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Enhancing Doctoral Research Education through the Institution of Graduate Writing Courses in Ghanaian Universities

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Abstract
A key support service in doctoral research that has increasingly gained attention is academic writing courses. This position paper argues for the institutionalization of graduate writing courses in universities in Ghana in order to acquaint doctoral students with the theoretical, procedural, and practical aspects of the writing of high stakes academic genres. An overview (including evaluation) of existing courses on research-related writing in some universities is proffered. The study consequently presents arguments to support a proposal for institutional graduate writing courses in Ghanaian universities, followed by a discussion of other pertinent issues such as the curriculum, staffing, and funding. It is hoped that the institutionalization of such a writing support service will ultimately improve the quality of doctoral research education in Ghana.

Keywords: academy, doctoral research education, Ghana, graduate writing course, support

Introduction
Worldwide, doctoral research education has, in recent times, attracted increasing amounts of research and policy attention, partly, in response to a perception that all is not well at this most advanced end of the formal educational spectrum partly by reason of its close link to national development. However, attention has principally focused on organizational and administrative matters such as completion times, completion rates, costs, and benefits (Bair & Haworth, 2005; Bansel, 2011; Bitzer, Trafford, & Leshem, 2014; Aitchison & Mowbray, 2015) as well as on the broad issue of quality (Manathunga, Paseta & McCormack, 2010) of doctoral education and the scare of unemployment that faces doctoral students upon the completion of their programs (Kamler & Thomson, 2014).
Research writing has only recently begun to receive serious attention. In other words, little attention has been paid to the processes through which doctoral candidates learn to write and, hence, learn to become authorized and authoritative writers within the scholarly communities in which they seek to take their place. In this paper, I define academic writing, part of which is that central, difficult, and often trauma-ridden activity of the production of the ultimate doctoral thesis, as:

a term largely used to describe written works presented from an informed stance that is reflective of significance, criticality, detail and organization, and designed for review by a wider audience. In most instances, the term is used primarily to describe a style of writing specific to a discipline within the academic sphere. It is an integral part of teaching and learning at the tertiary level as it is the primary measure by which educational success is judged. (Watson, 2013. p. 12)

Without doubt, writing instruction is critical to doctoral student success (Lee, 1998; Aitchison & Lee, 2006; Flaherty & Choi, 2013; Burford, 2017). Lee (1998) refers to the ‘profoundly textual nature’ of doctoral research. Writing, conceptualized as a discursive, social, and embodied practice (Kamler & Thomson, 2008, 2014; Hopwood & Paulson, 2012; Barnacle & Dall’Alba, 2014; Bosanquet & Cahir, 2015), locates doctoral writers within scholarly and institutional communities where they must construct and position themselves as legitimate knowers and text producers. Moreover, research writing does not merely record the knowledge that has been produced elsewhere but actively shapes it (Hakkarainen et al., 2004). In this paper, the reference to ‘research writing’ is deliberate as it is meant to protest the often but erroneously held view of writing as essentially separate from research and often left until quite late in the process of completing the degree.

The practice of research writing is at the core of doctoral studies. During their studies, doctoral students write many genres, among which are annotated bibliographies, critical reviews, literature reviews, articles, and dissertation proposals or prospectuses that set up research projects. They are also trained in the writing of grant proposals that make a case for funding research and theses/dissertations that report findings from research already undertaken. Such forms of writing help student-researchers create, evaluate, share, and negotiate knowledge (Hyland, 2004; Starke-Meyerring et al., 2011). As doctoral students are offered the chance to write these high stakes genres, they adopt new roles as junior scholars, using writing to explore the theory, practice, and research of their chosen disciplines. Doctoral research writers learn to ‘invent the university’ (Bartholomae, 1985) for themselves, and they do this before they become ready to undertake a proper project, carve a niche for themselves, and acquire the
confidence to speak as academics. In other words, doctoral research writers cannot wait until the research is done and then spring “full-formed” into the scholarly community.

