

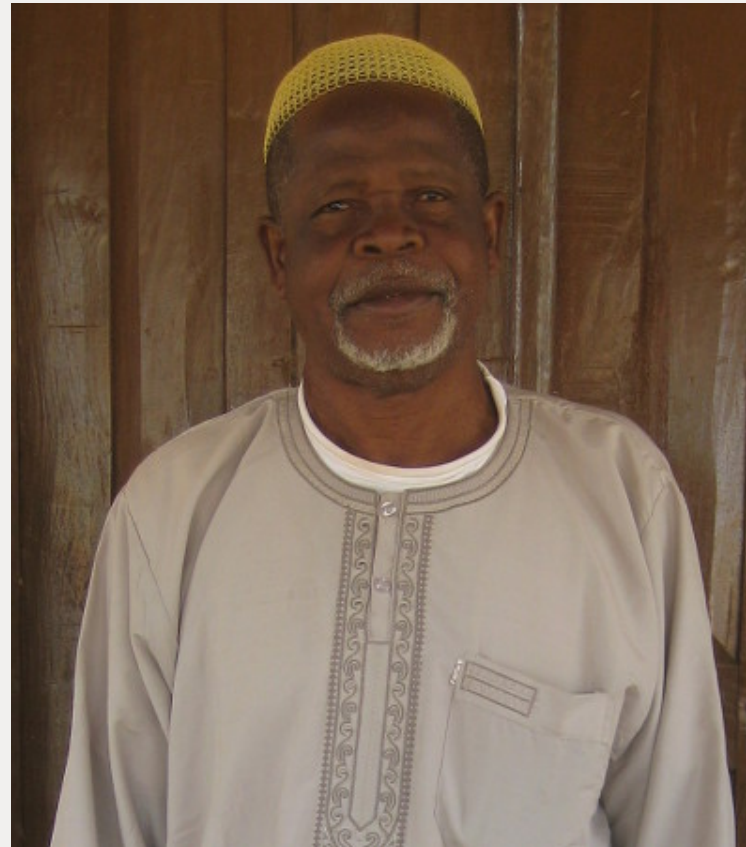
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGING LANGUAGE ATTITUDES IN A SMALL WEST AFRICAN LANGUAGE GROUP

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Study Motivations

- The work presented here is dedicated to the memory of Papa Saharabar (M. GOMON Idikoukou Yacoubou), who was the heart and soul of Anii language development for over 40 years, who sadly passed away on September 19, 2016.

