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## CONTENTS

Legon at 60: New Directions for the Humanities  
**Amba Oduyoye** ........................................... 1

The Ethnopragmatics of Akan Compliments  
**Kofi Agyekum** ........................................... 13

From Centre Stage to the Wings: The Process of Cultural Adjustment in *Arrow of God.*  
**S.I. Akhuemokhan and R.A. Masagbor** ................. 39

The Role of Films in the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
**Ildiko Csajbok-Twerefou** ................................. 51

The Hamartia of Aristotle  
**Albert A. Sackey** ........................................ 77

Infelicitous Use of Anaphoric “THIS” in Undergraduate Academic Writing  
**Gordon S.K. Adika** ...................................... 99

“If your dress gets missing, I shall buy one”: Compliments and Compliment Response Strategies in English in Ghana  
**Jemima Asabea Anderson and Charity Afisem Asiama-Ossom** ........................................... 127

Othering Through Gendering Discourses and Patriarchal Hegemonies in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*  
**Victoria Amma Agyeiwaah Moffatt** ...................... 165

A Look at How Students in the University of Ghana Realise Final Stops in Monosyllabic Words”  
**Kari Dako and George Frimpong Kodie** ................. 181
LEGON AT 60: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE HUMANITIES

Amba Oduyoye

The Current curriculum of the University of Ghana, Legon for the Humanities may be accessed online. Whatever the organizational components of the humanities, one thing is clear: we are being called upon to re-think what is human if we are to offer new directions for his aspect of the university’s raison d’etre. This keynote is a personal statement. I plan to speak as I would do at a family meeting on the key words, Community and Imagination. Seeking new directions for the Humanities demands no less an effort than that of re-imagining the role of the Humanities in our national life.

Continuing Interest in Human Identity

In the 1970’s the WCC launched a study on this issue, simply naming it the “Humanum Studies”. It was directed by David Jenkins. This was a period of intensive studies related to Human Rights. The Programme to Combat Racism and the studies surveying the “Community of Women and Men in Church and Society” are but two of them. Reflective Christians were asking again and again, “what is Man?” For my part, I could not associate with any deliberations on “Man” that did not openly include woman. What I was struggling with was a restatement of a Christian anthropology.

A rule of thumb description of the humanities goes like this: “Whatever is not in the sciences belongs to the humanities.” Like all other generalizations, it is debatable, and we in the humanities are adept at debating every concept. The humanities, one could argue, are for plumbing the depth of our humanity in order to contribute to generating visions of how human life is to be lived. There are many views on what it means to be human. We are in the process of becoming human and we ourselves are responsible for the end product, if one can posit such an idea. Atheistic humanists operate in this light. Others have a human centred humanism that at the same time has room for extra-human influence. Its stance is that in the

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1 Mercy Amba Oduyoye is the Director of the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Accra. This lecture was her keynote address at the 2008 Colloquium of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ghana.
final analysis human worth, “human agency and human responsibility” for the sake of dignity and justice depend on human will and choices.

For the academic year 2007-08 the Centre for the Study of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School is offering a lecture series on the theme, “Rethinking the Human.” The series features the following:

- Who is the human in “Human Rights?”
- Or what’s a Heaven for Bioscience and the Alteration of Human limits?
- Humanity, Ethics, and Our Animal Nature
- Is there an innate sense of morality?
- The Resurgence of Imagination.

The culminating conference is simply titled, “Rethinking the Human”. This series focuses particularly on “religious, ethical and cultural perspectives within diverse historical contemporary settings”.

Significantly, we have found it necessary at this time that the university turns 60 to re-imagine what we can proffer in this challenge of rethinking our offerings in relation to studies in the humanities. Human beings are part of the animal world. We believe, however, that we are distinct, and the sense of “the other”, of a world beyond the physical, is a key marker separating us from the rest of the animal world. In the Judeo-Christian religion there is a claim that human beings are only a little below the divine ones (Psalm 8:5). In fact, the Hebrew says we are “a little less than God”. The Akan describe our make up as Body—nipadua, Soul—okra, which links us up with God, and spirit—sunsum, that which constitutes our individual presence. We human beings think so highly of ourselves that, often being so full of ourselves, we exploit the rest of creation with impunity. In the Abrahamic religions we pride ourselves on having been given the stewardship of the rest of creation. If in a university we want to call attention to the role of human beings in the universe, what are some of the parameters to be explored?
Dictionary Descriptions of the Humanities

In the older universities, the humanities comprise Philosophy, History, Law, Politics, Political Science, Literature, Linguistics, etc. Sometimes this discipline carries the name humanics and is described as “the branch of knowledge that deals with human affairs”. But wait: what do we have to study that is outside the humanities? The Cambridge International dictionary says the humanities labels “the study of subjects like literature, language, history, philosophy”, changing the list and the order only slightly from its more comprehensive sibling. Webster’s Concise Dictionary says the humanities consist of “those subjects as philosophy, literature and fine arts that are concerned with human beings and their culture, as distinguished from the sciences”. So, do the natural sciences and social sciences not concern themselves “with human beings and their culture”? But what includes all often ends up being nothing and I think that is the plight of the humanities. As we look at New Directions the issue of our identity and uniqueness will continue to haunt us.

Part of history opts out of the humanities; in some places when law quits it is forced to acknowledge its roots by giving at least a term to the Greek and Roman Classics, an aspect of the humanities that has stayed longest in the British universities. In this university it is even not very clear to me who belongs to the humanities and why. Law, philosophy, classics, language, linguistics, cultural studies, history, psychology, parts of social sciences and parts of African Studies. Do we offer fine arts? As you can see, I am coming from the fringes of academia. You know who you are. My task is to stimulate you to envision what you may become.

It seems to me that the real challenge we face is one of positioning ourselves in such a way as to be relevant to the task of human development in this country, Africa and the world. The human mind is endowed with the capacity to transform creation, and to tap all its energies and potential, we can split the atom, go to space and engineer not only non-living things but living ones too. We can clone and we have the potential to create life. Our exploits have reached a point that has pushed the current Pope to redefine the seven deadly sins, naming them tendencies and delineating what they
urge us to do as the real sins. The tendency to be greedy, for example, is leading us to the sin of environmental degradation.

To be human is to have the ability to create and to transform, and the will and discretion to utilize this ability. The ability to make choices is one that marks us off from the rest of creation. The issue is, on what bases do we make our choices? We in the humanities can position ourselves as humanists, concerned with and interested in human affairs. We can dispense with divine or supernatural matters. We can take a stance or “outlook emphasizing common human needs and seeking solely rational ways of solving human problems”. We can focus our study as an area “concerned with humankind as responsible and progressive intellectual beings”. Our humanistic offerings will not have to struggle with divine or spiritual things. We can do all right without religion, but whose Ghana will we be serving?

A long time ago Prof. Geoffrey Wainright of Duke University, Durham, USA, requested a paper from me in connection with the Humanum Studies mentioned above. My offering was titled, “On Being Human: A Theological Anthropology”. I could not do otherwise; I was born into a Ghana/ Africa that was theistic and remains so, if not more so today. The anchor of that paper was my belief in the oneness of the human family and the sacredness of the human being. My stance as far as the scope of the humanities goes is therefore one that says whatever else is excluded, the sacredness of the human must remain with the a priori affirmation of “the beyond” in our life together. Whatever African myths of origins one picks, the message is clear: human beings have a special place in creation and special links with a Source or Ground of Being which demands a special relationship of responsibility and answerability when it comes to other human-beings and the rest of creation. Our primal imagination moves us to see “The Beyond” as demanding that we promote community, what we have come to describe as “the communal ideology of Africa”. The well being of all creation is therefore in our hands. The basic human ethic of the “golden rule” should cover not only inter-personal and human relations but also our dealings with the rest of creation. The humanities, therefore, have to be concerned with all aspects of creation and should champion interdisciplinary learning. The ethics of euthanasia, in-vitro fertilization,
genetic modification of plants and animals and the exploitation of the rest of creation should all be the concern of the humanities. The least we can do is to ask questions concerning the ends of our acts so that in all things we can “proceed with integrity”.

The Humanities are concerned with human culture—all that we human beings have “cultured”, fine arts and language and protocols. What we have made out of and because of our environment and life together should all be part of our concern. We are duty bound to move generations to reflect on their choices and their actions. Humanities link chronologically to the departed, the living and the yet-to-be born. This makes both history and imagination the concern of the humanities. Without the past we cannot appropriate the present and without imagination we cannot transform our present nor strive for a different future. Concern with human culture and with our being as persons in community links the humanities closely to the Social Sciences, and that closeness is already observable in the choice that students make for their studies and their specializations.

Where are we?

University faculties have become more complex and more variegated. Students used to classify themselves as either arts or science. Then the Social Sciences waded in to muddy the waters. From then on universities and their faculties have become more universal in their approach to learning. Today even history at this university has one foot in social science, geography has migrated altogether and so has law. Those who study Fine Arts, Classics, Languages, Philosophy, Linguistics and Religion find themselves on the margins. Not only are they ignorantly considered as “soft options”, but economically they are not the money-spinners. Look around this campus: who attracts funds to put up bigger and better facilities? Check graduate employment opportunities. I dare not pronounce on this, but I would like to see research done on the employability of our graduates: what fields and what employment? Whatever the findings, we cannot run away from the fact that our humanity and life in community will be the poorer if we neglect the humanities.
As persons in the humanities, do we see our intellectual enterprise as a worthwhile occupation? What do we contribute to our life together as Ghanaians, indeed, as members of the human community? Humanizing humanity is a task we cannot avoid, and yet like most such tasks, it is a thankless job, taken for granted and disparaged until we hit a rock that tells us we have fallen short. How often do we say, “How can this happen? How can people do such a thing? What went wrong?” Every time we say in Mfantse about a person, ḕyε ne ho Nyimpa, we are saying that, that person’s demeanor falls short of what we in the Mfantse community associate with the identity and concept of being human. Given recent happenings in Ghana, Africa and the world, I would like to highlight three aspects of our human identity and community. These are language, religion and gender.

**Language**

If we do not have adequate language we cannot communicate effectively. Conflict resolution, mediation, living with tension, all require delicacy of language. We speak a lot about living in harmony, reconciliation, compromises, dialogue, but one word said too soon or too crudely can derail all sophisticated planning. The task to accept and live with multiple perspectives requires language that communicates powerfully, clearly and felicitously. “Language empowers and kills. Verbal language, with its attendant body language, can affirm, offer love, do ministry, and seek justice. Verbal and body language can likewise assault, maim, harm and kill. Language is essential in everything that we say, do, think, and display to others and ourselves about who we are.”

Information is power and how we transmit it affects all human and community relations. The technology for doing so is available but the content of what we transmit depends upon the humanities. What does it take to create the programmes that go on air, what quality and to what purpose? Airtime is available, but who created the human rights principles and ideals that are transmitted? What philosophies and ideologies are being created and peddled by whom, and to what purpose? All of this is the arena of language, not to talk of the language of symbolism in fine arts and dance. Our identity as one nation is at times strained when we
stray into the arena of which language/s to promote or to teach. Whatever
the linguistic vehicle, it must be able to carry what makes us distinctively
Ghanaian, for that will be our contribution to the pool of human culture.
Without our distinctive contribution we remain in the mimicking mode in
which our contact with western culture has tried to place us.

**Religion**

Critical to the humanities in Ghana today and tomorrow is the factor
of religion. Religious visions enrich our sense of who we are as human
beings. Religion is a two-edged sword that rules our individual and
sometimes our community lives and interactions. I am still haunted
by an article in *Cross Currents* by Julia Kasdorf that calls attention to
the very laudable religious ideal of forgiveness.\(^5\) You need to read this
article which discusses how the principle of forgiveness worked out in
an Amish community in the USA after an unspeakable atrocity had been
perpetrated in a school.

Peace and harmony in many parts of this continent hang on inter-religious
relations and the practice of religion by individuals and communities. Yet
this is an area that the majority refuses to study, refuses to apply their
rational faculties. They would rather mystify in order to hold others to
ransom and in some cases to exploit them physically and financially. A
radical transformation of our attitude to the study of religion has become
necessary—not only the study of the phenomenon but also how it is
utilized and how it acts in interpersonal relations.

The study of religion has to deal with real life issues. Human rights and
Social Justice have to have cardinal points in the Study of Religion.
Studying Religion is not just a study of the Bible, the Qur’an and other
scriptures. Religion is a very complex mix that defies cryptic definition;
all religions have a history, both in terms of the ideas and the practices.
Religions are dynamic as generations and contexts appropriate or reject
aspects and continue to transform them to meet contemporary yearnings.
Shifts of meanings continue to occur, so there is much to challenge our
intellect and our integrity in the study of Religion. Theology is no longer
the queen of the sciences, but it has to be a faithful servant to all facets
of the humanities. Religion could fuel our imagination as we seek new directions for the humanities in this university. We can begin even today with a research into the presence of religion on this university campus.

Mainstreaming Gender

Obviously I do not dare to comment on the whole of the humanities, but I cannot exclude a comment on the challenge of gender from the studies of the humanities. Again, once requested for a paper on the Christian doctrine of Man, I agreed to write only if my formulation of the subject as “Feminism: a pre-condition for a Christian anthropology” would be accepted. How could I forget what the early church fathers had to say about women and “malestream” church theology’s approach to gender? How could I observe silence when I had just finished reading the Amish Story and am still wearing my black prayer bangles in memory of the so-called ritual murders of women in this country? The humanities have to deal with the human, the anthropos, the human being, and not just vir, aner and man as in the human male. All studies of the humanities have to be inclusive.

Contemporary Ghana is a sphere of gender sensitivity and has many institutions that advocate gender justice. Gender is not the same as women, but by and large the issue is justice for women and an even playfield for women and men. There is no law against the education of women; in fact, there is a lot of pro-active rhetoric and even structures and provisions to encourage and enhance the education of women. “Send your girl child to school” evoked remarks like “who is the educated girl going to marry if the boy child is not sent to school?” as if anyone is saying sending girls to school entails keeping boys out of school or even that the educated girl child has to marry. Some even said the boy child has become an endangered specie. This dualistic way of reasoning is not serving us well. In a world where women constitute the only non-minority group that suffers bias regardless of cultural context, we cannot think of new directions in the humanities without intentionally reshaping our epistemics to include women’s perspectives and experiences.
The programmes offered in our tertiary institutions have to consciously include the challenge of building a nation of women and men participating according to their ability. The curricula, especially in the humanities and social sciences, should incorporate issues raised by women. Scientific issues have to have women’s perspectives. How a woman approaches crop science may differ from the concerns of a man. How HIV affects a woman may differ from how it affects a man. Most urgently needed is a study of masculinity.

Specific research into women in religion, women in history, women in law, women in culture, women in politics, women in the media and so on will yield material for policy oriented research that may feed into the crafting of legislation. Several NGO’s have been researching on women in Ghanaian life; this has to be mainstreamed and supported in the context of tertiary education. The challenge is to receive women’s experiences, lives and reflections as valid locus of epistemology. Reflections based on women’s experience have yielded ideals such as inclusivity, respect of difference and plurality. These are facets of be-ing human that the humanities cannot ignore.

Women’s leadership is being probed and the work that led to the Domestic Violence Act featured a lot of women’s input. What has become evident is that all these efforts are to be formally inserted into tertiary education and funded. Individual lecturers have factored women and gender concerns into their offerings and many students are interested in researching women and/or gendered parameters in church, society, local history, the origins of cultural practices, etc. Tertiary education should be poised to give formal and effective support to this search. We have here a mine of intellectual concerns to offer students to grapple with. It is an urgent area and one that affects everybody.

Continuing Transforming Visions and Imagery

Having commented on the areas of the humanities that I have been most concerned with, let me flag the fact that several papers of this colloquium will direct your attention to others. From Church History we in Christian studies shifted to the History of Christianity, Historiography
keeps changing and we need to probe the reasons for the changes and the purposes too. History too is dynamic; it presents us with aspects of continuity and changes. We may describe the past, but what we find can lead us to theories about our human be-ing. In the humanities we need those who will diligently foster our historical consciousness, because it is indispensable that we should know that ideas are historically situated. We need to be aware of the cultural conditioning that created these ideas and circumstances. To proceed with integrity, we should never ignore the Akan proverb, *Asem ba a na wobu be*.... There is no smoke without a fire.

We used to study English Literature but had to shift to “Literature in English” so we may study what our own African creative writers have contributed to that language. We studied Classics and Modern languages. Today African languages, including Arabic and Swahili, feature in our offerings. How are we going to communicate effectively in the African Union if we cannot talk to one another? Interpreters and translators are not born; they are made, and who but the humanities can lay the ground for this service?

**What is at Stake**

We cannot deal with human rights without coming up against cultural and religious differences. The moral and ethical arguments in sciences, philosophy and psychology are all part of the task of the humanities. The religious argument that sympathy and compassion are defining characteristics of be-ing human should direct us to concerns beyond the boundaries of Ghana and Africa. After all, do we not have an Akan proverb that says there are no boundaries to humanity? There is a permanent challenge in the humanities between “the one” and “the many”, pluralism versus a monolithic and uni-vocal stance.

Debates on brain-drain become issues of migration in the context of globalization. How can you globalize the economy without globalizing politics and the movement of human beings? Whatever touches human beings is the concern of the humanities and we need imagination to make our contributions. The human factor is an inescapable one in life and we need imagination to dream up what it means to be human and to structure
how to locate that within the study of universal factors. “All our human worlds are products of our human imagination.”

This 60th anniversary of the University of Ghana, Legon, affords us the opportunity to exercise our imagination. When I came to Legon in September of 1959, almost half a century ago, there were 40 of us women at what we were to name Volta Hall. The first court was ready; the second court was being built. Volta Hall has changed; the women have spilled over into other halls. Legon has changed physically and qualitatively. Academic offerings that did not exist, like computer studies, are now commonplace. This colloquium is an occasion for us to dream creatively so that come the next 25 years those walking these streets and corridors will have a quality of life that befits our human nature. In Christianity we see human beings as made in the image of God, only a step away from the divine, and the Akan say Nipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, thus fit for all respect and honour. We need to work towards creating an environment that will make this glorious affirmation a reality in our future. New directions for the humanities will have to be anchored firmly on our growing understanding of what it means to be fully and truly human.

I thank you.

Endnotes

The Ethnopragmatics of Akan Compliments

Kofi Agyekum

Abstract

In this paper I examine compliments in Akan from an ethnopragmatic point of view. I analyse Akan compliments within the framework of politeness. I consider the ethnographic situations within the Akan society where compliments are employed. The areas where my data was collected include Akan adverts, Akan football commentary, classrooms, praise poetry for chiefs, public speeches, folksongs, dance and hunting. I look at types of compliments, namely, (1) appearance, (2) character and comportment, (3) performance and (4) possession. I also examine the structure and language of compliments, response to compliments and functions of compliments.

1. Introduction and Theoretical Framework: Compliments and Politeness

I will discuss Akan compliments under the theory of politeness as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987) and other scholars like Leech (1983), Ide (1989), Fasold (1990), Fraser (1990), Bonvillain (1993), Holmes (1995), Foley (1997) and Kasper (1997). I will briefly consider politeness and link it with compliments. Politeness has been widely discussed in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, anthropology and social psychology. Politeness is defined as proper social conduct and the tactful consideration for others. Linguistic politeness is the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to addressees. It refers to ways in which linguistic actions and expressions are properly and appropriately carried out in social interaction so as to be respectful and avoid offensive and face threatening acts (Grundy 2000:146).

Brown and Levinson (1987:101-211) discuss positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies include statements of friendship, solidarity and compliments, and they list 15 strategies under positive politeness. These include: attend to H’s interests, needs and wants; use
solidarity and in-group identity markers; be optimistic; offer or promise; exaggerate interest in H and his interests; avoid disagreements and joke. We will analyse Akan compliments along the lines of some of these. One major aspect of positive politeness is exaggeration that serves as a marker of face-redress, and this is manifested in Akan compliments.

Negative politeness is oriented towards the addressee’s negative face and his desire for autonomy (Brown and Levinson 1987: 129-211, Foley 1997: 272). Negative politeness strategies typically emphasise avoidance and minimizing of imposition and so the speaker minimally interferes with the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987: 129-211) discuss ten strategies of negative politeness, but they are outside the main purview of this paper. Politeness is more appropriately seen as adherence to social norms and values.

It is argued that the Brown and Levinson model of face is an exponent of Western culture, which focuses too much on individualistic needs (see Kasper 1997:379). The common objection to Brown and Levinson’s model is that the intended universality of the theory is untenable. In discussing face wants, Brown and Levinson emphasized the speaker, the addressee, the individual and his/her private sphere (singular). Goffman’s (1967) view of face is more compatible with non-Western face constructs, and this is exactly what pertains in the Akan face concept. Goffman’s is a sociological notion that sees face as public property on loan from the society rather than as personal property. Akans place much premium on communalistic needs and on the Akan face concept, and Akan compliment expressions are based on these communal and societal needs.

While Akans share standards of “societal behaviour” recognizable to the social distribution of responsibility, Brown and Levinson’s face theory focuses strongly on individual behaviour and responsibility. The Akan socio-cultural concept includes a folk audience that shares responsibility for the fulfillment of the act to which the speaker of face expressions commits himself/herself. The face indexicalises and reproduces social and pragmatic issues that affect the entire society. The perlocutionary effect of a compliment transcends the individual to his family, cronies and society. Matsumoto (1988) and Ide (1989) complain that Brown and
Levinson’s “face constructs” do not capture the principles of Japanese interaction because they do not include the acknowledgement of societal relations. Gu (1990) shares the same sentiments and argues that among the Chinese, politeness is more appropriately seen as adherence to social norms than as attending to the individual’s face wants.

Compliment strategies avoid conflict and provide harmony among communicative participants and aim at politeness. Akan compliment expressions strengthen the communal aspect of Akan culture. This tallies with Ide’s (1989:225) view of linguistic politeness as being the “language usage associated with smooth communication, realised through (1) the speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favourably by the addressee and (2) the speaker’s choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities”. It is the first part of Ide’s definition that deals with compliments.

Compliments fall under such ethnographic contexts as setting, participants and genres. In the case of participants we could have upward compliments where the compliment comes from a subordinate and is moved up to a superordinate. Compliments could also be downwards from a superordinate to a subordinate. We see such a dichotomy between a chief and his subjects. For compliments to work there should be a certain degree of intimacy between the participants.

1.1 Methodology

In this paper I employed ethnographic methods to find out how compliments as a socio-cultural linguistic routine operate among the Akan of Ghana and whether Akan compliments are unique or similar to those of other societies. I combined ethnomasematics, ethnopragmatics, participant observation, interviews and introspection to study Akan compliments.

During the interviews I used open-ended questions that brought in new ideas and questions as the interviews flowed. Such questions included: Why do people use different compliments and responses at different times to different people? What is the role of compliments? Name some of
the popular compliments about one’s appearance and character. I posed similar questions to several people and compared their answers to check their validity.

I collected the data at different times and locations from conversations and other social interactions on occasions such as funerals, religious setups and functions at the palace. I took some of the data from the recorded versions of Akan advertisements on radio and TV and also from Akan fiction, drama and poetry books. A variety of them are from my own intuitive knowledge of Akan folklore, culture and philosophy.

2. Definitions and Concept of Compliments

The Akan indigenous term for compliments is nkamfo, made up of the nominaliser n- and the verb kamfo, ‘to compliment or praise’. Compliments are expressive speech acts that put emphasis on the perlocutionary effect of the utterance. According to Holmes (1986: 485) “A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ possession, characteristic, skill, etc. which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” In looking at compliments as a positive politeness strategy, Holmes (1998: 100) reiterates her former position on compliments and states that “Compliments are prime examples of speech acts which notice and attend to the hearer’s wants, needs or good”. We see clearly that a compliment is addressee-oriented since it is meant to enhance the mood and personality of the addressee. Searle and Vanderveken (1985:21) aptly define compliments as follows: “To compliment is to express approval of the hearer for something. Compliments presuppose that the thing the hearer is complimented for is good, though it needs not necessarily be good for him” (see Duranti 1997:253). To Tannen (1995: 68) “compliments are a conventional form of praise, and exchanging compliments is a common ritual”. It is important for the complimenter to be very sincere with the compliments so as to avoid a face threatening act.

One of the basic theories of compliments hinges on “meaning” and the sharing of a common socio-cultural and linguistic code (in our context, Akan) by both the complimenter and the recipient. Expressions of
compliments may differ from one cultural background to another. The notions and concepts encoded in the complimentary language should conform to the general cognitive and socio-cultural framework of the culture concerned so as to make processing easier and relevant to the recipient.

Compliments have perlocutionary effects. A perlocutionary act is performed by means of saying something, e.g., getting someone to believe that something is so, persuading someone to do something, moving someone to anger or consoling someone in distress. The use of complimentary language as a perlocutionary act affects the intellect, emotions and reactions of the addressee (see Agyekum 2004:66, Lyons 1977:730). Complimentary language must be polite and devoid of face threatening acts, for in some cases the addressee will respond very nicely to the compliments and in others s/he will refuse the compliments either through utterances or non-verbal communication by gestures or silence (see Levinson 1983:339).

3. Contents and Categories of Compliments

Holmes (1998: 111) identifies four major areas under which compliments are expressed and these are (a) appearance, (b) ability and performance, (c) possessions, and (d) personality/friendliness. I have adopted these categories, with some changes, in the discussion of domains of Akan compliments. For instance, I prefer to have character and comportment in place of personality since Holmes’ appearance and personality categories sometimes overlap.

3.1. Appearance Compliments

Appearance compliments talk about physical aspects of the person, including personal structure, height and complexion, the type, colour and style of clothing and jewelry s/he wears, his/her hairdo, eyes and other parts of the body. These compliments are normally used at funerals, weddings, out-dooring ceremonies and durbars. When people are complimenting on the clothes worn by others, they compare them to the most expensive ones. Some of the appearance compliments refer to the
beauty of the complimentee and they include *ahoɔfɛ ni*, “what a beauty”, *ahoɔfɛ na adware wo sei*, “you are soaked with beauty”, *ahoɔfɛ na adura wo sei*, “you are extremely beautiful”, *ahoɔfɛ na Ereku wo sei*, “how can beauty be killing you so”, *wo ntoma yi deɛ ense ha*, “your cloth is so glamorous that it is out of place here” and *ɛyɛ ma wo*, “it is good for you”. Among the Akan, to be killed or soaked by something implies that one has the item in abundance.

Many advertisements by Ghanaian businesses are in the Akan language. There is a considerable number of appearance and beauty compliments in the advertisements below. They were compiled by Kwadwo Dickson of Peace FM.

1. *W’ahoɔfɛ na ɛkye me se adwamaa yi.* “Your beauty attracts me like a lamb.” (Befa Rock Shop)

   In this excerpt the complimenter compares the addressee to a lamb and transfers to him/her the qualities of the lamb, which include its beautiful fur and its peaceful and humble nature. The Befa Rock shop sells clothing and the speaker is complimenting the addressee on how beautiful she looks in a dress purportedly bought from the shop. The speaker has personified beauty by attributing to it the ability to ‘catch’ him. This implies that the addressee’s beauty has attracted the attention of the speaker and he has therefore fallen helplessly into the former’s grips. We can see that the addressee uses a hyperbole.

2. *W’ahoɔfɛ nti mete me ho a, ɛnte.* “Due to your beauty, I cannot dissociate myself from you.” (G and G beauty Products)

   This excerpt also talks about beauty and the complimenter describes the beauty of the addressee as the tool that has solidly glued him to her. Her beauty has made the two inseparable. The expression, *mete me ho a, ɛnte*, means that no matter how much he has tried to break the relationship, it has not been possible because of her beauty. The complimenter has personalized and transferred the functions and efficacy of the beauty products to the person who uses them. It implies that if the products can make a person so beautiful, then people should go for them.
3. *Mese wo ho hwam, mente gyae.* “I tell you, the fragrance from your body is so good that there is nothing else I can do.” (Asky Beauty Soap)

As we saw in example 2 above, the complimenter is describing the functions of the Asky soap and provides an agent who uses it to portray how fragrant the soap is. The soap has been applied to the addressee’s body and the resulting fragrant smell is superb. The speaker elevates it to a superlative degree by saying *mente gyae* (lit. ‘I do not hear stop’); that is to say, nothing can stop me from smelling the fragrance of the soap. Since the soap now refers to the person’s body, it connotes that even if the addressee told the speaker to stop moving with her, he could not, due to the sweet smell from her body.

4. *Afua, wei dee merekwere wo din wɔ mmaa ahoɔfe akansie no mu.*
   “Afua, now I am going to write your name on the list of competitors for the women’s beauty pageant.” (Maxi Light Beauty Cream)

Again, we see how the advertisement compliments the beauty cream by referring to what the cream has been able to do. The speaker makes an indirect compliment by not saying directly that Afua is beautiful. Instead, he says that he is going to add her name to the competitors for the beauty pageant in which only beautiful ladies are eligible to compete. This means that Afua’s beauty goes beyond the ordinary.

5. *Efiri nne rekɔ rewire wo Akosua Sɔɔɔ; enam wo ho fɛ a aye nti no.*
   “As from today, I will start calling you ‘Akosua the Glamorous One’ due to how beautiful you have become.” (Africana Collections)

The complimenter (male) in this excerpt is using a temporal frame to highlight the beauty of the addressee by saying, “as from today, I will start calling you ‘Akosua the Glamorous One’ due to how beautiful you have become.” This means that the lady had not looked as beautiful before, as she did at the time the compliment was paid her. This elevates the status of the addressee, and her beauty results from the use of the cream and lotions from Africana Collections.
“Agyaaku, may I know the one who cut your hair? As for today, you are more handsome than the weaver bird called Akyem Polisi.” (Mascaponi Barbering Shop)

In this excerpt, the complimenter (female) compliments the addressee by referring to the agent who has made him so handsome. The complimenter is so amazed by the sudden change in the appearance of the addressee that she uses the focus marker, *deɛ* (“as for”), to imply that the man had never before been as handsome as he appeared “today”. His handsome nature is compared to the weaverbird that stands out among other birds. The complimenter is wondering who in this world could have given Agyaaku such a glamorous haircut that has made him so extraordinarily handsome. Such adverts are meant to draw customers to the barbering shop.

7. *Me dɔ hemmaa, danedane wo ho ma menhwe w’akyi. Wopa ho a, obi fofoɔ biara ho nye me fɛ bi.*
“My sweet heart, turn round and let me look at you. I cannot think of any other as beautiful as you.” (Angel Cream)

The (male) complimenter uses the honorific *me dɔ hemmaa* (“my sweet heart”) as a persuasive device to lure the complimenter to turn round (see Agyekum 2004 on persuasion and 2003 on honorifics). When the addressee turned round and the speaker saw her, he complimented her by using the exclusive expression “apart from” in the statement, “apart from you I cannot think of any other beautiful woman like you”. The compliment elevates the addressee and places her in a special class and no other person’s beauty (from the speaker’s point of view) is comparable to hers.

8. *Nku ben na wosra a ama wo wedee rete gya nyinamnyinam sei?*
“What lotion have you been using such that your skin is sparkling so?” (Pharmadem)

The complimenter (male) addresses the skin of the (female) addressee by saying that her body is sparkling like flames or light. As usual, the compliment goes to the person as a whole and not only to the body. This is a metonymy and the state of the skin also depicts the powerful nature of the lotion that was applied to the skin.
9. *Eyɛ a home gu me so, efiri se wohome koraa a, ema me da nnahɔɔ.*

*Afei Close-Up a wode twitwiri wo se no eyɛ a, tɔ no nnaka mu na metua ka.* “Just breathe on me, because your breath gives me a sound sleep. Now, just buy the close-up you have been using in boxes and I will pay for them.” (Close-Up Tooth Paste)

The complimenter exaggerates the efficiency of the toothpaste called Close-Up. According to him it is so good that it makes the addressee (female) breathe so well and the scent from the mouth is so good that it makes him sleep soundly. He elevates the Close-Up toothpaste by advising the addressee to buy it in boxes and he will pay for it.

There are certain cultural taboos on the use of appearance compliments. For example, in the Arab world it is generally inappropriate for a male to give appearance compliments to an unmarried female. Among the Akans, it is rather a taboo to give too much appearance compliments to a married woman, for such an action can be misconstrued as an intention to have an affair with her.

3.2 Character and Comportment

Certain compliments target the character and comportment of a person and also relate to his/her moral life. Character and comportment compliments are directed at specific traits such as wit, courage, intelligence, politeness, friendliness, kindness, patriotism or more general positive remarks about the person as a whole (e.g. “a good” person”). Such compliments may also extend to the person’s relatives and family ties, including husband, wife, children, friend, roommate, classmate, colleague, pastor or boss (see the communalistic nature of face in section 1).

Character and comportment compliments elevate the person, sometimes in an exaggerated form. Examples are compliments like *mahunu se woyɛ onipa papa pa ara* [“I have seen that you are really a good person”] and *gyɛ nipa se* [“he is really a human being”]. These imply that the person has all the qualities and virtues of a human being. A person who is sociable gets the compliment, *n’anim te se* [“s/he has such a brightened face”]. Bright things attract people, while a gloomy face frightens people. The se here is an intensifier that denotes the highest degree one can think of. Other
character compliments include wonye fo [“you are not a nonentity”], wonye nnipa ketewa [“you are not any mean person”], and honorifics like ɔkesee [“Big Boss”], ɔpanin [“Elderly Person”], onimuonyamfoɔ [“a dignified person”] and ɔdeɛfoɔ [“the magnanimous one”]. Some Akan honorifics are based on character and these are usually deployed in funeral dirges where the dead are well praised.