Furthermore, even for the highly motivated student, doctoral research writing is a complex and lengthy process. While, in general, doctoral students are a highly selected and talented group of students, a good number of them struggle with their writing (Fergie, Beeke, McKenna, & Creme, 2011). In the end, as McAlpine and Norton (2006) report, some of them fail to complete their thesis. I agree with Boice (1993) and Brookes-Gilles et al. (2015) when they attribute this failure to the lack of support for academic writing and the focus of research methods courses in doctoral programs on approaches to research (Kwan, 2010). It must be pointed out that learning doctoral academic writing is challenging as it does not only involve exhibition of individual skills (Pryor & Crossouard, 2010) but an understanding of what constitutes “culturally specific knowledge-making practice” (Starke-Meyerring, 2011, p. 85), where students learn “what knowledge is valued, what questions can be asked and who is allowed to ask while at the same time learning what they know and how to write what they know” (Badenhorst et al., 2015, p.2).

Against the above background, in the rest of the paper, I present some efforts and a brief evaluation of writing support services for postgraduate, including doctoral, students in some parts of the world. This is followed by a profile of academic writing courses at some Ghanaian universities, focusing on both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The arguments for the institutionalization of graduate writing courses (GWCs) in Ghanaian universities are proffered. The paper then profiles the proposed GWC by paying attention to its curriculum, theoretical underpinning, staff and administrative set-up, funding, and envisaged challenges.

**Overview and Evaluation of Some Graduate Writing Courses (GWCs)**

As early as the 1970s, Leming (1977) advocated instructional support to prepare graduate students for the rigors of professional survival, and Struck (1976) reported on a course specifically designed to support graduate writing skills. In this section, I discuss and evaluate GWCs in such settings as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, and Singapore to provide the context in which the proposed Ghanaian model can be located.

The teaching of academic writing has a long history in the USA, where university-level writing instruction has for decades been provided to undergraduate students, mostly native English speakers, for decades (Materese, 2013a). Research into the effectiveness of this instruction led to the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) movement, where students were taught the requirements
of academic text production specific to the disciplines they were studying. Attention, in the last three decades, has shifted to graduate writing. Many North American universities operate different permutations of GWCs. Some of these courses draw international students from various departments throughout the university, and as such focus on graduate level writing genres (for example, abstracts, and grant or conference proposals).

One of the most cited and earliest surveys of graduate writing courses (GWCs) in the USA which involved 213 universities was conducted by Golding and Mascaro (1985), following the pioneering study of Bjork (1983) that focused on writing courses in American medical schools. The aim of Golding and Mascaro’s research was to establish the extent and range of GWCs throughout the USA and the rationale for offering them. Although some faculty who participated in the survey had proffered “remediation” as the reason for such writing courses, most GWCs surveyed covered professional and scholarly subject matter not dealt with at the undergraduate level. In 2004, the University of Kansas launched an interdisciplinary Graduate Writing Program as part of an initiative to increase degree completion rates (Sundstrom, 2014). Serving both domestic and international students, this program employed a rhetorical (that is, genre-based) approach in a series of courses organized around the genres of graduate school and beyond.

In the UK, academic writing (often referred to as English for Academic Purposes) assumed importance in the seventies, leading to a national survey of staff perspectives on the teaching of academic writing in 2000. This, in turn, led to Ganobcsik-Williams’ (2004) publication, which provided an overview of existing academic writing courses and initiatives in UK higher education. The overview is offered as a provisional map of current approaches taken by staff to support student academic writing. The four types of provision deemed most useful by a cross-section of staff included one-to-one tutorials in writing offered via a university writing center (93%), optional professional development sessions for academic staff in the teaching of writing (92%), optional courses taught by a writing specialist on subject-specific forms of writing (91%), and optional centrally-taught writing courses for students from all disciplines (88%). Required courses for students and staff were supported, to a lesser extent (65% and 52%), while the idea of “required centrally-taught writing courses for students from all disciplines” was categorized as “useful” by 44% of respondents. The Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) in Coventry University, in particular, addresses the needs of postgraduates through a module “M01CAW: Writing for Scholarly Publication”.