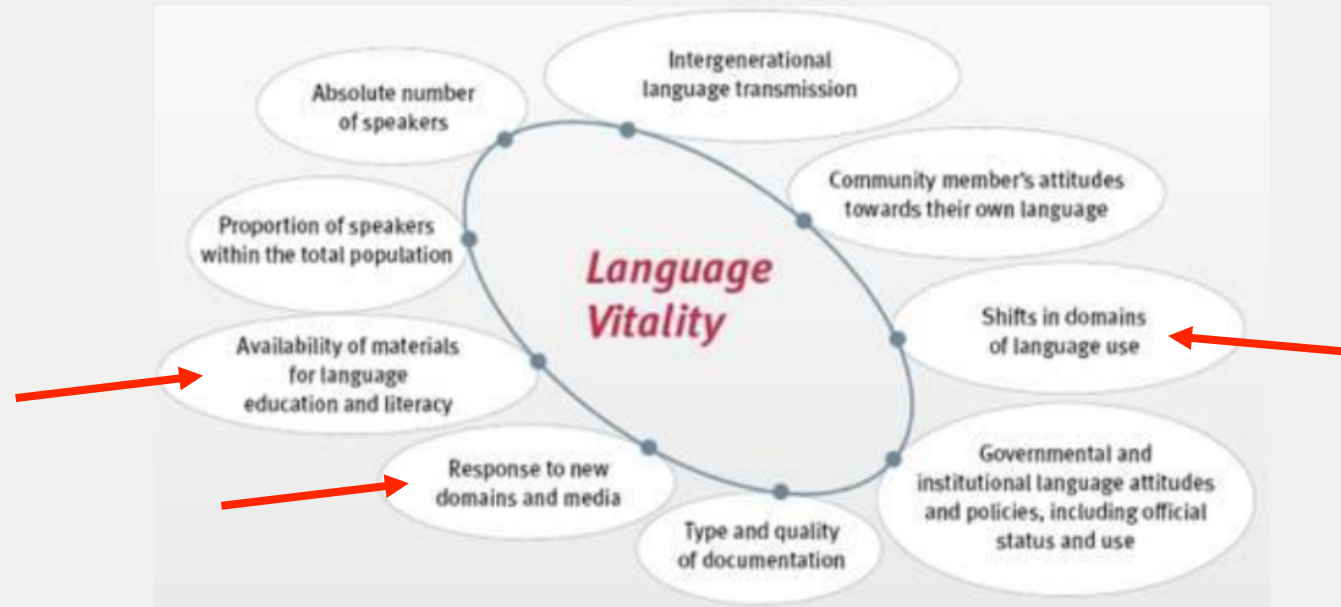


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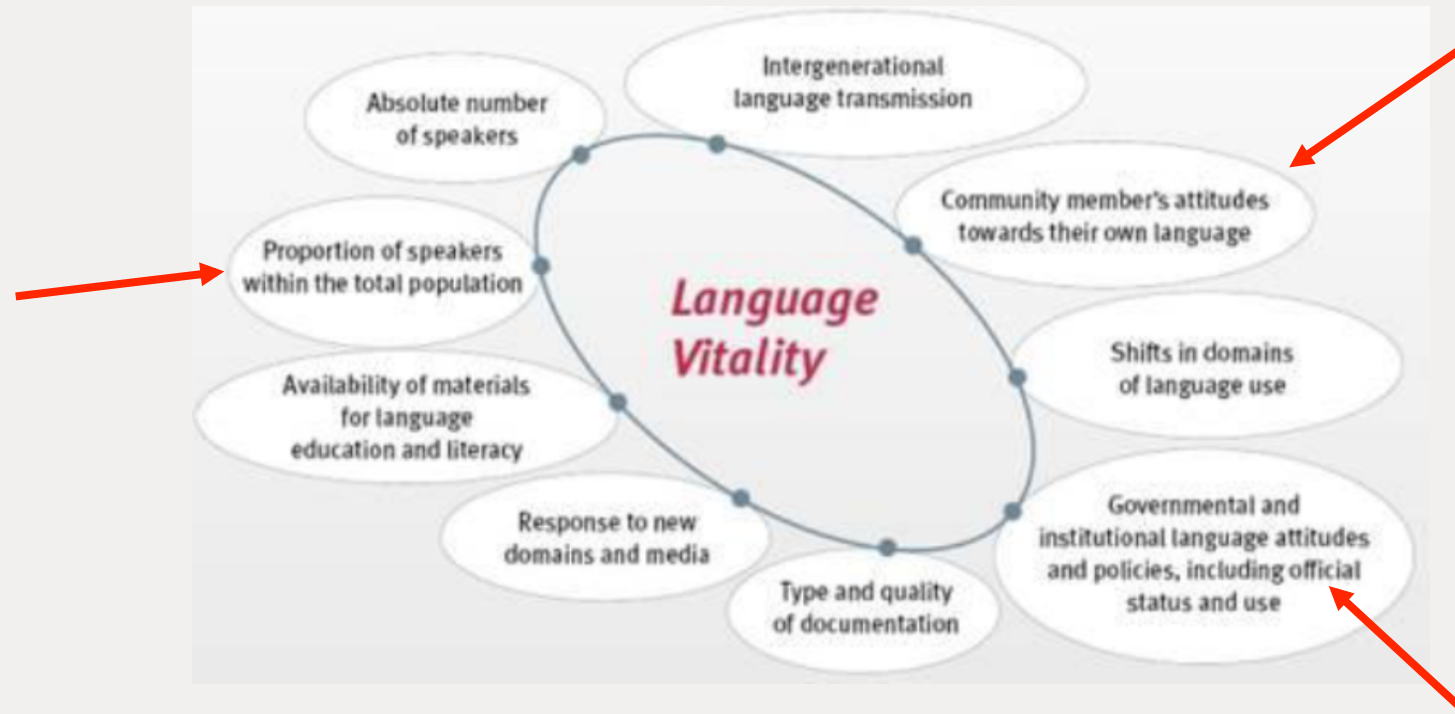
Study Motivations

- Work on language endangerment over the past decades (cf. Crystal 2000, Harrison 2007, Lewis, Simons and Fennig 2016) has often pointed out that a key factor in a given language variety's long-term sustainability is the **stability or growth of the domains of usage**.
- UNESCO'S Language Vitality and Endangerment Scale (UNESCO 2003):



Study Motivations

- Another central factor in language endangerment is how a particular language community views themselves and their language, and how they are regarded by surrounding people and by government officials, i.e. language attitudes.