In some ways a compliment is just a special type of positive assessment directed towards an involved party. For example, if I say to my friend, “It’s a great book”, this statement would be considered a simple assessment. On the other hand, if I said the same sentence to the author of the book he would probably respond to it as a compliment.

3.3 Ability and Performance

Some compliments target a person’s ability, skills and performance. They cover a spectrum of things that a person does, including academic laurels, tasks, utterances, speech, preaching, teaching, eating, business, driving and trade. In academic terms, parents whose ward has performed very well can say, mo woate yen anim [“Well done, you have brightened our faces”; “We are proud of you; people can point to us as the parents of this bright girl or boy”]. When people perform tasks like weeding and other manual work, the normal compliment in Akan is, mo ne adwuma [“well done”]. A person who has completed the pouring of libation is complimented with, mo ne kasa, [“congratulations on a good speech”]. The compliment for an artisan like a carpenter, weaver, mason, tailor or seamstress is, wo nsa ano adwuma ye fɛ [lit., “works coming out of your hands are superb”]. This means that you are very skilful and your handiwork is good. Ability and performance compliments are also showered on chiefs, pastors and directors to indicate how well they are doing in their office.

A football player who manipulates the ball and plays very well attracts compliments like, wonim twetwe [lit., “you know how to pull the ball to your feet”], and wonim fam [lit., “you know the ground”]. They connote that the player has a fair knowledge of the terrain on which the ball is played. There was one good striker of the Asante Kotoko football
team called Opoku Afriyie, and anytime he played very well people complimented him with the title, bayie [“wizard”]. He was called football wizard, because according to his admirers his performance transcended the physical into the spiritual world. Akan football commentators also use a lot of ability and performance compliments to describe how well players perform. Examples include wabo no feefeefe [“he has played it very beautifully”], wakye no kua/fam/kama [“he has caught the ball very firmly/nicely”] and wato ne ho se akra [“he has swung himself like a cat”]. The last two examples describe the agility of a goalkeeper, and in the last one a simile is used to compare the goalkeeper to a cat.

Akan also uses a lot of compliments for good speech and public speaking. These include w’ano tene [lit., “your lips are straight”], w’ano huam [lit., “your lips are fragrant”], wonim kasa [“you know how to talk”], dwidwam [“split the chunks of words”], paepae mu [“analyse it/be candid”], mo ne kasa “well done; you made a good speech”] and Ese wo, efata wo [“it befits you, you are good”]. All these expressions are meant to encourage the speaker to continue with his good speech and also indicate how the complimenter admires the speaker. For example, to have fragrant lips implies that the words falling from the lips are good. Most of these expressions often come from close associates and family members. Sometimes the family members use in-group identity expressions by mentioning the speaker’s clan and using terms like Asonaba mo, Asona nana mo [“grandsire of the Asona clan, well done!”]

There are certain compliments that are often used at the palace to show the performance of the chief. They include the following: atene [“it has been straight”], watena ase kama [“you have sat down very well”], watena ase ama aye fe [“your sitting has been very beautiful”], enne dee aye fe akyen daa [“as for today your sitting has been marvellous and more fantastic than any other day”], and enne dee woafira ntoma a obi mfiraa bi da [“as for today you have worn a cloth that nobody else has worn before”]. Anytime the chief is sitting down in public there is a group of people in charge of protocol who comment on his sitting. In all the above the Asante king is complimented by his own servants and they portray his appearance, comportment and performance on this day as more glamorous and more splendid than any other person’s or on any
other day. The compliments relate to his manner of walking and sitting as well as to his clothing. If the chief is swearing an oath, the akyeame, or “chief’s spokesmen”, give him compliments such as wic, ampa, turodoo, wom [“this is true, factually reliable”] (see Akuffo 1976:20).

In dance, we meet compliments like èse wo, efata wo [“it fits you well”], danedane wo ho é [“just keep turning yourself”], mo Osua, Amu, Amen, Asɔn, [“well done Osua, Amu, Amen”]. These expressions are responses to particular clans and are used hypocoristically to show appreciation and to encourage the dancer to continue to dance well (see Obeng Gyasi 1997 on Akan Hypocoristic day-names). In most cases the complimenter raises his/her right hand and waves to the dancer or makes a “V” shape with the index and middle fingers. A complimenter can also use a handkerchief to wipe the face of the addressee, spread a cloth for him/her to step on it, or cover his/her neck with a piece of cloth to show appreciation. The latter can be referred to as semiotic or non-verbal compliments.

The performance of hunters, especially when they kill big game like the elephant or the buffalo, attracts some compliments, including mo ne toɔ [“well done for a good shot”], mo ɔpeafo [“well done, holder-of-the arrow”] (see Nketia 1973 Abɔfodwom).

Compliments are also used after funeral donations, whether in cash or in kind. The speaker asks the audience to praise or thank the donor using expressions like X ayɛ adeɛ [“X has done well”] and mompene no é [“praise him/her”] and the response is hmm or Mommɔ no akurum ε [“shout with a joyful voice”].

Teachers usually give performance compliments to encourage their students to work harder and for the weaker ones to buck up and be recognized. In Akan, we clap for good students with an ideophonic clapping accompanied by mo! mo! woayɛ adeɛ [“congratulations! congratulations! You have done well”].¹ In our schools, girls who perform well, especially in mathematics, science and technical subjects, are often given compliments. This confirms the assertion by Holmes (1998:107) that even in classrooms it seems that females receive more praise or positive evaluations than males.
One can use a sarcastic performance compliment to imply the opposite of the compliment. An example is if one does a shoddy job and somebody says, “you have really done well”. There are also ironic compliments on performance. In Akan the expression woaku me [“you have killed me”], rather implies that what you have done to me is superb, marvellous and beyond description. There is another indirect performance compliment, wote se mawu a, didi [“when you hear that I am dead, eat”]. Culturally, this means that you have performed so creditably well that I am exempting you from fasting when I die. Among the Akans, when a person dies close relatives and friends refrain from eating fufuo, the normal menu.

3.4. Possessions
Compliments that relate to possession are praises on personal property and belongings, e.g., house, boat, store, building, business, car and computer. Examples are wo fie yi dee ense ha yi o [“as for your building, this is not the place for it, it should have been somewhere else”], wo X yi nye fo “your X is not bad at all”. The X can refer to any item possessed by the addressee. Peer group members also use the slang wo X yi nye kye [“your X is not a child”]. The term kye is a shortened derivation from the English word “children”. Among the Akan items possessed by adults are supposed to be of good quality.

One can also compliment a friend on his/her family, spouse or children, by saying, ah mma dee woawo bi [“you have really got great children”]. Another example is wei dee wɔawo adehyee [“you have indeed given birth to royals”]. It is assumed that people from the royal family are very beautiful or handsome, for they need such qualities to be chiefs. One can also give compliments to another’s spouse by saying, ah saa dee woaware [“you have actually married”]. With regard to marriage, the complimenter is saying that the addressee has good eyes to make a good choice. Sometimes the compliments are put in indirect forms like worekɔ dwa a, memane wo, [“if you are going to the market, I will ask you to buy me something’] or w’ani so aboa ye fe [“your eyes can see beautiful things”]. All these compliments depict the admiration of the speaker for the addressee’s possession.
There are certain prohibitions on the use of compliments in some societies and these are culture specific taboos. For example, in some societies in Denmark, it was considered improper to praise children when they were present. In the Arabian Gulf, praising someone’s possessions too directly or too strongly might force that person to offer them to you. If s/he does, you should decline at least twice before finally accepting. This is a taboo because it becomes a face threat and an imposition on the part of your addressee. Holmes (1998: 112) therefore states that “compliments on possessions are much more vulnerable to interpretation as face-threatening acts, since there is the possibility that the complimenter will be heard as expressing the desire for or envy of the object referred to”.

4.0. Participants in Compliments

This section will look at the people who use compliments in terms of gender and find out whether men give compliments to men or to women more often, or whether women give more compliments to their fellow women or to men. We also want to find out whether compliments move from subordinates to superiors or vice versa, and whether compliments are predominant among peer groups.

Generally speaking, we give compliments to people of our age and status. Teenagers thus compliment other teenagers while adults mostly compliment adults. Within the chieftaincy domain, however, we see that in Akan, subordinates give more compliments to chiefs, the compliments ranging from character, comportment and appearance to possession and performance. When chiefs compliment their subordinates it is often based on the performance of the subjects.

Compliments and gender research by Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1998) indicates that women gave and received more compliments than men did. In two different American studies by Wolfson (1983) and Hebert (1990), the results show that women use compliments more frequently and are complimented more often than men. Among the Akan today, women tend to lavish more of their compliments on other women than on men. The reason is that women interact more with other women than with men, and naturally their compliments will go to their female counterparts. Women
are also much more likely to receive compliments on their appearance than men.

In the traditional Akan system, it was men who were complimented more, and the compliments came from both sexes. Most of these compliments were on performance and possessions. This was so because apart from some aspects of farming, women did not do the most tedious tasks like hunting, felling trees, going to war and mining; these were done mostly by men. In most folk musical traditions like *nnwonkorɔ*, *adenkum*, *osoode* and *apatampa* in which women feature prominently as composers and singers, there are lines that are compliments for men, even though the female singers can also lavish compliments on their fellow women. Traditionally, Akans do not compliment on the taste of food. It means therefore that the major times women were complimented were after child delivery, and since most men would not visit mothers during the first few days, the compliments on child delivery came mostly from other women.

In the modern Akan system the picture has changed, with women attracting more compliments than men, especially on appearance and performance. Since women are fighting for equality in modern Ghana the performance put up by women in fields which hitherto were reserved for men, is highly recognized. Female professors, administrators, judges, lawyers, bankers, heavy truck drivers, mechanics and artisans are highly complimented. Men who take the jobs that were traditionally for women, like cooking and child-care, and those who take nursing as their professions, are highly complimented.

In finding an answer to why people compliment women more often than men, Holmes (1998:106, 1995: 125) states that (1) women value and appreciate compliments and (2) since compliments express social approval and in most societies women occupy a subordinate social position, compliments are used to build the confidence level of women. Compliments thus serve as encouragement for them to continue with their approved behaviour and patronize activities towards socialization. Notwithstanding the differences above, some men and women seem to give praise equally to both men and women.
Some female students on the Legon campus of the University of Ghana pointed out that when they compliment their male counterparts on their appearance, possession or performance the latter do not respond favourably. Sometimes they just nod their heads. Conversely, their female counterparts appreciate compliments and respond amicably.

5.0. Responses to Compliments

When a compliment is given, it demands a response. A sincere response demands an acceptance and an appreciation from the addressee, which is typically, “thank you”. In most societies the acceptance can take various forms, most of which are ritualistic and thus seem to be universal. In contemporary Akan, as in languages like English, we can have (a) a ritualistic thank you (*meda wo ase*)\(^2\) and a smile, or (b) being pleased and showing pleasure in the object/skill praised. The use of *meda wo ase* as a response is an influence from the English and American cultures. Traditionally, the complimentee would not say anything.

It is also possible for the addressee to accept the compliment with some amendment. We can have any of the following: (a) minimized acceptance (“Thanks, but...”, “Yeah, but...”, i.e., weak agreement). The Akan can respond with the saying, *wei dee woregoro me ho* (“as for this, you are flattering me”); (b) a return compliment (“You too!”); (c) magnified acceptance (“I’m not just good, I’m great!”); or (d) a request for confirmation (“Really?”, “Would you like some more?”).\(^3\)

If the addressee sees that the compliment is insincere, s/he refuses to acknowledge it, and can employ silence to evade the compliment. This is however very rare in conversations. The worst scenario is where the addressee denies the compliment and probably attacks the complimenter. This happens in antagonistic situations where the complimenter uses the compliment as sarcasm. This happens on Legon campus, where male students use compliments as verbal harassment. More than half of all compliment responses fall into the category of “acceptance”, with “acceptances with amendments” being the next largest group. Very few responses are in the categories of no acknowledgements and denials.
6.0. Language of Akan Compliments

Compliments are politeness expressions that have some perlocutionary effects on the psychological state of the addressee. Compliments employ persuasive language and other forms of rhetorical expressions to enhance the personality of the individual.

Compliments can be explicit or implicit. In an explicit compliment, the utterance contains words that carry the positive evaluation of the complimentee (see Yi 2002:84). An implicit compliment, on the other hand, is often a general statement about the addressee where the positive evaluation can be inferred from the context. For example, if a friend sees his colleague in a glamorous uniform/dress and remarks, *ennɛ deɛ wo nse ha* [“as for today, you should have been somewhere else better than here’”] or *worekɔ dwa a, memane wo* [“if you are going to the market, I will ask you to buy me something”], he implies that the uniform/dress is splendid. On the average, however, people use more explicit compliments than implicit compliments that have ambiguities and hidden meanings.

The most frequent word class used in compliments are adjectives like *papa*, [“good”], *feefe* [“beautiful”], *mono* [“new”], *kyeaoe* [“brand new”] and *sokoo* [“fresh”].

We also use focus markers like *deɛ* [“as for, really, indeed, truly’’] to isolate the quality which is the target of the compliment. Examples are *wo fie yi deɛ ense ha yi o* [“as for your building, this is not the place for it”, i.e., it should have been somewhere else], *ah mma deɛ woawo bi* [“you have indeed got great children’’], *wei deɛ woawo adehyee* [“you have really given birth to royals”], *ah saa deɛ woaware* [“you have surely married”], and *eba pa ara ni* [“what a lovely child’’]. The use of the focus marker heightens the degree of the compliment and foregrounds the special nature of the entity commented on. In addition, we use the copula verb *ye* [“to be”] to assign a quality to the addressee, or put the copula in the negative to say that the addressee has not got the negative quality specified. Examples of these are *w’ataadeɛ yi ye fe* [“your dress is beautiful”], *wo dan yi nye fo* [“your house is not bad”], and *wonye nnipa ketewa* [“you are no mean person”].
Another linguistic tool used in compliments is rhetorical patterns in which the addressee puts the compliment in a form that seems like a question but has an emotional undertone. These patterns are ended with words like *sei* [“like this”], *nie/ní* [“this is”] and *yi* [“this”]. The common denominator in all these words is the determiner “this”, which has the semantic features [+ specific, + proximity]. The determiner restricts attention to the item complimented and makes it specific and closer in the minds of the addressee or audience. Examples of such patterns are, *adeɛ na eyɛ fe sei* [“how can a thing be nice like this”], *ahoɔfe pa ara nie!* [“what real beauty you do have!”], *ahoɔfe na ereku wo saa yi!* [“what an absolute beauty!”], *ahoɔfe bafua ni!* [“is this a single beauty!”] and *ahoɔfe na adware wo sei!* [“how well have you been soaked with beauty”]. To be soaked with something implies that your whole body is covered with the substance, and in the cases above it means your beauty is total and overwhelming.

In Akan we use the particle *o* [“really, indeed, actually, surely”], at the end of a sentence to indicate how surprised we are about an object or a situation. In view of this, the particle is used as a tag for compliments to indicate that the object is splendid and superb. Examples are *Asantefoɔ moasi hene o* [“you Asantes have indeed installed a chief”], 4 *woatɔ kae o* [“you have really bought a car”], *woasi fie o* [“you have surely built a house”].

Compliments are often initiated with the second person singular pronoun, *wo* [“you”] or its possessive (still) *wo* [“your”] that refers to the addressee. It means that compliments are not often targeted at a third person outside the setting of the compliment. Performance compliments usually begin with *mo* [“well done”, “congratulations”] as in *mo, woayɛ adeɛ* [“you have really done well”], *mo ne awoɔ* [“congratulations on your childbirth”]. In these constructions the action verb is nominalised; for example, *to* [“shoot”] becomes *toɔ* [“shooting/shot”], as in, *mo ne toɔ* [“well done for your shooting”] and *wo* [“to give birth”] becomes *awɔɔ* “childbirth”.

Kofi Agyekum
7.0 Positive and Negative Roles of Compliments

Compliments play both positive and negative roles in interaction, and these are based on the theories of politeness as outlined in section 1 of this paper.

7.1 Positive Role of Compliments

Compliments are aspects of positive politeness strategies meant to enhance the personality of the addressee and also to show rapport and solidarity (see Foley 1997:271). The primary interaction goal of giving compliments is to create affiliation, i.e., a feeling of closeness and friendliness. On the other hand, the giver might want to create affiliation in order to later make some sort of request; in other words, the function of compliments might be to “soften and pave the way up”. This is certainly one of the reasons why people often feel uncomfortable when they receive a compliment, for they know that they have to respond with something and this becomes a face threat and an imposition on the part of the addressee.

Compliments attend to the addressee’s interest and are meant to redress the affronts of the face of the addressee, which otherwise could have been threatened. To Wardhaugh (1985: 190), “A compliment calls for some indication of appreciation; in compliments the speaker says good things in appreciation of the addressee” (see also Wierzbicka 1987: 201). Compliments act as a tool to (a) evaluate the person being praised, and (b) show the pre-existing relationship between the item which is the target of praise and the addressee. For example, if I praise a friend’s shirt, I am implying that there is a strong link between the niceness of the shirt and his neat appearance.

Scholars on speech acts claim that compliments are positively affective speech acts that serve to increase and/or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. Holmes (1998:101) therefore states, “The primary function of a compliment is most obviously affective and social rather than referential or informative”. We see then that one of the ingredients of compliments is relationship. Compliments act as social lubricants that help to propel the smooth running of the engine of social ties and rapport. A compliment could be considered as a positive
politeness strategy used as a kind of social accelerator to boost the level of intimacy between the complimenter and the complimentee (see also Pomerantz 1978). The complimenter tries to establish or strengthen a cognitive, affective, or social relationship with the recipient of the compliments. When such a stand is adopted, the speaker will be able to get the addressee to fulfil his/her intentions.

Compliments can be considered as a persuasive device to induce the addressee to do something. To persuade is to cause another to believe something, or to convince another to adopt a particular idea. Compliments as a form of persuasion constitute an attempt to cause a person to act in a certain way, sometimes against his/her will. The intentions of the complimenter are to engender action(s) towards a change in the behaviour or mind of the complimentee.

7. 2 Negative Role of Compliments

Compliments may also have adverse effects on the addressee. In using compliments, the speaker may exaggerate the use of address and honorific terms and other expressions and may be negative and face threatening. When a compliment is exaggerated it becomes embarrassing and sarcastic. Holmes (1998:103) supports this claim by saying that “when the content of a compliment is perceived as too distant from reality, it will be heard as sarcastic or ironic put down”. An exaggerated compliment is referred to in Akan as fɛwdie [‘sarcasm’] or ngoro ho [‘flattery’ (insincere praise)]. We can thus argue that when misused and misapplied, a compliment becomes embarrassing and a face threat (see Pomerantz 1978). Compliments must be reasonable in order that their perlocutionary effect will be realised.

Compliments may also show some aspects of envy that are also face threatening. Some compliments may depict that the complimenter envies the addressee or something belonging to him/her (see Holmes 1998:103, 1995:119). If a woman who has an irresponsible husband tells the friend ei wo tiri ye o, woanya kumpa [“you are very lucky, you have a good husband”], it may imply that the speaker would have wished to have such a husband.
Brown and Levinson (1998: 66) suggest that a compliment can be regarded as a face-threatening act when the complimenter envies the addressee in some way, or would like something belonging to the addressee. In Akan one can say to a friend whose job one envies, saa deɛ eʋe ma wo [“it is indeed good for you”]. This is an expression said with a pinch of salt. One can also compliment food that one would like to taste by saying w’aduane yi deɛ eʋe huam o [“as for your food, it smells very good”].

Among the Akan, compliments meant to obtain a favour may take place between people and their poor counterparts. Some poor people will intentionally praise rich people to get some favours and gifts. Such compliments may be face-threatening if they show some unwarranted and false intimacy.

In oral literature performance, we also see this in folksongs where a singer cites the appellation of a dancer or a renowned person within the audience with the intention to receive some money from them. In nnwonkorɔ, a female folksong tradition, there are young girls whose duty is to look round a funeral gathering and find out the names of dignitaries, which are then cleverly cited in songs just to attract gifts. These aspects of imposition tally with the Akan maxim, se obi ye wo papa a, na waha wo [“if somebody does good things for you, then he or she has given you problems”], for there is nothing like a free lunch.

Some compliments may show some degree of embarrassment. This happens especially in compliments from men to women. Legon male students use “insincere compliments” as sarcasm and verbal harassment. When they see women in red dress they shout kɔkɔɔ o, kɔkɔɔ [“red oo, red”]. On Legon campus some male students see their female counterparts and remark, ɛtɔɔ ni o! [“what buttocks!”] Some women may consider such compliments positive, but looking at the context of usage, the male counterparts use these to tease them and call them all sorts of names. In most cases, the females become embarrassed and feel uncomfortable; compliments then change into verbal harassment (see Holmes 1998:104).
Conclusions

Compliments are universal pragmatic speech acts that carry perlocutionary effects on the addressee, but there are some cross-cultural differences based on the sociocultural fabric of a particular society. Compliments are aspects of linguistic rituals and routines that form part of politeness. We have seen that the use of compliments draws the speaker (complimenter) closer to the addressee (complimentee). We also notice that compliments are positive politeness strategies that express goodwill and solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. Compliments directly or indirectly attribute credit to or approval for the addressee. In the case of performance compliments, they serve as critical evaluative mechanisms and a feedback valve for the addressee to assess how people see and perceive him/her. Compliments can be targeted at four areas of a person’s life, namely, appearance, character and comportment, performance and possession.

We saw that Compliments as a positive politeness strategy are prime examples of speech acts that notice and attend to the hearer’s wants, needs or good. Compliments are addressee-oriented since they are meant to enhance the mood and personality of the addressee. Two major functions of compliments were identified, namely, positive and negative. The positive function enhances the image, expresses approval of the addressee and says good things about him/her. In their negative role compliments are regarded as face-threatening acts, for they may imply that the complimenter envies the addressee in some way or would like something belonging to the addressee. In other cases, we saw that compliments constitute verbal harassment, especially when they involve some degree of sarcasm. Thus, although ideally we might expect people to formally accept compliments, in some cases there are insincere compliments and addressees may not accept them. The complimenter and the complimentee should work on how to give and how to accept sincere compliments, respectively.

In the case of gender, compliments are directed at women more than they are at men. In Akan, there has been a change from the traditional system of compliments that were directly targeted at men, to the current state where women are now more complimented than men. We emphasized
that this has resulted in a change in the social stratification between men and women.
Bibliography


**Endnotes**

1 In my elementary school days, anytime the dull girls in the class did well, our teachers gave compliments like “excellent, excellent, and excellent.” However, the boys shouted *ntokoms* to mean that this was just a random guess. This is a verbal harassment that depicts envy on the part of the boys who wanted to receive the compliments.

2 For instance, if the house is in some of the outskirts of Accra, the person would say “this house should have been at East Legon, Airport Residential, Cantoment, Ridge or Labone.”

3 The use of *meda wo ase* as a response to a compliment is very new and it is a western influence, so are responses like *me tiri da wo ase* ‘my head thanks you’, that comes after the compliments on childbirth *wo tiri nkwa*, ‘life to your head’.

4 Yi (2002:210) listed the following semantic formulas that are used as responses to compliments, acceptance, explanation, return, appreciation, upgrade, reassignment, invitation, suggestion, confirmation seeking, down grade, disagreement and opt out (with a smile).

5 This a compliment by a non-Asante senior member of the University of Ghana targeted at the performance of the Asantehene.

6 The envy may also show up in some cultures like the Samoan culture where an expression of admiration or compliments for an object imposes an obligation on the addressee to offer it to the complimenter as a gift.
FROM CENTRE-STAGE TO THE WINGS: THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN ARROW OF GOD

S.I. Akhuemokhan and R.A. Masagbor

Abstract

The essay examines culture and cultural adjustment in Arrow of God by Chinua Achebe. Using Edward Said’s theory on culture as a foundation, it explores the elasticity of a fictional, precolonial West African society, Umuaro. The essay pictures culture as a large cell with core elements located at the centre, like a nucleus. The study then proceeds to apply this mental picture to the text, seeing the protagonist as analogous to a core element in his culture and hence as equivalent to the nucleus at the centre of the cell. The protagonist is a pivotal figure initially, and this idea is expressed symbolically in terms of the centralized position of the core element in the cultural cell. At the end of the day, however, he has become a social outcast, a status which again is expressed symbolically in terms of the movement of the core element away from the centre to the periphery. The essay concludes that the symbolic reproduction of culture re-inforces the literal one, and that Achebe recognizes equally the strengths and weaknesses of the community he is describing.

Introduction

In 1871, the anthropologist, Edward B. Tylor, defined culture lucidly and “in its widest ethnographic sense as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (1). Elaborations, modifications and streamlining of his classic definition have been made over the decades by intellectuals both inside and outside the discipline of anthropology. For instance, Roland Posner (1989: 254), a writer of both literary and sociological essays, identifies three types of culture: social culture (institutions and rituals transmitted from one generation to another); material culture (artifacts and skills transmitted in like manner); and mental culture (mentifacts and conventions also transmitted from one generation to another). A more recent contribution to the dialogue

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comes from the erudite Palestinian literary scholar, Edward Said. Said (1983) underscores the intricate relationship between culture and the text, in particular, the literary text, an area where his studies are largely recognized as ground-breaking. He distinguishes two salient elements of culture which affirm the traditional viewpoints and at the same time are indicative of his innovations in the field of cultural criticism:

In the first place […] culture is used to designate not merely something to which one belongs, but something that one possesses and, along with that proprietary process, culture also designates a boundary by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play […] But, in the second place, there is a more interesting dimension to this idea of culture […] by virtue of its elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too. (8-9)

It is evident that Edward Said, like his predecessor and namesake, Edward Tylor, views culture as a complete entity with discernible boundaries and a specific domain. There are concepts “intrinsic” to the culture, which fall within the boundaries, and there are concepts “extrinsic” to it. In addition, Said evidently construes culture as a differentiating force with a mandate to promote any given number of concepts – the beliefs, art, morals, laws, and so on outlined earlier by Tylor – or alternatively to downgrade them. Thus it is that culture can “authorize,” “legitimate” and “validate,” according to Said, or “dominate,” “demote” and “interdict”.

Said’s definition is appealing and provides a befitting theoretical framework for this paper because it articulates so clearly the most fundamental principles of culture. His definition embodies a foundational element of Tylor’s definition, which is the idea of culture as a complex whole comprising multiple parts, and it goes beyond this to imply a continual sifting and sorting of the parts within the whole. Bearing this in mind, one can posit that the boundaries of culture shift with time and
space, and that capabilities and habits that are central to a culture in one era can become peripheral in another or even go into extinction. The nature of culture is such that this process of cultural phenomena shifting from core position to boundary – and thence perhaps into extinction – is ceaseless. We look at this process of shifting cultural phenomena in terms of cultural adjustment. Seen from this perspective, cultural adjustment is the relocation of the parts within the complex whole, whereby the “old” habits and capabilities recede to the borderlines of communal activity and new ones move to a core position. This view presupposes the demotion of the former elements and the legitimization of the latter, to use Said’s terminology. Therefore, adjustment may incorporate the notion of centralization, as certain phenomena are brought to the limelight; the notion of marginalization, as certain phenomena are relegated; and even the notion of demise, should the relegated phenomena ultimately die out entirely.

It is interesting to see how this theme is treated in a familiar African novel: *Arrow of God (AG)* by Chinua Achebe. *Arrow of God* depicts a culture in the process of adjustment, and the continual positioning and re-positioning of the protagonist, Ezeulu, figuratively reproduces the demotion of a core cultural element when the cultural whole is undergoing transition. It is a drama which takes the leading performer from centre-stage to the wings, and the manner and speed of his transference is enlightening when studied from the angle of culture as an agent of differentiation.

Cultural adjustment is a key topic in reviews on Achebe. As the literary analyst, Chidi Okonkwo (1996: 105) avers: “A whole generation of Achebe critics has concentrated on the cultural-conflict aspect of Achebe’s plots and themes in his novel”. Okonkwo (1996: 105-106) cites Emmanuel Ngara and Ossie Enekwe as exemplifying a considerable body of critics who agree that Achebe’s cultural-nationalistic novels hover around “cultural disintegration […] ignor[ing] the fact that the same cultures which are supposed to have ‘disintegrated’ are also portrayed as triumphant”. Okonkwo is not persuaded that the disintegration of Igbo culture is Achebe’s preoccupation, and he questions the tendency of reviewers to parallel the decease of the protagonists with the end of their ways of life. Towards the close of his paper he remarks:
The New Yam Feast crisis ends in a mass conversion of Umuaro to Christianity. Achebe suggests that this is a result of Ulu and Ezeulu’s having mutually ruined themselves […] However] though Ulu and his priest are ruined, Umuaro is not. Critics who interpret the denouement to mean disintegration of Umuaro miss the fact that despite the stampede which characterizes the people’s embracing of Christianity, the clan actually emerges whole from the ordeal, though significantly changed. In other words, Umuaro has triumphantly gone through its rites of passage and been reborn. (119, emphasis added)

Okonkwo’s observation that the clan “emerges whole” after having gone through its rites of passage is noteworthy. Culture as qualified by both Tylor and Said – that is, in terms of a complex body comprising a variety of elements – would certainly bear this out. Indeed, what Okonkwo perceives as change through rites of passage is approximate to the shifting, or re-ranking, of the parts within the whole. Nevertheless, Okonkwo does not press the matter. He proceeds with scholarliness to highlight Achebe’s use of time and number as social documents, and to evaluate Ezeulu’s task as “the reckoner of time and season in his community” (108). We examine the mechanism of change slightly more thoroughly than Okonkwo does because we believe it illuminates determinate aspects of the culture depicted. Furthermore, we detect a tenuous bridge between the erstwhile parallel convictions on Achebe’s portrayal of cultural adjustment; i.e., the conviction that the clan disintegrates as against the conviction that it triumphs. Assuming culture is a communal cell, it is feasible for the disintegration to take place at its borderlines even while the clan remains whole.

Before winding up this section, reference should be made to one of our earlier papers on Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Arrow of God (Masagbor and Akhuemokhan 2007). We compared iconicity in the two texts, applying the three types of icon – viz. the image, the diagram, and the metaphor – to the mental reconstructions of the reader and the writer. Being a linguistic appraisal based on the theory of the semiotician, C.S. Peirce, the paper quite naturally did not do justice to the wealth of
literary symbolism in either of the novels. The present study hopes to
redress this.

In summary, much has been written on *Arrow of God* but nothing by way
of a literary appraisal of a culture invalidating one of its own intrinsic
concepts. Ezeulu is analogous to a core element within his culture, and
his centralization and later marginalization reflect the tendency of culture
towards grading its elements as well as the positive and negative sides
of Umuaro’s cultural fluidity. A closer look at the novel will make the
analogy clearer and aid an objective reading of the author’s portrayal of
cultural adjustment.

**Centralization**

Commenting on Ezeulu, Okonkwo (1996: 108) posits that Achebe
“conceives this character partly in the light of anthropological theories
which portray priests as the intellectuals of tribal society”. Ezeulu may
consequently be deemed emblematic of the intellectual limb of his society.
He may equally be deemed emblematic of something else or something
weightier, because it is manifest that his larger-than-life quality, which
many literary analysts have attested to, makes him seem more of an
institution than an individual at the start of events in *Arrow of God*. As
the celebrated priest of Ulu, the major deity of the six clans that constitute
Umuaro, he is a pivotal figure. He influences the greatest and the least
of the people’s decisions: regulating their monthly calendar, sitting in
the elders’ meetings and acting as a mediator between them and their
god. Ezeulu is an interesting fusion of the clan’s political, economic and
spiritual concerns – perhaps not representative of its entire culture, but
definitely representative of a central part of it. A graphic illustration of his
initial place at the heart of the community occurs early in the narrative
during the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves. During the feast, he officiates at
the centre of the market place ringed around by the inhabitants of all the
six villages. The men form the outermost ring, the women the inner ring;
the six messengers circulate within the arena proper and he presides at the
nucleus. He is painted half white and half black as a token of his affinity
with the spiritual and physical life of Umuaro, respectively. The paint
underscores his peculiarity and simultaneously marks him as a cohesive
agent on two levels; first, on the vertical level, between earth and heaven, and second, on the horizontal level, bonding neighbour to neighbour in a vivid expression of communal solidarity. Hence he functions as a magnet, coordinating a ceremony which induces the scrutiny of the gods above and pulls the community together below. In the forthcoming scene taken from the feast, the men station themselves in the background to give moral support, and the women actively participate in an exercise which Ezeulu marshals with authority:

By now Ezeulu was in the centre of the market place. He struck the metal staff into the earth and left it quivering while he danced a few more steps to the Ikolo which had not paused for breath since the priest emerged […] Then he pulled the staff out of the ground and with it in his left hand and the Mother of Ofo in his right he jumped forward, and began to run round the market place […]

The six messengers followed closely behind the priest and at intervals, one of them bent down quickly and picked up at random one bunch of leaves and continued running […]

As if someone had given them a sign, all the women of Umunneora broke out from the circle and began to run round the market place, stamping their feet heavily […] Then the women of Umuagu […] no one ran out of turn. (AG 72-73)

Literally and figuratively, everything revolves around Ezeulu. He plainly embodies something momentous in his community. We take him as symbolic of a core phenomenon in his people’s culture, which is also undoubtedly a vibrant, or living, phenomenon. The vibrancy of the phenomenon is indisputable because despite the chief priest’s years, the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and the other ordinances that he conducts cannot be misconstrued as defunct cultural habits. The Feast is the ultimate prayer of confession and supplication offered collectively by his people, and similarly the New Yam Festival, which occurs later in the text, is an elaborate fête of thanksgiving that commands the presence of “every grown man in Umuaro” (202). The manner in which the tribe turns
out *en masse* for these festivities is an index of the degree of faith attached to them, and validates the chief priest’s office as integral to fervent and fruitful cultural habits.