In Australia, as in the USA, there are approaches and practices in supporting doctoral research writing. Aitchinson and Lee (2006) reported the emergence of two key approaches to academic writing for doctoral students. For instance, at the University of Western Sydney, the Learning Skills Unit initiated thesis writing
circles in response to the problem of student writing in contexts where there were few system-wide structures for the support of doctoral research development and none that recognized the importance of writing. In the Faculty of Education at the University of Technology (Sydney), there was a doctoral writing group that focused explicitly, for the first time, on the research development needs of academics enrolled in doctoral studies. In this writing group, domains covered included epistemology, expertise, skill, and know-how about writing. Johnson (2014) also describes a qualitative research study of a cross-disciplinary, cohort-based doctoral writing in the New Zealand university context, following the successful trialing of the Thesis Writing Circles program in the University of Waikato. Similarly, The University of Hong Kong offers a series of workshops for cross-disciplinary students who need to write dissertations in English (Cooley & Lewkowicz, 1995; 1997; Allison et al., 1998).

The profusion of courses on academic writing has been supported by pedagogical texts such as Writing up Research: Experimental Research Report Writing for Students of English (Weissberg & Buker, 1990), Academic Writing for Graduate Students (Swales & Feak, 1994), English in Today’s Research World: A Writing Guide (Swales & Feak, 2000), and Academic Writing: A Handbook for International Students (Bailey, 2015). These texts usually valorize Anglo-American rhetoric. Also, worth noting is illuminating work of Thaiss et al. (2012) on writing courses worldwide, which includes those in South Africa and Egypt. While these courses mainly celebrate Anglo-American rhetoric, the collection by Zawacki and Cox (2014) has drawn attention to the use of Global English in some writing courses at George Washington University and Middlebury College, with the view to encouraging the acceptance of different types of rhetoric in different writing courses. As far as I know, the first attempt to comprehensively describe the range of writing support for non-Anglophone researchers was made with the publication of Supporting Research Writing: Roles and Challenges in Multilingual Setting (Materese, 2013b). The book advanced the view that effective writing support in non-Anglophone research setting requires input from three professional areas, key among which is the teaching of academic writing.

As the goal of each writing course is to equip students to write at the university level, subsequent outcome evaluations have allowed universities to measure the effectiveness of writing programs. Existing studies have produced somewhat contradictory results. While some studies report no improvement after students have taken a writing course (e.g., Read & Hays, 2003), others find improvements (e.g., Elder & O’Luighlin, 2003; Storch & Tapper, 2009). It is worth noting that many of such evaluation studies as those by Xudong, Cheng, Varaprasad, & Leng (2010), and Wong (2015) have confirmed a positive correlation between writing courses and improvement in writing ability in both Western and non-Western contexts. Although some scholars (e.g. Freedman,
1994; Casanave, 2002) have criticized the genre-based approach in academic writing courses, it continues to be the preferred approach, as it produces positive results in students’ writing ability, especially in doctoral education.

Academic Writing Courses (AWCs) in Ghanaian Public Universities

In this section, I refer to four public universities in Ghana – University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) – with the view to ascertaining the existence of academic writing courses (AWCs), especially, at the postgraduate level.

It is interesting to note that in all these four Ghanaian public tertiary institutions, there are university-wide writing courses designed to assist undergraduate students to handle the voluminous and varied forms of writing forms. In particular, at UCC, plans are far advanced to introduce an AWC for undergraduate students in the Department of English, apart from the university-wide AWC, popularly called Communicative Skills (CS). At UG, there is a Language Center which provides the university-wide EAP program as well as a Writing Center that provides consultancy services mainly to students. At UCC, there is also a Writing Unit for both faculty and students. Like the two previously mentioned universities, UEW and KNUST offer Communicative Skills to undergraduate students, with varying lengths of duration. There is no writing center to support either group of students (that is, both undergraduate and postgraduate students) or faculty at either university. A study recently conducted by Nimako, Danso, and Donkor (2013) has suggested the need for a writing course for junior faculty at KNUST with limited experience in academic writing.

Informal discussions with faculty and my former students who are pursuing doctoral programs in the above-mentioned universities indicate the absence of GWCs. Rather, seminars and workshops on thesis writing, in particular, are organized for doctoral students. Experts and scholars who have been involved in postgraduate training for many years are invited regularly to speak on pertinent aspects of research writing (e.g. research proposal and thesis). Such seminars and workshops are mandatory for doctoral students. As in the University of Kansas, the University of Ghana has a Summer Doctoral Writing course. At the University of Cape Coast, in particular, these seminars relate to aspects of research methodology and thesis writing. The Academic Board of the University of Cape Coast has commenced discussion, and approval of a proposal on the introduction of a GWC for all graduate students (including doctoral students) is expected soon.