Study Motivations

- Two important factors affecting language endangerment:
 - Domains of language use
 - Language attitudes

- Central Research Question:
 - **Can both of these factors be effectively addressed to prevent or slow down language endangerment and death?**
 - How do they affect each other?

Study Motivations

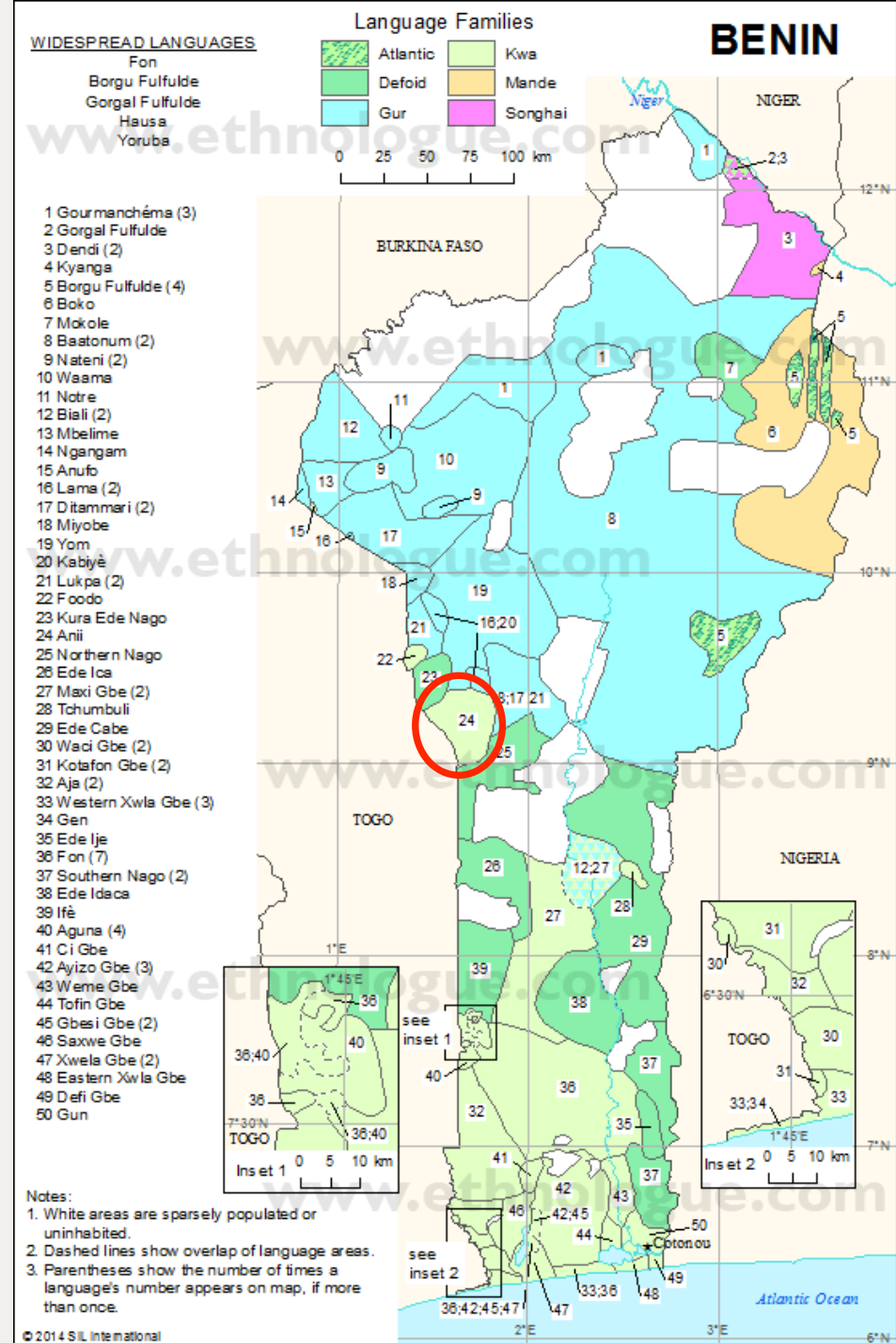
- Language development work is about creating the possibility for expanding domains of language use.
 - There are many techniques for doing so.
- Language attitudes are much less-easily changed.
- BUT the evidence presented here suggests that when domains of use expand, language attitudes can change as well.