When we place Ezeulu on the symbolic drawing board, viewing culture as a single compartment with designated boundaries, we see him as a radial point in a communal organism. The picture is that of a large cell with a bright living element at mid-section. Such conjecturing might appear to be nothing but mental sketching of the narrative material; however, it re-iterates unmistakably the singularity of the culture being described and the author’s attitude to this culture. For example, Ezeulu’s centralised position in the diagram works artistically to proclaim Achebe’s approval of Umuaro. The core position of a living phenomenon is indicative of a healthy and fluid society in which the “heart” is alive, thereby guaranteeing life and movement throughout the whole. Under these circumstances, energy is the defining trait of the entirety, and there is little possibility of disintegrating phenomena being left to contaminate it. Rather, anything threatening to become debris will be automatically flushed out of the bloodstream – a principle which is played out with tragic effect in the very pages of the text. In substance, the vital force at the bosom of the organism, and the flux and flow which naturally emanate from the vitality, are explicit signs of a dynamic and liquid culture. The symbolism reinforces Achebe’s pre-eminent motif of a flourishing flexible pre-colonial society.

Ezeulu’s stature is undeniably considerable, but significantly, it is subject to a higher authority. Accordingly, even while he looms like a Colossus at the centre of his culture, the differentiation process continues. The process is impelled partly by forces outside his control, such as the coming of the Europeans and the intrusive, corroding presence of the white District Officer, Captain Winterbottom. But in another sense Ezeulu’s own actions precipitate the re-ranking mechanism, a prime illustration being his testimony against his clan during the land dispute with Okperi which makes him an object of mistrust. The important point is that culture, as sovereign administrator within its domain, does not require the chief priest’s knowledge or consent to operate, and while it sanctions his centrality in one season it debars it in another.
Marginalization

Cultural adjustment can occur with speed in a liquid society. Aside from all that has been said about Umuaro thus far, its fluidity infers absorption, which is the signature of more than one of Achebe’s traditional societies. A case in point is Umuofia in his acclaimed novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Umuofia’s capacity to absorb whatever comes its way is lauded in a series of proverbs: “Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching” (*Things Fall Apart* 16); “[t]he clan was like a lizard, if it lost its tail it soon grew another” (121); and so on. As the critic, Umelo Ojinmah (1991: 20) rightly asserts: “The society’s ability to adapt to any situation […] is a survival mechanism”. As it is in Umuofia, so it is in Umuaro, and nobody would quarrel about a people’s desire to survive. A problem surfaces, however, because the dividing line between being adaptable and being fickle is often precariously slim, and the clan can be judged in its dealings with Ezeulu. Umuaro appears to subordinate its paramount spiritual watchman and intercessor with alarming ease – he translates from “a kind of priest-king in Umuaro” (*AG* 38) to a condition reminiscent of paltriness “almost overnight” (211). Admittedly, the community escapes whole after his send-off, but not without a dent on its dependability. Be that as it may, his shift demonstrates cogently the effectiveness of his society’s demotion machinery.

Ezeulu’s marginalization is swift. He maintains a relatively central position until Obika’s death a few days before the New Yam harvest, and then experiences a full and abrupt eclipse. We use the qualifier “relatively” because the destabilizing forces earlier mentioned, occasioned by colonial interference and Ezeulu’s individualism, have been imperceptibly weakening his footing from the start. This point notwithstanding, almost throughout the narrative, his centralized position can be envisaged as a bold dot amidst an array of rings. The protagonist consistently remains under the spotlight as a focal point, a magnet, and an arresting performer. The other characters – the inhabitants of Umuaro, Okperi, and Government-Hill – range themselves around him, figuratively speaking, watching his every move. It is intriguing to see how the opening picture of Ezeulu, the painted priest at the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves with the
rings of men and women surrounding him, is sustained metaphorically almost to the close of the text. He continues to function as the colourful individual in the thick of events, keeping the community electrified with his unorthodox behaviour and causing all eyes to be ever fixed on his person.

One way or the other he is regularly a point of reference. As a positive point of reference he is the chief priest of the chief deity and the sole voice that challenges the idea of a mission to Okperi, a venture which ends in disaster as he predicts. Added to this is his impressive compound, his outstanding wealth, which is evident in the marriage he hosts, and the exceptional good looks of his family. On the other hand, as a negative reference point his younger son, Oduche, does the unthinkable when he locks up the sacred python in a box, and his favourite son, Obika, is whipped for going late to build the white man’s road. Half-way through the text Ezeulu travels to Government Hill, Okperi, but the change in location does not detract from his centralized position. On the contrary, it accentuates it, because Government Hill is the headquarters of British Administration in the province, and even from his prison cell his story is on all lips. The health of Captain Winterbottom, for instance – which Ezeulu is reportedly monitoring by magical devices – is only of interest to the Africans as far as it relates to Ezeulu, and his haughty rejection of a chieftaincy appointment sends currents through his audience that remind them that he is eternally Ezeulu, the magnet. In fact, the ripples of excitement he generates from his confinement fan out through Okperi and Umuaro in a fashion that replicates the prevailing pattern of a dot in the middle of dilating spheres; it is the regular bull’s-eye picture mirrored in water.

On Ezeulu’s return to Umuaro every eye remains glued to him, albeit in hostility when he refuses to call the New Yam festival. Invariably, his son dies and the impact is like a minor earthquake, beginning in his compound and spreading abroad: “Obika’s death shook Umuaro to the roots” (220). The conclusion to be drawn from these episodes is that any physical movement Ezeulu makes is superficial to his basic symbolic centrality. His stature in the community is comparatively undiminished until the moment that everything suddenly caves in. The earthquake is the
last of the ripples he creates. Obika departs and “a few days after” (230) his father is on the fringes of communal activity.

Achebe’s choice of language in describing the transition is thought-provoking – “almost overnight”, “a few day’s after”. They raise vague misgivings in the reader’s mind about a society which can so smoothly switch from one cultural habit to another. For the people troop to the Christian harvest, bypassing a convention (the New Yam Festival) which, only the previous year, had attracted every grown man in Umuaro (202). And for the crowd that decamps there is no going back. “Thereafter any yam harvested in [its] fields was harvested in the name of the son” (230, emphasis added). This is the closing sentence of the novel, delivered with a tone of finality. The reader ponders over the fluid society of Umuaro and concedes, with some regret, that anything liquid readily gives way under pressure.

To return to the concept of a cultural whole and cultural parts, the preceding outline betokens a sweeping adjustment manoeuvre in which a core phenomenon is radically taken to the sidelines, and maybe thence into extinction, as was postulated in our earlier comments on culture. At the point at which Ezeulu becomes an outcast, the demotion process can be said to have resulted in interdiction, perhaps the severest measure of culture as a discriminating force. The deftness of the process re-iterates the fact that Umuaro is a liquid culture and that certain behaviours accompany the liquidity. For example, it would be unreasonable to ask a liquid entity to provide a foothold, or an elastic entity to keep its shape when stretched. Had Ezeulu reflected on this, and on the natural make-up of his society, he would have guessed that when faced with a life-and-death dilemma of the sort Umuaro faces, the clan would not stand behind him for long. It is a reality which Achebe takes in his stride. He describes the chief priest’s exit with a practicality that communicates his knowledge that such casualties, though disturbing, are part and parcel of that particular civilization.
Conclusion

The tale of Ezeulu is that of a proud hero’s transference from centre-stage to the wings. We have taken him to be analogous with a core element in his culture, and have tried to illustrate that his initial centralization and later dislodgment reflect a grading tendency that is inherent in culture. Initially, Ezeulu is the figure at the centre of affairs in Umuaro. He is visualized as an immense decimal point where communal forces converge; a thriving element deep-seated in a liquid organization that Achebe patently sanctions. Then centralization gives way to decentralization, italicizing the fluidity of the clan’s way of life. On account of Umuaro’s liquidity the tide of its events is rapid, which means that adjustment is commensurately fast, even to a fault. In consequence, Ezeulu’s deportation is effected with minimum delay and without sentiment, presenting itself as a dot streaking to the perimeter of the cultural graph. The dot has been jeopardized by numerous pressures for some time, and when the moment finally arrives it undergoes a full-drive eviction to the boundary. But this is not to presume that Ezeulu means nothing to his people. It merely confirms the thesis that prompted our symbolic translation; namely, that culture is in truth a powerful agent of differentiation.
References


The Role of Films in the Teaching of Foreign Languages

Ildiko Csajbok-Twerefou

Abstract

Films are a very valuable medium in the teaching of a foreign language. Our research and experience indicate that in the foreign language classroom films offer an opportunity for students to learn not only the target language and its culture, but also new words, new terminologies and new phraseology, as well as their proper usage—activities which would not be achieved in a normal language classroom. Films can also create a forum for students to practise using the language through class discussions, especially at the advanced level. It is for this reason that many language-teaching institutions have multi-media rooms with the requisite facilities such as television sets, video cassette players, CD and DVD players. However, the successful use of films depends on many factors, including the preparedness of the instructor and the right approach, and perhaps these considerations account for their virtual absence from classrooms in many countries, and specifically in Ghana. In this work we analyze the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages. We focus on the importance of films, the mode of their selection and the appropriate timing for their use. We also outline a methodology and recommend exercises at each stage of the teaching process in order to provide a point of reference for instructors.

I. Introduction

There are many ways and conditions of teaching and learning a foreign language. These include individual or group learning with or without an instructor. The main aim of learning a language is to be able to understand, speak, read or write the language. In all these endeavours films can play a significant role. Films provide a context for students to better appreciate the language and its cultural context and can therefore make foreign language learning easier and more interesting.

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It is for these reasons that multi-media rooms with facilities such as television sets, video cassette players, CD and DVD players are made available for the teaching and learning of foreign languages in many institutions. Unfortunately, in foreign language teaching departments in many countries in general, and in Ghana in particular, the use of films is not yet a common practice. The argument most often heard is that watching films in class does not give students the opportunity and the time to practice using the language. Besides, the general perception of many lecturers and students is that films are used for fun. This last point is true. However, the fun nature of films makes them a valuable resource for language learning. This is because using them provides the dual advantage of having fun in class while also learning. The video and audio components offer model pronunciation, intonation and accent, as well as showcase the behavior of the native speakers of the language. These aspects of language use cannot be found in textbooks or storybooks.

The Department of Modern Languages of the University of Ghana offers six foreign languages and therefore has six sections: Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish and Swahili. Apart from Chinese, which was introduced a few years ago, all these languages have been taught for many years. Based on the previous knowledge of first year students, one can categorize these languages into two groups, with French and Arabic in one and the rest in another. This is because in Ghana French is taught in junior high and senior high schools (JHS and SHS), and a student must obtain a very good grade in this subject at the SHS in order to pursue it at the university. With regard to Arabic, about fifteen percent of Ghanaians are Muslims (Asamoah-Gyedu, 2003), who learn this language in order to be able to read the Koran. There are special schools, mostly established by faiths of the Islamic religion but sometimes with the support of the government, where Arabic is taught. Thus by virtue of their religious affiliations some Ghanaians can understand Arabic, although there are many students of the Arabic Section with no knowledge of the language. In contrast to the languages in this first group, students who enter the university to study languages in the second group usually have no knowledge in them.
This paper looks at the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages in Ghana, paying particular attention to the importance, the challenges likely to be encountered and some methodological issues involved in an attempt to use this medium. Such a discussion is relevant since it will provide instructors with practical steps that will facilitate their choice of appropriate films and guide them in the pre-watching, watching and post-watching processes. The paper uses a three-fold approach to investigate the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages. First, it provides an extensive literature review on the topic, with specific attention paid to the use of films in the teaching of the Russian Language. Secondly, it is based on a survey undertaken on the use of films in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ghana. Thirdly, it draws on the author’s extensive experience in the use of films in the teaching of the Russian Language over the past seven years. The paper has seven sections. Section two discusses the importance of using films while section three gives an insight into when it is appropriate to use them. Sections four and five examine the choice of film and the teaching process, respectively. The last section concludes the paper.

Using films in foreign language teaching is not new. Leontev (1975), a Russian psycholinguist, argues that at the intermediate and advanced levels of foreign language learning, when students have got the basic knowledge of the language, the use of film becomes imperative. Another scholar, Kutuzova (1982), places more emphasis on the use of films than on reading passages or stories because films offer rich material for listening and speaking as well as for discussion and civilization studies. In addition, Massi and Merino (1996) conclude that giving visual messages a place in the foreign language curriculum is an interesting and entertaining way to enhance the learner’s command of the target language and the messages available through film offer a refreshing change of routine in the classroom. Generally, having a combination of audio and video components in the classroom makes it possible for students to better understand the language since it offers them an opportunity to ask more questions, make more comments and have a better feel of the language than they would otherwise experience.
In historical films there are many different elements which are not very much related to the story being told in the film but which make important additions to it. Examples are music which psychologically and emotionally affects the audience, altering the speed of scenes at different times; narrators who explain specific and core elements of the film; and information provided about the time and place of the films (Balazs, 2002). All these make it easier to understand the film and the language.

One problem that has been identified is the lack of information on the methodology for the use of films in the teaching of a foreign language. Azimov (1990, 1994, 1996), Kasnyáné (1985), Kasyanova (2004), Leontev (1975), Lonergan (1988), Schukin (1981, 1990, 2003) and Vegvari (1981, 1988, 1999, 1998) argue that the methodology in the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages is not well developed, notwithstanding the fact that the use of films in the teaching process is not new. Kasyanova (2004) argues that in many cases the pre-viewing and post-viewing exercises are not done properly, and therefore many cultural aspects, words and phrases, among others, are not understood by the students. A study by Petneki (2007) in Hungary showed that even if institutions acquire technical equipment such as audio or video gadgets, due to the dearth of knowledge on the methodology for the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages only a few language teachers would use such resources frequently, in spite of the numerous advantages that they have.

2.0 Situational Analysis of the Use of films

There are many advantages in the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages. Massi and Merino (1996) and Gvozdeeva, (2004) argue that the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages is not common in foreign language teaching departments in many countries. Reasons given for the absence or the poor use of films in the teaching of foreign languages include the lack of methodology or time to prepare for lectures and the dearth of equipment and materials. In a study by Petneki (2007) to evaluate the use of alternative methods in the teaching of foreign languages, respondents who were instructors in the teaching of English were asked how often they use alternative methods in their teaching. About eight percent (8%) responded that they often use video in teaching,
seventy six percent (76%) said they sometimes use it, while about sixteen percent (16%) answered that they have never used it.

Our survey on the use of alternative methods in the teaching of foreign languages in the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ghana revealed a minimal use of alternative methods in the teaching process. Out of the thirty five foreign language instructors who were interviewed, about a fifth - twenty percent - responded that they use alternative methods in their teaching. Of those who use alternative methods of teaching, seventy one percent (71%) use audio, twenty eight percent (28%) use video and fourteen percent (14%) use computers in a multiple response mode.

Reasons given for the use of alternative methods in foreign language teaching include: that they provide a convenient way of making students cope with different accents, intonation patterns and voice modulations and voices; that they help build the communicative skills of students, including listening and responding appropriately to sound beats taken from a native environment of original speakers of the language; that they improve students’ writing and sharpen their ability to distinguish between homophonic words; and that they help students to polish their understanding of the language and provide an authentic and formative way of learning it. With respect to the non-use of alternative methods in the teaching process, seven percent (7%) said they do not know how to use them, sixty four percent (64%) alluded to the non-availability of equipment and materials, twenty nine percent (29%) responded that alternative methods are not applicable to the courses that they teach (i.e., history and literature⁴) and twenty four percent (24%) alluded to the large class sizes and the intermittent supply of electricity. However, the majority of the lecturers – about eighty three percent (83%) – said they are prepared to use alternative methods if facilities and training are provided.

Our teaching experience indicates that more use of films in foreign language teaching would be a welcome change. For example, students’ assessment of a course in which they watched and analyzed films in oral classes was excellent. Specifically, the students were asked to rate the extent to which the course advanced their knowledge of the discipline. In the four consecutive semesters that the course was offered, the overall
score by the students was 4.37 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “poor” and five means “excellent”. This translates into an overall percentage score of 87.45% and crudely indicates that the methodology is excellent.

3.0 Importance of Using Films in Teaching Foreign Languages

Films portray the socio-cultural background of a people and provide information about the reality of appearances, about language and speech and about character. They communicate this information not only through what the actors say but also through what the film “shows” its audience. For example, when we watch a Ghanaian film, it captures areas of the country and the lifestyles, mannerisms, morals, religion, beliefs, values and dreams that pertain in these places. To know these is to know the people of Ghana and their socio-cultural and socio-economic environment. The same argument applies when we use foreign films in the teaching of a foreign language. There is a wealth of non-linguistic and cultural information in films from countries whose languages we teach. Asamoah-Gyedu (2003:14) remarks that African films and TV drama have become means of moralization. Language structures and lexical items used in communicative situations provide rich examples of the use of the language in everyday life. According to Massi and Merino (1996: 20), “film is an excellent medium for the explicit teaching of syntactic, morphological, semantic and pragmatic aspects of a foreign language”. Films thus help to create the appropriate “language environment” in the classroom.

Some Universities provide a study abroad programme that is designed to help students to understand the use of the language in everyday life, among other things. However, very often the programme does not provide students with the opportunity to visit traditional families, and to some extent students do not get to see the traditional setting of the country and to have a feel of the everyday use of the language. An understanding of the traditional setting and everyday life through films is a great step for students towards understanding the country and adapting well, should they have the opportunity to visit that country through the study abroad programme or other means.
There is a psychological benefit in using films: it strengthens the motivation and interest of foreign language students. Gvozdeyeva (2004) argues that one of the positive effects of using films in the foreign language classroom is their ability to impact students’ emotions and to influence their power to understand the practical use of the language. Leontev (1975), a Russian psycho-linguist, argues that at the intermediate and advanced levels of learning foreign languages, when students have got the basic knowledge of the language, the use of film becomes very imperative. Kutuzova (1982) also emphasizes using films more often in the teaching and learning of foreign languages than reading passages or stories, because not only do students have more information from the films compared to the reading of stories and passages, but also, films provide rich material for listening, more opportunity to speak or discuss, and a context for civilization studies, all at the same time. Additionally, Massi and Merino (1996) conclude that giving visual messages a place in the foreign language curriculum is an interesting and entertaining way to enhance the learner’s command of the target language, and the messages available through film offer a refreshing change of routine in the classroom. Furthermore, the use of audio, video and multimedia equipment in teaching foreign languages provides more room, more actions and varied situations in the communication and the teaching of foreign languages. This is quite different from the usual teaching process in classrooms (Lukyanova, 2002).

According to Vegvari (1998), it is important to introduce new technologies into the methodology of foreign language teaching using feature films, because many studies in Hungary have concluded that doing so is the best way to teach the language in the classrooms, particularly in the absence of a native language environment. Therefore, having audio and video facilities in the classroom makes it possible for students to better understand the language, since these offer them an opportunity to ask more questions, make comments and get a better feel of the language.

Fazilyanova (2006) argues that as a result of the use of films in the teaching process, the level of knowledge of foreign language students is higher than that of those who were taught using traditional teaching methods. According to her, before information technologies became a part of many disciplines, teaching experts established through many
tests and researches the relationship between teaching and learning methodologies and strategies, and how students can successfully recall or remember studied material at some later date. The results indicate that if audio materials are used, a student could recall one fourth of the materials. If the information is visual, the students could recall a third at some later date. When they combined the data from audio and visual material, the indications were that a person remembered almost half of the information at a later date, and if the student took active part in the learning process, he or she could remember about three-quarters of the heard and seen information.

Many resolutions from the Congress of MAPRYAL\(^2\) (in 1986, 1990, 1994, etc.), have concluded that using films to teach a foreign language is relevant in that films may provide the best language surroundings in the class; students learn new things about the particular country such as its political, cultural and educational systems, traditions, morality, as well as the different time periods of the country. Films also help students to learn many new phrases, words and phraseology. Massi and Merino (1996: 20) argue that “using films in the teaching of a foreign language is not an entertainment. It is dosage, a strong drug, and it is important to know where, when and how much should be given at anytime”.

Based on the work of Kadochnikova (2003), Kasyanova (2004) and Dmitrievna (2005), we summarize the importance of the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Importance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>• help increase the interest of students;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• stimulate the ability of students to work independently;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• help students actively develop critical thinking;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• provide an opportunity for instructors to better know their students (through deep discussions and analysis of the films);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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• provide opportunities to acquire and master the language within a reasonable time.

**Socio-cultural**

• enable students to understand the culture and social life of others;
• enable students to compare different cultures and psychology of peoples living in different countries;
• enable students to see people in different social environments through their pronunciation, the use of grammar and style;
• make it easier for learners to adapt to the foreign country should they have the opportunity to visit that country.

**Pedagogical**

• increase the motivation of students to build the stimulus for the development of their abilities in their chosen specialty;
• reduce emotional tension;
• make it possible to use different interactive forms of organization in teaching foreign languages;
• bring to the fore questions on moral and ethical issues.

**Linguistic**

• help activate and develop the main types of action in speech (reading, writing dictation, speaking and audio/listening);
• introduce lexicological structure used in speeches.
Paralingual • make it possible to see and understand paralingual situations;
• help develop non-verbal situations such as body language, mimicking, distance between the actors, clothes, etc.;
• help to understand the language through the actions in the film that go to explain its phonogram;
• help introduce non-verbal ways of interacting.

3.1 Challenges
Like all teaching processes, the use of films in the teaching of foreign languages has some challenges. These can be grouped into technical, methodological and psychological. In the area of technical challenges, Dmitrievna (2005) argues that lack of television and video systems in the classrooms and difficulties in getting correct and useful tapes/records present the most important challenge. In addition to these difficulties, the majority of respondents who took part in our survey cited the irregular supply of electricity and the large class sizes. With respect to methodological and psychological challenges, the preparatory exercises before the class (watching the film, preparing questions, typing, printing and copying questions) takes a lot of the instructor’s time, while on their part students unable to understand what is said in the film may get frustrated and lose interest in watching it.

4. When to Use Films and Types of Films
Generally, in the teaching of foreign languages instructors prefer that beginners answer questions in full. This is because when students answer questions in full, they repeat much grammatical and lexical material that is already known. In this way, the language is taught without regard to the real world situation. For example, in class, if a question is asked, *what is your name?* the required answer would be *my name is John*. This is correct. However, in the real world, the answer is more likely to be ‘John’. For beginners, this way of teaching foreign language cannot be changed. We
may only add more communication, dialogue, simple songs, etc. However, at the intermediate and advanced levels the use of films becomes a very effective way of learning foreign languages since it provides an immersion into the real language, especially in situations where the students do not have the opportunity to visit the country of origin of the language. This suggests that the use of film could be more appropriate at the intermediate and advanced levels. For example, in the University of Ghana, as students major in different areas, the number of students decreases during the third and fourth years. It is at this level that the use of films in the teaching of a foreign language becomes necessary and advisable. The third and fourth year students should have the vocabulary necessary to analyze individual films and to do a comparative analysis of films from different cultural and historical contexts. For beginners, our experience suggests that one can use other materials such as songs, cartoons or short films that would be well appreciated by students.

In using films to teach foreign languages a challenge that arises in connection with the methodology is the type of film to use in class. Kasyanova (2004) argues that the choice of film is one of the most important steps in the foreign language teaching process since it should depend on the concrete audience. According to Gvozdeyeva (2004) two types of motivations are important in the choice of films:

- Self-motivation - when the film is interesting by itself, and
- Motivation - when the student understands the film in the language which he or she is studying.

Films that are quite easy to understand bring satisfaction to the student, instill some confidence that (s)he can understand the language and encourage him/her to put in more effort in studying the language. Good films can serve as a valuable pedagogical aid, both in the classroom and in private studies. Also, a good film arouses the sensitivity of the learner and stimulates him/her to stretch his/her imagination and creativity (Massi and Merino, 1996). According to Kasyanova (2004) films made on a native writer’s stories, novellas etc. should be compulsorily shown to students. The problem that one is confronted with is that, sometimes students may not understand the language of these feature films because
the phonogram of these films may be difficult. It is also advisable to use comedies which reveal the sense of humor and help to understand the psychology of the natives.

5.0 Considerations

The following are important considerations regarding how to decide what type of film to use.

5.1 Entertainment value

The first consideration is that the film should be interesting. Making the right choice of films may pose a considerable problem for the instructor. This is due to the fact that a film which may be interesting to the instructor may not be appreciated by the students, partly due to the age difference between students and instructors. Thus, it will be imperative to know the students before the choice of film is made. A way out of this problem is to read some short stories during the first 1-2 weeks. These short stories should be different in theme, author, the time they were written and the periods they describe. Analysis and discussion of the short stories could help instructors in choosing the best film that will be of interest to the students. In this way, the majority of the students will appreciate the film and watch it with interest and zeal.

5.2 Proficiency level of Students

The second consideration in the choice of films is students’ level of knowledge of the language. As Gvozdeyeva (2004) argues, efforts should be made to ensure that students enjoy the film through their understanding of the language and not only through the other aspects of the film. Specifically, students’ level of knowledge of the language does differ and therefore choosing a film to satisfy all students – those with a greater and those with a lesser knowledge of the language—becomes a problem. To some extent, this problem also may be resolved by reading and discussing different short stories initially to observe the level of knowledge of individual students. In fact, the daunting task of the instructor in this situation is having an idea of the level of knowledge of the average student and using that as a benchmark for selecting films. The
problem that arises with this methodology is that some students benefit at the expense of others if care is not taken during discussions. Specifically, students with above-average knowledge in the language may not benefit during the analysis and discussions, while those with below-average knowledge of the language may not wholly understand the analysis and discussions. It is also possible that students with a better knowledge of the language may not lose but on the contrary, enjoy the film much more than anyone else. This is due to the fact that such students have no problem with understanding the conversation. Thus, they may pay more attention to other aspects of the films such as the character of the actors, the beauty of the heroes or of places, jokes etc. Contributions from such students during the analysis and discussion of a film could be used as a yardstick by the instructor to measure his/her success in the choice of film.

5.3 Historical Context

The third consideration is to acquaint the students with the period in which the film is set. In situations where students are not familiar with the period, especially with films acted in the medieval age, the ideal way is to describe the nature and the specific features of that period before watching the film. This is a very important step, because without it the film may not be interesting and will not be understood by the students. Films set in modern times may also need some initial description of their nature and features. However, such description should not be done in detail since it may prevent the students from making their own comparison of the civilization, morality and peoples of their own country and those of the country the film is depicting. In historical films, there could be many different elements which are not very much related to the story being portrayed in the film but which make important additions to its meaning. Examples are music which psychologically and emotionally affects the audience; the variation of the speed of scenes at different times; narrators who explain specific and core aspects of the film; and provision of information about the time and place of the films (Balazs, 2002). All these make it easier to understand the film and consequently the language.
5.4 Duration of the film

The fourth consideration is the length of the film. Films which are longer than thirty minutes but not much more than two hours are recommended. This is because the film should be watched thrice. Sometimes there are very interesting and useful television serials. However, because of the limited time in the classroom, they may not be the best for oral classes but could be good for oral exercises. Such films could be given to the students to watch during their leisure time.

5.5 Cultural Sensitivity

The fifth consideration is the difference between the country of origin of the student and the country about which the film is made or in which it is set. Since we have different countries, so also do we have different moralities and political, cultural, religious and social structures. Care must be taken in choosing films from different countries due to these differences. It is quite acceptable to show films that portray the differences between countries. However, we must be cautious since some moral, social and cultural values which are approved of in some countries may not be accepted in others. It is recommended that instructors have a good idea of the differences between African, European, American and Asian cultures where sexuality or religion is a great concern. Also, instructors should be careful not to choose films that seem to portray negative aspects of a country since they might not depict the whole truth. For example, many films in Africa and in Ghana to be specific, portray the consultation of “spiritualists” and “mallams” in times of need, but that may not be the general practice in the country (Asamoah-Gyedu, 2003).

5.6 Subtitles

The question that arises here is: “should the film have subtitles or not?” It is good to have films with subtitles that can be regulated. In this way one decides to use the subtitles when one needs them, and switches them off when one does not need them. When is it recommended to use subtitles? Ideally, it is good to switch off the subtitles if the conversations in the film are not difficult to understand. This will help the students to develop their comprehension. On the other hand, if the text of the film is difficult
and complex, using the subtitles will be beneficial to the students. In sum, the use of subtitles should depend on the level of the students and on the degree of difficulty of the phonogram of the film (Boyko, 2007).

5.7 Melodies in Films

There is another dimension in the choice of films: should the film have songs or not? Some songs in films may talk about the country, the people or their traditions. Some films may have foreign melodies, which can be of interest to students. This may also show the relation of the country to different countries of the world. Therefore, films with songs are recommended. There should however not be many songs and they should be interesting to the students. Some songs have verses of famous native writers and may appeal to students. Our experience suggests that many students, especially in Ghana, like singing and show interest in learning such songs about the country whose language they are learning.

In general, making the right choice of film provides teachers with practically unlimited possibilities to analyze and compare the different socio-cultural environments and the specific behavior of people in different situations (Dmitrievna, 2004; Novikova, 2004, etc).

6. The Teaching Process

From our experience, the best result of using films in the teaching of foreign languages is achieved when the film is watched thrice. In this section we present the actual processes involved in using films to teach a foreign language as well as the methodological issues. When we work with any text in class, the methodology for teaching a language as a foreign language involves three major stages - pre-reading, reading and post reading. Using films in the teaching of a foreign language has the same format - pre-watching, watching and post watching.

Some instructors (see, for example, Abdrahmanova (2007) and Kasyanova (2004)) have argued that the film should be watched twice. Using examples from two famous Russian comedies of Leonid Gayday – The Caucasian Captive and Diamond Hand, Kasyanova (2004) argues that the basis of
the film – apart from its cultural importance – is a detailed analysis of the use of the language or its phonogram and therefore divides the teaching process into three stages:

1. Student’s self-study of the phonogram of the film, which should be provided together with words, phrases and phraseologies that play an important role in understanding the phonogram of the film, often referred to as the *lexical minimum*;

2. watching the film using the lexical minimum and watching the film without the lexical minimum;

3. analyzing the film – the characters, the story, the pictures and many more.

The problem with this methodology is that students cannot have the opportunity to watch the film step by step with the instructor during the second stage of the process. Therefore many questions which arise during the self watching will not be answered simply because the instructor cannot provide the students with the whole phonogram of the film as lexical minimum. This warrants the third watching of the film that should be done together with the instructor.

Abdrahmanova (2007) argues that it is very important to have pre-watching exercises, because one can anticipate and respond to questions which may come up during the watching process. If pertinent questions are not well answered before they are raised this can affect the work of the post-watching stage, because the students would not be able to understand the film without some important information, such as the period in which the film was acted and the morality and traditions of the country. In this regard, it is imperative for the instructor to watch the film and prepare exercises for the class. Recommended activities before watching the film with the students could include but should not be limited to:

1. Explaining the period in which the film was acted, especially if it is different from our period.
2. Explaining the major morality and the political situation of the country portrayed in the film.

3. Giving or discussing the lexical minimum of the film.

4. Developing questions about the film in written form that will help students pick up the relevant information the film wants to communicate. This has the dual advantage of helping students to focus their attention on the major points of the film and the instructor to check if they really understand the film. Such questions may include:

   - What are the names of the heroes?
   - What is their social status?
   - What are the names, ages, social status, etc., of their family members?
   - What are the names, ages, social status, etc., of their friends?
   - What dreams do they have?
   - What is the main problem of the film?
   - How was the problem settled? Was it solved well?
   - Characterize the heroes.
   - Who was your favorite hero? Why?
   - What language styles were used by the heroes? How does language characterise them?

In cases where students have visited the country or the town about which the film was made or in which it was set, we may ask students questions about the places they know. We may also ask questions about the character of the people in that town or country and ascertain whether or not the
filmmakers are right in their depiction. Other questions could include whether they did meet heroes in the film in that country, what their feelings are about the film and how it could be continued, as well as the possibility and necessity of continuing it. All these form part of the pre-watching stage and will help the students to polish up their oral proficiency as well as understand the culture of the country whose language is being learnt.

Students watch a film by themselves once or twice from the onset. Instructors may decide to watch the film with the students during this time, though it is not necessary. It all depends on the availability of time, classrooms, equipment, etc. The first time the students watch the film, they should understand the main story the filmmakers want to communicate. It is generally not recommended during this time to give any information other than what has been earlier suggested, so that students have the opportunity to think critically about the film. As they watch the film for the first time, the subtitles may be on or off. Ideally, it is good to put them off so that students may develop their own audio-visual understanding.

In watching the film a second time, the subtitles could be included to make it easier for the students to get more information. However, as discussed earlier, this will depend on the level of difficulty of the film and the level of understanding of the students. The subtitles could be put on if the instructor believes that the film is too difficult for the students or their level is below the standard required for them to understand the film. Sometimes, the instructor may be compelled to ask students whether they want the subtitles to be switched on or off. Personal experience over the past years indicates that students with a lower level of knowledge of the language will ask for subtitles to be put on while those with a good knowledge of the language may remain indifferent. Actually, such reaction (or the lack of it) from students helps the instructor to know their level of understanding.

