

STATEMENT ON THE GUREN& LANGUAGE
DELIVERED AT BONABOTO CONGRESS, DECEMBER 2006

Background

Guren& or Farefari is the major language of the **BONABOTO** area. It is the sole language spoken in our three districts and even in a greater part of the Kasena-Nankani district in Navrongo and yet the language is not recognized as a language of instruction at the Basic and Senior Secondary Schools. Before I discuss other issues pertaining to the state of the language today permit me to give you a brief historical background of the introduction of the language in the school system for the benefit of those who might not be privileged to know.

The language was first introduced in the school system as a subject of study in the early 1990s at the then Ajumako School of Languages, Adjumako. Only two students were admitted at the time to pursue a three-year Diploma program in Guren&. There was nobody with a higher qualification in linguistics or Guren& to teach the students and as a result the students were guided by Dagaare tutors (our slaves). By 1993 the first batch had graduated. The School of Languages was also moved to be part of the University College of Education, Winneba in 1992. Guren& was then made a unit under the Department of Ghanaian Languages. The late Mr. Awuntige Ayamga was the only tutor in Guren& and was later joined by Mr. Louis Asakeya. Mr. Nsoh, Avea Ephraim who was also studying linguistics at Legon joined the staff as a part time tutor. Student enrolment was so low for each year registered students below 10 and in some cases below five. From 1990 to 1994 the language was being taught to students with scanty or no written materials and this made teaching and learning very difficult and frustrating for both teachers and students. Worst of all there was no standard orthography for writing the language. That is an approved spelling rule for writing the language to facilitate reading and writing in the language.

By 1995 Mr. Avea joined the Guren& unit in Winneba as a permanent lecturer, at a time Mr. Awuntige Ayamga was also released from the University by the University authorities. Mr Avea together with Prof. Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu (University of Ghana, Legon) made concerted efforts towards the development of the language particularly the orthography. They made initial contacts with the Bolgatanga and Bongo district Assemblies in June 1996 and held meetings with

representatives of concerned groups in Bolga. The outcome of these meetings brought about the formation of the Gurene Language Development Association (GULDA) in February 1997. GULDA was charged with the responsibility of spearheading the development of the language. Mr. Avea and Prof. Kropp Dakubu drafted the Gurene Orthography document in 1998. The two district Assemblies at the time Bolga and Bongo organized and sponsored a three-day workshop in Bolga in September 1999 and invited Mr Avea and Prof. Dakubu as consultants to facilitate discussions on the draft orthography document. GULDA and all other stakeholders such as the Catholic Church, Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy, and Bible Translations (GILLBT), the two district Assemblies (Bolga & Bongo), and some individuals participated actively in the discussions. This culminated in the final approved orthography document which was published with the sole support of BONABOTO and launched at a BONABOTO congress in 2000 in Bolga. The launch of this document marked the first official step in our language development process and paved the way for the formal introduction of the language at the Basic and Teacher Training Colleges.

The State Of The Language Today

Mr. Chairman, the current status of the language presents two contrasting faces—a brighter face on one hand and a gloomy one on the other. On the flip side of the bright face one of the major achievements is that through the efforts of Mr. Nsoh Avea, the Gurene Unit now under the Department of Gur-Gonja at the University of Education, Winneba now has three qualified young lecturers (including himself) to teach and research in the language. Also since 2001 Gurene has been introduced into the Teacher Training Colleges program as one of the examinable Ghanaian Languages. Thus, our students who used to write Dagaare or some other Ghanaian Languages with a lot of frustrations at Teacher Training Colleges exams is now a bit relieved. It is also worthy to note that quota for Gurene admission into the University of Education has been increased in recent times but sadly we do not get many applicants to fully utilize the opportunity. Significantly, the period from 2000 to 2005 has also witnessed an increase in the production of teachers to teach the language at the pre-university levels.

Mr Chairman, one other major development of the language is a dictionary project which started in 2002 as part of the Legon-Trondheim Linguistics project at the Linguistics Department of the

University of Ghana, Legon. This project is solely sponsored by NUFU through the initiative of Prof. Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu. The editors are Prof. Mary Esther Kropp Dakubu, Mr. Atintono, Samuel Awinkene and Mr. Nsoh, Avea Ephraim. Three Trial versions of the dictionary have been distributed to teachers and others to make comments to improve the entries. The dictionary is at an advanced stage (ready for press) and it is expected that the first edition will be launched by 2007.

Mr Chairman, let me now highlight some of the challenges at the gloomy side. One major challenge is that up till date the language is not examined at the Basic level (JSS) and Senior Secondary School (SSS). Concerted efforts have been made by GULDA and the Gurene lecturers at the University of Education since 2004 to let WAEC include Gurene as one of the examinable subjects at both the JSS and SSS levels, but this has not been possible. The main problem being that CRDD at GES is demanding for published books in the language for the various levels before approval could be granted. There have been a number of manuscripts written by both lecturers and students of Gurene ready for publication but non-availability of funds is the major hindrance. It is anticipated that BONABOTO and the district Assemblies can come in to assist in the publication of these books as a matter of urgency to facilitate the inclusion of the language at JSS and SSS levels. We all know the benefit that our students can derive if Gurene is examined at the two levels. Most of our students who completed JSS last year, their names were left out in the computerized selection partly because they did not offer a Ghanaian Language to make up the required subjects of 8 or 9. This I think is likely to cause a doom for all of us.