Talk Outline

- I will present a case study of the Anii language, using historical knowledge and interview data to show how expanding domains of use for a minority language can lead to changes in language attitudes of minority language speakers
 - Background on Language Development in Anii
 - Language Development and Language Attitudes before 2001
 - Language Development and Language Attitudes after 2001
 - Wider Applications

Background on Anii

- Anii is spoken by approximately 50,000 people (my estimate), mostly in Benin, and some in Togo, West Africa.
- The Anii area is surrounded by languages with larger ethnic populations, and is not ‘important’ nationally.
 - 23, 25 = Varieties of Nago (Yoruba)
 - 20 = Kabiye (one of the two ‘national languages’ of neighboring Togo)
 - 17 = Ditammari (more active literacy development before 2001)
 - 21 = Lokpa (also small, but about twice the population as Anii has, with more vigorous language development initiatives)
 - 19 = Yom (regional lingua franca farther north, much larger-than-Anii population)
 - Mainly in Togo = Kotokoli (Tem) (regional lingua franca in the Anii region, promoted by the Togolese government)
 - More common nationally = French, and more southern languages have larger populations, closer to the seat of power.



Language Development in Anii

- There have been two distinct phases of language development in the Anii, one government-sponsored (starting in the 1970s), and one from an NGO (starting in 2001)
- These initiatives have promoted the use of Anii, but there have been mixed signals from outside groups regarding attitudes towards Anii.

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 - People from larger language groups have often looked down on Anii as being unimportant because of the relatively small population size. Many from the big cities have never heard of Anii.
 - The larger languages around Anii have in the past had more resources, better language development programs, more literacy materials, etc., which in some cases has inspired the Anii programs.

Language Development in Anii

- So, language attitudes are complicated.
- How have the two phases of development affected the formation of these attitudes?

Language Development in Anii

- Interview data used here comes from several group interviews conducted in the SIL Bassila offices with two different groups of people:
 - The SIL Bassila team, who are Anii language and literacy development workers. Most are between 20 and 35 years of age, though two are older.
 - The Study Group for the Anii language, which includes government officials/literacy teachers, and also elders interested in the development of the language. Most are 50-70 years old, a few are younger.
- Other data is from personal knowledge and Zaske 2014, which is a compilation of the history of language development in Anii.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- From 1972-1990, the Marxist government of Mathieu Kérékou pushed educational reforms, including intense promotion of local languages (cf. Zaske 2014):
 - Creation of “Linguistic Commissions” and development of alphabets (though not orthographies) for all Beninese languages.
 - Four big meetings of Anii students and elders (1979, 1980, 1982, 1989) began awareness, research, and promotion of oral and written Anii.
 - German anthropology professor Georg Elwert helped with language research and alphabet development, and continued to visit regularly from 1974-1998.
 - Government-funded local-language literacy classes (mostly just teaching the alphabet over and over)
 - A key figure here is Papa Saharabar, who worked tirelessly to train and guide literacy teachers, start new classes, regularly visit villages to promote literacy, etc. He was completely invested, voluntarily at first, and later as the official Literacy Coordinator.
 - Continued after government funding stopped with money from a German forest project. Some teachers continued teaching for free when that money stopped.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- From 1972-1990, the Marxist government of Mathieu Kérékou pushed educational reforms, including intense promotion of local languages (cf. Zaske 2014):
 - Some materials developed
 - e.g. a primer, a handful of health and development booklets, translations of prayers from Arabic, editions of two newspapers (1980, 1994), the history of the town of Bassila
 - Promotion of local-language literacy especially for those who had never been to school. ('Que les paysans avancent'...)