After watching the film for the second time, the student should have more understanding of it as well as new information about the characters, country, lifestyles, etc. It is important at this point to discuss the answers to the questions provided. Where necessary, the instructor could provide more information about the period of the film as well as explain the
traditions of the country about which the film was made. Such traditions may not exist or may be different from what is practised in the country of the students. For example, “Boxing Day” in Ghana falls on the 26th December, while in Russia it falls on the last night of the year - 31st December. Thus a Ghanaian student watching a Russian film in which presents are given on the 31st of December will not understand the situation since (s)he knows that this must be done on the 26th of December. Also, the Russian word – баня – banya – “bath-house” has many meanings and carries so many traditions which could not be explained by simply providing its translation. The discussion should not be very deep, since the students could be asked to write essays on those differences. However, it is important to answer any questions before the third show.

During the third show, it is recommended that the film be watched in parts and together with the instructor. After every scene it is necessary to stop the film and discuss it. At this point the pictures which were not understood the conversation, new words and phraseology should be explained. It may sometimes be necessary to use the subtitles. It is also important to give more time to the students to express themselves during the discussion stage to enable them develop and comment on both the film and the language used in it. Watching the film for the third time is very important and probably takes the longest time because every scene should be discussed thoroughly to the understanding of the students, and where necessary, a scene should be re-watched. The question that arises is, “when is it recommended to stop the film during the third watching?” The phonogram and the flow of the story can help the instructor divide the film into short episodes and consequently direct him/her when to stop and discuss the film (Kasyanova, 2004). Generally, it is advisable to stop the film any time the instructor wants to explain something. Sometimes, it might be necessary to repeat some portions of the film, for example, pictures of national importance, since the students may never have seen such sights before. Additionally, it is important for pre-developed questions to focus on these places or pictures of national meaning and importance. Generally, during this time it is essential that the culture and civilization of the country should be discussed.
It is also imperative to stop the film when we hear a very useful phrase, word or phraseology. In native films we may meet a lot of such expressions, which students may not understand even if their knowledge of the language is above average. This is because students mostly learn the language in the classrooms and do not get the opportunity to listen to its use in everyday life - in the streets, in shops, in offices, in hospitals, at different levels of the educational system, at home, in the kitchen or in the bedroom. In addition, one can stop the film when there is any psychological specialty of the country, such as humor. In their everyday language people often use wisecracks or witticisms, many of which are from films. The work of the instructor is to draw the student’s attention to these by stopping the film and, if necessary, re-watching the episode. Furthermore, one can stop the film if there is any key information which should be understood by the students to enable them enjoy and understand the film as one complete story. Discussion at this level should be more detailed than it was after the second watching of the film.

After watching the film the third time with an in-depth discussion, students should be asked important questions on the film: What did they learn from the film? Why do they think it is important to watch the film? Can they continue the story of the film? If yes, how? If no, what are the reasons? This forms the post-watching stage. If the general perception of the students is that the film cannot be continued, then maybe the story was well told. Students’ response to the film helps the instructor to evaluate the choice of film and the presentation and discussion of the material. If the right choice of film is made, all stakeholders involved— students and instructor— should enjoy the whole teaching and learning process.

Finally, we should give post-viewing exercises. Such an exercise should be in written form and should help students learn how to write essays. Post-viewing exercises could focus on:

- (Short or long) summary of the film.
- Analyzing the behavior of one or more characters.
• Expressing feelings about the film (either some scenes or the film as a whole).

• Comparing the socio-cultural environment of the country in/about which the film was shot with that of their own country.

Undoubtedly, such a three-tier process of using films in the teaching and learning of a foreign language requires time, but time can be saved if the students have their own copies of the film. In that case the film could be watched twice in class and the students allowed to watch it for the second time at home, or students could watch the film twice individually and the third time with the instructor. Pre-developed questions could also be done at home and discussed in class. Evidently, such a process is possible only if the class size is small. With a small class size, all the students can have the opportunity to contribute significantly to discussions.

7. Conclusion

Our study indicates that many language instructors do not use alternative methods in the teaching of foreign language, and this is because of the time needed to prepare and to what is perceived as the unduly multi-staged teaching process. However, our experience and that of others indicate that using films in the teaching of a foreign language provides an opportunity for students to learn new words, new terminologies and new phraseology, as well as practise the language in class through discussions, especially at the advanced level. The success of using films in the teaching of a foreign language, however, depends on the preparedness of the instructors and the application of the right methodology.

The most difficult challenge that faces an instructor is the development of the socio-cultural competence in teaching: how to interpret different verbal and non-verbal aspects of a specific cultural setting, how to choose the right film and to avoid imposing one’s own conclusions, opinions and views on students. However, most of these challenges could be surmounted if instructors put in more effort and ensure that the context of the film suits the development of the students.
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Notes

1 They are to some extent wrong in thinking that they cannot use films in teaching History and Literature. Films can be used in teaching these subjects, but the methodology may be a little different from that for oral classes.

2 The International Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature (MAPRYAL) was founded as a public and non-governmental organisation at an Inaugural Conference in Paris (7-9 September 1967), on the initiative of scholars from a number of countries. In 1975 it was accorded UNESCO’s consultative status, category “C”.

3 Boxing Day is the day when people give presents to friends and loved ones. In Hungary, for example, Boxing Day falls on the 24th of December.
The Hamartia of Aristotle

Albert A. Sackey

ABSTRACT

The term hamartia, as it appears in Aristotle’s Poetics, has baffled critics. Two schools of thought have dichotomized the meaning of the word. While the first attempts to explain it in terms of moral evil and proposes tragic suffering as the retributive consequence of a “tragic flaw” in the individual’s character, the second rejects this moral interpretation but is unable to find a suitable interpretation or explanation for the word. The moral school’s interpretation of hamartia is based on a perceived direct link between tragic character and tragic purpose, with tragic action being assigned a subordinate status. However, a careful scrutiny of the Poetics reveals that tragic flaw or moral weakness is not one of the requirements of tragedy and that a hero’s misfortune is due, not to his nature, but to the wrong he has committed, either through ignorance or out of duty. Moreover, to Aristotle the requisite for consideration is positive, not negative character traits as in a tragic flaw, and tragic acts are committed not in character but out of character. A tragic hero, by his hamartia, brings a dislocation in the natural order. When he is punished, the disruption is removed and harmony is restored to the universe.

One passage which has baffled critics in the reading of Aristotle’s Poetics and has led to a great deal of misconception of the source of the tragic situation as understood by Aristotle, appears in the Poetics where Aristotle defines the proper tragic character. In Chapter XIII he states:

ο μεταξὺ αρα τοιων λοιΠος εοτι δε τοιουτος ο μητε αρετὴ
diaΦερον και δικαιοσυνη μητε δια ακιαν και μοXθηριαν
μεταβαλλων εις την δυστυΧιαν αλλα δι αμαρτιαν τινα
tων εν μεγαλη δοξῃ οντων και ευτυΧια οιον ΟιδιΠους και
θυετης και οι εκ των τοιουτων ενων εΠιΦανεισ ανδρες

There remains then the man who occupies the mean between saintliness and depravity. He is not extraordinary in virtue and righteousness, and yet does not fall into bad

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fortune because of evil and wickedness, but because of some hamartia of the kind found in men of high reputation and good fortune, such as Oedipus and Thyestes and famous men of similar families. (Aristotle, the Poetics, 1453a. 7-12.)

The word “hamartia” appears for the first time in Aristotle’s definition of tragedy in the extract quoted above. According to Brian Vickers, two schools of thought have dichotomized the meaning of the word. The first school attempts to explain the word in terms of moral evil and proposes tragic suffering as the retributive consequence of a “tragic flaw” in the individual’s character; the second school rejects this moral interpretation but is unable to find a suitable interpretation or explanation for the word.

It would appear the moral school was begun by the 10th Century Arab physician/philosopher Avicenna in his commentary on the Poetics where he uses the Arabic word zalal, meaning “error”, to translate hamartia. According to Avicenna, this error implies a “straying from the path of duty and losing sight of what is more noble” (Avicenna, The Cure). To Avicenna, tragedy teaches us the right thing to do in our given circumstances, that is, the proper conduct in society. Avicenna, therefore, in his equation of the emotional and ethical effects of tragedy, became the first critic to attribute moral relevance to the tragic hamartia.

In the 16th Century, after the rediscovery of the Poetics, the moral school began to gain more ground. Most of the major Italian Renaissance critics, in their commentaries on the newly discovered Poetics, agreed with Avicenna that Aristotle had a moral concept in mind when he introduced the tragic hamartia in his definition of the tragic character. Four critics immediately come to mind in this context: Antonio Minturno, Lodovico Castelvetro, Giraldi Cinthio and Torquato Tasso. In his dialogic discussion of the tragic hero in Book II of his L’arte poetica, Minturno suggests that tragic heroes like Oedipus, Thyestes and Creon are unhappy “more through human error than through deliberate wickedness” (emphasis mine).1 Similarly, Castelvetro, in his commentary on the tragic situation of pity and fear, argues that tragic characters, “through error of mind, act horribly when they believe they are acting fitly” (emphasis mine).2
Minturno and Castelvetro here perceive the tragic circumstance in terms of human weakness. In parallel translations Cinthio and Tasso render hamartia as “error”, linking it to a moral incapacity, however benign, on the part of the tragic hero.⁴

These sixteenth century commentators on Aristotle spoke with authority and conviction and their moral thesis set the stage for the great error of the next three hundred years. Indeed, no subsequent study of the Poetics was spared the moral impetus of their debate and they influenced almost every writer and critic after them, including Hegel who almost two centuries later actually introduced the phrase “tragic flaw” as a translation of hamartia.⁴

A.C. Bradley, the great Shakespearean scholar of the last century and an ardent disciple of Hegel, took up the mantle of the moral school, and in his monumental study of the psychological inwardness of the Shakespearean tragic character, did more than any other critic to advance the concept of tragic flaw as an essential ingredient of the tragic character.⁵ But Hegel and Bradley are not experts in critical discourse, and their understanding of hamartia is primarily in relation to their discussions of drama generally.

For specialized scholarship on the hamartia of Aristotle we must turn to three Aristotelian critics of the 20th century: S.H. Butcher and Lane Cooper (two of the chief exponents of the moral school) and Gerald Else, the most authoritative critic of the second school.⁶ Butcher, in The Poetics of Aristotle (1920), calls hamartia “some error or frailty”, as he wavers between “error” and “frailty.” Lane Cooper (1947) translates hamartia as “some error of judgment or shortcoming.” In a long commentary on his conception of hamartia as “moral flaw”, Cooper first argues that the etymology of the word makes it possible to apply it to both the inner and outward faults of man. But as Else rightly points out, such semasiological investigations of the word have been carried out in the past,⁷ and none of the studies has revealed the word’s true meaning. Else reminds us that the Poetics was written in the fourth century B.C., when “αμαρτανειν, αμαρτια, and their cognates and compounds display such a wide range of meanings—all the way from simple error or failure to ‘sin’ or as close to it as a classical Greek ever comes” (379).

Three cognates of the Greek word hamartia appear in the Poetics: αμαρτανω, αμαρτια and αμαρτημα. Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English
Lexicon gives the meanings of all three words. The verb ἀμαρτάνω (from which the infinitive, ἀμαρτανεῖν, is derived) is translated as “to miss, miss the mark,…to fail of doing, fail of one’s purpose, go wrong; to be deprived of a thing, lose it, to fail, do wrong, error, sin” (38). The same lexicon gives the meaning of both ἀμαρτήμα and ἀμαρτία as “a failure, error, sin” (ibid). The word ἀμαρτανεῖν is first used in the Poetics in Chapter 8, 1451a.20. Cooper translates it as “faulty choice” (30), Butcher as “error” (33) and Else as “wrong” (296). When the same word appears in Chapter 13, 1453a.24, Cooper has “error” (42), Butcher, “error” (47), and Else, “error” (399). In Chapter 15, 1454b.17, it becomes for Cooper “mistakes” (51), for Butcher, “error” (57) and for Else, “wrong”. In Chapter 19, 1456b.15, Cooper gives the meaning as “fault” (64), Butcher as “fault” (71) and Else passes over the chapter entirely. Finally, in Chapter 25, 1460b.23, Cooper translates “fault”, Butcher, “error”, and again Else passes over the chapter. The cognate hamartema appears four times in the Poetics: first, in Chapter 5, 1449a.34, where Cooper renders it as “shortcoming and deformity” (14), Butcher as “some defect or ugliness” (21) and Else as “mistake or piece of ugliness”; then thrice in Chapter 25, 1460b.19 and 30, and 1461b.8. In 1469b.19, Cooper has “mistake” (84), in 1460b. 30 he has “error” (85) and in 1461b.8, “mistake” (89). Butcher has “error” (99) and “mistake” (105), respectively; again, Else has no commentary on Chapter 25.

Aristotle uses the controversial word hamartia itself five times in the Poetics. Apart from Chapter 13 where it comes up twice, it occurs once in Chapter 16 and twice in Chapter 25. In Chapter 16, 1454b.35, Cooper translates it as “fault” (53), Butcher as “fault” (59) and Else omits the Chapter entirely. In Chapter 25, 1460b.15 and 17, Cooper renders the word as “errors” and “fault” (84), Butcher respectively as “faults” and “error” (99) and Else does not discuss the chapter. In Chapter 13, hamartia is first contrasted with kakia in 1453a.10, then with mochtheria in 1455a.16. In 1453a.10, Cooper translates it as “some error of judgment or shortcoming” and Butcher as “some error or frailty”, while Else has “some mistake”. In 1453a.16, for hamartian megalen Cooper has “a serious defect in judgment or shortcoming in conduct”, Butcher has “some great error or frailty” and Else “a big mistake”. A careful look at the interpretations of hamartia
given by Cooper and Butcher reveals an interesting discrimination in their translations. For the verb *hamartano*, on three occasions Cooper translates it as “fault,” as “error” on one occasion, and as “mistake” on another. Butcher has “error” on four occasions and “fault” on one. It is difficult to justify these shifts in rendition of the same word. Cooper is particularly guilty of this arbitrariness.

Cooper’s commentary on hamartia goes beyond etymology and semantics and wades into thematics. In a long discussion of the tragic character, he contends that most tragic heroes suffer from a general flaw which he calls a “blindness of heart”:

> Under this general flaw may be gathered the specific flaws of various heroes, for example: the wrath of Achilles’ in the *Iliad*; the overweening curiosity and presumption of Odysseus in the encounter with the Cyclops; ‘Man’s first disobedience’ in *Paradise Lost*; the jealousy of Othello; the ambition of Macbeth; the rashness of Lear. It is this flaw in the inward eye which mars the vision of agents whose penetration otherwise is keen, such as Oedipus and Hamlet, making their outward activity at critical junctures sometimes too slow and sometimes too hasty (40-1).

Cooper is here guilty of two faults. He confounds the plot and character of tragedy and epic, which Aristotle sees as distinct genres with distinct features and characteristics. Secondly, Cooper’s identification of Milton’s and Shakespeare’s heroes with characters of Greek tragedy is flawed. The characters of Milton and Shakespeare are consciously conceived within the framework of Christian ethics. They are based on the Christian doctrine of unity of character and being which postulates that the character cannot be separated from the action, that action and character are complementary. This is opposed to the Pre-Christian pagan ethical concept of morality, what Potts calls “the pagan morality of doing rather than being” (11), which is at the background of Aristotle’s persistent insistence in the *Poetics* on the separation of character and action.

The moral school of Aristotelian critical discourse intimates a direct link between tragic character and tragic purpose and sidelines tragic
action to subordination. But a careful scrutiny of the *Poetics* abundantly demonstrates otherwise and affirms the centrality of plot in the tragic enterprise. I list below excerpts from the *Poetics* on the relative importance of action in carrying out the objectives of tragedy. All quotations are from the translation of Allan H. Gilbert. The following extracts are from chapter 6:

- Tragedy then is the imitation of an action (1449b.24).
- The most important of these is the putting together of the separate actions, for tragedy is an imitation not of men but of actions and life (1450a.15-16).
- And happiness and unhappiness reside in action, and the end is some sort of action, not a quality, for according to their characters men are what they are, but according to their actions they are happy or the reverse (1450a. 17-19).
- They do not, then, act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are (1450a.20).
- So in the actions and the plot is found the end of tragedy, and the end is more important than anything else (1540a.21).
- Without action there can be no tragedy, but without characters there can be one (1450a.22).
- The soul of tragedy is the plot; the characters are in the second place (1450a.37-38).
- The plot is an imitation of an action and presents characters primarily for the sake of what they do (1450b.3-4).

The necessity of plot in the attainment of the tragic end is reiterated in other chapters: Chapter 7, 1450b.21; Chapter 9, 1451b.19; Chapter 11, 1452a.29; Chapter 14, 1453b.1; Chapter 15, 1454a. 16; Chapter 17, 1455a.34; and Chapter 18, 1455b.24.

If plot rather than character is the propelling engine of tragedy, and Aristotle has ruled strongly on the matter in his *Poetics*, what then may explain the stubborn obsession with the character and his tragic flaw as
The source of the tragic hamartia? Perhaps the Italian Renaissance critics, the initiators of the tragic flaw theory, may provide the answer. When the *Poetics* was first discovered in the Renaissance, Italian critics were the first commentators to actually see the original text and to have the opportunity to pass judgment. Italian commentaries on the *Poetics* were widely publicized long before the Greek text became generally available, and most European scholars first read the treatise second hand in Italian translations. Inevitably, these early Italian readings (or misreadings) of Aristotle influenced later readings of the text. A concept like the unity of place, with no Aristotelian sanction, came to be ascribed to the master by Castelvetro and his contemporaries.10 The same critics began the “characterization” of *hamartia* where the tragic hero is burdened with a tragic weakness.

The early Italians then were responsible for propagating the moral school, and to appreciate why these early critics and their followers, notwithstanding Aristotle’s own statements to the contrary, insisted on reading the tragic *hamartia* as an inherent character trait, we must examine the dichotomy between the classical psyche steeped in a pagan morality and the Christian mind with its belief in Original Sin. To the pagan mind a man’s actions are not necessarily determined by his character but most often by forces beyond his control; hence a good man is capable of evil action. The ancients separated a man’s character from his actions, with the latter rather than the former usually being the cause of his good or bad fortune. Christian morality is the opposite. Because of the notion of original sin, no man is without blemish of character. Therefore, when the Christian Renaissance came to translate the pagan Classics, the Christian sensibility was perplexed by the apparent amorality of the pagan message. How can innocent persons be punished for unpremeditated crimes? Why should a good man suffer for acts committed not through evil or wickedness? In the face of this apparent absence of a moral code of conduct, the Christian critics of the Renaissance, in their interpretation of the pagan stories, ardently searched for moral defects of character to explain the heroes’ fall from grace. A good example is Castelvetro’s discussion in his *Poetics* Chapter IX, 223-226 of the tragic events in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* and
Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and *Medea*, where the Italian critic imposes tragic flaws on the three female characters to justify their fall.

The point can now be forcefully made that any reading of *hamartia* which links it to character has no basis in Aristotle or Greek tragedy, and perhaps for a proper appreciation of why post-classical criticism places such moral emphasis on the tragic situation we may turn to the Christian lexicon, *Anno Domini*. In the Greek Bible, the word *hamartia* underwent a metamorphosis of meaning distinct from its classical usage. Throughout the New Testament the word is used to describe “sin”. 1 John 3: 9-10, our most illustrative text on New Testament understanding of *hamartia*, reads in the Greek:

Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμάρτιαν ὁ θεοί ὁ Ποιεῖ, ὅτι ἐπερμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μενεῖ καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγεννημένοι.

Hamartia appears as both noun (*hamartia*) and verb (*hamartano*) in the extract above to denote human frailty. We may literally translate the Greek:

Anyone born of God cannot commit *hamartia* because the seed of God remains in him, and therefore he cannot *harmatanein* since he is born of God.

The key to the meaning of *hamartia* here hinges on two pivotal assumptions:

- The seed of God is present in anyone born of God.
- God is perfect and divine and a person with God’s seed implanted in him is unable to commit hamartia, even if he so desires, since it is not in his nature to commit *hamartia*.

Evidently, the meaning of *hamartia* here is related to the doctrine of sin, and throughout the Greek Testament *hamartia* translates as sin, a moral flaw in the human behaviour interlinked with character. This new understanding of *hamartia* acknowledged by the Christian Renaissance was unknown to the ancients who dichotomized action and being.
In its historical context from Homer to Aristotle, a period spanning some five hundred years [850BC to 322BC], there was very little change in the use of the word *hamartia* in the Greek literary script. From the Old Ionic dialect of Homer, through the New Ionic of Thucydides, to the Attic dialect of Plato, Aristotle’s contemporary, the meaning of *hamartia* was often associated with an external activity rather than with an inherent weakness of character. The word *hamartia* itself is rare in ancient literature, but its cognates and compounds, such as *hamartano, hamartema, hamartole* and *examartano*, abound in the literary tradition of ancient Greece. In Homer, especially in the *Iliad*, the verb *hamartano* is used several times during battle to describe the hurling of missiles at an enemy and the failure to hit the target, as in the *Iliad*, VIII: 309-11; X: 372; and XI, 232-5, in all of which instances the word is used to describe the failure of a thrown missile to hit its target in warfare, hence the absence of accurate aim. In Homer, then, *hamartia* and its cognates mean “missing the mark”.

In Thucydides, the word *hamartia* is used at least once, but the variants *hamartano* and *hamartema* appear a number of times, usually in contrast with the verb *adikeo* and its substantive *adikema*. In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I: XXI, 1, Thucydides uses *hamartanoi* to describe an error of opinion, and in I: XXXIII, 3, the expression *gnomes hamartanei* means error in judgment. Again, in I: XXXVIII, 5 - XLII, 2, *hamartano* is on three occasions differentially set against *adikeo*, which connotes injury and injustice. In I: XXXVIII, 5, *adikoumenoi* delineates the moral wrongness of waging an unusual war against the enemy whilst *hamartanomen* suggests that such a morally wrong war may be an error or miscalculation. In I: XXXIX, 3, *edikemetha* conveys the injustice of the enemy’s assault, and *hamartematon* expresses the tactical blunders of the enemy in battle. Finally, in I: XLII, 2, the expression *elachista hamartane* means an error of action, as opposed to the expression *keleuousin adikein* which denotes instigation to evil. In I: XXII, 5, in a passage unique for its semblance to Aristotle’s diction in his definition of the tragic hero, Thucydides juxtaposes *hamartia* with *kakia*, a word which connotes evil and wickedness. From these we may observe that in Thucydides, *hamartia* means error or a failed purpose, signification more significantly subjective than its earlier Homeric sense.
Plato was a contemporary, indeed the teacher of Aristotle, and his understanding of *hamartia* is similar to Aristotle’s. In Plato’s dialogues, the word *hamartia* and its cognates largely echo the meaning in Thucydides, who was his contemporary but not Aristotle’s. Let us take a few examples. In the *Apology*, 22D, Socrates equates *hamartema* with vanity of knowledge which he perceives, not as a weakness of disposition, but as a general failing associated with certain professions whose special expertise sometimes leads to a false profession of proficiency in unrelated fields. In the *Crito*, 53A, Socrates explains *examartano* in terms of breaking the law by escaping from lawful custody; and in the *Phaedrus*, 263A, Socrates again uses the verb *hamartano* to describe a faulty statement which lacks art. In the *Phaedo*, 113D-114A, Socrates gives four instances of acts of *hamartema*: grave deeds of sacrilege such as *hierosylia* (desecrating or stealing from consecrated grounds); wicked and abominable murders; acts of outrage or violence against a parent in a moment of passion, which one regrets afterwards; and acts of murder in a moment of passion, also regretted afterwards.

We observe from the four examples above that Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, establishes two types of *hamartia*: the deed done deliberately [the first two instances] and the deed done unwittingly [the remaining two examples]. Aristotle makes similar observations about the tragic situation. In the *Poetics*, Chapter XIV, 1453b, 1-50, Aristotle observes that a good tragedy involves family members or people with mutual affection for each other and prescribes four situations of tragedy, “besides which there is no other”:

- the deed done by those who know and understand
- the deed not done because the culprit knows and understands
- the deed done in ignorance, with knowledge and understanding afterwards
- the deed not done because of sudden recognition and knowledge.

In an insightful follow-up commentary on these four situations, Aristotle points out that a tragic deed need not be committed for tragedy to be effected. In other words, a tragedy need not contain a *hamartia* and its
consequent misfortune and suffering. Indeed, of the four conditions of tragedy, Aristotle considers the fourth as the best and “the most tragic”, where a *hamartia* is avoided at the very last moment. Aristotle himself cites Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris* as an example of the best tragedy, where just before his sacrifice, Iphigenia recognizes Orestes as her long lost brother, and consequently avoids the *hamartia* of his murder. Bypassing the *hamartia*, however, does not necessarily make a good tragedy. On the contrary, Aristotle insists that the second situation is the worst and the most “untragic,” where a *hamartia* is missed at the very last moment by a culprit who all along knows and understands the implications and facts of the deed. Such a position merely plays upon our feelings of horror by carrying us to the point of tragedy and retreating without any real suffering. To Aristotle, this is inexcusable, and the event is not tragic. For an example of this kind of tragic situation, Aristotle refers us to the end of Sophocles’ *Antigone*, where Haemon, in righteous anger at his father’s guilt in Antigone’s death, draws his sword in the heat of passion to strike him but hesitates, and Creon flees as Haemon turns the dagger on himself. To Aristotle, Sophocles should not have had Haemon act in this way, and the son should either have killed the guilty father or not drawn his sword at all. As it turns out, we are suddenly, and with horror, confronted with a possible patricide with all its implications, however justifiable, but one which does not, for no obvious reasons, materialize.

From Aristotle’s discussion in Chapter XIV, only the first and third situations contain *hamartia*, in the sense that the deed is actually carried through under those circumstances, and they are respectively, in the view of Aristotle, the third and second most tragic situations after the fourth. Indeed, the first and third situations echo Socrates’ four examples of *hamartema* in the *Phaedo*. The first situation, though only the third in Aristotle’s scale of preference, is the most common among Greek tragedians, and is mirrored in Socrates’ first two examples in the *Phaedo*, viz. grave deeds of sacrilege, and wicked and abominable murders. According to Aristotle, in this situation the deed is deliberately done in full knowledge and understanding, and he uses Euripides’ *Medea* as illustration where Medea, to spite her husband, kills her sons in full knowledge and understanding of her action. As Aristotle points out, this
type of tragic situation is the practice of the ancient poets and abounds in Greek tragedy: Phaedra’s incestuous lust for her stepson and her willful plotting of his murder [Euripides’ Hippolytus]; Clytemnestra’s vicious murder of her husband to make way for her adulterous relationship with Aegisthus [Aeschylus’ Agamemnon]; Orestes’ murder of his mother to avenge his father’s death [Aeschylus’ The Choephoroi]; and many others.

The third situation, the second best according to Aristotle, is where the deed is done in ignorance. Socrates’ last two examples of hamartema in the Phaedo are our nearest equivalent of Aristotle’s second most tragic situation. In the Phaedo example, even though the hamartema is committed in full knowledge, the act is done in the rashness of passion, to be regretted later. Here, the tragic deed is done in the blindness of the moment which occasions a momentary incapacity to understand and appreciate its meaning. The inevitable remorse which follows is therefore a movement to gnosis from an initial agonia, as in the case of Aristotle’s best hamartia which is his second best tragedy.

Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus is Aristotle’s supreme model of the best hamartia. But there are others. Theseus in Euripides’ Hippolytus murders his son in full knowledge of his identity, but in the heat of passion and in ignorance of his son’s innocence. In the end, when Artemis reveals the truth to him, he has compunction and begs for forgiveness. In Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, Agamemnon chooses to sacrifice his daughter for the sake of expediency, an action the chorus describe as madness and an act of hamartia. He repents too late and suffers the guilt the rest of his life. Creon in Sophocles’ Antigone undergoes a similar fate when in the blindness of ignorance he unwittingly causes the deaths of his son and wife. The hamartia of all these characters – Oedipus, Theseus, Agamemnon and Creon – cannot be a “flaw in the inward eye”, as Lane Cooper insists. Their wrong actions betray a certain blindness, but it is not an inward blindness of disposition but a blindness of perception. They suffer not from a moral blindness of character but from an external incapacity due to ignorance or to the impetuosity of an unguarded moment. Such a false step can in no way be described as an inward flaw or a moral shortcoming. The temper of Oedipus is not as instrumental as agnoia [ignorance] in the commission of his crimes, which include
willful acts of impiety. The source of the tragic mathesis in Oedipus Tyrannus is not Oedipus’ temperamental character but his patricide and incest, both committed in agnoia. Oedipus’ patricide is more a result of his ignorance than his temper, and his marriage to his mother is an act of pure ignorance. Besides, these are crimes of the mythical Oedipus which Sophocles skillfully wrote out of his play to make provision for Oedipus’ acts of impiety which so dominate the play and which form the bedrock of the literary Oedipus’ tragic hamartia. Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus is therefore not a tragedy of character where the hero falls from grace to grass because of a tragic flaw, but rather a complex tragedy of action in which the fall is occasioned by a final anagnorisis, leading to a movement from ignorance to knowledge and resulting in the hero’s misfortune.

The same plot structure informs Euripides’ Hippolytus. Theseus’ hamartia is not a character trait but his murder of his son in the blindness of his ignorance of the son’s true virtue. This much Artemis confirms in her last speech, where she exonerates all three tragic characters: Theseus, Phaedra and Hippolytus:

His death was not your will; men may well commit hamartia
When the gods so ordain.¹⁴

Here, the act of hamartia is generalized to describe the fatal actions of all three central characters. Men may commit hamartia when the gods so decree. This statement separates the doer from the deed and blames external forces, not human depravity, for men’s woes. This externalization applies to the character and actions of Phaedra, who perceives her incestuous desires for her stepson, not as a result of an internal weakness of character, but as an external madness brought upon her by her ate. Indeed, it is this absence of internalization which marks out Euripides’ Phaedra from the Phaedra of Seneca and Racine, both of whom trace her malady to a tragic flaw in the personality. As for the character of Hippolytus, the central figure in the play, his absolute lack of moral flaw or frailty of character is so apparently evident that Jean Racine, working under the onus of the moral flaw doctrine, is compelled in his version of the myth to create the character with a faiblesse to satisfy his Christian perception of character:
Pour ce qui est du personnage d’Hippolyte, j’avais remarqué dans les anciens qu’on reprochait à Euripide de l’avoir représenté comme un Philosophe exempt de toute imperfection; ce qui faisait que la mort de ce jeune Prince causait beaucoup plus d’indignation que de pitié. J’ai cru lui devoir donner quelque faiblesse qui le rendrait un peu coupable envers son père, sans pourtant lui rien ôter de cette gradeur d’âme avec la quelle il épargne l’honneur de Phèdre, et se laisse opprimer sans l’accuser [Preface to *Phèdre*]

Like Euripides, the other two major tragedians of ancient Greece, Sophocles and Aeschylus, never intended their tragic heroes to fall into misfortune because of evil or wickedness caused by an imperfection of character. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, the hamartia of the central character is not a flawed personality but a wrong choice of action which leads to damnation. This is clearly articulated by the chorus of the elders of Argos in their opening parodos, where they define the hamartia of Agamemnon. In the translation below, the Greek word *hamartia* has been rendered as a reckless wrong:

> Hence that repentance late and long
> Which, since his madness passed, pays toll
> For that one reckless wrong.15

In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the hamartia of Creon or Antigone is not what he or she is, but what he/she does. Antigone, however good the intention and justifiable the deed, acts against human law. A similar hamartia applies in the situation of Creon, who acts for human law against divine law. These actions are not caused by human failings; they are merely wrong acts. Creon’s blindness is one of ignorance of the divine law, which leads to the death of a blood relation, his son. In the *Antigone*, in a short space of eight lines Sophocles uses the word *hamartia* thrice [1259, 1261 and 1269] to describe the crime of Creon, which is the act of killing his own son in ignorance. Below is Elizabeth Wyckoff’s translation of the scene [1257-1269]:

> Hence that repentance late and long
> Which, since his madness passed, pays toll
> For that one reckless wrong.
[The messenger goes into the house. Creon enters with his followers. They are carrying Haemon's body on a bier.]

Chorus: But look, the king draws near.

   His own hands bring
   the witness of his crime,
   the doom he brought on himself.

Creon: O crimes of my wicked heart,

   harshness bringing death.

   You see the killer, you see the kin he killed.

   My planning was all unblest.

   Son, you have died too soon.

   Oh, you have gone away
   through my fault, not your own.16

[I have italicized the three words which translate hamartia]

My analyses above are intended to firmly posit that the ancient Greek tragedians do not burden their tragic heroes with a weakness of character. In this, they are following the best traditions observed by Aristotle. The heroes of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus are not conceived in the same way Milton, Shakespeare or Racine perceives tragic character. We do not talk about the “character” of Oedipus, Agamemnon, Creon, Antigone, Theseus, Hippolytus or Phaedra, as we talk of the “character” of Milton’s Satan, Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Lear or Macbeth, or Racine’s Phèdre. In Greek tragedy we are concerned, not with what the characters are, but with what they do or do not do, or what happens or does not happen to them. In Milton, Shakespeare and most Renaissance and post-Renaissance Western tragedy, it is the character of the heroes which sustains the tragic action; in Greek tragedy, character does not have such pivotal force because it is not conceived that way.