It is worth mentioning a special writing course that targeted lecturers from Francophone West African countries (in particular, Burkina Faso). This three-week course titled ‘English for Academic and Publishing Purposes’ was presented at the Department of English of the University of Cape Coast to lecturers from
universities in a French-speaking country to improve their writing ability and enhance their chances of publishing in English. In 2014, an advertisement appeared in Daily Graphic, a state-sponsored Ghanaian newspaper, inviting interested students to enroll in a course ‘Graduate Writing and Publishing’, although I do not have any means of ascertaining whether or not the organizers of this course delivered it to their targeted clients.

Moreover, academic writing research in Ghana in the last two decades and half has become increasingly vibrant, with many of such efforts focusing on the writing of undergraduate students and, in recent times, postgraduate writing. Very few studies have been conducted on aspects of research articles written by Ghanaian academics. While no survey has been made of all these anecdotal efforts, it bears mentioning that beyond these empirical studies on academic writing research in Ghana, there have been few non-empirical papers. Among these are Adika and Owusu-Sekyere’s (1997) proposal for a department-based writing program and Afful’s (2007) proposal for a revision of the University of Cape Coast’s Communicative Skills. Interestingly, Nimako, Danso, and Donkor’s (2013) proposal for a writing course for junior faculty at KNUST with limited experience in academic writing raises the question whether there exists any writing course for postgraduate students in Ghanaian universities. In 2012, Afful had argued for the collaboration between practitioners of Applied Linguistics on the one hand and Schools of Graduate Studies and faculty of various disciplines on the other hand, listing courses on thesis writing as an important step. As far as I know, there are neither Thesis Writing Courses (TWCs) nor GWCs in any of the four established public Ghanaian universities mentioned earlier. What exists in the selected public universities are regular seminars and workshops organized for all postgraduate (including doctoral) students to equip them with generic skills in writing. The scholarship gap in an important area such as graduate writing for doctoral students in Ghana justifies the current study. In the next section, I present arguments for the institutionalization of GWCs for doctoral students in Ghanaian universities.

Arguments for Graduate Writing Courses (GWCs)

In this section, I shall attempt to present cogent arguments for instituting writing courses against the backdrop of the preceding discussion of writing courses in non-Ghanaian universities and the absence of same in their Ghanaian counterparts.

First, the First-year Composition (FYC) in universities in the USA; English for Academic Purposes in the UK and other European contexts; Communicative Skills, Communication Skills, and Use of English in other contexts, including Africa; and the more traditional undergraduate writing assignments alone are insufficient preparation for graduate-level writing tasks. Yet, while institutions in English-medium universities in Ghana have long seen these writing courses as
integral to undergraduate studies, these same institutions have strangely viewed
graduate writing as something to be learned by intuition and the lack of strong
writing skills as something akin to a deficit. Graduate writing, in fact, assumes
content knowledge, process knowledge, and knowledge of social and power
relationships (Tardy, 2009; Frick, 2011) to enable graduate students to understand
normalized knowledge-making practices (Sullivan, 1996). It assumes students
know how to apply critical thinking to transform and create knowledge as well
as develop their identity as future scholars. Unfortunately, this assumption is not
ture among doctoral students who are either non-native users or native users of
English (Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006).

The second point concerns the shifting demographics in graduate student
population worldwide, in general. This situation has now led to institution-
wide failures where time-to-degree and completion rates are concerned, making
it imperative to find ways of dealing with the situation. Graduate student
demographics show much greater diversity in age, gender, marital status,
education, and work experience than previously. Increasingly, faculty report
feeling a sense of helplessness in guiding the writing of such a diverse student
population (Starke-Meyerring et al. (2011). As universities recruit a diverse
graduate student body, they constantly express worry about the very students
they admit. This reflects a failure to update graduate curricula to address today’s
institutional missions. Graduate studies faculty worldwide report a lack of
effective pedagogies for mentoring graduate students (Aitchison & Lee, 2006).
Unsurprisingly, students are more likely to become casualties in their graduate
programs. As Lovitts (2001) avers, these institutional failures are no longer
tolerable since we understand the lifelong consequences of students failing in
graduate school. The proposed GWC seeks to not only prevent these failures
but also add value to degrees for doctoral students by giving them a leg up in
publishing (Lee & Kamler, 2008; Kwan, 2010; Watts, 2012) and making their
final research reports as strong as possible.