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- The government literacy programs had mixed receptions among the Anii.
- On the one hand, the French colonial era had just ended, and many people thought writing in French was enough.
 - An elder who was a young farmer at the time:
 - “When the first Anii language teacher started, at first, well, we minimized it. We didn’t think about other things, other than we already understood French, so why do they have to bring Anii on top of that?”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- The government literacy programs had mixed receptions.
 - On the other hand, the literacy classes were part and parcel of the government efforts to give power to the peasants:
 - The elder continued:
 - “But, at a time when we had thought about it, in 1983, the important people said, to not let yourselves be deceived by the powerful, you have to know how to write in your own language. Because the white people, they came to colonize us, they taught us things, but they wrote in their own language. And that’s when we all signed up, we started learning our Anii language. But I didn’t do it for long, I stopped.”
 - Many other interviewees shared how they or their parents started literacy classes for a bit and then stopped.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- The resources to support these government-sponsored development efforts were scarce.
- One of the first language development workers, IBRAHIMA GOMINA Mahazou, described his work with Papa Saharabar and KALAM Karim in the 1970s this way:
 - “The three of us, we started like that, and well, we had started literacy work in Anii. In the House of the Young [a public building in Bassila, the largest Anii village], there were nights, often nights because the farmers, well, they went to the fields, so it was the nights that we used.”
 - “And I had spent one year here in Bassila in ‘77, I was in charge of courses for the high school, we called it ‘students on a teaching mission’, so after two years of university, we did that mission there. So, it was really that year that allowed us to think a lot.”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- The resources to support these government-sponsored development efforts were scarce.
- Another elder described how getting a government position is what allowed Papa Saharabar to keep working after that one year:
 - “The revolution wanted the development of the local languages. And look, he was already on that path. The Colonel [Mahazou] was a university student, so he didn’t practically have the time to do anything for the language. Papa KALAM was a political personage, but at the same time interested in his language. So, no-one had time like him [Papa Saharabar] to work for the language. ”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- In addition, the classes seemed strange to some people. One of the young literacy workers, who was in school when Anii literacy classes were being taught, said:
 - “When he [the literacy teacher] came like that for teaching our older brothers and our mothers who sat around him, the students, we came to mock them...it was like that, we came every day, we watched them. When they wanted to start, we would stay in the back for the pronunciation of the letters, and we just laughed.”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- Though often short-lived, people's attendance at the government literacy classes did help in some ways later.
 - One young literacy worker said:
 - “What I learn a bit is from some people who say that it is thanks to Anii that they can do a little [reading]. When they buy cellphones, they can read the names when someone calls, they already saved his name. They look, they see oh, it's that person, it's that name. So, they never went to the French school...but with what little they learned with Anii, they can decipher at least their friends' names, they can see something on a road sign.”
 - In 2006, SIL ran a radio contest asking for people to share why they are glad they learned to read and write in Anii. Top reasons (also mentioned by others through the years):
 - Writing letters to friends/family for oneself
 - Improved math skills for business purposes

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- So, people were initially not interested in expanding the domains of use for their language, because of the hegemony of French in the education system and government.
- But government propaganda (and the untiring work of Papa Saharabar, the Literacy Coordinator) convinced many people, especially those who had not had formal schooling, to start taking literacy classes.
- The enthusiasm did not last, however.
 - Anii literacy was viewed as being less advantageous than French literacy, only for the less privileged, who didn't make it to school.
 - It was also viewed as being a little strange.
 - Anii had not yet successfully expanded into the written domain, since there were very few documents in Anii at that point.
 - “Now I have learned my alphabet, but what do I use it for?” (question asked by an Anii woman to Stefanie Zaske in the early 2000s)

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1

- So, the old language development efforts succeeded in some sense:
 - Helping people become literate who otherwise might not have been.
 - Exposing educated, French-literate people to the idea of reading in Anii as well.
- However, they only expanded the domains of use for Anii slightly.
 - People were still not regularly reading and writing in Anii.
 - There were not a lot of resources for those who were interested in using their language more. In particular, the only widely available Anii-language document was the reading primer.
 - There were a lot of technical issues with equipment that made making the materials widely available difficult.
 - There was still a lot of skepticism about the value of Anii in comparison with French and larger local languages.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 1.5

