeces thinking that was the food she cooked. Ananse kept on doing this till the old woman died.

Bello (2013), in her research, interviewed an old woman who told her that most of the stories told in Larteh are in Akuapem Twi, but could be translated into the Lɛtɛ language. Based on what the old woman said, and the content of the stories she gathered, Bello (2013) concluded that the language of most stories in Larteh is Akuapem Twi though there are stories in Lɛtɛ with only one out of four stories told at Larteh being Lɛtɛ stories. This research found out that her assertion that a lot of stories told at Larteh were Twi stories which had been translated into Lɛtɛ was true by looking at the intranarrative songs used in the stories. Many of the songs were in Akuapem Twi, with a few in Lɛtɛ, even though the stories were in Lɛtɛ. In addition, most of the songs used to break boredom and involve the audience in the storytelling performance were in Akuapem Twi, with a few in Lɛtɛ. This gives further credence to the assertion of this paper that the storytelling tradition is dying among the Larteh. This is because the stories; the songs that go with the stories; and the performance traditions of storytelling have not been passed on to the younger generation and are likely to be non-existent after the older generation has passed on.

At the end of the storytelling performances, the audience and the storytellers were interviewed about the loss of interest in storytelling among the Larteh. The young ones blamed the demands of formal education for their lack of interest in storytelling performances. They said they often returned late from school with homework, and in addition to that had to perform household chores. They therefore did not have time to listen to stories or learn how to tell stories. The older generation meanwhile blamed urbanization, education and religion for the demise of storytelling in the town. They explained that because of urbanization both the older and younger generations preferred to spend their time watching television programs or movies on laptops and computers, rather than engage in storytelling in the evening. Urbanization has also resulted in storytelling at wake keepings being replaced by the playing of recorded songs. The practice of setting fires to produce light and for roasting plantain has disappeared completely as light is now produced by electricity; people prefer to take soft drinks with pastries or alcoholic beverages rather than roasted plantain. Formal education was also blamed for taking all the time that the younger generation had for listening to stories. The younger generation often ended up in the boarding houses from the age of fifteen and spent little time at home during the vacation as they had to attend vacation classes. Before going to the boarding house, the younger generation spent most of the day at school and often returned home late with lots of assignments to submit the next day. Since all parents want their children to excel at school, no one interrupts their studies with storytelling performances. Finally, religion was seen as playing a role in the demise of storytelling in the town. According to the older generation, the younger generation and some parents saw storytelling as demonic and likely to transfer evil spirits into them or their children. They therefore prevented their children from partaking in storytelling sessions or singing songs related to stories. It is expected that through active participation of the narrator and the audience, certain cultural elements are passed down by the narrator, usually an elderly community leader. The audience learn the correct pronunciation of words, new vocabulary,

correct sentence structure, rules that govern the use of language and the traditions of the language community. By engaging the audience, there is transmission of culture of which language is a critical aspect. Reviving the traditional practice of storytelling in the Larteh community will go a long way to enhance language revitalization efforts, this time, initiated by the community members themselves. This could be through the introduction of storytelling as part of club activities, teaching sessions or the setting up of a storytelling center like *Atwa Kodzidan* at Ekumfi Atwa in the Central Region of Ghana, which was set up to promote the storytelling traditions of the Fante.

VIII. CONCLUSION

As Lord (1991) says, "A people's history and the fundamental values of its legal and social structures are expressed in its traditional literature." Storytelling is dying among the Larteh because they are not being performed as they used to be. When stories were being performed regularly, the next younger generation was learning the stories and how they are performed. Now, due to various reasons, the stories are not being performed as they used to be so the younger generation is losing the stories and the performance of the stories. The National Cultural Policy, in addressing issues of cultural education, says "The impartation of positive national cultural values and the sustenance of cultural institutions and practices shall depend on the education of the youth and the general public" (National cultural policy: 2004, 23). As this paper shows, the education of the youth and children about storytelling among the Larteh has been absent or woefully inadequate. As a result, the upcoming generation has does not have control over the Lɛtɛ language, which should be the vehicle for conveying stories among the Larteh. This has resulted in a loss of knowledge about the original professions (farming and hunting), and flora and fauna of the Larteh. In addition, the aesthetics of storytelling are also being lost. Therefore, the songs and storytelling performance that go along with stories are also being lost. Larteh storytelling is therefore losing its unique taste and place in society as the "fufu" will soon be eaten without "palm nut soup" and "snails" because the next generation is neither being taught about fufu and palm nut soup with snails nor being taught how to "eat it".

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There was no conflict of interest whatsoever regarding the research team or the participants in the conduct of this study.

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