A further reason for the institutionalization of GWCs for students in Ghana
is the increased demands on faculty time. The increasing pressure on universities
to be entrepreneurial and on faculty to bring in research funds, conduct
interdisciplinary research, and publish more has resulted in less available
time for mentoring doctoral students. Overburdened faculty have less interest
in adding individualized teaching of academic and professional writing to the
other demands on their time (Epstein, 2007; Thomson & Kamler, 2010). Some
advisors and supervisors who are great mentors are so overbooked that they
do not have time to perform that role. Some faculty mention their own lack of
training in mentoring graduate writing at the very time that a greater need exists
for in-depth feedback and instruction.

Admittedly, only departmental faculty advisors and supervisors can
determine the research territories and the potential niches that a student’s research
will address, the accepted methodologies, the key participants in the field, and the expectations of the doctoral thesis committee and department. However, faculty advising can be—and, in the face of the research pressures placed on faculty today, often must be—supplemented effectively with writing instruction and/or consultations if we want strong future stewards of the disciplines (Golde & Walker, 2006). In this sense, the GWC works to bridge the gap between what faculty expect and what students know about the writing in their discipline.

**Curriculum**

In what follows, I discuss the curriculum of the proposed GWC by taking into account the course structure, the course objectives, material development, topics, and assessment strategies to ensure the effectiveness of the course.

First, the proposed GWC is an intensive three-credit bearing course that spans over a thirteen-week period in a semester. In a given week, students are expected to have three contact hours with their instructors or faculty. Given the number of students and the scarcity of faculty to teach this course, students can be encouraged to take the course in either the first semester or second semester. To maintain the proposed in-built intensive writing practice, it is expected that there will be no more than twenty students in a class. As much as possible, students from the same discipline will be made to constitute a class to foster collegiality and make collaboration a useful aspect of the course.

Concerning the aim and objectives of the course, first, the course provides the opportunity for the doctoral students at universities in Ghana to develop and acquire rhetorical knowledge and practices for studying, understanding, and writing effectively a wide range of genres and part-genres within discipline-specific contexts. It is expected that at the end of the proposed course, the student would have learnt to:

i) Apply the key features of academic writing to writing within their disciplines;

ii) Define and describe procedures and processes in writing for various academic purposes;

iii) Develop successful writing, proofreading, and editing habits and strategies;

iv) Develop strategies for using/providing/understanding feedback;

v) Develop awareness of the politics and craft that govern academic writing in the disciplines (such as working with faculty mentors, journal editors, and writing consultants);

vi) Gain a thorough understanding of the social and political processes involved in writing for academic and publishing purposes.
To accomplish the above objectives, graduate students are to be taken through topics such as the general features of academic writing, the interface between research and knowledge, and some key theories and concepts underpinning academic writing. The GWC will also focus on other practical issues in research writing such as language use, discipline-specific vocabulary, and grammatical features; proofreading and editing; appropriating the benefits of written feedback comments; and the geopolitics of writing for pedagogic and publishing purposes. The course draws on a combined framework of theories from various fields such as linguistics, rhetoric, philosophy, and sociology. For instance, from the field of linguistics, the appraisal theory is utilized to enable students to understand the language of evaluation which is pivotal in academic writing. Toulmin’s (1958) theory of argumentation is also utilized together with Johns’ (1997) socio-literate theory to underscore academic writing as a form of argumentation and a social practice. Graduate students are expected to be introduced to key written genres (e.g. research articles, theses/dissertations, research proposals, and grant proposals) and part-genres (e.g. abstract, keywords, introduction, and literature review). Other topics which relate to the candidates’ future academic development include offering them practice and opportunity to analyze and write texts such as bio data, curriculum vitae, and teaching philosophy in support of a research career. Linguistic issues at the morpho-syntactic and lexical levels can be discussed with the help of faculty from the Departments of English and Linguistics, and the Writing Unit as well as established academic corpora in the USA, the UK, and emerging corpora from some African countries. To give students ample opportunities for practice through individual and group tasks, the course identifies genres such as critical review, annotated bibliographies, synthesis (a kind of literature review) of articles on a given topic, research proposal, and a research paper to be written in the course of the semester.