Let us examine the matter further by turning to Aristotle. In the Poetics, Chapter XV, Aristotle identifies four necessities of tragic character: He/she must be morally good, appropriate, true to life or to the mythical prototypes, and consistent (1454a, 16). Tragic flaw or moral weakness is
not one of the requirements, and Aristotle rejects baseness of character in tragedy and insists that where frailty of character becomes necessary because of its presence in the mythical original, the flaw should be played down so as not to affect the goodness of the character. Since a hero’s misfortune is not due to his nature but to the wrong he has done, negative traits like anger, cowardice and cruelty should not be allowed to cloud our perception of his tragic situation.

A proper tragic hero then, according to Aristotle, is not morally flawed. In moral terms Aristotle places him in a definite context. He must be good, though not too virtuous or righteous, but never villainous or evil or wicked, and if possible he may not even be tainted with such relatively minor negative traits as cowardice, anger and cruelty. Such strict criteria disqualify the majority of the post-classical so-called tragic heroes of Western literature: Satan, Faustus, Richard III, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Lear, Hamlet, Othello and a host of others.

In Chapter VI of the *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious”. The indefinite article qualifying the word “action” here suggests one single piece of action, hence a single, not a double plot, which focuses on the great tragic action of the central or any other figure. I quote Aristotle on the unity of action:

> A plot is not unified, as some think, because it is concerned with one man, for a countless number of things happen to one man, some of which cannot be combined with others in a single unit; thus there are many acts by one man which cannot form part of a unified action. Therefore all the poets who have written *Heracleids, Theseids*, and similar poems seem to have gone wrong, for they think that since Hercules was one man a plot dealing with him must also be a unit . . . It is necessary then, just as in other imitative arts there is one imitation of one thing, that the plot, being an imitation of an action, should be concerned with one thing . . .

Aristotle’s sentiments here explain why in Greek tragedy a tragic figure sometimes appears in several tragedies by the same or different authors,
and often plays major roles in more than one play. Since tragedy is about what a character does rather than what he is, a playwright may write as many tragedies on an individual as there are tragic situations in his life. The famous trilogies of Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides are in this tradition, where because of a series of tragic situations revolving around a family or its members, several tragedies are composed on the family, each play being a complete and separate, autonomous unit. In these plays, as Aristotle strongly affirms, the characters “do not act in order to represent character, but in the course of their actions they show what their characters are”\textsuperscript{22} Being human (remember they are neither saints nor villains), they are capable of human error, hence their potential for tragic action, and we do not blame their misfortune on negative character traits but on the wrong they have committed. This is the source of the pity we feel for them, and because their suffering is undeserved, it touches our \textit{philanthropia},\textsuperscript{23} or human feeling.

As Aristotle points out, these tragic men and women fall into bad fortune not because of evil or wickedness, but because of some \textit{hamartia} or wrong act they have already committed before the play opens, or commit in the course of the play. This is how Aristotle puts it in Chapter XIII, 1453a.12:

\begin{quote}
The change . . . must be from good fortune to bad fortune, not because of wickedness but because of some great \textit{hamartia}, either of such a man as has been indicated or of a better rather than a worse man. Proof of this is found in practice. For at first poets accepted plots as they chanced on them, but now the best tragedies are written about a few houses as on Alcmaeon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes Telephus and others on whom it came to suffer or do terrible things.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Aristotle would accept for tragic consideration individuals who are better, not worse, than these six men in character or status. The requisite here is positive, not negative character traits as in a tragic flaw. None of the six tragic heroes mentioned here is a villain or has a tragic flaw which is instrumental in the commission of his \textit{hamartia} or “terrible thing”.
Alcmaeon’s hamartia is matricide. In a play by the Greek tragedian, Astydamas, Eriphyle, the mother of Alcmaeon, for the love of gold kills Amphiaras, her husband, through treachery. Alcmaeon, in revenge, kills his mother for his father’s murder.\(^{25}\) Oedipus’ hamartia is his patricide and incest and consequential acts of impiety during the criminal investigation, all done in ignorance. Orestes, like Alcmeaon, kills his mother, Clytemnestra, in revenge for her murder of her husband, his father.\(^{26}\) Meleager’s hamartia is his killing of his mother’s two brothers who have wronged him. For this crime his mother Althaea kills him in revenge and later commits suicide.\(^{27}\) Thyestes commits hamartia by eating the cooked flesh of his own son in ignorance in a meal served by his treacherous brother, Atreus. Thyestes suffers remorse the rest of his life for this error. For this treachery, his son Aegisthus later revenges on Atreus’ son, Agamemnon.\(^{28}\) I cannot trace the story of Telephus, but from the bits and pieces I gather from Homer, the following outline may suffice: Mars, the god of war, secretly made love to the faithful Astyoche, wife of Telephus, unknown to her, and she brought forth twin sons of the god who were mistaken for her husband’s.\(^{29}\)

All these terrible acts are committed not in character but out of character, either through ignorance, as in the case of Oedipus, Thyestes and Telephus’ wife, or as a duty (through revenge), as in the case of Alcmaeon, Orestes and Meleager’s mother. Anagnorisis then becomes the inevitable progression of the tragic circumstance, and the hero, as it were, wakes up from the nightmarish experience of his hamartia, and in his recognition of the truth of his situation experiences “a change from ignorance to knowledge – resulting in love or hate – by those marked out for good fortune or bad fortune”.\(^{30}\) Recognition is crucial to the untying of the tragic knot. According to Aristotle, “for every tragedy there is a tying of the knot, or complication, and an untying of it, or solution. The tying is composed of what is without the plot, and many times of some things within it; the rest is the untying”\(^{31}\). Aristotle explains further that the tying includes every event both outside and inside the play, which adds to the complication of the tragic situation up to the point when recognition takes place and the change of fortune begins. The untying is the result of Recognition and everything else that happens when there is a change
from ignorance to knowledge. This follows that the *hamartia*, whether it occurs without or within the plot, is both the genesis and soul of the tying whilst Recognition is the genesis and soul of the untying. In other words, *hamartia* creates the complications whilst Recognition brings about the solution. Greek tragedy therefore does not present the tragic fall of a hero due to an inherent tragic flaw, but rather offers a complication and its denouement through the untying of the tragic knot.

In conclusion, the *hamartia* of Aristotle is simply a going wrong [not being wrong, for that would be an error of character, which is untragic], when the character is either ignorant of a particular wrong he is committing [like Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother in ignorance], or acts in the heat of passion [like Orestes killing his mother to revenge his father’s death]. Under such circumstances, Greek society prescribes appropriate sanctions against the culprit to right the wrong done. A tragic hero, by his *hamartia*, brings a dislocation in the natural order. When he is punished, the disruption is removed and harmony is restored to the universe.

NOTES

4 See Hegel’s discussion of tragedy in his *The Philosophy of Fine Art*.
7 Else mentions critics like Hey, Phillips and Harsh—all advocates of the “moral flaw” theory—as earlier investigators in the semasiology of the word.
8 Note the way Cooper and Butcher seem to interchange “error” and “fault” for *hamartia* in Chapter 25, 1460b.15 and 17.
9 Allan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*.
10 See Castelvetro, 353, 32 where in a clear misreading of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, XXIV, 59b.17, he writes: “Tragedy…cannot represent any action except such as occurs in one place and within the space of twelve hours…”
11 See the Messenger’s speech in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, specifically 1231 ff.
12 Euripides, Medea, 1236 ff.

13 Lane Cooper, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry.

14 Euripides’ Hypolytus, 1433-4. Translation is partly by Philip Vellacott in Euripides Three Plays (Penguin, 1970), p.70

15 Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, 222-4. Translation is by Philip Vellacott in Aeschylus: The Orestelan Trilogy (Penguin, 1965), p.50


17 In both Chapter XV, 1454a.16 and Chapter XXV, 1461b.15 of the Poetics Aristotle refers to the Menelaus of Euripides’ Orestes as an example of an unnecessary wickedness of character.

18 In Chapter XV, 1454b.8 (Poetics) Aristotle refers us to Homer’s Achilles as an example of hard but good character.

19 I have here summarised Aristotle’s description of the tragic hero as set out in The Poetics, Chapter XIII, 1453a.7 and Chapter XV, 1454b.8.

20 Aristotle, The Poetics, Chapter VI, 1449b.20. Translated by Allan Gilbert, pp. 75-6.

21 The Poetics, Chapter VIII, 1451a.16. Quoted from Gilbert, pp. 80-1.

22 The Poetics, Chapter VI, 1450a.15; ibid, p.77.

23 The Poetics, Chapter XIII, 1452b.28.

24 Quoted from Gilbert, p.86.

25 My sources for the story of this play, which is now lost, are The Poetics, Chapter XIV, 1453b.1-26; and Homer, The Odyssey, XI, 326-7.

26 Aristotle compares the matricides of Orestes and Alcmaeon in The Poetics, Chapter XIV, 1453b.24-25.

27 Vide Ovid, Metamorphoses, Bk VIII, 260-530.

28 Vide Aegisthus’ speech in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon, 1578-1612.

29 Homer, Iliad Bk II, 511-15; Homer, Odyssey, Bk XI, 516-21.

30 The Poetics, Chapter XI, 1452a.29. Quoted from Gilbert, p.84.

31 The Poetics, Chapter XVIII, 1455b.24. Quoted from Gilbert, pp. 95-6.
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Infelicitous Use of Anaphoric “This” in Undergraduate Academic Writing

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to describe the contexts of misuse of the anaphoric pronoun “this” in paragraphs composed by undergraduate students in their academic writing assignments and account for the infelicities, with the hope that the findings will extend the frame of reference for the analysis of such infelicities for instructional purposes. The study unearthed the following infelicities: (a) Ambiguous co-reference; (b) Extensive use of “this”; and (c) Textual distance between “this” and its referent. Practical intervention measures are proposed to help both students and instructors to deal with the problem.

1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the study

Anaphora may be defined as the process where a word or phrase refers back to another word or phrase which was used earlier in a text. The theoretical area of anaphora is vast and complex (Aoun, 1985; Langacker, 1991; King, 2005). Indeed, the phenomenon of anaphora has been treated at a high level of abstraction as it relates to the theory of government and binding in some linguistic studies, and in the area of psycholinguistics and philosophy in terms of psychological processes involved in interpretation processes and discourse representation theory, context dependent quantifier approach and dynamic logic approaches, among others. However, in this paper, I am simply concerned with the anaphoric function of the demonstrative pronoun this in paragraphs composed by undergraduate students in their academic writing assignments. The objective of the paper is to describe the contexts of misuse and account for the infelicities. Considering various philosophical and linguistic debates on approaches to the analysis of anaphora and in the light of the motivation for this study, I must stress...
that this paper should be placed and appraised simply in the context of writing instruction and pedagogy.

1.2 Review of related literature

Academic writing I would define simply as writing for scholarly purposes in scholarly contexts. Texts so produced would have to fulfill the expectations or requirements of the academic discourse community.

Discipline specific requirements may vary, but the general principles of effective written communication are fairly uniform and they include appropriate vocabulary, correct sentence structures and linkages, spelling and punctuation.

Infelicitous use of pronominal reference in undergraduate academic writing has received some attention by Dako (1997). She examined scripts in literature by Part II (i.e. final year) students of the Department of English of the University of Ghana in a specific year in the 1980’s. Her aim was to find out how effective the writing skills of English graduates were. Her study focused on such issues as sentence variation, use of sentence-transition devices, extent of vocabulary and general language competence. Of particular note are instances where she discusses linkage under sentence variation. She explains that a common device used by students is linkage by means of pronouns referring to antecedents found in preceding sentences. She cites the case of an essay that comprised 55 sentences and of these, 32 sentences started with the pronoun “he” and 11 sentences started with “that is/this is”. The conclusion Dako draws from her analysis is that:

Pronominal reference appears to be an overused linkage device in students’ essays. The rules of reference were often not adhered to so that it at times was difficult to know which NP was the antecedent. As a result many essays were unplanned enumerative sequences rather than clearly structured texts with an introduction, a discussion and a conclusion (p. 268).
Dako’s conclusion is most revealing, but the problem of pronominal reference, especially infelicitous use of anaphoric “this”, deserves a more exhaustive characterization. Therefore, the objective of this paper as mentioned earlier is to describe the contexts of misuse of the anaphoric pronoun “this” and account for the infelicities, with the hope that the findings will extend the frame of reference for the analysis of such infelicities for instructional purposes.

1.3 The problem and the data

1.3.1 The problem

Infelicitous use of anaphoric “this” in undergraduate academic writing involves:

(a) Ambiguous co-reference;
(b) Extensive use of “this”; and
(c) Textual distance between “this” and its referent.

These infelicities create looseness in information links across the text, which leads to a breakdown in communication in the text.

1.3.2 The data

Part of the data for this paper comes from samples of academic writing texts which were originally collected in the late 90s as part of my research work towards a higher degree. The texts for that research consisted of samples of extended writing from Level 100 students both in the Humanities and Science from the University of Ghana who were doing Language and Study Skills (i.e., Academic Writing). The assumption at that time (which is true even now) was that a typical academic writing class is a meeting of a cross-section of first-year students, with each class containing a cohort of students with different subject combinations straddling the Arts and Social Studies in the case of the Humanities, and Biological, Mathematical or Earth Sciences in the case of the Sciences. In all, 179 texts were collected from both the Humanities and Science. The texts for Levels 100 and 200 (Humanities) were students’ essay-type responses to take-home assignments on questions from their subject
areas. The data for the science students represented a challenge since their writing involved mainly responses to objective type questions and short notes. Fortunately, a course that involved extended writing, namely Earth Science, was taken by all level 100 science students, so texts were obtained directly from the lecturers handling the course. Data for level 200 science students were collected from the Departments of Zoology and Chemistry for the following reasons: first, Level 200 science students do not take Language and Study Skills, and second, some aspects of Chemistry and Zoology are compulsory for this category of students. Those aspects which involved extended writing were identified and samples from these areas were collected from the lecturers teaching these courses. The materials consisted of mainly laboratory reports in the case of Chemistry and an essay on the topic, “Discuss the consequences when the functional niches of two closely related species overlap”, in the case of Zoology.

The other part of the data consists of cases of infelicitous use of the demonstrative pronoun “this” as and when they occur in the scripts of students who happened to be in my academic writing groups over the years. In addition, I have examined some long essays, spanning the years 1994 to 2004, of final year undergraduate students of the Sociology department which I randomly selected. I have also enhanced the data with a focus group study on anaphoric “this” based on Swales and Feak (2004) with my 2005/2006 academic writing group which comprised a mix of students from the humanities and sciences.

1.4 Norms of usage-- Anaphoric “this”

The Webster’s 1913 dictionary defines the demonstrative pronoun “this” as “a pronoun distinctly designating that to which it refers”. Other dictionaries have defined it as “a pronoun that points out an intended referent”. Numerous grammar books have spelt out the nature and use of the demonstrative pronoun “this”, but I will here specifically draw from the works of Quirk and Greenbaum (1976), and Downing and Locke (1992) to explain the pronoun “this” in general terms. From their perspective, the demonstrative pronoun “this” can be used to refer to a whole proposition and this reference may be characterized as anaphoric for references to a previous part of the text, cataphoric to a later part of the text or exophoric
to something outside the text, and some references are idiomatic. Below are examples taken from Downing and Locke (1992: 414-415):

**Anaphoric:** You are working too long and too hard, and *this/that* is bound to affect your health in the long run.

**Cataphoric:** The plan is *this*: plane to Cairo, night train to Luxor and then up the Nile by boat as far as Aswan. That makes sense, what you’ve just said.

**Exophoric:** I hate working like *this!* (= in this way)

In discussing discourse reference in general, Quirk and Greenbaum (ibid) provide specific examples to illustrate the different ways of indicating anaphoric or cataphoric reference. This is useful; however, the Halliday and Hasan (1976: 64-65) summary of the norms of usage for anaphoric “this” captures, in a theoretically concise manner, the linguistic behaviour of the pronoun and its variants, namely, “that”, “these”, and “those”:

Since ... they identify semantically and not grammatically, when they are anaphoric [they] require the explicit repetition of the noun, or some form of synonym, if they are to signal exact identity of specific reference; that is to refer unambiguously to the presupposed item at the identical degree of particularization. A demonstrative without a following noun may refer to some more general class that includes the presupposed items, and this also applies under certain conditions to a demonstrative with a following noun - namely if the context is such that the noun can be INTERPRETED more generally.

1. **Analysis and Discussion**

2.1 **Ambiguous co-reference**

*Ambiguous co-reference refers to cases where neither the content of the preceding text nor any idea or specific piece of information in the preceding text relates directly or clearly to the pronoun “this”.*
Extract 1 below is taken from an essay on the topic “Explain the rise of President Rawlings to power in Ghana”. It consists of four sentences, with sentence 3 beginning with the phrase, “with regard to this”.

**Extract 1**

However, it was not until 1981 that Rawlings saw the ineffectiveness of Dr. Hilla Limann. (2) Besides, he needed to rule the country by himself. (3) With regard to this, Dr. Hilla Limann handed over to him and Rawlings became the President of Ghana. (4) From 1981, President Rawlings started to find solutions to the problems which contributed to the retardation of the country’s economy.

In interpreting the presupposition set up by the anaphoric “this” in sentence 3, the reader’s expectation is that sentences 1 and 2, in whole or in part, constitute likely antecedents. Such an interpretation would mean that “Dr. Hilla Limann” as the grammatical subject of sentence 3 handed over to Rawlings in consideration of antecedents 1 and 2, that Rawlings had seen his ineffectiveness and that Rawlings needed to rule the country by himself. Indeed, from a slightly humorous perspective such an interpretation would be considered plausible in the light of the social and political situation at that time or the circumstances surrounding the handing over of Rawlings to Limann in 1979. Or are we to interpret the use of “this” from the writer’s perceptual centre? In that case, the interpretation would be that from the writer’s point of view the propositions in sentences 1 and 2 led to Limann’s action as indicated in sentence 3. If that is the case then probably the transitional word needed to link sentence 3 with the preceding information is “so” or “therefore”. The awkward interpretational plausibility as exemplified above creates an ambiguous referential relation.

Let us consider another extract from a student’s essay on the topic, “Compare and contrast urban and rural life in terms of personal safety and educational facilities”. In this extract, there is a lack of clarity as to the co-referential relationship between “this” in sentence 3 and its assumed antecedents. The ambiguity is partly a consequence of the grammatical and the stylistic infelicities which characterize the preceding text.
Extract 2

When also we take education into consideration we will find out that the rural areas do lack teaching facilities such as school buildings, qualified teachers, textbooks, libraries, laboratory for their practicals, bookshops to enable them acquire some of their books for learning, also their administration becomes very poor in terms of planning and ruling the school well. (2) In all, it brings about low educational background as the people have not acquired much for productive ventures. (3) This brings about less productivity in the areas and even makes it difficult for them to know the essence of going to school.

Sentence I of extract 2 is long and unwieldy. Two points are made here: that the rural areas lack teaching facilities and that the administration of the schools is poor. Part of the weak information linkage in this text is due to the inexplicitness of the phrase “the rural areas”, considered in terms of the surrounding information. The phrase should appropriately read “the schools in the rural areas”, which then renders the interpretation of the phrase “their administration” easy. “Their” would then relate anaphorically to the schools. As the phrase stands there is an intelligibility problem. The phrase “their administration” is in reference to the schools and not the rural areas. Additionally, the grammatical subject of sentence 2 is the pronoun “it”, which in this sentence is functioning like “this” since it is supposed to refer to the situation that has been described in the preceding sentence. The point is that some explicitness is desirable at this stage. Probably, the substitution of “it” with the demonstrative pronoun “this” combined with the appropriate summary word (for example: this situation) would have been much more felicitous. This substitution would then allow the writer to use “it” instead of “this” in sentence 3, in combination with an appropriate sentence connective. A possible restructuring is as follows: “... this situation brings about low educational background... and it (reference to this situation) also brings about less productivity... “ The restructuring is motivated by the parallelism engendered by the repetition of the verb phrase “brings about” in sentences 2 and 3.

Extract 3 is taken from an essay entitled, “Show how the Christian missionaries influenced the social life of Ghanaians”. In this extract, the
antecedent of “this” is “cocoa”, but the surrounding information does not allow such straightforward interpretation.

Extract 3

(1) The Dutch also introduced coffee which served as a basis of their trade. Cocoa was also introduced but could not thrive well. (2) Somewhere in 1869 it was reintroduced and it served as the basis of Ghana’s economy. (3) This was brought by Tetteh Quarshie of Ghana.

The development of information is as follows: The Dutch introduced both coffee and cocoa. However, cocoa was not successful. In 1869, cocoa was re-introduced and it served as the basis of Ghana’s economy. It is after these pieces of information that the student writes: This was brought by Tetteh Quarshie of Ghana. Anaphoric “this” cannot refer to all the preceding pieces of information. A reader with knowledge of Ghana’s history can figure out that the writer is referring to the introduction of cocoa to Ghana; however, a reader who does not have this knowledge will be left floundering. In order to ascribe a coherent interpretation to the text, the reader may come up with the theory that there is probably missing information— information that should constitute the antecedent of “this”.

Extract 4 below is taken from an essay on the topic, “Discuss the consequences when the functional niche of two species overlap”.

Extract 4:

1. The following graphs can be realized. [Graphs]

2. When cultured separately P. caudatum and P. Aurelia both show a sigmoid curve.

3. This explains that they increase in number.

Sentence 2 of extract 4 is in reference to the graphs that have been presented. In other words, the sigmoid curve is what the graphs denote. The absence of a transitional word to explicitly establish the relationship
between sentences 1 and 2 blurs the characterization of the antecedent for “this” in sentence 3. A possible restructuring is as follows: “As presented in the graphs, when cultured separately P. caudatum and P. Aurelia both show a sigmoid curve. This (i.e., the sigmoid curve) shows that they increase in number. This curve...”

2.2 Extensive use of “this”

Extensive use of “this” refers to cases where “this” is used three or four times or more and in succession in the same paragraph, thus creating a referential chain of presupposed items, and in cases of “unsupported” this (Swales and Feak, 2004: 33) ambiguous co-reference and a looseness in information relationships result.

Extract 5 is taken from an essay on the topic, “Assess the value of your main subject of study at the university to the development of the nation”.

Extract 5

Psychology helps in Guidance and Counselling. (2) This helps students to help others like counselling them on the type of jobs people should do so that by this people are able to do the type of work suitable for them. (3) This guidance and counselling also helps in schools like the secondary schools, by helping them with their problems like type of subjects to choose and by doing this, the children in turn benefit by choosing the right course which will not give them problems.

In sentence 2 of extract 5, the referent of the demonstrative pronoun “this” is the immediately preceding sentence, which is “Psychology helps in Guidance and Counselling”. The nature of this help is not provided, an indication of which would have constituted a clear antecedent for the demonstrative “this”. What is evident is that the way in which the subject or the course “psychology” helps in guidance and counselling is assumed to be known by the reader. This assumption contributes to the uncertainty of the co-reference tie. The sequencing of information may be illustrated as follows:
Psychology helps in Guidance and Counselling helps students to help others like counselling them on the type of jobs people should do (the inference is that psychology probably trains students in the areas of guidance and counselling and so psychology students are equipped to counsel people on their careers; another inference is that the general study of psychology will enable the student to offer guidance and counselling services), “by this” (is it a reference to the psychology students’ ability to counsel people on the type of jobs they should do, or simply to guidance and counselling in general?)

In sentence 3 of Extract 5 which reads, “This guidance and counselling also helps in schools like the secondary schools, by helping them with their problems like the type of subjects to choose and by doing this the children in turn benefit by choosing the right course which will not give them problems”, the use of “This”, with its effect of particularizing “guidance and counselling” within the sequence of information, rather confuses the orientation of the discourse. Should “guidance and counselling” be interpreted strictly in terms of “counselling on types of jobs”? The information in the rest of the clause does not allow for this straightforward interpretation. In sum, extract 5 does not communicate the writer’s message clearly, and this stems from the extensive use of “this”.

Extract 6, which consists of two sentences, is taken from an essay on the topic, “Why do we have to live a moral life?”

Extract 6

(1) Omoregbe (1979:212) counteracts this claim by saying that in the first place one has to be a believer in God and in life after death before one can be convinced by this answer as a reason for living a moral life. (2) An atheist, for example, cannot accept this answer because he does not believe in God so this has no meaning for him.

In terms of text structure, there is, strictly speaking, no serious impropriety in the referential chain:
this claim ——→ this answer ——→this answer ——→ this. The claim being referred to was made in a paragraph preceding extract 6. So the antecedent is easily recoverable from the preceding text. The problem is that the extensive use of “this” especially for a two-sentence text, besides being tautological, increases the remoteness of the semantic relationship between the referring expression and the propositions that constitute the antecedent.

Extract 7 below actually constitutes the entire response of the writer to a writing task which required students to write short notes on the topic, “Hardness of a mineral”. The text consists of six sentences.

Extract 7

(1) **This** is ability for a mineral to resist abrasion. (2) It is not its ability to smash. (3) When two minerals are rubbed together the one that is able to scratch the other is referred to as the harpest. (4) There are various scales used for measuring or determining the hardness of a mineral some of which are moh scale and **this** deals with different types of object being able to scratch a mineral. (5) It is scaled 1-10 and some of the objects considered are finger nails, knife, etc., and according to **this** the hardest mineral is diamond and talc is the least. (6) The other one is the absolute scale and **this** is scaled 10,000 to 0 and the hardest mineral is nearing 10,000 and the rest lie within the range of 2000 and O.

The text is initiated with anaphoric “this” in apparent reference to the topic under consideration. Tracing the antecedent of “this” in sentence 4 presents some difficulty. If “this” is a reference to the moh scale, then the clause “... and **this** deals with different types of objects being able to scratch a metal” is absurd. The rest of the paragraph degenerates largely because of the overuse of anaphoric “this” and to some extent the writer’s weak control of English sentence structure and limited vocabulary. In tracking the antecedents of anaphoric “this” across the text, a reader in search of a coherent interpretation may try to find an interpretational path from the following: **there are various scales** [sets up a general
category] ... some of which are the moh scale [sets up a subset of the general category] ... the other one is the absolute scale [sets up an alternative within the subset] ... and this [makes specific reference to the alternative]”. The attempt at a sub-categorization may be helpful, but beyond anaphoric “this” in sentence 6 we are taken on a path of unintelligibility: how do we interpret “this is scaled 10,000 to 0” and the noun phrase “the rest”?

Extract 8 is taken from an essay topic, “Critically examine the view that the relatively underdeveloped state of the tropical world is due fundamentally to the character of its climate”. In this extract, there is an extensive use of “this” which creates looseness in information relationships.

Extract 8

Also, developed countries like the USA and Japan for example have exploited the third world by coming down and collecting our scarce goods and capital to their countries, manufacturing or processing them then sending them back to us to buy for money which they pocket, more or less leaving us with nothing. (2) This can be clearly seen under the ‘core-periphery model’ which illustrates this. Gourou also supports this factor.

What seems clear is that anaphoric “this” in the first two instances of its use (sentence 2) refers to the same antecedent, namely, the situation described in the preceding sentence, though it is arguable that some degree of explicitness is desirable in the second instance. For example, explicitness may be achieved by attaching the pronoun “this” to a noun that captures the central idea of the preceding sentence. The word “situation” may appropriately be used to achieve such a degree of explicitness. Thus, the sentence will read, “This can clearly be seen under the ‘core-periphery model’ which illustrates this situation...” In sentence 2 again, the noun phrase “this factor” which refers again to the situation as described in the preceding sentence further increases the looseness in information relationships for two reasons. First, it occurs as part of a sequence of a long referential chain, and second, there is the difficulty of establishing a clear semantic relation between the word “factor” and the situation under discussion.
Extract 9 is taken from a student’s long essay. In this extract, the infelicitous use of anaphoric “this” emanates from the overuse of the pronoun.

Extract 9

The problem of corruption is central to almost all developing nations woes/plight to under development and this calls for effective “war tactics” to win this war at all cost. (2) But this depends on good governance as well as good morals among political leaders/politicians, civil/public servants as well as rallying in all stakeholders including the effective involvement of our churches, and other religious bodies to achieve this target.

Let us consider the antecedents of the referential chain: [Antecedent: that the problem of corruption leads to under development calls for ...] this.................. [Antecedent: the problem of corruption characterized metaphorically as war] ← this war [Antecedent: winning this war]← this [Antecedent: is it wining this war?] ← this target.

By the time we get to the last occurrence of anaphoric “this”, even in this case where it has been combined with a summary word, namely, “target”, the prose has become limp simply because of the extensive use of anaphoric “this”.

2.3 Textual distance between “this” and its referent

Textual distance between the pronoun “this” and its referent refers to cases where there is an intervening example or where there are several sentences (or clauses) between “this” and its referent, thereby creating a sense of a gap between the pronoun and the presupposed item.

Extract 10 below is an extract from an essay on the topic, “Assess the view that foreign policy is the reflection of domestic realities”. It consists of three sentences.
Extract 10:

[1] It has been argued that mere possessing of the natural raw materials will make a country viable on the international scene and that unless a country is able to identify its natural resources, manage to extract it and harness it with other areas of its economy its foreign policy will still be negative. (2) For example, it has been proved right that Ghana has crude oil (a large quantity) in the Volta Region but it could not organize and extract it and harness it with other resources due to other economic reasons. (3) This has been the case in many countries especially Africa “and the foreign policies are seriously shaped by this factor.

In extract 10, the two cases of anaphoric “this” occur in sentence 3, the last sentence of the paragraph. The preceding text, which constitutes the antecedent either in part or whole, comprises two long sentences, each of which exhibits an overuse of the pronoun “it”. In all, there are 10 instances of the use of “it”, some of which are infelicitous. For example, the two cases of “it” in sentence 1 in reference to “natural resources” should be “them”. Also “it” after “but” in sentence 2 should probably be changed to “the country” since that seems to be a better characterization. It is clear then that the antecedents of anaphoric “this” in sentence 3 suffer from some grammatical and stylistic infelicities. While the sentence-initial “this” in sentence 3 may refer to the content of sentences 1 and 2, “this factor” vaguely points to sentence one. The textual distance combined with the grammatical and stylistic infelicities somewhat create looseness in the presupposition being evoked.

Extract 11 is taken from a long essay. It is a two-paragraph text comprising eight sentences.

Extract 11

(1) ... the Ghana Police Service with reference to the Motor Transport and Traffic Unit (MTTU) responsible for Road Traffic regulation have come under strong criticism from the general public for being
corrupt. (2) The MTTU personnel are seen collecting monies during broad daylight from drivers when performing their normal duties, thus when inspecting and checking documents and conditions of vehicles applying [sic, plying] our roads. (3) **This** is a known fact which needs no empirical evidence to substantiate. (4) It is even on the lips of even toddlers or young [sic, the young] as well as adults that the service has lost its credibility, confidence and respect in the eyes of the Ghanaian public. (5) **This** may be due to the fact that personnel of the service are publicly seen collecting bribes from motorists especially drivers of commercial vehicles.

(6) **It is in the light of these** that the researcher wants to ascertain to which [sic, what] extent the nature of the policy work (enforcement of the laws) renders them vulnerable or whether the officers face constant temptations from people seeking to corrupt them (organized crime syndicates) among other factors. (7) Especially what accounts for the apparent disregard for principle of integrity and public condemnation among perpetrators? (8) **This** among other things has called for this criticism.

In extract 11, anaphoric “this” and its variant “these” have been used felicitously in the text preceding sentence 8. However, the two instances of the use of “this” in sentence 8 present us with interpretation challenges. In sentence 8, the sentence-initial anaphoric “this” probably refers to sentence 7. “This criticism” on the other hand takes us on a hazy interpretation journey: is it in reference to sentence 1?

3. **Implications of analysis**

3.1 **Insights from Swales and Feak (2004)**

One of the implications of the analysis is that students pay scant regard to the norms of usage of the pronoun “this”, and how these norms of usage affect information relationships. Additionally, the extensive use of “this”, probably, also stems from students’ refusal to think hard about the link they hope to establish or evoke when they use the demonstrative pronoun. Furthermore, students may not be aware of the disambiguating power of a combination of the demonstrative pronoun “this” and a summary
word as explained for instance by Swales and Feak (2004), “... if there is a possibility your reader will not understand what this is referring to, your best strategy is to follow this with a noun so that your meaning is clear.” In this section of the paper, I present the results of an exercise I gave to my 2005/2006 academic writing class based on extracts from Swales and Feak (see appendix). These extracts comprise an explanation of strategies for using this felicitously and exercises that test the ability of students to compose appropriate summary words and produce alternative summary words that are relevant to the context in question.

3.1.1 Methodology and Data Analysis

The experiment involving the Swales and Feak extracts was done during a two-hour class session. First, the class discussed the use of “this” in text reference and examined a few cases of ambiguities. Next, we discussed the strategy proposed by Swales and Feak. Students were then given 30 minutes to do Tasks one, two and three. Their performance was then analyzed with the one-way ANOVA (i.e., Analysis of Variance).

One hypothesis was tested with the One-Way ANOVA:

• There will be significant difference in the performance of the students in the three tasks – Task One, Task Two and Task Three.

Task One involved choosing a correct noun from a list of nouns to complete sentences, Task Two involved choosing a summary word from a list of words to complete sentences, and Task Three required that students find or provide summary words that best complete the given sentences.

The responses of the students were converted into marks or percentage scores and (considering the fact that the scores are measured on the interval scale), One-way ANOVA was used to test for significant differences in the performance of the students in the three tasks. The test was carried out at 95% significance level (p=0.05). One-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance F-test) was used to compare the performances of the students of the three tasks. The assumptions underlying the use of the One-Way ANOVA include:
1. The scores obtained by the students were independent and randomly distributed.

