

## Linguistic Portfolios

---

Volume 4

Article 14

---

2015

# Paradigm Shift in Language Planning and Policy: Game Theoretic Solutions -- My Response to Dr. Sayers' Review

Ettien Koffi

St. Cloud State University, [enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud\\_ling](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling)

 Part of the [Applied Linguistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Koffi, Ettien (2015) "Paradigm Shift in Language Planning and Policy: Game Theoretic Solutions -- My Response to Dr. Sayers' Review," *Linguistic Portfolios*: Vol. 4 , Article 14.

Available at: [https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud\\_ling/vol4/iss1/14](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling/vol4/iss1/14)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by theRepository at St. Cloud State. It has been accepted for inclusion in Linguistic Portfolios by an authorized editor of theRepository at St. Cloud State. For more information, please contact [rswexelbaum@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:rswexelbaum@stcloudstate.edu).

## **PARADIGM SHIFT IN LANGUAGE PLANNING AND POLICY: GAME THEORETIC SOLUTIONS – MY RESPONSE TO DR. SAYERS' REVIEW**

ETTIEN KOFFI

The real paradigm shift that Dr. Sayers missed is this: introduce African languages in the Francophone world in middle school and continue with it through high school and college. Doing so will bring about another paradigm shift in mother-tongue education, namely, German and Spanish will no longer be taught in French-speaking middle and high schools in francophone countries. This antiquated practice goes back to colonial times and has no benefit for francophone governments or/and for the learners of these two languages. Students forget them as soon as they graduate. In their stead, I propose the teaching of African languages. This is indeed a paradigm shift. The old paradigm (which many scholars still advocate) is this: introduce African languages in the first three or four grades of elementary school.

Dr. Sayers was so busy monitoring and taking offense at the “disrespectful” tone of my book that he overlooked another important paradigm shift described in Chapter 9. Here is this paradigm shift: in the old paradigm, language planning was understood as the responsibility of big governments and NGOs. The new paradigm that I’m proposing is this: individuals do make a difference in language planning. This is a paradigm shift because since the 1960s, language planning has been seen as the prerogatives of state or suprastate agencies. The role of the individual has been diminished or ignored. Chapter 9 seeks to remind language planners that individuals do make a difference, and have made a difference in the past. So, this is also a paradigm shift. In reality, in his review, Dr. Sayers sought to sow a discord between my esteemed African linguists whose positions I challenged in the book and me. Little did he know that they are my friends and that we challenge each other, sometimes intensely but always amicably, at conferences.

Dr. Sayers’ review has reminded me of this essential truth: no book is perfect. I did not set out to write a perfect book. I did, however, set out to challenge the status quo in language planning and policy, especially in francophone and lusophone Africa. Since there is no word count and page limit on online reviews, Dr. Sayers wasted his readers’ time with beside-the-point comments and unfounded and flawed criticisms, which on the face of it appear scholarly, but betray serious lack of understanding of the sociolinguistic landscape in sub-Saharan Africa. It also appears to me that he does not have sufficient understanding or familiarity with the Game Theory in general, much less the two Game-Theoretic models used in the book. The first model, the Repertoire Model by David Laitin helps identify the best combination of languages that individuals in multilingual countries should know. The second model, the Predictioneer Model by De Mesquita, predicts (as the name indicates) the type of mother-tongue that most people are likely to agree on in education. The formula is clearly stated and explained in Chapter 2. It is a predictive model. All predictive models have flaws. Think of the flaws in weather forecasting, or in economic and electoral predictions. Sometimes predictions do not turn out as forecasted but this has not discouraged anybody from forecasting future events. Since these are the models that inform my book, it goes without saying that I’d rely

abundantly on the authors of these Game Theoretic models. Dr. Sayers took issues with this because I did not cite his favorite language planning scholars and anthropologists. The book has eight double-sided pages of bibliographical reference! Furthermore, I had to limit my citations to what is relevant. Dr. Sayers' lack of familiarity with the Game Theory caused him not to understand how the Predictioneer Model works and to make comments that are completely beside the point. It also seems to me that Dr. Sayers lacks proficiency with the linguistic situation of francophone Africa, and especially in Côte d'Ivoire. He displays this rather clearly when he insinuates in his review that Nouchi, a pidginized urban youth language, could have some role in the educational system. This betrays a naïve understanding of sociolinguistic sentiments in Côte d'Ivoire. Given his lack of/or insufficient understanding of the inner workings of the Game Theory or the complex sociolinguistic situation of the francophone world, Dr. Sayers would have done himself and the online readership a great service by refraining to review a book for which he lacks expertise.