With regard to the syllabus design and material development, knowledge of general tendencies and the relative importance of the various schematic features in the selected genres can help teachers or textbook developers of GWCs to address student needs in their disciplines. The syllabi can incorporate knowledge of the correspondences between a generic feature and communicative purpose(s). Integrating both the process- and product-oriented approaches, some aspects of the syllabus can be divided into rhetorical teaching units, with each unit focusing on a generic feature such as tense and its categories. The unit can include corresponding communicative purposes for each tense category per rhetorical move of the thesis. In this approach, generic features are not treated as ends in themselves but as consequences of rhetorical choices. Such syllabi can include carefully designed tasks that specify the competencies expected of students, what they will do to generate the required product and the resources available to the students to generate the product. I suggest that the most effective way of raising students’ awareness of the key generic and linguistic features and
the role they play in the writing of various academic genres in their disciplines, is for GWC teachers to select their own authentic materials such as research articles and theses in their disciplines. The use of such materials is one of the best ways of developing students’ academic writing potential at the doctoral level.

Assessment strategies such as portfolio, teacher observation, and conferencing may be adopted in checking student progress. In general, a portfolio is a folder or box in which students store significant pieces of class work that mark their progress. Students are able to reflect on and track their progress if they keep successive pieces of a task in a folder. For instance, an initial exercise on writing a rhetorical section of the thesis can be followed up by write-ups of the same task after class revisions and discussions to help learners improve on their performance. All such exercises can be filed as an accessible gauge of a student’s progress. When working on various learner tasks, the teacher also needs to be a participant-observer. For instance, when creating and analyzing mini-corpora involving student and expert writing, the teacher needs to informally participate in and observe how the student executes the task. The teacher can use this to respond to any queries students may have. Besides, the teacher can document those areas where the learners are doing well and where they are going wrong. Conferencing with individual students is another form of learner-contextualized assessment that allows the academic writing course to review how much students’ writing goals have been achieved. Students can use this forum to present their findings on small-scale research, focusing on the relationship between particular generic features and the rhetorical purposes they fulfil in respective genres. The proposed GWC will apply an ABC grade, as grades in general serve as critical motivational factors for students not accustomed to the rigors of graduate writing.

Theoretical Framework

For the GWC, I propose a combined theoretical framework that recognizes the role of epistemology, the different sociological spaces that house different departments (that is, disciplinary variation), and the persuasive use of language (that is, rhetoric).

First, given that academic or scientific writing involves the construction, dissemination, and evaluation of knowledge, Bereiter and Scardamalia’s (1987) knowledge telling and knowledge transforming models are critical here. Although Bereiter and Scardamalia’s work has been severely criticized for being largely cognitivist, thereby focusing on individual development, they stress the power of writing in developing an individual’s thinking. As the literature indicates, knowledge telling is associated with the learner who must grapple not only with the content but also with the conventions of academic writing. The expert, on the other hand, is easily able to transform what content there is into new forms of knowledge. Tardy (2009) observes that students must develop both writing
and content area expertise so they can transform knowledge in their fields. Learning academic writing involves learning how to transform knowledge into a comprehensible and disciplinarily acceptable entity for a specific audience. It is not only about the adoption of disciplinary concepts and theories, but also about the command of the methods and practices of disciplinary activities which can be achieved in a supportive context.

The second set of theories that a GWC can leverage on identifies the nature of disciplines as sociological spaces referred to, in broad terms, as ‘discourse communities’ and in metaphoric terms, as ‘tribes’ and ‘territories’ (Becher & Trowler, 2001). A discourse community is a group of people who share certain language-using practices (Bizzell, 1992) as well as other ties such as geographical, socio-economic, ethnic, and professional relationships (Lee, 1998). As ‘socio-rhetorical networks’ (Freedman & Medway, 1994, p.8), discourse communities may be both generic/homogenous and heterogeneous/discipline-specific (Becher & Trowler, 2001). Generic academic writing assumes the existence of a single invariant literacy that is transferable and usable in any situation. On the other hand, discipline-specific writing valorizes multiple literacies. A GWC must draw attention to generic academic writing and discipline-specific writing and highlight the relationship that exists between them. Discipline-specific academic writing is not absolutely discrete, as it draws on the broad features identifiable with general academic writing. Overall, the actualization of features of writing in a specific discipline depends very much on the use (extent and range) of the following: multimodal semiotic representations such as graphs, tables, diagrams, symbols, and figures; lexical, collocational, and phraseological features; and, taxonomies, detachment, and genres (Afful, 2012). For instance, Chemistry discourse differs from that of History based on the former’s dominant use of symbols and the latter’s use of emplotment built around causation (Coffin, 2004).