2. The probability distribution of the performance of the students was normal.

3. The variances of the performance of the students were equal.

The results in Table 1.0 show the proportion of students with regard to the total number of correct answers provided to the sentences in Task One. The results appear to be normally distributed. It can be observed that a few (6 13.0%) students provided no answers at all, quite a number of them 16 (34.8%) provided one correct answer, a further 18 (39.1%) provided two correct answers and a few (6 13.0%) students provided the expected number of three correct answers. The result in Table 1.0 indicates that just a little over a tenth (6 13.0%) of the students’ performance measures up to the expectation. Thus the performance of the majority (over two thirds) of the students did not measure up to expectation.

Table 1.0: Total Number of Correct Answers - Task One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of correct answers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct answer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be observed from Table 2.0 that the students performed creditably in Task Two. Out of an expected number of six correct answers, 9 (19.6%) of the students were able to provide four correct answers, 15 (32.6%) provided five correct answers and a further 13 (28.3%) of them provided the expected six correct answers to the sentences in Task Two.
The results in Table 2.0 therefore indicate that the performance of the majority of the students in Task Two was commendable.

Table 2.0: Total Number of Correct Answers - Task Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of correct answers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct answer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 3.0, however, show a rather poor performance by the students in Task Three. The majority (60.9%) of the students could provide only one correct answer out of an expected number of five correct answers and at best two correct answers, which was provided by only 8 (17.4%) of the students. These results indicate that because the students were not provided with a list of answers to choose from, they were not able to supply their own words based on their understanding of the surrounding information in Task Three.

Table 3.0: Total Number of Correct Answers - Task Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of correct answers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No correct answer</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the whole, it can be observed that students performed better in the multiple choice tasks (Task One and Task Two) than they did in Task Three, which required students to fall on their own stock of vocabulary.

3.1.2 Hypothesis Testing

Table 4.1: Statistics of the Performance of students on the three Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Score (%)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task One</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50.73</td>
<td>29.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Two</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>75.73</td>
<td>22.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Three</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19.13</td>
<td>12.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>48.53</td>
<td>32.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 4.1 show the performance of the students in the three tasks. It can be observed that the students performed poorly in Task Three, scoring just 19.13 percent, performed averagely (50.73%) in Task One and performed excellently in Task Two, scoring 75.73 percent. The differences in the scores obtained by the students in the three tasks were found to be significant (F=71.04, df = 2, 35; p<0.05). Thus at 95% significance level, there were differences in the performance of the students in the three tasks.

Summary Table of One-Way ANOVA on the performance of students in the three tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>74000.161</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37000.081</td>
<td>71.041</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>70311.353</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>520.825</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144311.5</td>
<td>137</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The post-hoc test for multiple comparison shows that the students performed significantly better in Task Two (75.73%) than in Task One
(50.73%) and Task Three (19.13%). Also, the performance of the students in Task One (50.73%) was significantly better than in Task Three (19.13%).

Multiple Comparison: Post Hoc Tests for performance of students in the three tasks using least Square Deviation (LSD).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of task</th>
<th>Task One</th>
<th>Task Two</th>
<th>Task Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task One</td>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Two</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Three</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: p<0.05 - The mean difference is significant at 0.05.

3.1.3. Summary
In sum, the poor performance of the students in task three suggests that they might have a fundamental problem with generalizing across pieces of information and providing summary words to capture the thrust of the surrounding information. My speculation is that this problem may be a consequence of the students’ small vocabulary size and their lack of practice in exercising the intellectual effort required in re-conceptualization.

3.2. An Evaluative grid for the use of “this”
I believe that the ultimate responsibility for the quality of students’ writing lies with the students themselves. As an advocate of process writing philosophy which sees the written product as the culmination of several stages of composing— pre-drafting, drafting, rewriting, and revising— I propose evaluative grids for use by students as part of rewriting and revising activities during the writing process. Undergraduate students should be able to work on their own with these grids after some practice in class with their writing instructors.
The evaluative grid in figure 1 is supposed to help students engage with their writing in an interactive way with the specific objective of dealing with ambiguous co-reference. The questions under “issues to consider” direct the writer’s attention to possible ambiguities in the text: does this refer to a specific item in the preceding text? If it does and you have not clearly demonstrated it, then take the necessary disambiguating action—signal exact identity of antecedent through a definite or explicit mention. If you intend this to refer to a part of or all the information in the preceding text, make yourself clearer by using a summary word. Also consult a thesaurus and a dictionary to identify suitable summary words.

Figure 2 below is designed to help students to avoid using the pronoun this extensively and to think about the textual distance between the point where the pronoun is used and its referent. During the rewriting and
revising stage of writing, students may appeal to figure 2 as an evaluator or co-editor of their text. The question under extensive use requires the writer to take another look at the frequency of occurrence of *this*, while the question under textual distance invites the student to take another look at the intervening pieces of information between *this* and its intended referent.

Fig. 2: An evaluative grid for dealing with extensive use of *this* and the textual distance

4. Conclusion

This study has been concerned with describing and accounting for infelicities in the use of anaphoric *this* in the writing of undergraduate students. In all, three types of infelicities, namely, (1) Ambiguous coreference; (2) Extensive use of *this*; and (3) Textual distance between *this* and its intended referent were analyzed and discussed. The analysis was restricted to the effects of the misuse of *this* on text’s intelligibility and information relationships. Clearly, the infelicitous use of *this* creates lack
of clarity and distorts information relationships in the text. As writing instructors, we need to continue to provide fresh and innovative guidelines that would help our students to deal with the problems presented by anaphoric this. Additionally, we need to help our students to deal with the fundamental issue of re-conceptualization through vocabulary development and expanded reading. Finally, I hasten to point out that the study recognizes the interplay of other factors such as weak sentence construction, limited vocabulary and inappropriate use of other pronoun references like “it” as contributing to the ambiguities and problems of interpretation in undergraduate academic writing. Nonetheless, the focus on anaphoric “this” has fulfilled a critical objective, which is documenting contexts of infelicitous use in an exhaustive and systematic way.
REFERENCES


Appendix


Language Focus: this + Summary Word

Another way to maintain flow is to use this/these + a noun to join ideas together: Consider the following sentences.

ESL lecturers know that students need to understand the differences between formal and informal language. However, this understanding cannot be usually achieved quickly.

What does this understanding refer to?

Consider the following sentences:

In recent years, the number of students applying to Ph.D. programmes has increased steadily, while the number of places available remains constant. This situation has resulted in intense competition for admission.

What does this situation refer to? What is the effect of using this instead of that?

The phrases in italics contain a summary noun or word that refers back to the idea in the previous sentence. These phrases summarize what has already been said and pick up where the previous sentence has left off. You may have noticed in your academic reading that this is not always followed by a noun, that is, this is “unsupported.” Keep in mind, however, that if there is a possibility your reader will not understand what this is referring to your best strategy is to follow this with a noun so that your meaning is clear.
TASK SEVENTEEN

Choose a noun to complete the following.

1. According to a recent survey, 26% of all American adults, down from 38% 30 years ago, now smoke. This___________ can be partly attributed to the mounting evidence linking smoking and fatal diseases, such as cancer.
   a. decline    b. reduction    c. improvement
d. decrease    e. drop

Can you think of any other nouns that could complete the sentence?

2. Early in September each year, the population of Ann Arbor, Michigan, suddenly increases by about 20,000 as students arrive for the new academic year. This _____________ changes the character of the town in a number of ways.
   a. Influx    b. Increase    c. invasion
d. rise    e. jump

Can you think of any other nouns that could complete the sentence?

3. Nowadays, laptop computers are lighter, more powerful, and easier to use than they were five years ago. These _____________ have led to an increase in these machines.
   a. changes    b. developments    c. advances
d. improvements

TASK EIGHTEEN

Choose a summary word from the list to complete each sentence. Can you think of other possible summary words in addition to those on the list?

Process    situation    finding
Problem    difficulty    disruption
estimation    view
1. The traditional economic and consumer behaviour models assume a rational, thoughtful consumer who gathers information about a good and carefully makes a purchase. This _____________ has recently been challenged, particularly because of the growing number of consumer choices.

2. Our pilot study has shown that wind turbines used to generate electricity can pose a threat to flying birds. This _____________ suggests a need for further research on improving the safety of these mechanisms.

3. In soccer, goalkeepers routinely wear gloves that may restrict heat loss from the hands and cause discomfort. In order to alleviate this _____________, special materials, called phase control materials (PCMs), have been incorporated into gloves to reduce the amount of heat inside the glove, thus maintaining a comfortable temperature.

4. Normal average human temperature is 37°C. At any lower environmental temperature, heat will be lost from the skin to the environment as the body attempts to heat up the air in direct contact with the body. This _____________ is known as conduction.

5. Until adjustment of the body clock has occurred, individuals suffering from “jet lag” feel tired during the new daytime, yet they are unable to sleep properly during the new night. For athletes in particular this _____________ of sleep can affect mood and powers of concentration and might result in poorer training performances and competition results (Reilly et al. 1997b).

6. Until recently, the support needs of frail older people in Sweden have been met primarily by the state, with there being little expectation that the family would provide care. This _____________ is now changing as increasing emphasis is being placed on the role of the family.
TASK NINETEEN

Now try to find summary words that can complete these sentences.

1. Irrigation in sub-Saharan Africa is in most cases performed using a rope and a bucket to raise and distribute water from a shallow open well. While this ______________ has the advantage of being inexpensive, its low capacity and labor intensive nature is decidedly a disadvantage.

2. Motor vehicle deaths in the U.S. declined from nearly 60,000 in 1966 to just over 40,000 last year, even though Americans drive millions more miles now and millions more vehicles are on the road. The death rate, which was 7.6 deaths per 100 million miles in 1950, declined from 5.5 in 1966 to 1.6 last year. This ____________ can be attributed to the manufacture of safer vehicles, with features such as airbags and antilock brakes.
“If your dress gets missing, I shall buy one”: Compliments and Compliment Response Strategies in English in Ghana

Jemima Asabea Anderson and Charity Afisem Asiama-Ossom

ABSTRACT

This study reports an analysis of compliments and responses to compliments by selected speakers of English in Ghana. The analysis is based on a combination of participant observer schedules and recall protocol questionnaire. The population for the study is drawn from speakers of English selected from a university in Ghana. The findings of the study show that in making and responding to compliments, speakers of English in Ghana show positive transfer of complimenting strategies from Ghanaian languages and cultures into the English language spoken in Ghana. These transferred elements, which are typical structures that are used to pay compliments in many Ghanaian languages, give the English language that is spoken in Ghana its distinctive pragmatic features.

1. Introduction

Compliments can be explained as favourable comments that a speaker makes to an addressee based on the speaker’s admiration of a particular characteristic or possession of the addressee. Such favourable comments serve as assurances to the addressee that he/she is appreciated and admired; this is why compliments are said to be positive politeness strategies (Holmes 1996). The hearer feels appreciated because the compliment boosts his/her image. Although compliments are positive politeness strategies, it has also been argued that compliments can sometimes make the ‘complimentees’ or addressees feel uneasy or embarrassed, thereby creating a threat to their negative face (Holmes 1996; Manno, 2005). If a compliment implies envy, assumes an unwarranted degree of intimacy or is insincere, it may threaten the complimentee’s negative face.

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There are instances when the compliment may be sincere but still contain face threatening elements. For instance, consider the following exchange between A and B:

A: *Your daughter is so pretty. She does not look like you at all. She looks more like her father.*

B: *Is that so?*

A’s intention here may be to compliment the addressee on her daughter’s appearance, but by saying that B’s daughter does not look like her at all, A is by implication saying that B is not beautiful. It is this implication that threatens B’s face. It may be argued that the head act itself is not a threat to the speaker’s face, but a counter argument would be that the supporting moves together with the head act form the compliment here.

Several scholars have investigated compliments that are used in different cultures (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Manes 1983; Holmes and Brown 1987; Pomerantz 1978; Holmes 1988; and Holmes 1996). The findings from these investigations of compliments in different cultures have indicated that although compliments generally occur in different cultures, the strategies that are used to realize these compliments are not universal. In other words, there are cross-cultural variations in the use of compliment strategies. For instance, it has been observed that there are strategies that are more predominant than others in certain cultures. Manes and Wolfson (1981), for example, note that speakers of American English use a limited range of syntactic patterns when they perform compliments. The three syntactic structures that they found are:

- I like NP.  
  I like your sweater.
- That’s ADJ NP.  
  That is a nice shirt.
- NP is ADJ  
  Your hair is beautiful

They also observe that the topics that are often complimented are personal appearance, possessions and skills. Manes (1983), who studied compliments and compliment responses in American English from a sociological perspective, observes that compliment and compliment response behaviours reflect a particular society’s norms and values.
The objective of this present study is to describe the formulae that speakers of English in Ghana use in paying compliments. In addition, the study aims at describing the topics on which Ghanaian speakers of English pay compliments the most. The study also seeks to describe the linguistic forms that Ghanaian speakers of English use in responding to compliments. The paper posits that since English is used along with other indigenous languages in Ghana, these languages are likely to influence the compliment realization of speakers of English in Ghana. In other words, the paper holds that speakers of English in Ghana are likely to transfer complimenting strategies which are used in their first languages into the variety of English that they speak. As a result, the compliments that emerge may have some characteristic features that can be described as “Ghanaian”. This argument is made on the basis that there are speech act structures that are prevalent in Ghanaian languages that may get translated into the variety of English that is spoken in Ghana. Such speech acts can be understood as the speech acts they represent only by speakers of English in Ghana. For instance, in many Ghanaian languages, one way of expressing admiration for something which belongs to another is by saying, *If XYZ gets missing, I shall buy one.* An addressee who is not a speaker of Ghanaian English would find it very difficult to interpret this utterance as a compliment. It takes a speaker of Ghanaian English to understand that this is meant as a compliment and not as an attempt to rob the addressee of his or her possessions. This formula, which is used as a compliment in many Ghanaian languages, is translated from these Ghanaian languages into English.

There are several similar structures like the one above that are transferred into the English language spoken in Ghana. An example is, *If your dress gets missing, come and search for it in my wardrobe,* a variation of the example given above. Others are: *Your dress is not small; When you are done with wearing this dress, pass it over to me; When you go home and change your clothes, send these ones to me; I check your dress;* and *Your dress is gɛ.* These are typical structures that are used to pay compliments in many Ghanaian languages and they have been translated into English in Ghana. It is such distinct forms that give the English language that is spoken in Ghana its distinctive pragmatic features. On the basis of
these distinctive pragmatic features, one can argue that there is a distinct variety of English that can be described as “Ghanaian English”.

1. Review of Literature

Compliments have been studied extensively from different perspectives in a number of cultures. The earliest studies on compliments were undertaken by scholars such as Pomerantz, (1978); Manes and Wolfson, (1981); Wolfson (1981, 1983, and 1989); Knapp, Hopper and Bell (1984); Herbert (1989) and Holmes (1988). Pomerantz’s study, which investigated compliments and compliment responses in English, observes that speakers of English accept compliments readily. Pomerantz also observes that in agreeing with and accepting the compliment, the respondent must make sure he/she does not appear bashful even though society expects the respondent to accept the gift of solidarity. Findings from other studies show that there are cross-cultural differences in compliment responses. Some studies, for instance, have shown that the Japanese, the Chinese and the French reject compliments more often than they accept them (Daikuhara, 1986; and Chen 1993).

Another aspect of compliments that has been investigated extensively by scholars is the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures that are used to pay compliments in different languages. Manes and Wolfson (1981), who studied compliment behaviour in American English based on nearly 700 naturally occurring compliments, observe that the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures used for compliments in American English are highly formulaic. Findings from later studies in other languages and cultures have also confirmed the formulaic nature of the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures of compliments. For example, Holmes’ (1988) study on compliments in New Zealand English; Daikuhara’s (1986) on compliments in Japanese; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk’s (1989) on compliments in Polish; Lee’s (1990) on compliments in Hawaiian Creole; Herbert’s (1991) on English and Polish compliments; and Ye’s (1995) on compliments in Chinese, all confirm the formulaic nature of the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures that are used to produce compliments. Herbert (1991), for example, notes that while English compliments use the
first, second and third person pronouns evenly, Polish compliments are made predominantly with second person pronouns.

Another interesting aspect of compliments that has received much attention is the topics that are complimented in different cultures. According to Manes (1983) and Holmes (1988), American English and New Zealand English speakers compliment addressees on personal appearance. Herbert (1991) however notes that Polish speakers compliment people more on their possessions. Nelson, Bakary and Al–Batal (1996) find that Egyptian Arabic speakers compliment addressees on personality, while Ye (1995) observes that Chinese speakers compliment addressees more on performance than on possessions or appearance. These findings show that the topics that speakers compliment vary and that such differences are due to the norms and values of the different societies.

Another important perspective from which compliments have been studied is the relationship between compliments and social factors such as gender, age and social distance. Several studies which have been undertaken to investigate sex-based differences in compliment behaviour show that women pay more compliments than men and that there are differences between the structures that are preferred by women and those that are preferred by men (Holmes 1988; Wolfson, 1983; Lee 1990; and Herbert 1990). Findings from some of these studies also show that women pay more compliments on appearance than on possessions or skills. Another important observation is that people of the same gender compliment one another more than people of different genders. Thus, more compliments occur between females than between males and females (Knapp, Hopper and Bell 1984; Holmes 1988; and Ye 1995). Again, women tend to use more intensifiers than men (Johnson and Roen 1992). In terms of social distance, the observation has been that more compliments occur among people of equal status than between those of high status and low status. In addition, people who are acquaintances of equal age tend to give lengthier and more compliments to one another than to people who are strangers (Wolfson1989).

Some scholars have also studied how compliments are performed in a second language by speakers of other languages. Lui (2000), Cedar
(2006) and Al Falasi (2007) have all undertaken studies which show that learners of a second language sometimes transfer the strategies for complimenting from their first languages into the second languages that they are learning. Some of these studies have compared native speakers’ performance of compliments to that of non-native speakers in the target language. The findings from these studies reveal that sometimes the L1 of the non-native speaker can intrude into the speech act performance in the target language. The findings from the studies undertaken by Cedar (2006) and Al Falasi (2007) show that the first language of Thai and UAE speakers of English intrude into their performance of compliments in English.

In spite of these numerous studies on different cultures, compliments and compliment responses in English in Ghana and in Ghanaian languages have not received much attention. The only study to date is Agyekum’s (2005) on the ethno-pragmatics of Akan compliments. Agyekum identifies certain ethno-pragmatic contexts in which compliments are used by Akans. Some of the contexts are palace discourse, marriage contracts and donations at funerals. Akan compliments also occur as part of praise poetry for chiefs and politicians and in football commentary. Other situations in which compliments are made include hunting, the pouring of libation and the performance of female folk songs. Agyekum observes that the types of compliments that frequently occur among the Akans pertain to appearance, personality, performance and possession. According to Agyekum, “Akans place much premium on communalistic needs and on the Akan face concept, and the compliment expressions that are associated with them are based on these communal and societal needs” (Agyekum 2005:2). In Agyekum’s view, “Akan compliment expressions strengthen the antipersonalistic and communal aspect of Akan culture” (Agyekum 2005:2). This study seeks to describe compliments in English in Ghana, to fill the void that is created by the dearth of literature on this subject and to demonstrate that a distinctive variety of English is emerging in Ghana through pragmatic transfers.
3. Data Collection: Method and Procedure

The techniques used in gathering data for this study were a combination of field note-taking, audio-recording of authentic speech and recall protocol questionnaire. These methods were used for validity and reliability. Compliment responses in general are not always verbal. Para-linguistic and non-verbal features such as facial expressions – smiles, frowns, blank stares; nods, hand waves, hugs and specific body movements which intensify verbal exchanges and which sometimes counter or emphasize verbal exchanges – are used. These are best observed in authentic speeches. The field note-taking and audio recording used the participant-observant procedures. The researchers observed naturally occurring speeches and recorded interactions on tape and non-verbal characteristics in note form. In addition, the researchers elicited information by asking respondents to remember the latest compliment they might have received or responded to. The recall protocol was a recall of actual conversations which respondents might have had recently; a questionnaire was used to guide the process.

The population for the study was drawn from speakers of English selected from a university in Ghana. Five hundred (500) respondents were involved in the data collection. The sample is made up of two hundred and forty males (240) and two hundred and sixty females (260). The first two hundred and fifty (250) respondents were used for the recall protocol and the rest were involved in the collection of the naturally occurring data. The researchers and their assistants listened to, observed and initiated conversations that included compliments and compliment responses. The compliments that were paid had true propositions, thus, the hearers had no reason to doubt the propositional content of the compliments. Participants who were complimented on ability and appearance actually had the attributes that were complimented.

Permission was sought from participants to use their compliments in this study. There were two ways in which permission was sought from respondents. In the first place, permission was sought from respondents only when recordings had been done, since it was thought that prior permission could influence performance. Secondly, some respondents
were informed that the investigators were undertaking a research study and that it was likely that their speeches would be used for this study without revealing their names. The respondents however did not know the exact aspect of their language use that the researchers were studying. Only respondents who granted permission for their responses to be used were included in the data sample. Compliments were paid on such topics as appearance, dressing, possessions, abilities, achievements and skills. The data from this method were compared to data from the recall protocol. The data were gathered under such situations as everyday mundane talk, which do not have any form of institutional structure except the conventions and norms that guide compliments and compliment responses in Ghanaian English. Therefore, priority was placed on interpersonal friendly interactions. Participants were purposively selected without recourse to any category other than sex. The recall protocol on the other hand was undertaken with the full consent of the respondents. The respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire given them in the presence of one of the researchers so that further clarification could be given when necessary. The data gathered were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The analyses were done while taking cognisance of investigations which focused on compliment topics and formulas employed in paying compliments.

A further classification was done to show whether the responses observed were agreements or non-agreements. This classification was done on the premise that Ghanaians generally agree with the propositional content of compliments before accepting the solidarity offered in the verbal gift. The framework for classification used in this aspect of the analysis is in consonance with the taxonomy developed by Herbert (1989). The framework is a three-tier taxonomy of responses with sub-classes. The three major categories of responses recognized here are agreement, non-agreement and other categories. The addressee may agree with the compliment by accepting it, by offering a comment or by transferring or re-assigning the compliment to a third person. When the addressee disagrees with the compliment, he/she may scale the compliment down, question the sincerity or appropriateness of the compliment, disagree with the compliment or give no indication that the compliment has been heard.
Finally, the addressee might interpret the compliment as a request instead of a compliment. Here are a few examples of the sub-divisions discussed:

I. AGREEMENT

A. ACCEPTANCE

1. Appreciation token: – A verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment. The acceptance is not tied to the specific semantics of the stimulus (e.g., Thanks, thank you, [nods, smiles, laughs handshakes, hugs])

2. Comment acceptances: – Addressee accepts the complimentary force and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic (e.g., Yeah, it’s my favourite too)

3. Praise upgrade: - Addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient (e.g., really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn’t it?)

A. COMMENT HISTORY: – Addressee offers a comment (or series of comments) on the object complimented; the comment shifts the force of the compliment from the addressee (e.g., I bought it from Accra. It was not easy)

B. TRANSFERS

1. Reassignment: – Addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person (e.g., my mother gave it to me; it is by God’s grace.) or to the object itself (it really built itself)

2. Return –The praise is shifted or returned to the first speaker (so is yours; you do better than I)
II. NON-AGREEMENT  

A. SCALE DOWN: --Addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is over-stated (e.g., it’s really quite old; it is a borrowed glory; it is nothing)  

B. QUESTION: - Addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment (e.g., do you really think so?; is that so?; really?)  

C. NON-ACCEPTANCES  

1. Disagreement: --Addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise or the compliment is deemed insincere: the first speaker’s assertion is an error or a mockery (I hate it, don’t flatter me; get away)  

2. Qualification: --Addressee merely qualifies the original assertions, usually with “though”, “but”, “well”, etc (e.g., it’s alright, but Timmy’s is nicer)  

D. NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: --Addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment; the addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment, silence or topic shift, or gives no response.  

III. OTHER INTERPRETATIONS  

1. REQUEST INTERPRETATION: --Addressee, consciously or not, interprets the compliment as a request rather than as a simple compliment. Such responses are not compliment responses per se, as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech act as a compliment (e.g., you want to borrow this one too?)
4. Discussion

1. Compliment topics and functions:

The compliments collected were classified under the following topics:

1. Appearance – This includes personal adornment, haircut or hairstyle, fashion designs and any other aspect which is reflected in the physical appearance of the addressee. Example: You look simple and handsome, sweetie.

2. Possessions -- This group includes personal traits (not physical) such as possessions or intangible things. Example: I like your coat.

3. Skills- These are special endowments and talents such as the ability to sing, cook or run. E.g., You are a born singer.

4. Performance – This group includes one slot performances such as attaining good grades, saying inspiring prayers or preaching sermons. An example is: Wonder, you have done the work very well.

5. Other – This group is made up of compliments that could not be put in any of the above. Such compliments include: Des, you are expensive o! See the queue of people waiting to see you?

Of these four broad topics [appearance, possessions, skills and performance], compliments on appearance were more frequent. The preference order of the topics in the recall protocol and the natural data were similar. Thus it is observed that respondents compliment one another more on appearance than on any other category. This means that speakers of Ghanaian English value appearance very much. Our findings also confirm those from various investigations, that compliments are given based on “only a few general topics”. These topics are appearance, possessions and performance, personality, ability, skills and achievement, among others (Ye 1995, Wolfson 1983). For instance, Wolfson (1983) observes that Americans pay compliments on appearance as a result of “deliberate efforts”, such as wearing new clothes, and ability such as good
cooking, a skilful games and athletics performance. Nelson et al (1996) also observe that Egyptians pay compliments on appearance, personality traits and skills/work. The findings of this study also corroborate findings from Agyekum (2005), who notes that appearance compliments occur very frequently in Akan commercial advertisements. Table 1 below shows the distribution of compliment topics observed in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliment Topic</th>
<th>Recall Protocol Data</th>
<th>Authentic Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessions</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recall protocol data recorded one hundred and twenty-three (123) compliments on appearance. This figure represents forty-nine percent (49.2%) of the total compliments under the recall protocol. Similarly, the naturally occurring data recorded ninety-one (91) compliments with appearance as the prime topic. This figure represents thirty-six per cent (36%) of the total compliments under the naturally occurring discourse. The next popular topic is performance. The recall protocol data recorded fifty-nine (59) of such compliments. This figure represents twenty-four per cent (24%) of the total compliments collected under the recall protocol. Seventy-eight (78) compliments on performance, representing thirty-one per cent (31%), were collected under the naturally occurring discourse. Compliments on possessions and skills are the least frequent among the four broad classifications. The recall protocol records forty-one (41) and twenty-seven (27) compliments representing sixteen (16%) and eleven (11%) percent, respectively, for the possessions and skills categories. Under the natural discourse data, there were fifty (55) and twenty (20) compliments, representing twenty-two (22%) and eight (8%), respectively, for the possessions and skills compliments.
The naturally occurring data revealed some compliments which could not be classified under any one of the categories given above. Here is an example:

(1) Two female friends met for a chat. One looked at the other’s dress and remarked:

A: Do you know you are a brave person?

B: (looked surprised and smiled) why?

A: Look at your dress; the fishes in your dress are swimming upstream! It takes a lot of courage and strength to do that.

B: (laughs hilariously and lightly slaps the other at the back) oh you… you always surprise me...

In the exchange above, Speaker A is truly complimenting her friend but the compliment cannot be listed under a single topic. The compliment can be classified as a possession compliment as well as a skill compliment. In one sense, it could mean that Speaker A is admiring the dress, but in another sense it could also mean that Speaker A is admiring the design of the dress. In the second case, it is the skill that is involved in the designing of the dress that is being complimented.

Even though the trend in preference order of the compliment topics is similar in both of the methods employed in this paper, there are differences in occurrences. For instance, forty-nine percent (49%) of compliments from the recall data—almost half of the total compliments paid, are appearance compliments, but the naturally occurring data had thirty-six percent (36%). The next popular topic, performance, has a higher percentage from the natural discourse than the recall data. The natural discourse data records thirty-one percent (31%), but the recall data records twenty-four percent (24%). The analysis above lends credence to earlier findings that though the topics on which compliments are paid seem similar, there are cultural preferences. Such findings include Holmes’ (1996) claim that ‘acceptable’ topics of compliments vary cross-
culturally. Anderson and Ossom (in prep) have also observed that among the Kfo, a Dangme speaking people of southern Ghana, compliments are paid largely on appearance, possessions, skills and personal traits, in that order. Chinese speakers also pay compliments more on performance than on appearance (Ye 1995).

The high percentage of appearance compliments which occurred in the recall protocol data suggests to us that the compliments respondents remember most are the ones that are paid them on their appearance. Given the fact that such compliments manifest between friends, it can be deduced that the function of the appearance compliments is to enhance inter-personal relations; therefore, such compliments are hard to forget. From the data, appearance compliments are paid to close associates such as friends, and thus serve to deepen social ties. The compliments can be seen to have referential functions as well, since they inform the addressee about his/her looks at the particular time. This point corroborates the observation that the primary function of a compliment is affective and social rather than referential or informative (Holmes 1996, Cedar 2006).

Another important observation we made is that compliments on appearance generally manifest in interactions where social distance and unequal power are relatively minimal. In the data collected from both methods, the incidence of compliments on appearance is observed between intimates such as friends, classmates, colleagues and roommates. A few compliments on appearance were however observed in non-congruent power interactions. Here are examples of such compliments:

1. Two lecturers, a male senior lecturer and a female assistant lecturer met at the club and the following ensued:

   Male lecturer: Is that you, old girl?
   Female: Sir, (smiles) you look good. (Moves closer to him)
   Permit me to commend you on your choice of colours.
   They match and make you look younger.
   Male: Thanks (smiles and waves towards her) but that is my wife’s taste, not mine.
(3) A male lecturer complimented a female student out of class thus:

Male: You are growing stylish these days

Student: (smiles) Sir, thanks.

The interactions above are initiated by the higher status persons. In the first example, the use of ‘old girl’ as a pet name (compliment) minimizes the social gap between speaker and addressee and gives impetus for deepening the interaction. However, the addressee does not lose sight of the unequal social distance; therefore, she uses verbal and non-verbal politeness strategies as signs of deference. In the first place, she addresses the senior lecturer as ‘sir’ and moves closer to him before continuing her speech. She also asks for his permission before paying him the compliment since the compliment can be a face threatening act (FTA) –i.e., the junior is intruding into the personal space of the senior. Even though the sequence of compliments exchanged in the interaction above allows the participants to deepen their social relations, due deference is given to the senior in the interaction. Such compliments are rather few. This situation supports earlier observations by Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1988) that compliments upwards are fewer than compliments downwards.

However, the assertion that compliments upwards are initiated by the high status persons is debatable. The low status person can also initiate a compliment, as seen in (2) above. The personal relationship that exists between the high status person and the low status person is the most important factor that determines if the compliment can occur. We agree with Holmes that when compliments are directed upwards, it means the participants must have known each other and must have been in some friendly relationship. This is seen in (2); moreover, the familiarity gives the low status person the confidence to further compliment the high status person. In the second example [i.e., (3)], there is not much social interaction as observed in the previous example; therefore, the compliment can be considered to function as a praise more than a solidarity activity. The participant, especially the lower in power, does not lose sight of the non-congruent power at all; the lady’s verbal response is preceded with a
deference marker, “sir”. This reinforces Holmes’ (1996) observation that compliments in non-congruent interactions can function as praises.

II. Compliment Formulae

The syntactic patterns observed from the recall protocol are not different from the patterns observed in the authentic data, but the authentic data revealed non-verbal forms which are absent in the recall data. Respondents in the recall data could not recall well the non-verbal aspects of the compliment paid them. Therefore, this section is based mostly on the data collected from the authentic discourse. Generally, the verbs used in explicit compliments are stative verbs. The SVC formula is the most prevalent (“You look beautiful”, “You are nice”, “You are a wonderful person”, “You are doing well”, “You are a hard working guy”). Stative verbs such as “look” and the copula “is” occur more than any other verb forms in the appearance compliments. The copula “is” construction is observed with all the categories of compliments collected. The prevalent use of adjectives such as “beautiful”, “nice”, “good”, “smart” and “wonderful”, also make the range of syntactic formulae employed in compliments few and predictable. In addition, the compliment utterances are short and crisp: You are looking smart; You are nice; You are doing well; You are growing stylish these days. Syntactic characteristics observed showed that there were limited syntactic patterns and the short nature of the explicit compliments emphasizes their character as speech routines.

Manes and Wolfson (1981) observe that “the speech act of complimenting is characterized by the formulaic nature of its syntactic and semantic composition”. This nature is seen in the range of the lexical items that carry the semantic meanings of the compliments. It has been observed that the syntactic structures and patterns employed in compliments are predictable. Compliments have become rituals as a result of their routine characteristic; moreover, their formulaic nature reduces the chance that a given compliment might be misinterpreted (Boyle 2000). According to Manes and Wolfson (1981), “two-thirds of English compliments use the adjectives ‘nice, good, beautiful, pretty, great’, and 90% make use of just two verbs, ‘like and love’”. The lack of creativity in the form and content of English compliments is related to their function in discourse. Since the
aim of a compliment is to make the hearer feel appreciated and approved of; the formulaic nature minimizes the chance that the compliment will be misinterpreted. Several socio-pragmatic studies (Herbert, 1990; Holmes 1988) have shown that compliments are routine formulae and employ a few syntactic patterns and a limited vocabulary that are specific in expressing admiration and praise.