- In 1999, in addition to on-going literacy classes, the Swiss-funded local radio began broadcasting in several local languages, including Anii.
 - There was 30-60 minutes daily of Anii programming, mostly translations of the news and local announcements.
 - Weekly broadcasts in Anii on other topics (e.g. health, agriculture, traditions, etc.)
 - These broadcasts were crucial to language development, especially re: developing Anii words for modern concepts (e.g. ‘polio’, ‘condoms’)
 - This knowledge spread rapidly, since the radio broadcasts were very popular.
 - The station head and the Anii radio announcer became important local figures, and their support for Anii language development was crucial to later work.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- When Stefanie and Martin Zaske came to Anii country in 2001 with the language development agency SIL, they built on previous work, but with a different strategy.
- They focused on growing domains of use for the language instead of on trying to first change language attitudes.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- They focused on growing domains of use for the language instead of on trying to first change language attitudes.
 - Publishing Anii reading materials (starting 2004)
 - Published ABC chart, started collecting and publishing stories and proverbs in yearly calendars and little booklets
 - They promoted these materials by visiting village markets to sell materials, group reading of enlarged documents, attending community meetings with literature, etc.
 - Adapting computer technology for the language
 - They made available suitable fonts for the alphabet and introduced unicode, they introduced local desktop publishing, allowing feedback from test-readers, they created the needed Anii computer keyboard, and trained Anii speakers.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- They focused on growing domains of use for the language instead of on trying to first change language attitudes.
 - An Anii-language magazine (called *GʊGʊ*, launched 2011) is pasted up for free round-the-clock-reading in every village, and is also available on-line.
 - The topics covered (world knowledge, humor, children's page, etc.) are geared to a wider audience than just rural village populations.
 - Audio recordings of all issues is also available in the villages and on the internet, so people can listen and read along.
 - A part of this initiative was a 3-year training of 8 young Anii people in writing, editing and publishing in Anii.
 - In 2015, the team began weekly dissemination of illustrated proverbs to subscribers through the popular chat application WhatsApp, which now reaches over 330 phone numbers.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- A key element of the success of these new initiatives: making most materials available on the internet as soon as internet was available in the area
 - The magazine, *GʊGʊ (Gʊfaŋa Gʊfɔli)*: <http://revue-gugu.org/>
 - All the booklet publications are available on the internet and on paper: <https://www.gasana.org/?lang=en>
 - A newly-launched collection of proverbs, with multiple language translations, geared at the Anii diaspora, esp. kids growing up as immigrants in Europe, and at Anii high school students studying foreign languages: <http://revue-gugu.org/proverbs/>

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- This expansion into new domains has led to more positive attitudes towards Anii in comparison with French, and with other local languages.
 - Speakers of Fon, the main language of the southern Beninese cities, have commented to me that they wish there were similar resources in Fon.
 - ARACA, the association for traditional kings in the Anii area, has made language development a focus, inspired by Papa Saharabar who became Secretary of the Chief king after his retirement as literacy coordinator and continued his enthusiastic promotion of language development until his untimely death in 2016
 - In their meetings, the development associations for some Anii villages have also promoted the available materials with excitement.

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- The domain expansion is even serving as a way to rally support for further language development.
- The King of Bassila, His Majesty King Atchiba the Second, mentioned the internet presence in a speech at a meeting of all the Anii traditional rulers in the village of Saramanga in 2013:
 - “Our Anii language has seen a noticeable burgeoning thanks to the work of SIL, who fight night and day with a dynamic team trained for the task. We now have our Anii language on the internet, thanks to SIL...That is why we, the Kings of the Anii Cultural Area are asking you to wake up before it is too late, because everyone around us is tackling the promotion of their languages and cultures, why not us in the Anii Cultural Area?”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- One of the young literacy workers put it this way:
 - “Today, when we go out with people who had their language already written down, we are proud to explain ‘oh’, to say that yes, us too, our language, minority though it is, it can develop, it can go from there.”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- There is still work to be done, though.
- Another young worker, who grew up speaking a different language as well as Anii, said this:
 - “When I watch the Yoruba TV-shows, they showed officers who speak Yoruba, and who don’t speak English. In the classes, the Yoruba would speak Yoruba, not English. I asked myself why do they like to study in their language, and not in English like we study in French.”
 - “So, that’s it. One should fight for one’s language. But today, I had some luck. I see that, when I am in Anii, I write, but at home in Tchamba, it is a step backwards. My luck and my dream is to advance in Anii, and to lift up the language of Tchamba, too.”

Language Development in Anii: Phase 2

- The expansion of Anii into new domains has facilitated the growth of positive attitudes towards Anii.
- In particular, Anii now compares more favorably in speakers' minds to French, and to the larger languages they are surrounded with.
- The growth of positive attitudes provides more interest in the further expansion of Anii through support for future projects

Language Attitudes in Development

- This case study suggests that both expanding domains of use and improving language attitudes are effective in fighting language endangerment.
- It also suggests that these two factors are not independent from each other, and that expanding the domains of use of a language can lead to more positive attitudes from speakers towards that language.

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Extra: Language Development Overall

- Four main factors in the success of Anii language development:
 - Favorable government policies in Benin
 - Expansion of domains of use (esp. new media), esp. Radio Kouffe, *GUGU*
 - Wide availability and awareness (and cheapness) of new media
 - And interestingness (color, internet, etc.)
 - Key people
 - Especially GOMON I. Yacoubou (called Papa Saharabar), IBRAHIMA GOMINA Mahazou, KALAM Karim, ISSA Soumaïla, AFFO KOSSI N'KAN INOUSSA Foudou, Prof. ELWERT Georg, SOULE BOUKARI Moutawakilou, GOMINA Abou Bakari, etc.
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