Another criticism that Dr. Sayers levied against my book is about the reliability and the validity of the various figures used throughout the book, and especially those in Chapter 8. Again, this criticism is unfair and unwarranted because I was very careful in citing sources and even providing hot links to many of them. This criticism itself displays a serious lack of understanding of how Game Theoretic predictions are made. Professor Myers-Scotton, a sociolinguist familiar with the Game Theory has a completely different evaluation of my book. She concluded her review as follows:

In sum, this volume is required reading for any linguist specializing in language planning and language policy; however, to suggest that employing Game Theory results in a “paradigm shift” is too optimistic. Obviously, Africanists especially ought to read it. Because of its specialization, general linguists would find less to interest them here; further, it sometimes is heavy going. However, social scientists and especially those working on African data, whatever their field, would benefit from this study and how it attempts to provide a theoretical framework for predicting the best language policy decisions.

Dr. Leung (an applied linguist) and Tan, a graduate student in economics specializing in the Game Theory, teamed up to review my book. Here is how they sum up their two-page review:

In sum, we find this book to be novel in that it brings together two disciplines that are normally not discussed hand in hand. Through established Game Theory models, language maintenance and mother-tongue education are found economically viable and sustainable, which is not oftentimes stated as the case. However, the text at times reads disjointedly, and some calculations and statistics are not readily clear. Additionally, from an economics perspective, it is hard to state clearly where the payoffs in each game come from. We also wonder how these models would work outside of the African context, particularly with diasporic communities (e.g. speakers of pluricentric Chinese languages). We would recommend this book to those interested in the intersections of LPP,

language economy, and/or Game Theory.

These two summaries make it clear that the reviewers would have loved to see some aspects of the book clarified better, hence some of their misgivings. This is understandable. Scholarly book reviews are not meant to inflate the author's ego. Yet, I found these two reviews to be balanced and fair because the authors wrote about things for which they have undisputed credentials. Prof. Myers-Scotton's qualifications about sociolinguistics, the Game Theory, and language planning and policy in Africa are impeccable. Dr. Leung is an Applied Linguist specializing in mother-tongue maintenance in the diaspora, and her co-reviewer, Di Tan is an economist specializing in the Game Theory. Scholarly reviews like theirs deserve to be made easily accessible online, not Dr. Sayers' sanctimonious and irrelevant indignation about the tone of my book. Prof. Myers-Scotton's review appeared in *Language Policy* of July 18, 2012 and Dr. Leung and Tan's review is published in *Current Issues in Language Planning* of Nov 5, 2013. These scholarly reviews are available at:

[http://rezension.degruyter.com/show\\_rezensionen.phtml?freigabeid=6c534af1b24d743cee8379562820c7a4](http://rezension.degruyter.com/show_rezensionen.phtml?freigabeid=6c534af1b24d743cee8379562820c7a4). I encourage those interested in language planning and policy, language maintenance and revitalization, language economics, and African sociolinguistics in general, to read the book for themselves and come to their own conclusion as to why I claim that its findings can introduce a seismic change in mother-tongue education in francophone and lusophone Africa.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ettien Koffi** is a professor of Linguistics. He teaches the linguistics courses in the TESOL/Applied Linguistics MA program of the English Department at Saint Cloud State University, MN. He has written three linguistic books: *Language Society in Biblical Times* (1996), *Applied English Syntax, Second Edition* (2015), and *Paradigm Shift in Language Planning and Policy: Game Theoretic Solutions* (2012). He is the author of many peer-reviewed articles on various topics in linguistics. His primary area of specialization is at the interface between acoustic phonetics and phonology. He has extensive experience in emergent orthographies and in the acoustic phonetic and phonological description of dialect variation. He can be reached via email at: [enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:enkoffi@stcloudstate.edu).