In spite of these limited syntactic structures and vocabulary, there are instances of implicit and non-formulaic compliments. Implicit compliments in English in Ghana are mainly based on expressions and strategies that are transferred from Ghanaian languages to English. For example, our data showed that instead of explicitly saying he or she likes the addressee’s hair style or dress, a speaker could simply say:

(4) Can you take me to your dress maker?
(5) Who is your hairdresser? I want you to take me to her.

The speaker does not explicitly say that the addressee’s dress or hair style is nice, but by saying that she wants to be taken to the latter’s hairdresser or dressmaker, he/she implies that the complimentee’s dress or hair style is beautiful. Apart from such implicit structures, there are other structures which are directly transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages. Typical examples of these structures are:

(6) If this dress gets missing from your wardrobe, I shall buy one.
(7) If you cannot find this dress, come to my wardrobe.
(8) I can see myself in this dress.
(9) When you remove this dress, send it to me.
(10) When you are done with wearing this dress, hand it over to me.
(11) You have good eyes.
(12) The next time you are going to the market, I shall ask you to buy me something.

There are also instances where speakers pay compliments by simply using structures such as: You are a man, or, You are a real woman, to
compliment a man or woman for performing a task which is expected of a man or a woman in the Ghanaian culture. For example, *You are a man*, could be used to compliment a man who has succeeded in making his wife pregnant. Since child bearing is a highly valued activity in Ghanaian culture, a man is complimented when he is able to make his wife pregnant.

In a similar fashion, *You are a real woman*, could be said to a woman who has given birth to a child or a woman who cooks well. These are activities that are expected from a woman in Ghanaian cultures. *You are living well*, could be said to a friend who has acquired some possessions; *You are showing us*, is mostly said by females in admiration of fashionable clothes worn; *As for this, remember us*, is said by friends in admiration of sudden favours gained; *It is ge* (i.e., genuine), means it is a good quality product; *I cannot try you*, when used as a compliment means that the attribute admired is a paragon. Such compliments are transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages into English. Our data also revealed translated versions of some of the Akan appearance compliments which had been presented in Agyekum (2005). Here are a few examples that were used in the natural data we collected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Akan Compliment (Agyekum 2005)</th>
<th>Ghanaian English Version (Natural data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Wo kyɛn Akyem polisi”</td>
<td>(13) “You are more than a weaver bird”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ahoɔfɛ ni”</td>
<td>(12) “What a beauty!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ei, ahoɔfɛ na adware wo sei”</td>
<td>(13) “Ei, You are soaked with beauty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ahoɔfɛ na ɛreku wo sei”</td>
<td>(14) “See how beauty is killing you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Wo ntoma yi  deɛ, ɛnyɛ small”</td>
<td>(15) “This your cloth is not small”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In some Ghanaian cultures, people are more likely to pay compliments indirectly, especially when the interaction is between unequal powers.
The current study revealed such implicit compliments. These are not formulaic and they range from exclamations such as: “Great show! Good looking!” to other implicit compliments seen in the excerpt below:

(16)  A lady bought a laptop computer and her friends admired the machine.

   A:  It is a good machine o! It comes with a double ultra V port.
   B:  (smiles) thank God.

The speaker is indirectly complimenting the addressee on her possessions/achievement in (16) above.

(17)  At a social gathering, a male student compliments a female friend:

   Male: Here comes Miss Ghana.
   Female: (laughs) isn’t that flattery? Thanks, anyway.

In (17), the speaker is comparing the addressee to someone of whom he thinks highly. He thinks she can be compared to a beauty queen, “Miss Ghana”. Understanding such compliments calls for indexical and shared background knowledge. The addressee has to know who the speaker is referring to as well as who a “Miss Ghana” is to make meaning of the utterance. Such compliments denote an intense personal involvement. It is believed that such implicit compliments give more intense and better effect (Bruti 2006 and Boyle 2000). Even though implicit compliments can be costly because of the likelihood of ambiguity and the time it takes to process the information to realize their import, they have far reaching effects. In the first place, the implicit compliment is novel, suggesting that the speaker took special care in crafting it for a special reason. Secondly, as a polite form in itself, it helps the addressee to balance the modesty maxims, that is, to avoid self praise and agree with the speaker easily.

A marked feature of compliments in English in Ghana is the use of pragmatic markers from the indigenous Ghanaian languages. Markers such as, \textit{ei}, \textit{o}, \textit{fromo}, \textit{ehe} and \textit{ye/yei}, are transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages into English in Ghana. From our native speaker
intuition, the following are the meanings of the pragmatic makers: *ei* is an exclamation which denotes surprise and, to some extent, disbelief; *o* is an exclamation which can mean surprise or exasperation; it is also used to end phrases and sentences as most Ghanaian indigenous languages do not have closed syllables; *ehe* is an exclamation which denotes a flicker of remembrance which the speech situation invokes and which explains certain aspects of the interaction. These markers show a transfer from the L1 into the L2. The focus marker, *deɛ*, which means “as for” or “really”, is used to isolate the quality which is being complimented. These markers occurred very frequently in the natural discourse data as we see in the following:

(18) A student’s husband came to visit her on campus and her friends teased her.

   A:  *The laughter has an added “semitone” which was not there before*  o!

   B:  *(mimics a dance while still laughing)*

(19) A lady with a new hairdo went to her department, where she met a male colleague and the following ensued:

   *Male: (smiling) ei, I couldn’t see you o! You have changed; beautiful!*

   *Female: (smiles back) it is my hairdo eh, thanks.*

**III. Compliment Responses**

From the data, we observed that responding to compliments in English in Ghana is generally a blend of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The responses to the compliments observed and gathered through the recall protocol and the authentic discourse can be classified into three categories:

1. Verbal: Under this category the addressee responds to the compliment using only words without any form of accompanying non-linguistic strategy.
2. Verbal plus non-verbal: this category consists of responses which use a blend of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies.

3. Non-verbal only: this group consists of responses which are made without words. Such responses are strictly silence coupled with the employment of facial expressions and other kinetographic gestures to show appreciation or disapproval of the compliment paid.

The pattern of responses is presented in the table below:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manner of Response</th>
<th>Recall Protocol Data</th>
<th>Authentic Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal only</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal &amp; non-verbal</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Verbal only</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, more than one non-verbal strategy can be employed in a single response. The responses are exemplified below:

(20) During break time at a department seminar the following conversation was captured between two friends:

\[ A: \text{Fred, your paper is excellent.} \]
\[ B: (smiles) \text{really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).} \]

In the above instance, the addressee used two non-verbal responses: a smile and a handshake.

When the results for the first semester of 2007 were posted on the notice board, two friends conversed as follows:

(21) \[ A: \text{I said you carried away all the “A”; all of it!} \]
\[ B: \text{Really? (Smiles, does some dance steps and hugs the speaker).} \]
In the above, the addressee uses three non-verbal strategies in a single response: a smile, dance steps and a hug.

(22) **Compliment:** You have really gone far on the project work; you are doing well.

*Response:* (smiles) it is God’s grace.

(23) **Compliment:** You have eyes indeed; the next time you are going to the market, I shall ask you to buy me some items. Your lady was my student at the training college. She is brilliant. *(This is a compliment to someone who has a beautiful wife or girlfriend.)*

*Response:* (smiles broadly) Ehe! Thanks.

(24) **A:** Your hairstyle is beautiful.

**B:** (smiles) thank you; you are not bad either.

“Thank you”, and “You are not bad either”, are the verbal responses here. The discussion so far signifies that politeness in interactions in Ghanaian English is not only a verbal feature. To get a total understanding of politeness in interactions in Ghanaian English, equal regard should be given to the non-verbal and the verbal strategies employed.

**The Non-verbal Strategies:** The favoured non-verbal strategies observed from both methods—the recall protocol and the natural data—are “smile” and “laugh”. Smile, the fleeting facial expression of friendliness, and laugh, the loud expression of happiness, characterize most of the responses. In addition, these non-verbal strategies have intensities. A smile, for instance, is observed as a “smile” or a “broad smile”; a laugh as a “light laugh”, a “hearty laugh”, a “giggle” or a “loud laugh”. These non-verbal strategies have their own meanings. A smile means a warm reception of whatever is said and a laugh means joy at what has been said. These are followed in preference by the tactile group – handshakes, hugs, pats and waves. It is observed that at certain times more than one non-verbal strategy are employed in a single response; moreover, the non-verbal strategies mostly precede the verbal strategies, as in the following
excerpts. Where more than one non-verbal strategy is used, the semantic classification is done according to the perceived intention of the addressee.

(25) A student did editing work for a lecturer and the following conversation between the lecturer and the student was captured:

Lecturer: Wonderful; you have done the work very well.

Female student: (smiling) Thanks, sir.

(26) A lady returned to campus with a new haircut and her friends complimented her thus:

A: (admiringly) what a nice haircut!

B: (smiles) are you sure?

A: The cut is splendid; I will have one too.

B: (laughs) Great, and it will suit you.

(27) A class of students was waiting for their lecturer to arrive for a lecture. A male student walked in wearing sporty designer clothes and the following ensued:

A: Great show!

B: (smiles and shakes hand with the speaker).

Verbal Responses

The varied verbal response strategies employed can be grouped as follows:

a. Is that so/?are you sure/?really?, or any other form that expresses doubt but could indicate acceptance.

b. Oh, it is nothing, or any other form that plays down the effort/quality admired.
c. Thank you.

d. It is by God’s grace.

e. You do better than I do, or any other form that deflects the compliment to the giver.

f. Thank God/it is God or any other form that deflects the compliment to a third person.

g. Oh, it is a borrowed one/it is an old one/I bought it in Accra/it was not easy.

h. Any other verbal form apart from the above.

i. Any forms of rejection- get away, don’t flatter me, and be careful.

The “h” group of responses comprises mostly explanations such as, Thanks, or, it is expensive. It is observed that some respondents used more than one of the above in their response patterns. The following explains this point:

(28) A lady entered her friend’s room at the Hall of residence and remarked:

Compliment: This is a lady’s room. (The implication here is that it is clean or tidy.)

Response: (laughs lightly) is that so? But your room looks tidier than here.

In the response above the respondent uses a combination of “a” and “e” categories.

(29) Compliment: Ei Abena, where have you been... you look smart and your body....!

Response: My sister, let’s thank God; but you are not bad either.
The last response also combines the “f” and “e” categories. This pattern is also seen in the responses collected from the natural discourse. The common verbal strategy recorded from both the recall protocol and the natural data is the appreciative token of “thank you”, or “thanks”, with or without any other strategy which implies appreciation. Witness the following:

(30) Two students met at a social gathering and one complimented the other thus:

*Female: Nowadays, you are looking handsome.*

*Male: (smiles) Yei, thank you.*

(31) At a department seminar, during the break period the following conversation was captured:

*Male: Fred, your paper is excellent.*

*Response: (smiles) really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).*

Here “thank you” occurs after a question. However, “thank you” hardly occurs alone; other phrases are typically added. The excerpts below further illustrate this point:

(32) *Compliment: The last time I met you, you were ten years older.*

*Response: I am honoured, thanks.*

(33) *Compliment: I like your haircut; it is cute.*

*Response: (smiles) really? Thanks, you are the first to say it.*

Thus, other comments are added to “thank you” when it occurs in Ghanaian English. This situation makes semantic classification difficult. The ultimate classification is done according to the order of precedence order of the verbal strategies, so that in (32) above, “I am honoured” is given precedence over “thanks”. Other forms of responses observed
include questions such as: “is that so?”, “really?” and “are you sure?”.
These can be seen in the following excerpts. The first was captured in an
interaction between a female and a male, the second in a conversation
between females on their way to church:

(34) Female: Your hairstyle is nice; in fact, you are my man on campus.

Male: (smiles and hugs the lady) is that so?

(35) A: The perfume you have used is very pleasant.

B: (smiles) Is that so? It is very expensive.

This mode is the second most popular in both the recall and natural
discourse data. On the surface, the questions look like rejections, but they
are not. The questions normally co-occur with smiles, so that in effect
they do not question the sincerity of the speaker but seek re-affirmation
of the truth value of the compliment and constitute a modesty strategy.
By requesting the speaker to reaffirm the compliment, the addressee is
according the speaker the benefit of being an absolute judge, thus directly
minimizing praise of self and maximizing praise of the other. This action
enhances the face of the speaker and makes him/her share the glory of
the compliment. As a result, the social tie between the speaker and the
addressee gets strengthened.

Other forms of verbal responses include expressions which deflect the
compliment to the speaker, a third person or God. In both the recall and
discourse data, the various forms of deflection outnumber the prime
“thank you”. The following examples of deflections reveal the principles
behind such speech behaviour.

(36) A female student visited some friends in their room and the
following ensued:

A: Jane, you people can really keep your room tidy; I love it.

B: (laughs) how about your room? Thanks, anyway.
(37) A female student met a colleague walking along with a baby and the following took place:

A: *That’s a beautiful baby; he looks well kept.*

B: *laughs lightly* it is God’s grace.

(38) Two female post graduate students met on campus and the following compliments were paid:

A: *My dear, you are ravishing, ravishing like that!*

B: *smiles* Really! Thanks. You are not bad also in that blue jeans o!

A: *oh, it is an old “reach me down” from my sister* (laughs lightly).

In example (36), the speaker tells the addressee that their efforts at keeping their room tidy are recognized and admired. In example (37), the speaker is indirectly praising the mother’s childcare skills, while example (38) is a typical appearance compliment. In addition, in all the instances the speakers imply that they are friends to the addressees. In responding to the compliments the way they do, the addressees are guided by culturally informed assumptions about politeness. These authors are of the view that speakers of English in Ghana typically draw on the rules of politeness of their L1 in interacting with one another in the L2, even though there are adjustments to suit each situation. This view is based on the assumption that as the English Language is used in the L2 environment to satisfy socio-cultural needs of the L2 speakers, the norms of the L1 will influence patterns of interaction (Hondo and Goodman, 2003).

**Categorizations of the Responses:** The compliment responses observed are discussed in the light of Herbert’s (1986) Taxonomy of Responses. His taxonomy is based on the realization that addressees’ responses are simultaneous answers to the positive evaluation as well as the “verbal gifts” offered. He realizes that the addressee agrees first with the propositional content of the compliment before accepting it. Therefore, he classifies responses as:
1. Agreements  
2. Non-agreements  
3. Other interpretations

Within each of the three categories are sub-divisions. The agreement category, for instance, has sub-divisions like Acceptance, Comment History and Transfers. These are shown below:

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall Protocol Data</th>
<th>Authentic Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation Token</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment Acceptance</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praise Upgrade</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comment History</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassignment</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale Down</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Acknowledgement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request Interpretation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the analysis of data collected that speakers of English in Ghana generally agree with and accept compliments. More than two thirds of the total responses fall within the first category of Herbert’s taxonomy of responses. The Appreciation tokens, both verbal and non-verbal, are the most frequently used of all the strategies. Generally, the appreciation tokens are blends of the verbal “thank you” with smiles or laughter. In certain instances, it is only the non-verbal strategy or the verbal strategy—“thank you”—that occurs. The transfers which manifest as Reassignments and Returns are the next most used forms of response. The recall protocol records seventy-six (76) of such responses, which constitute thirty percent (30%) of the total responses. The natural data
reveals forty-nine (49) responses in this category, representing nineteen point six per cent (19.6%) of the total responses. Despite the fact that there is disparity in the extent of occurrence, the trend is the same: both methods reveal this group as the second most used form of responses. However, Reassignments outnumber Returns; the recall protocol reveals fifty-eight (58) Reassignments and the natural discourse data reveals twenty-five (25).

The reassignments generally are towards God or God’s Grace. These forms of responses reveal the religiosity of the Ghanaian. The Return group manifests as strictly returning the compliment to the speaker. The Transfer category, in general, reveals the politeness orientation of the Ghanaian speaker of English. The Transfers manifest a blend of the Agreement and Modesty maxims. The Praise Upgrade group reveals differences in data from the two methods. Whereas the recall protocol records just four (4), the natural discourse reveals as many as thirteen (13), a figure that represents four per cent (4%) of the total responses. This discrepancy could be the result of the unreliability of the memory in recalling past occurrences. The respondents could recall that the compliment was accepted but could not recall the comments. However, the natural discourse data which was collected through participant observation and which used audio recording and note-taking procedures could be fairly reliable. The praise upgrade can be seen in the following:

(40) Two male lecturers, one of whom had just returned from study leave in America, met at the club and conversed as follows:

A: You are wonderful; you worked really hard!

B: (laughs) Charlie, it wasn’t easy.

The response above upgrades the feature of hard work which is the propositional content of the compliment. The response not only accepts that “he worked hard” but goes on to qualify the words of praise with, “it was not easy”, which emphasizes the compliment.
There was an interaction between two females at an End-of-Year party thus:

A: Madam Treasurer, who made the pie you served? It is very tasty.

B: (smiles) that is good news; I made them myself.

This response upgrades the proposition in the compliment that “the person who made the pie must be a good cook”. The addressee, by saying “I made them myself”, publicly praises her culinary skills. This verbal response could be said to be impolite, but the nonverbal “smile” smoothens its effect. In the first place, the non-verbal reaction carries the semantic aspect of the response. The smile, on its own, indicates agreement with the compliment and acceptance of the camaraderie implied in the remark, so that it can absorb the “brag” of the verbal aspect. It can be argued that the occasion—a party— and also the feeling of achievement on the part of the addressee, made her respond the way she did. Moreover, the interaction is between colleagues where there is neither social distance nor non-congruent power effects. However, Herbert’s classification of “question” as a non-agreement strategy is contrary to the situation observed. Questions such as, “is that so?” and “really?”, when used as responses in Ghanaian English, are not non-agreement strategies; they are best seen as requests for affirmation. They are most often accompanied with non-verbal strategies which carry the semantics of the response. The non-verbal strategies include smiles and laughs. In addition, some of the responses end with thanks, as observed in the exchange below:

At a department seminar, during the break the following conversation was recorded:

A: Fred, your paper is excellent.

B: (smiles) really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).

If the question, “really?”, expressed doubt of any sort, it would not be followed with an appreciation token, “thanks”.
The Non-agreement group is minimal. It consists of disagreements, no acknowledgements and scale down responses. There are nine (9) scale down responses from the Recall data but fourteen (14) from the Natural discourse data. There is only one (1) disagreement from the Recall data but fourteen from the Natural data. The non-verbal strategies which accompany disagreements are frowning, avoiding eye contact with the speaker and remaining silent. These can be seen in the following excerpts:

(43) At a get-together on campus the following was recorded:

Male: Wow! Nice dress! It is gorgeous!

Female: (looks away) do not flatter me.

(44) A male student met a lady with whom he was not on friendly terms:

Male: Lovely hair.

Female: (frowns) be careful!

(45) A gentleman met a male friend who was walking with a lady and the first man tried to compliment the lady:

Male: Who is this beautiful lady? She is lovely. Will you be my gal?

Female: (silence)

There are seven (7) no acknowledgements from the natural data but none from the recall data. All together, there are only twenty-four (24) non-agreement responses from the natural discourse data and thirteen (13) from the recall protocol. These show clearly that speakers of English in Ghana generally agree and accept compliments. The Request Interpretation category which interprets compliments as requests has only two (2) responses from the natural discourse data but none from the recall data.
Conclusion

Generally, compliments are speech acts which function to promote and strengthen social relationships between people in the speech community. Ghanaians compliment each other on “appearance” more than on any other topic. The compliments observed manifest mostly in congruent interactions such as between friends and colleagues. A few of the compliments have been observed between non-congruent interactions where due deference is given to the senior in the interaction. Such compliments are rather few. This situation gives credence to earlier observations by Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1988) that compliments upwards are fewer than compliments downwards. The study also observes that factors such as social distance and power do affect the complimenting behaviour in English in Ghana. However, formality does not seem to affect compliments as inter-personal encounters.

The study further revealed that compliments are mostly direct and explicit. Generally, the verbs used in the compliments are in the active voice. The SVC formula is the most prevalent (“You look beautiful”, “you are nice”, “You are a wonderful person”, ‘You are doing well”, “You are a hard working guy”). Stative verbs such as “look” and the copula “is” occur more than any other verb form in the appearance compliments. A marked feature of compliments in Ghanaian English is the use of news markers. Such news markers are “ei, ye, oh, o, ehe”. The fact that these news markers are involuntary exclamations, coupled with the fact that they come from Ghanaian languages, clearly demonstrates that speakers of Ghanaian English use interactional strategies of the L1 as mind sets in interactions in the L2.

Responses to compliments in English in Ghana are a blend of non-verbal and verbal strategies, very often with the non-verbal strategy carrying the semantics of the responses. Ghanaians generally agree and accept compliments when they deem the propositional content of the compliment true. Compliments are rejected when the propositional content is considered untrue or the addressee thinks the speaker is insincere. The favoured non-verbal strategies observed are “smile” and “laugh”. Smile, the fleeting facial expression of friendliness, and laugh,
the loud expression of happiness, characterize most of the responses. In addition, these non-verbal strategies have intensities. Smile, for instance, is observed as a “smile” or a “broad smile”; laugh as a “light laugh”, a “hearty laugh”, a “giggle” or a “loud laugh”. These non-verbal strategies have their own meanings. A smile means a warm reception of whatever is said and a laugh means joy at what has been said. These are followed in preference by the tactile group—handshakes, hugs, pats and waves.

The popular verbal strategy recorded from the study is the appreciative token of “thank you”, or “thanks”, with or without any other strategy which implies appreciation. However, “thank you” hardly occurs alone; other phrases are added. Sometimes, more than one verbal cue is employed in the response. “Thank you, you are not bad either”, is a typical verbal response. Other forms of responses observed include questions such as: “is that so?”, “really?” and “are you sure?”. The questions normally co-occur with smiles, so that in effect they are not questioning the sincerity of the speaker but seeking reaffirmation of the truth value of the compliment and serving as a modesty strategy. By requesting the speaker to reaffirm the compliment, the addressee is according the speaker the benefit of being an absolute judge, thus directly minimizing praise of self and maximizing praise of the other. This action enhances the face of the speaker and makes him/her share the glory of the compliment. It is a modesty strategy since in the end the speaker is glorified more than the one who responds. As a result, the social tie between the speaker and the addressee gets strengthened. Other forms of verbal responses include expressions which deflect the compliment to the speaker, a third person or God.
REFERENCES


Othering through Gendering Discourses and Patriarchal Hegemonies in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*

Victoria Amma Agyeiwaah Moffatt

**ABSTRACT**

Many postcolonial studies of the relationship between the ‘empire’ and the ‘margin’ have revealed that it is characterized by persistent dominance and exploitation. Scholars like Frantz Fanon have argued that colonial encounters between the West and Africa constitute a relationship of dominance and oppression in which the oppressed is maintained as an exploited Other to the dominant Self. While the power differential in this relationship is obsessively guarded through varying forms of othering, the dominant self subtly explores new ways of upholding the structures of supremacy over the Other. Gender is one such subtle means, in the sense that the colonial Other is often ingeniously conceived as the traditional female who is a subordinate (Other) to the male. This essay examines ways in which such othering through gendering is achieved in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*.

Keywords: Gender, Othering, Post-colonialism

**INTRODUCTION**

In comparing the novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Poisonwood Bible*, one cannot help but notice that, despite their convergence in adapting Africa, precisely the Congo, as the major setting for their narratives, the texts differ at the level of gender presentation. *HOD*, on the one hand, is no doubt a male-oriented text that seems to have as part of its agenda the exclusion of women from the discovery of Kurtz’s horror, because it proceeds from the assumption that women are altogether too fragile, ignorant or naïve to handle the stark realities of life. *PWB*, on the other hand, is a female-oriented text that aims at giving a feminine perspective.
on masculine/imperial ‘heroic’ adventures into the conquest of the colonised Other, where the constitution of this Other is very much linked to the female body in the sense that both endure forms of penetration and possession by the patriarch/empire whose desire is to assert superiority over the colonised/female.

Sharing the common heritage of colonialism, both novels articulate gender difference and gender roles as a part of the organisation of imperial states and colonial territories. This subsumption of gender into the greater picture of human oppression is significant for two main reasons. First, the categorisation of gender into masculine and feminine often precedes a distinction between the treatment of and attitudes towards men and women. Secondly, gendering, like colonialism and other structures that operate on a system of binary oppositions, has at its core some level of oppression, in this case, of the ‘weaker’ half (the feminine). In an essay entitled “Deconstructing Equality–versus–Difference”, Joan Scott (1988:37) declares that:

[oppositions rest on metaphors and cross-references, and often in patriarchal discourse, sexual difference (the contrast masculine/feminine) serves to encode or establish meanings that are literally unrelated to gender or the body. In that way, the meanings of gender become tied to many kinds of cultural representations, and these in turn establish terms by which relations between women and men are organized and understood.

However, she argues further that there exists some “interdependence”, some complementarity in these ostensible opposites. In support of this assertion, she draws on the views of Jacques Derrida and explains that,

Western philosophical tradition...rests on binary oppositions: unity/diversity, identity/difference, presence/absence, and universality/specificity. The leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms (1988:37).
In my analysis of *HOD* and *PWB*, I find such binary oppositions at work at three different levels, each of which has a bearing on the others. These are the levels of masculine/feminine, white/black and the West/Africa. These oppositions contribute to formulating the concept of otherness by replicating difference through the referential terms “we/they, us/them.” In my study of the texts I intend to show how such oppositeness contributes to meaning and to the creation of a particular image of Africa that seems to be constructed from the combination of the three levels of opposition that I have already identified. To this end, I agree with Scott that “if binary oppositions provide insight into the way meaning is constructed, and if they operate as Derrida suggests, then analyses of meaning cannot take binary oppositions at face value but rather must “deconstruct” them for the processes they embody” (1988:37).

This essay will, therefore, attempt to explore how power structures are established through gender related otherness, which endorses forms of oppression aimed at keeping the feminine gendered subject in a constant state of subjugation to patriarchal authority. Further to this, I will attempt to discuss some of the ways in which different gendered subjects resist gender oppression through agency (either subtly or blatantly) by undoing gender difference and transgressing gender roles.

**GENDERED STEREOTYPES**

Different scholars have conceived of gender in various ways in order to identify its varying forms and break the stereotypes associated with them. These forms develop from what Mary Hawkesworth (1970:649), quoting Harold Garfinkel, calls the “‘natural attitude’ towards gender,” which encompasses a series of ‘unquestionable’ axioms about gender, including the beliefs that…gender is invariant; genitals are the essential signs of gender; the male/female dichotomy is natural; being masculine or feminine is natural and not a matter of choice; all individuals can (and must) be classified as masculine or feminine—any deviation from such a classification being either a joke or a pathology.
To challenge “the validity” of such beliefs, Hawkesworth (1970:650) argues that “[e]arly feminist scholars used gender to repudiate biological determinism by demonstrating the range of variation in cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity”, whereas more recently, “others use gender to analyze the social organization of relationships between men and women...to investigate the reification of human differences...[and] to illustrate the microtechniques of power”, among others. She further posits that the more different analysts try to conflate different approaches to dispel the myths about gender, the wider the contextual scope it encompasses.

Of the several ways cited by Hawkesworth (1970:649-50) in which gender has been viewed, it is the definition of gender “in terms of a binary opposition” and “as relations of power manifested in domination and subordination” that are most relevant to my discussion (Mackinnon 1987; Gordon 1988; qtd. in Hawkesworth 1970: 651). To support these ways of analysing gender in relation to my primary texts, I also adopt Joan Scott’s definition of gender “as a concept of two interrelated but analytically distinct parts,” as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and [as] a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (qtd. in Hawkesworth 1970:652). With regard to *HOD* and *PWB*, the first part of this definition applies to the categorisation of characters based on their biological sexual differences (male/female; men/women). The second part relates to the way in which certain characters, irrespective of their biological sexual identities, may be gendered to play out or “signify ... relationships of power”.

**IN BLACK AND WHITE**

Gender, in the self-evident sense of the word, that is, as biological sexual identity, is clearly spelt out in the novels. In *HOD*, there are fewer women than men. Between Marlow’s aunt mentioned at the beginning of the narrative and Kurtz’s Intended whose pallid aspect draws Marlow’s brooding tale to a close, we encounter three other women: Kurtz’s African mistress and the Fates “guarding the door of Darkness” (*HOD*, 12), bringing the total number of women characters in the novel to five. On the other hand, the male characters are represented multiply through
Marlow, his clique of attentive listeners ‘secret-sharing’ with him on the Nellie, ‘the great man himself’ in the ‘Company’s offices’ (11), the French doctor who conducts some medical examination of sorts on Marlow “in the interests of science” (13), the Swede captain of the little steamboat that transports Marlow to his Company’s station (17), the company’s chief accountant (21), the manager (25), the company of wearisome pilgrims, the brickmaker, Kurtz’s Russian disciple and Kurtz himself…the list seems endless. Thus outnumbered by the male characters, the women in the text certainly seem to be out of place in this male dominated narrative. Cast hazily as dreamlike entities removed from the reality of life, each of the female characters possesses an aspect of illusion that disqualifies her from a discovery of truth. The Fates “guarding the door of Darkness” (12) as well as the African mistress have an ominous aspect that casts them in the realm of nightmarish apparitions; the Intended is kept in a state of ignorance about the truth of Kurtz’s life and death; and Marlow’s aunt lives in a state of pure naiveté that distances her from the truth. Thus discarding the ominous three to the sphere of the unreal and remarking simply that they are the “most improper person[s] to be…at the other end of such an affair” (81), Conrad sums up his opinion of the fair pair in Marlow’s words about his aunt:

It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over (14).

In a thought provoking essay about the exclusion of women from Conrad’s novel, Nina Pelikan Straus (1987:124) has stated that “Marlow presents a world distinctly split into male and female realms—the first harboring the possibility of ‘truth’ and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion”. So pronounced is the superiority of men in the text that in a strain of comparison, the two most dominant male figures in the text, Marlow and Kurtz, seem to be all it takes to downplay the importance
of all five women. Kurtz, in life as in death, retains possession over his Intended. In his minatory personality, he surpasses the ominous aspect of the Fates and the enchanted nature of the African mistress put together. Marlow, on the other hand, is ushered into his nightmare on a wave of incertitude, slightly piqued by his aunt’s naïveté regarding the reality of the colonial enterprise about which he knows better. At the end of his journey, having traversed to “the centre of the earth” (15) and back to “the sepulchral city” (88), he restively performs the finale of ‘guarding’ the Intended’s innocence, sealing her ignorance with his lie about Kurtz’s last words.

In *PWB*, a markedly feminine text, there seems to be a reversal of Straus’ assertion, for though indeed the Price females (Orleanna, the mother; Rachel, the eldest; the twins, Leah and Adah; and Ruth May, the youngest) also present a world distinctly split into male and female realms, here, it is the women who harbour the possibility of ‘truth’ while the men (or man, Nathan in this case) are “dedicated to the maintenance of delusion” (Straus 1987:124). As though she were consciously aiming at undoing Conrad’s text, Kingsolver creates a parallel text to *HOD* through which “she critiques European and American imperialist policies toward Africa [and] oppressive patriarchal attitudes toward women” (Fox 2004:406). Building her narrative around the Price family consisting of five females and a sole male, Kingsolver’s novel is dominated by the females through whose personal perspectives the story unfolds. Each of the Price females recounts in her own way the domineering hegemony of the single male who rules each of their lives at the beginning of the novel. However, as they narrate their individual experiences, they become more aware of their precarious existence dependent fully on the authority and dubious conviction of the one man in their lives. With this discovery of themselves comes also their realization of the need to rule their own lives based on their own convictions. Making personal sacrifices to this end, they each forge ahead to make their own lives independent of the tyrannical male and his patricentric laws.

At the beginning of the novel, it is evident that Nathan, the husband, father, patriarch and ‘god’ of the Price females, stands unopposed as the superior male who dominates (even if silently), the lives of all the five females. So
delusional is he in exercising his power to rule the lives of others, to give commands and have them obeyed that, using his tyranny over his family of females as a model, he relentlessly tries to bend the will and traditions of Africa and its people to the will of the imperial and colonial power of which he is a religious representative. So overbearing is his power over the lives of the women that Adah, the lame twin, cynically refers to him as “Our Father” (32-4; 171-4; 213-4), observing that he speaks for all of them (32). Thus, even though in the novel, his voice as a narrator is conspicuously absent, his ‘law’ dominates and influences the narration of each of the females. In a disparagement similar to Marlow’s opinion of his aunt, Nathan generally opines, by implication, that the females, whom he indubitably equates to “bad dogs and morons” (133), have “failed to grasp” (13) the seriousness of their mission as a family to Africa because, led by their mother, Orleanna, they display a materialistic “outlook” (133) on the task of leading the way “out from [the] place of darkness! …into a brighter land!” (28).

Apart from these characters represented in both novels as clearly biologically male or female, there are other characters and entities in both novels that come out as gendered. They are either strongly/super masculine or stereotypically feminine. As already stated in Scott’s (1988:37) definition, such gendering, imputed either consciously or unconsciously, often serves to determine relationships of power between or among these characters. This assertion is replicated by Helen Bradford (1996:355) as she states in her essay on gender and colonialism that “[t]he colonial state was a male state: in its social base, personnel, and, not least, its military preoccupations and gender discriminatory laws”. Bradford (1996:356) argues that this androcentric structuring of state and society was bequeathed by representatives of the imperial states who carried with them into Africa ripples of political revolutions taking place in Europe at the time. As a result, many texts from that period (and from the present, when many of such deeply ingrained ways of thinking still persist) consist of

[a] repertoire of gender stereotypes…structuring ways of thinking about both sexes. On the one hand, men are largely gender neutral, conceptualized not as men but as
people, linked with categories like economics, politics or race. On the other hand, women are gendered beings, with an implicit or explicit emphasis on their sexual attributes and their familial relationships with men.