The final theoretical point to consider in any GWC is its largely rhetorical orientation, which invokes scholars such as Aristotle (with his triad of ethos, logos, and pathos), Toulmin’s (1958) argumentation, and Swales’ (1990) perspective on genre theory. The proposed rhetorical orientation of the course draws on the view of rhetoric as an organizational pattern in a piece of writing which aims at persuading the reader in an academic discourse community. This means recognizing the importance of the combined rhetorical features such as message, purpose, and audience on one hand and the distinct features of academic writing on the other hand. Swales’ (1990) rhetorical approach has become the most popular in GWCs, given its pedagogical orientation, enabling graduate students and professionals to raise their rhetorical awareness as a first step in handling both academic and non-academic genres. In this approach, genres are seen as both rhetorical actions in response to recurrent situations and part of the recurrent situations themselves (Miller, 1994). The rhetorical genre approach...
facilitates students’ study of academic and other professional genres, the rhetoric of their fields, and the disciplinary and cultural contexts in which they write the specific genres. Genre theory offers tools for balancing disciplinary and cultural contexts and expectations with individual goals, rhetorical contexts, and purposes as students write themselves into future careers.

From the above discussion, it is clear that a combined framework for the success of a GWC depends on rhetorical knowledge, subject-matter knowledge, and process knowledge. In writing authentic classroom genres, graduate students move from peripheral to full participation in a rhetorical community, developing their research space and professional identity. In the view of Afful (2009) and Frick (2011), this is a matter of doctoral students ‘becoming’ in which they position themselves ontologically, epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically in multiple disciplines.

**Staffing, Administration, and Funding of GWCs**

For an effective running of the GWC, it is important to have full-time faculty or the equivalent, part-time lecturers, and language specialists in addition to the Coordinator, the Administrative Assistant, and Research Assistants (preferably, doctoral students). The Course Coordinator may have administrative, teaching, research and development, professional development, and service duties in a tenured academic staff position. The Administrative Assistant could manage everything from reception and enrollment to database management and evaluation through events coordination. Faculty may also perform some administrative tasks and services.

Faculty will be expected to come from disciplines including, but not limited to, Academic Writing, English Studies, Communication Studies, (Applied) Linguistics, and English Language Education. In the application and interview process, successful applicants who have a Masters or have yet to complete their PhD seeking to be part-time can be required to demonstrate their strengths by submitting a graduate or professional text in which they do the following: analyze exemplars of graduate genres from other fields, provide appropriate oral feedback, and demonstrate an awareness of key rhetorical and linguistic features. Writing instructors could be specialists, as described by Oehler and Fowler (2004), bringing to the program a strong background and skills related to genres and disciplinary writing.

An important issue in the training for both faculty and part-time instructors in approaches to genre studies, is using training at semester beginnings and during the semesters, such as staff meetings, professional development, and course meetings. Training for faculty will include pre-service meetings, weekly new instructor meetings for the first one to two semesters, and ongoing faculty professional development meetings. In these professional development sessions, faculty will read and then discuss articles from Genre Studies, Rhetoric and
Composition, Discourse Analysis, English as a Second Language (ESL), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), including literature on mentoring and peer review, to continue to hone their art and craft. New faculty will be expected to complete the rhetorical and genre studies exercises used with students based on samples from unfamiliar fields and discuss disciplinary practices and opportunities for creativity before they work with students. The Coordinator and faculty will be expected to conduct research into mentoring and/or teaching graduate writing to keep on top of this emerging field and to fulfill research or professional development requirements.