More importantly, the survival or sustenance of the Gurene program in the Universities is threatened because since university requirements specify that one must have an SSS grade in the language before one can seek admission it becomes difficult for us to survive since nobody offers it at the SSS level. For now those who get admitted into the University of Education, Winneba come through the mature students' window and they are mostly teachers. This is not good enough and certainly not a sustaining means.

Need For The Development Of The Language

Mr. Chairman, every language is of utmost importance to its speakers. Language is the medium through which the people learn and understand the world, and through it they relate to their families and friends and work out their ideals for live on daily basis. Speakers of Gurene or Farefari for that matter have the same world view and as such consider themselves as members of some global community- a tribe, people, ethnic group or whatever we choose to define it. In this regard, whether you speak Nabt, Talen, Nankani or Booni we all recognize ourselves as one people. Thus, language performs its function, as an identity maker of a group and the group must do everything to preserve it.

Mr. Chairman, of all the acquired habits of man, it is only language, that distinguishes him from other primates. It is language, which he needs most to function as thinking individual and a social being. There is no socio-cultural trait that does not involve language. Yet Mr. Chairman the role that our language plays in the day to day lives of our people has been grossly underestimated. Mr. Chairman if we intend to have a well-integrated Farefari educated person and not a black westerner; we must give high priority to the study of contemporary Gurene culture through the learning of the language.

Mr. Chairman, many people including some of us here have questioned and continue to question why we need to develop a language such as Gurene at the dawn of the new millennium where world languages such as English, French, German, Russian etc have taken center place in the wake of globalization with respect to ICT. Their position or thinking even become deep seated when they realize that Ghana has over 45 languages and Gurene happens to be among the minority and therefore the least on the social recognition scale.

Mr. Chairman, I dare say that their perception is carved out of ignorance of the advantages of learning our own language or rather an underestimation of our ideals as a people. In the wake of today's globalization we need to strive hard to assert our identity and not to be subsumed by others.

Mr. Chairman, the mentality or attitude in which our own people look down upon our own language with a certain amount of shame is very worrying. In some cases they regard it as not worthy for their children to speak or study until they have known English. This tendency is found quite frequently among both the elite and our un-informed brothers and sisters of our community. In some other cases some people get so educated away from their culture to the extent that they become uncomfortable strangers in their own linguistic group. They are embarrassed to admit they belong to the group. Mr. Chairman, this is what is termed linguistic imperialism and it is more subtle and depersonalizing than political and economic imperialism. Many Gurene speakers have been over taken by it and many more will fall victims if we do nothing about it.

Mr. Chairman, the way to free ourselves from this linguistic imperialism is not by throwing English overboard as an extremist would advocate. Rather it is important that we assert our true identity as speakers of the language and speak it with pride. Indeed, we must admit that we are at least bilinguals using both English and Gurene. English is certainly a universal language and there is no way we can afford to leave it.

Mr Chairman, permit me to now suggest the following steps for the development of Gurene.

- We must first change our attitude towards the learning of our own language to a positive one as a beginning point.
- Encourage and support people to write books and publish in the language
- The three district Assemblies (Bolga, Bongo, and Talensi-Nabdam) need to devote a percentage of their Common Fund for the development of the language. They can also support in the training of personnel for the teaching of the subject at all levels of education. Also, the Assemblies can help provide logistics for GULDA to revive its activities.
- There is need to identify NGOs that can assist in cash or kind.
- Teachers trained to teach the language must show confidence and commitment to the teaching of the language and not to teach other subjects.
- Identify and collect existing material in the language within or outside Ghana e.g. Fr Libel's collections.
- Promote music and drama to generate interest in the language and culture.

- Organize an Awards ceremony to identify and award personalities engaged in the development of the Language.
- Devote time on URA Radio for sensitization on the use of the language.
- Authorities in and outside the language area should endeavour to include language programmes in all programmes that affect the area (e.g. Poverty alleviation programmes etc).
- Encourage the use of the language by government officials especially at local functions or gatherings.
- Greater commitment of GULDA and BONABOTO in the development of the language.
- Durbars and Rallies could also be occasionally organized.
- A permanent secretariat needs to be established to be responsible for the coordination of language development issues.
- There is need for people to take up interest in the study of the language or linguistics at the University of Education, Winneba and University of Ghana, Legon.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen permit me to conclude with the proverb that ***Ba ka togeri ki'itiŋa yele pa'ala kuko*** since we are all Gurensi and certainly know what our Language have done for us and continue to do for us. Let us also be reminded by the proverb that ***Nera ka pa'ale a aseba yire gobega***. Thank You.