This attitude towards gender may well explain why Conrad’s text, written at what may be considered the exploratory years that laid the foundation for colonialism, endows men with heroic abilities while women demonstrate a deficiency in knowledge about certain aspects of life. As Straus (1987: 125) argues, “Conrad’s text itself…stimulates the notion that the psychic penury of women is a necessary condition for the heroism of men”. And as I have already suggested, Kingsolver’s *PWB*, in the sense that it tries to work out a reversal of gender attitudes, seems to induce the psychic penury of men as a necessary condition for the heroism of women.

To revisit Scott’s definition of gender that Hawkesworth (1970: 652) applies to her analysis of gender, it is possible to examine how gender is deployed in *HOD* and *PWB* as an indication of “relations of power manifested in domination and subordination” and as “a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. In *HOD*, such power relations are manifested through characters like Kurtz, Marlow and his male audience on the yawl (to whom Strauss extends the metaphor of secret-sharing). These men are depicted as definitely masculine by dint of their heroic abilities or by the transference of these abilities merely through association (as male listeners or even readers) with the heroes. Thus gaining superiority over the effeminate women, who lack the experience of adventure and, as a result, the knowledge of ‘truth,’ the masculine is portrayed as the dominant gender to which the feminine is subordinate, signifying in this way the dynamics of power between the two. The ‘truth’ itself is gendered in the sense that, presented from the perspective of the ‘powerful’ male, it is, in actual fact, a justification for the need to colonise and exert power over the Other.

There are the women in the novel who occupy clear feminine positions. It is worth noting that these women are not even given names. Whether they symbolise good/light or evil/darkness (as do the Intended and the African mistress, respectively), evince benefaction or presage an omen
(as with the aunt or the Fates), they bear no names. The identities of each one of them has been reduced to the feminine pronoun ‘she’, and once collapsed into this single unit, their individual identities are voided. They do not exist for themselves. They exist only insofar as they move Marlow’s tale forward. Straus (1987:134) argues in her essay that because the Intended is without a name she is “thrice voided or erased” by Kurtz, Marlow and Conrad, none of whom ever speaks her name. If we carry this argument further and extend it to the other gendered characters in the novel, it will be evident that all five women “remain in the stereotypically convenient world of ‘she’” (Straus 1987: 134) and so are all equally voided at one level. However, there is a second level of erasure from which the Intended and Marlow’s aunt are spared, because they at least have voices. The African mistress and the Fates are placed at a level of erasure where they neither have names nor voices, and even their very forms are linked to the nebulous, sinister nature of the darkness through which Marlow has travelled to find Kurtz, a darkness that only deepens into “something ominous…tenebrous…with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose” (HOD 76). These characters are not only feminised but also to some extent dehumanised, which reflects how feminine-gendered characters also fall into a category of otherness that contests their humanity. This may or may not be a direct result of their representation but is linked, largely, to the overall dominant patriarchal attitudes that have accompanied definitions of men and women over time.

In PWB, there are similar constructs. There is the masculine-gendered male, Nathan Price, who, though only nominally represented, exerts authority over the females, thus asseverating his superiority. He is the epitomised representation of the dominant patriarch whose laws must be obeyed. Though his character is portrayed through the narratives of the female characters, we are still able to decipher that his attitude corresponds to “masculine ideals of self-reliance, individualism, sexual sampling, mobility and adventure” (Comer 1997:78). On the other hand, the females are feminine-gendered at the beginning of the novel, stereotypically revealing “female values such as attachment, connection, belonging, community and commitment” (Comer 1997:78). This representation is
however reversed, or at least questioned, as the females make an effort to reconstruct their selves away from gender stereotypes.

**CHANGING PLACES**

There is another category of feminised characters in the novel who are not biologically female. These characters are represented in the forms of the African men in the novel. First, there is the chief of the village, Tata Ndu, whose chiefly regalia includes “large black glasses frames (which bore no lenses)” (PWB 97). When we first meet him, he is cast as a caricature who is more concerned with the acquisition of more wives and copulation than with the affairs of his village. However, when we encounter him later in the wake of Nathan’s gradual debilitating power, he is gaining power and savouring this power over the white missionary. He gradually sheds his effeminate self in exchange for an increasingly masculine attitude, through which he asserts his authority as chief of the village. He stands up to Nathan, puts Nathan’s version of religion to the test of voting, a procedure defined by the West, and thus exposes the inadequacy of Western ideals imposed on African cultural or value systems.

There is indeed Nathan himself who lands in Africa, the typical male overlord, tyrant and virtual ‘god’ of his household. It is significant to note that there is no other male in his nest who would have stood up to him, for there cannot be two captains on one ship. When his power to dominate and repress starts to give way, he gradually becomes effeminate. We actually see a foreshadowing of his emasculation in the fact that he is denied a narrative voice to recount his own experience of Africa. Rather, we learn about his experiences and his actions from the parallel narratives of his all-female family. When Mama Tataba, the African housekeeper who worked for Nathan’s predecessor and later worked for Nathan and his family, stands up to him, it is a shock to his family who have never thought that kind of action possible; and it is the prefiguring of other such revolts against him. When Anatole, an orphan who was cared for and educated by previous missionaries and who now serves as Nathan’s translator, visits the Price homestead, he tells Nathan the truth about how ineffective his mission is among the village folk, stating that the chief, “Tata Ndu is happy for (Nathan) to draw the bad-luck people away, but worries (he
is) trying to lure too many of the others into following corrupt ways” (PWB, 129). Later, we find that even his “favourite pupil,” Leah, stands up against his authority and command and goes hunting with the men even though he forbids her to do so. This seems to be the final silencing factor that completes his evolution into a feminine-gendered character. For, from this point onward, we hear less and less about him until he is completely erased from the picture except to continue hovering over and haunting his family. His haunting presence is captured in his family’s individual recollections of the experiences they lived through as a result of his dragging them into the Congo with him in the first place. The final time we hear of him is in Leah’s report of his mystical reclusive life as a haunt among the native people and his eventual portentous, horrific, and ghoulish death. Adah points out the irony of his death in the context of his own methods and his life: “he got [the last] The Verse” (487).

Finally, the other character who falls into this category of the feminine-gendered subject is Anatole. When he is introduced at the beginning of the novel, he is clearly masculine, demonstrating self-reliance and individualism. Orphaned at an early age, he has learnt to survive on his own and on the benevolence of the white priests who took him under their wing and trained him. Having thus acquired high literacy skills, he inadvertently becomes Nathan’s assistant and translator in the church, although he still has his own opinions about Nathan. At the village gathering following the hunting expedition, he stands up for himself and for Leah when the village elders discriminate against both of them on the grounds of orphanhood and femaleness, respectively. Thus, he demonstrates clear masculine ideals in standing up for himself and for others, in fearlessly stating his opinion on any subject and in his adventurism when he actively participates in the revolution for independence in the Congo, which earns him an arrest. However, in marrying Leah, he seems to have yielded his independence, his identity and his voice to her. His subjectivity is subsumed under Leah’s authoritative and privileged voice and his assertiveness is almost completely swallowed up by Leah’s idealisation of him, of Africa and of her life in Africa. In the end, he seems to exist only for her, for it is through her dominating voice and point of view that we get to hear of him at all. In this gender representation of Leah and Anatole,
not only do we observe a reversal of gender roles and a subversion of gender differences, but also we detect the endorsement of racial power relations in maintaining the hegemony of white over black.

DE-/PHALLICISING GENDER

In both novels, it is possible to see the imperial West as a vague, though strong, masculine character that possesses the patriarchal phallic status penetrating into Africa upon whom it has imposed a maternal clitoric, feminine status and over whom it asserts its power and authority. In her essay on “prostitution and sexual geography,” Felicity Nussbaum (1995:19) connects the colonial enterprise to prostitution and demonstrates how pornographic representation of the hypersexual female body as “the silenced ground for a nationalist and colonialist agenda” is linked to the exotic representation of the “torrid/ tropic zones” as the fertile ground for colonial exploitation and domination. She further shows how, in John Cleland’s novel, Memoirs, the narrator depicts the possession of his prostitute’s corporeal ‘territory’ as “one of mutual pleasure in the exploration and discovery, as the colonized is increasingly pleased by the colonizer’s intrusion” (1995:26). Discussing how in eighteenth century English society the prostitute or errant “permissive female” was likened to the “torrid zone’s Other” and considered “an aberration” and an “evil” necessitating control, Nussbaum explains further that, for this society, it became exigent that sexuality be regulated in a bid to curb and domesticate (moderate) the hyper erotic tendencies of both the prostitute and the torrid Other. Among the repugnant evils of prostitutes which were to be guarded against was autoeroticism, for the prevention of which it was suggested that women be protected from themselves. To this end, one writer recommended that the woman’s body be “literally swathed during the night” to hide her body from her. Thus “[d]iscouraged from exploring their own bodies, women (were expected to) await discovery by another” (Nussbaum 1995:22).

To extend Nussbaum’s metaphor of linking the woman’s body to colonial territory, I argue that Africa’s material wealth and value were (and still are) the pleasure that the imperialist sought. Already compared to the permissive woman, Africa was considered a threat and a danger to herself
since she lacked the ‘civilisation’ (domesticity) to control her excessive sexuality and erotic pleasure. She is a prostitute requiring domesticity and regulation to turn her into a chaste, modest woman. Except that, unlike the clitoral Fanny Hill of Cleland’s Memoirs who, by gaining Charles’ love, is transformed from low-class, “elevated to bourgeois status and fully domesticated” (26), Africa, having more than one ‘intruder’ and gaining the love of none, remains a prostitute, since in the colonial encounter there was no intention of marriage on the part of the European invader. The correlation between Cleland’s Memoirs and the colonial experience lies in the fact that for Fanny Hill, the sexual encounter is used to domesticate her, whereas for Africa, it is used to entice and then subjugate and colonise her, which is the ultimate goal of the domineering phallic empire. Given such a clitoral portraiture that is enormous enough to suck in more than one imperial phallus, Africa remains prostitute to all empires, slave to all.

In the light of this sexual metaphor, it is evident how Africa is gendered in both HOD and PWB; for abstract in nature, yet present with some level of performative force, are the Imperial West and Africa. Represented by its motley agents (missionary, civilising or mercantilist), and so subtly eclipsed by these agents (magnified by reason of humanity), the Imperial West is the most dominant male character in both novels. It is gendered masculine and displays attributes of masculinity: adventurism, conquest, sense of superiority and dominance. In PWB it is represented in Nathan who remains convinced that, for his mission, he has the strong and unwavering approval of God and the United States of America even while his wife and daughters turn “un-missionary” (525), disillusioned with the threefold father figure of God, American leaders and Nathan. Each of them gradually casts off the power wielded over their lives by the domineering male figure and reconstructs herself into a new, more assertive person. It is equally represented in the spy-cum-merchant, Eeben Axelroot, who, in the true nature of the empire, exploits the deception of the colonial enterprise for his personal benefit. In a more subtle way, it is also represented in the person of “Eisenhower… [t]he King of America [who] wants a tall, thin man in the Congo to be dead” (297), evidence of the power he wields over the lives of others, no matter how far away they may be from his seat of authority. It is, in fact, this controlling force of
the Imperial West, brandished by the puppeteer, Eisenhower, that sets the pace for emasculating Nathan who is defeated by Africa, starting with Mama Tataba’s revolt against and disregard for him.

In *HOD*, the imperial West is represented strongly by the men and the adventurers and more metonymically by the Thames and the exploits that have been carried out on it in the past as well as by the evocation of various ships on which, and ports from which such exploits were led:

> And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has... ‘followed the sea’ with reverence and affection than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current...in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne... men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin...ships...from the *Golden Hind*...to the *Erebus* and *Terror*...from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith...they had all gone out on that stream, bearing the sword and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land...The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires” (*HOD*, 5 emphasis added)

It is of interest to note that in Nussbaum’s (1995:25, 26) analysis of sexuality and conquest she states that ships were often used as “a common trope for whores”, and that Cleland’s novel suggests that the whore “Fanny Hill’s body is both male and female”. Male, because it represents the might of the empire which penetrates, by way of exploration, into ‘unexplored’ lands; and female because it is itself controlled by male sailors who operate the ship, taking possession of it and directing its course. With such a suggestion, a relation can be detected between the ship as female, explored and enjoyed by the male adventurer who sails upon her, and the ship as male, penetrating into the female regions of the earth to explore and colonise. With the men and ships together thus symbolising the “might” and the “empire,” it is possible to identify them as the mighty empire itself that penetrates into Africa. Marlow confirms his identification with this mighty empire when he asserts: “After all, I also was a part of the great
cause of these high and just proceedings” (HOD, 19). In this statement by Marlow, however, there is a hint of irony, for Marlow’s entire role in “these high and just proceedings” consists mainly in revealing how ignoble the whole sordid affair is, of having to engage in ‘sowing’ “the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires” (5) or to rescue the insane (such as Kurtz) from the effects of such expeditions. This is evidenced in his assertion that “the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (7-8).

In PWB, we observe a similar correlation between the masculine gendered conqueror who represents the empire and the feminine gendered conquest who in part is also Africa, colonised, plundered and abandoned but hardly domesticated. The masculine is represented in the character of Nathan who, on behalf of the West (which is his god) “rides in to vanquish the untouched tribes” (PWB, 9) bearing “the torch” (HOD, 5) of religion. But like “Dr. Livingstone…and all the profiteers” before him, he “walk[s] out on Africa as a husband quits a wife, leaving her with her naked body curled around the emptied-out mine of her womb” (PWB, 9). Explicit in Orléanna’s assessment of Africa’s situation is the imagery of a broken matrimony in which the West, through its ‘conquering’ representatives, is the husband, and Africa, invested with the feminine qualities of reproduction through the metaphor of the womb, is the abandoned wife.

Through this metaphor of reproduction and other such tropes, Africa is conceived of as feminine in the novel. Abstract as it may be, Africa is represented as the native primitive female, endowed with wealth and resources, whose ‘lovers’ exploit her and abandon her: “poor [Africa], barefoot bride of men who took her jewels and promised the Kingdom” (PWB, 201). Through this patronising imagery, Africa is cast not only as female but also as naïve. As implied by the metaphor of the womb, she also has regenerative abilities, though these may not be readily recognisable. She seems to be able to regenerate in two major ways: autogenously and heterogeneously, suggestive of a bisexuality that transcends gender stereotypes and defies traditional gender roles. In PWB, this dual reproductive ability is rendered in the observation that the
forest sustains itself and regenerates by feeding on itself, “this forest eats itself and lives forever” \((PWB, 5)\). This is evocative of the fact that despite the plundering, Africa’s ‘womb’ is never ‘an emptied-out mine.’ Due to this fact, Africa perpetually calls to herself rivalling powers which all seek to have dominance over her. Nevertheless, as Orleanna experiences: “Africa shifts under [her] hands, refusing to be party to failed relations” \((10)\), defying exploitation from greedy, self-seeking profiteers and identification with abandoned wives and emptied-out wombs.

**CONCLUSION**

In sum, gender is deployed in both \(HOD\) and \(PWB\) to maintain the dynamics of power and superiority of the imperial West (the self) over Africa (the colonised other). This is evidenced in \(HOD\) in the way Africa and Africans are Othered through the systematic exclusion of women and the eventual erasure of the African woman (and therefore of Africa) from experiencing the supremacy of an individual self. In \(PWB\), the reversal of gender roles and the obliteration of the domineering patriarch only serve to methodically obscure Africa and her people in the might of the West. While the African women (along with their emasculated men with whom Nathan gets thrown in) gradually lose their individuality as they are subsumed under the larger image of Africa as an entity that is both male and female, the gendered representation of Africa in reproductive terms confines it to an otherness dominated by the masculine Western self. This is an otherness that establishes the relationship between the colonised and the empire.

**Endnote**

\(^2\) Hereafter referred to as \(HOD\) and \(PWB\).
REFERENCES


A Look at how Students in the University of Ghana Realise Final Stops in Monosyllabic Words.

Kari Dako and George Frimpong Kodie

Abstract:

Some students in the University of Ghana appear to elide the final stop in monosyllabic words or replace it with a glottal stop. A survey of 20 male and 20 female students of the University of Ghana under the age of 25 was undertaken to elicit how final stops were realized in monosyllabic words.

Introduction

This paper attempts to find out how students at the University of Ghana treat final stops, especially in monosyllabic words. We thus:

1. wanted to look at the tendency in younger students of the University of Ghana to elide final /t/ /d/ /p/ /b/ /k/ and /g/;
2. attempted to determine the prevalence of glottal stops (GS) as final-stop substitutes; and
3. wanted to find out whether the subsequent sound and/or preceding sound influences the selection of final stop or not.

The study was undertaken because it is apparent that some English words have assumed a distinct mode of pronunciation in Ghana. But, for example, is often heard as [ba] or [ba?]. That a final consonant sound can be elided in Ghana is not unusual, after all, as was noted by Strevens (1965: 113):

one would expect a description of the pronunciations of English which may be heard in West Africa to bear a close relationship to description of the phonetic characteristics of the language spoken as a mother tongue by various groups of people. This is in fact the case”.

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1 Kari Dako is Associate Professor, George Frimpong Kodie an Assistant Lecturer. They both teach in the Department of English, University of Ghana.
However, this quotation leads us into a further question: do aspects of pronunciation in Ghanaian English always reflect transfer phenomena? In many Ghanaian languages the syllable structure does not have a consonantal coda, so one might wonder whether we are dealing with a transference phenomenon when students elide final stops. But as many students substituted final stops with a glottal stop, we have had to ask, where does the glottal stop come from? Whereas final consonant elision is a common feature of Student Pidgin, glottal stops are rare in this code. Can the use of the glottal stop or the elision of final stops be explained by the number of Ghanaian students going to the UK to work during the summer vacation and picking up Cockney traits in their speech? Can the use of the glottal stop or the elision of final stops be a temporary fad inspired by, for example, TV announcers who use glottal stops? How widespread is the elision of the final stop or its substitution by a glottal stop?

A glottal stop, according to Gimson (1972:9), is produced when “the glottis is held tightly closed with the lung air pent up below it”. This “glottal stop” [?] frequently occurs in English, e.g., when it precedes the energetic articulation of a vowel or when it reinforces or even replaces p, t, k. In some English dialects glottalisation can be heard when especially unvoiced stops—[p],[t],[k]—initiate an unstressed syllable that occurs between vowels, as in water, or between a vowel and a sonorant, as in button, or at the end of a word, as in put it on. It is, however, not a sound found in RP, which is the target pronunciation in the Ghanaian education system. Word final consonant sounds, especially alveolar sounds, often assume the features of the word initial consonant of the following word. We can therefore expect that final stops are elided when the initial sound of the following word is consonantal.

Methodology

Twenty male and twenty female students under 25 years were asked to read 20 sentences (as in handout). The students came from a good spread of secondary schools from all the Regions in Ghana (list appended). The sample students were carefully selected to represent all the Regions of the
country and a broad selection of L1s (breakdown appended). Care was taken to avoid students who had been abroad.

The students were not told beforehand which aspect of their speech was of interest. As each student read a sentence, it was noted how each final stop was realised.

To gain a better feel of students’ speech habits, an additional 90 minutes of informal conversation was recorded, using different students from the ones who had read the sentences. The recorded data was used to support our evidence from the read data.

Analysis of Data

The results can be broken down as follows.

**Sentence 1: Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink.**

Six females and nine males read this sentence with all final stops.

1. **Water:** no deviance in medial position
2. **But:** 8 females and 7 males used glottal stop (hence GS), 2 males elided the final stop.
3. **Not:** 7 females and 3 males used GS, 1 female elided the final stop.
4. **Drop:** 1 female and 2 males used GS, none used elision.
5. **Drink:** no deviance.

**Sentence 2: The big, bad wolf ate the sheep.**

19 females and all males read with all final stops.

1. **Big:** 1 female used GS.
2. **Bad:** no deviance.
iii) **Ate:** no deviance.

iv) **Sheep:** no deviance.

**Sentence 3:** **I could not log into the internet last night.**

3 females and 3 males read with all final stops.

i) **Could:** 15 females and 13 males used GS. 1 female and 3 males elided the final stop.

ii) **Not:** 3 females and 3 males used GS. 1 female elided the final stop.

iii) **Log:** no deviance.

iv) **Internet:** no deviance.

v) **Last:** no student used GS, 1 female elided the final stop.

vi) **Night:** no deviance.

**Sentence 4:** **But what does it mean?**

10 females and 5 males read with all final stops.

i) **But:** 7 females and 7 males used GS.

ii) **What:** 8 females and 11 males used GS. 1 Female and 1 Male elided the final stop.

iii) **It:** 1 Male used GS.

**Sentence 5:** **He works in a lab somewhere**

All students observed stops.

i) **Work(s):** no deviance.
ii) **Lab:** no deviance.

**Sentence 6:** *I liked Kwesi, but did he like me?*

11 females and 11 males read with all final stops.

i) **Liked:** 2 males used GS. 1 female and 4 males elided the final stop.

ii) **But:** 5 females and 2 males used GS. 1 female elided final stop.

iii) **Did:** 2 females and 1 male used GS. 1 male elided final stop.

iv) **Like:** no deviance.

**Sentence 7:** *Don’t kick the dog!*

16 females and 16 males read with all final stops.

i) **Don’t:** 4 females and 4 males elided final stop.

ii) **Kick:** no deviance

iii) **Dog:** no deviance

**Sentence 8:** *I asked him to put it down.*

All females and 10 males read with all final stops.

i) **Asked:** 8 males elided final stop.

ii) **Put:** 2 Males elided final stop.

iii) **It:** no deviance.

**Sentence 9:** *If you are still hungry, lick the plate!*
16 females and 15 males read with all final stops.

i) **Lick:** 2 females and 2 males used GS. 2 females and 3 males elided final stop.

ii) **Plate:** no deviance.

**Sentence 10:** *You must pat the dog gently.*

11 females and 6 males read with all final stops.

i) **Must:** 1 male used GS. 9 females and 13 males elided final stop.

ii) **Pat:** 1 male used GS.

iii) **Dog:** no deviance.

**Sentence 11:** *Would you look at that great, red bud!*

12 females and 11 males read all final stops.

i) **Would:** 5 females and 5 males used GS. 1 female and 2 males elided stop.

ii) **Look:** 1 female elided stop.

iii) **At:** 1 female used GS.

iv) **That:** 1 female and 2 males used GS.

v) **Great:** 1 female and 2 males used GS.

vi) **Red:** 1 female elided stop.

vii) **Bud:** no deviance.

**Sentence 12:** *He put the book away and could sit down.*
15 females and 10 males read with all final stops.

i) **Put:** 1 female and 1 male used GS. 1 male elided stop.

ii) **Book:** no deviance

iii) **And:** 4 males used GS. 1 female and 2 males elided stop.

iv) **Could:** 3 females and 3 males used GS.

v) **Sit:** no deviance.

**Sentence 13:** The cat sat on the mat and jumped into my lap.

18 females and 15 males read with all final stops.

i) **Cat:** no deviance.

ii) **Sat:** 1 male used GS.

iii) **Mat:** 1 male elided stop.

iv) **And:** 1 female and 3 males elided stop.

v) **Jumped:** no deviance.

vi) **Lap:** 1 female elided stop.

**Sentence 14:** Do you get it? – be tip top and a bit fad.

18 females and 17 males read with all final stops.

i) **Get:** no deviance.

ii) **It:** 1 female and 1 male used GS. 1 male elided stop.

iii) **Tip:** 1 male elided stop.

iv) **Top:** no deviance
v) **And**: no deviance

vi) **Bit**: 1 female used GS.

vii) **Fad**: 1 male elided stop.

**Sentence 15**: I just bought a new set of books.

11 females and 10 males read with all final stops.

i) **Just**: 2 females used GS. 7 females and 9 males elided stop.

ii) **Bought**: no deviance.

iii) **Set**: 1 male elided stop.

**Sentence 16**: I bet he stopped the fight.

18 females and 17 males read with all final stops.

i) **Bet**: 1 female and 1 male elided stop.

ii) **Stopped**: 1 male used GS. 1 female and 1 male elided stop.

iii) **Fight**: no deviance.

**Sentence 17**: He asked me to make a bid.

9 females and 10 males read with all final stops.

i) **Asked**: 2 males used GS. 10 females and 8 males elided stop.

ii) **Make**: no deviance.

iii) **Bid**: 1 female used GS.

**Sentence 18**: You should put a stop to the fight.
3 females and 5 males read with all final stops.
   i) **Should:** 14 females and 12 males used GS. 3 females and 3 males elided stop.
   ii) **Put:** no deviance.
   iii) **Stop:** no deviance.
   iv) **Fight:** no deviance.

Sentence 19: **Cut the cord!**

18 females and 15 males read with all final stops.
   i) **Cut:** 2 females and 4 males used GS. 1 male elided stop.
   ii) **Cord:** no deviance.

Sentence 20: **Take the next street left!**

14 females and 15 males read with all final stops
   i) **Take:** 1 female used GS. 5 females and 5 males elided stop.
   ii) **Next:** no deviance.
   iii) **Street:** no deviance
   iv) **Left:** no deviance.
We expected more deviance in male speech than in female speech. We made this assumption based on an earlier study of the presence of dental fricatives in the speech of students at the University of Ghana (Dako 1995) and also earlier work on female speech (Chambers 1992; Milroy and Milroy 1993) that show that females tend to be more prestige conscious than males in their speech and thus more likely to regard speech habits as social determinants. At the end of our survey, we came to realize, however, that the use of the glottal stop and the elision of final stops were considered prestigious speech elements in the University.

Discussion

From the breakdown of the findings of these sentences, we can make the following observations:

1. There is no definite pattern of glottal stops or elisions, i.e., a word might have a glottal stop or elision in one sentence and no glottal stop or elision in the next sentence in the same environment.

2. Elision or the glottal stop was not salient when the stop was followed by a vowel sound, but again, no definite pattern could be determined as seen in the following:

   1:iii: not a (10 GS, 1 ES)  8:ii: put it (2 ES)
   13:ii: sat on (1 GS)  13:iii: mat and (1 ES)
   13:v: jumped into (no deviance)  14:i: get it (no deviance)
   14:iv: top and (no deviance)  14:v: and a (no deviance)
   15:ii: bought a (no deviance)  15:iii: set of (1 ES)
   17:ii: make a (no deviance)  18:ii: put a (no deviance)
1. Final alveolar stops often assimilate to the place of articulation of the following word initial consonant. This has been noted by early English phoneticians (Jones, Gimson, Abercrombie). We would therefore expect that a final stop followed by a consonant sound would be assimilated, i.e., elided. But if we look at the final alveolar sounds followed by a word initial consonant sound, the pattern is highly irregular:

1:ii: *but not* (15 GS, 2 ES)  
2:ii  *bad wolf* (no deviance)

2:iii *ate the* (no deviance)  
3:i  *could not* (28 GS, 4 ES)

3:iv *internet last* (no deviance)  
3:v  *last night* (1 ES)

4:i  *but what* (14 GS)  
4:ii  *what does* (19 GS, 2 ES)

4:iii *it mean* (1 GS)  
6:i  *liked Kwesi* (2 GS, 5 ES)

6:ii  *but did* (7 GS, 1 ES)  
7:i  *don’t kick* (8 ES)

8:i  *asked him* (8 ES)  
8:iii  *it down* (no deviance)

10:i  *must pat* (1 GS, 22 ES)  
10:ii  *pat the* (1 GS)

11:i  *would you* (10 GS, 3 ES)  
11:iii  *at that* (1 GS)

11:iv  *that great* (3 GS)  
11:v  *great red* (3 GS)

11:vi  *red bud* (1 ES)  
12:i  *put the* (2 GS, 3 ES)

12:iii  *and could* (4 GS, 3 ES)  
12:iv  *could sit* (6 GS)

12:v  *sit down* (no deviance)  
13:i  *cat sat* (no deviance)

14:v  *bit fad* (1 GS)  
15:i  *just bought* (2 GS, 16 ES)

16:ii  *stopped the* (1 GS, 2 ES)  
17:i  *asked me* (2 GS, 18 ES)

18:i  *should put* (16 GS, 18 ES)  
19:i  *cut the* (6 GS, 1 ES)
20:i  *take the* (1 GS, 10 ES)  
20:ii  *next street* (no deviance)  

20:iii *street left* (no deviance)  

Note the three examples with *but*:  
*but did* (7 GS, 1 ES), *but what* (14 GS), *but not* (15 GS, 2 ES). We would have expected *but did* to show a high rate of elision since /t/ and /d/ are both alveolar sounds and thus easily coalesced, but both *but what* and *but not* show higher rates of substitution.

Note the instances of /t/ followed by the dental fricative:  
*ate the* (no deviance),  
*pat the* (1 GS)  
*put the* (2 GS, 3 ES),  
*cut the* (6 GS, 1 ES). It was initially thought that *ate the* showed no deviance – possibly as a result of the diphthong preceding the alveolar stop which makes it distinct from the other three examples:  
*pat the, put the, cut the*,  
but it was realized that *ate* was pronounced /εt/ and thus exhibited no vowel features distinct from the other words. The rate of deviance: 0- 1-5-7 can therefore not be explained phonetically.

Bilabial stops are not very likely to be elided or be replaced with a glottal stop.  
1:iv: *drop (to)* (3 GS)  
2:iv: *sheep (-)* (no deviance)  
5:ii: *lab(somewhere)* (no deviance)  
14:iii: *tip (top)* (1 ES)  
14:iv: *top (and)* (no deviance)  
18:iii: *stop (to)* (no deviance)  

Note that *drop to* had 3 GS whereas *stop to* had no deviance.  

Velar stops are also not very likely to be elided or replaced with a glottal stop:  
6:iv: *like (me)* (no deviance)  
1:v: *drink* (no deviance)
2:i: *big (bad)* (1 GS)

7:ii: *kick (the)* (no deviance) but 9:i: *lick (the)* (4 GS, 5 ES)

17:ii *make (a)* (no deviance) but 20:i: *take (the)* (1 GS, 10 ES)

11:ii: *look (at)* (1 ES) but 12:ii: *book (away)* (no deviance)

3:iii: *log (onto)* (no deviance) and 7:iii: *dog* (no deviance)

6. The modals **could, would, should** also exhibited curious results. We had two examples of **could:**

3: ‘I could not log onto the internet last night.’ (28 GS, 4 ES) i.e. 32/40 students did not articulate final stop.

S.12: ‘He put the book away and could sit down.’ (6 GS) i.e. 6/40 students did not articulate final stop.

The one example of **should:**

18: ‘You should put an end to the fight.’ (14 females and 12 males GS, and 3 males ES) – i.e. 29/40

The one example of **would:**

11: ‘Would you look at that..’ (5 females and 5 males GS, 1 female and 2 males ES): 13/40

**Must** as in:

S.10: ‘You must pat the dog gently.’ (1 male GS, 9 females and 13 males ES) – 23/40.
**Just** as in:


**Concluding Remarks**

From these findings, and supported from our recordings, we can conclude that female students use more glottal stops than male students, as the ratio was 89% of females to 77% of males. Male students, on the other hand, used more elisions: females, 55% and males 80%. We can also note that whereas Student Pidgin (SP), which is a male code, elides final consonants, not only stops, the glottal stop is hardly noticeable in SP.

This new speech trend is idiolectal rather than gender specific. It might be of interest to mention that we taped the Chief Vandal (the head student of Commonwealth Hall) in informal conversation. He did not exhibit one single case of either glottal stop or elision of final stop. Some female students, however, when asked, said they started using glottal stops when they came to Legon.

We did not find any evidence that we are dealing with transference phenomena. The glottal stop is not a salient feature in the bigger Ghanaian languages, and even though these languages do not have a consonant coda, elision of final consonants is not apparent in educated Ghanaian English speech. The inclusion of the glottal stop and the elision of the final stop are obviously fashion trends among our students. It is possible that it is a language feature that has its roots in the London dialect, Cockney, and is acquired by our students during stays in London. The distribution of both the glottal stop and the elided final stop is not systematic, but random, as our examples show.

**Endnote**

2 We are grateful to Prof. L. Boadi who pointed out that glottal stops do indeed occur in Asante Twi. We checked whether the students who favoured glottal stops were in fact Asante and spoke Asante Twi, but saw that this was not the case.
References:


Appendix I:

1. The students came from the following schools:


4. Upper East Region: Bolgatanga Secondary School


6. Volta Region: Anlo Secondary School,


9. Ashanti Region: St Hubert Seminary, Opoku Ware Secondary School, Toase Secondary School, Kumasi Secondary Technical School, Kumasi Academy, Dwamena Akenteng Secondary School,

10. Brong Ahafo Region: St James, Sunyani Secondary School,

Appendix II:

SENTENCES

1. Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink.
2. The big, bad wolf ate the sheep.
3. I could not log onto the internet last night.
4. But what does it mean?
5. He works in a lab somewhere.
6. I liked Kwesi, but did he like me?
7. Don’t kick the dog!
8. I asked him to put it down.
9. If you are still hungry, lick the plate!
10. You must pat the dog gently.
11. Would you look at that great, red bud!
12. He put the book away and could sit down.
13. The cat sat on the mat and jumped onto my lap.
14. Do you get it? – be tip top and a bit fad.
15. I just bought a new set of books.
16. I bet he stopped the fight.
17. He asked me to make a bid.
18. You should put a stop to the fight!
19. Cut the cord!
20. Take the next street left!