Depending on the resources of a particular university, a GWC may be housed within a Department of Communication Studies, Department of English, or Language Center, drawing on the expertise of faculty there. There also have to be proper structures for collaboration between the School of Graduate Studies and the departments as the courses are meant for graduate students from all departments in a university. Further, there is the need for the Coordinator of a GWC to generally collaborate with other stakeholders—the Writing Center/Unit, the School of Graduate Studies, and the Library—to develop other graduate writing support in the form of workshops and Research and Write-Ins (RWIs). These RWIs can be thought of as day-long writing retreats that provide or facilitate writing, workshops on research and writing, and writing consultations that typically occur twice each semester.

The School of Graduate Studies together with faculty can serve as a sounding board on programmatic issues such as course funding. They will be expected to serve as advisors to the Dean. Tuition should be levied as it is for other graduate courses. The writing course may receive part of the tuition paid by or on behalf of the enrolled graduate students. This budget can be jointly administered by the School of Graduate Studies and the departments involved.

Challenges in GWCs

The university (as an institution), faculty, and doctoral students are likely to face challenges in the implementation of the GWCs. These challenges, in essence, may differ from one stakeholder to the other but closely connect insofar as they mar the quality of doctoral research education.

First, there is no doubt that the courses will make considerable demands on the tutors of GWCs, if they have to read and develop a working understanding of lengthy texts such as dissertations/theses, part-genres of the thesis, and other academic genres; and moreover, there is a wide variety of disciplines involved. Nonetheless, from the perspective of instructors of GWCs who are not subject specialists, there is the nagging issue of what Allison et al. (1998) call ‘the nexus between language and content’. A pertinent issue is whether an instructor of GWC has to comment on an aspect of content such as the appropriateness of a research design, given that instructors have no mandate to comment on
substantive and procedural issues that relate to the research process itself and faulty research designs.

Further, the issue of disciplinarity needs to be considered by instructors in GWCs. Instructors bringing their evaluative criteria of Applied Linguistics and Language Education to, for instance, Medical Science or Law, may run the risk of imposing a scheme that is either too stringent or too lax on the course. Approaches to constructing an argument, reviewing the literature, and using discourse markers and hedging devices can help students appreciate disciplinarity. It is conceded that the appraisal of discipline-specific writing by non-members of the discipline remains problematic, as indeed acknowledged and discussed in EAP literature (e.g. Hyland, 2002). In class discussions, multiple types of rhetoric are expected to be explored so that students can choose to apply the appropriate one in a specific context. Students are required to explore how to foreground or background their voice, establish their authority, and convince a specific audience of their claims. Instructors in GWCs need to take account of arguments around language and knowledge ecology which warn us against the homogenizing effects of the global spread of knowledges in English (Skutnabb-Kandas, 2000). Taking a cue from Cadman’s (2005) ‘pedagogy of connection’, the strategy in any GWCs should aim at encouraging students to assess some of the broad intercultural influences on their research project design, implementation, and dissemination of findings. It is worth commenting that writing courses in Grand Valley University such as 

WRT: 354: Writing in the Global Context, WRT 200: 

Introduction to Professional Writing, and WRT 350: Business Communication

have begun to incorporate cross-cultural communication (Rydecki, 2014).

On their part, doctoral students need to grapple with the issues of disciplinarity, rhetorical practices, cultural context, and language use. Both Parry (1998) and Hyland (2002) recognize the disciplinary requirements and subject expertise of learners. While Parry submits that disciplinary preferences and practices be reflected in features of arguments, Hyland emphasizes control of ‘rhetorical personality’, and the ways in which writers engage readers. Doctoral students can read several articles, theses, and other publications for the purpose of ascertaining for themselves citation practices, use of personal and impersonal voices, hedging devices, and active and passive voice with appropriate verb forms. Differing cultural beliefs about what constitutes critical thinking, authorial voice, good research, and good writing pose some potential challenges to doctoral students in Ghana.

Doctoral students must recognize that critical thinking involves the capability of grasping, analyzing, and evaluating arguments or ideas. Thus, critical thinking becomes a socio-cognitive practice involving intrapersonal (between a reader and her or his own mind) and interpersonal (between a reader and text). Authorial voice involves three tones of positioning: ideational positioning, interpersonal positioning, and textual positioning. The ideational
positioning corresponds to what point of reference and values writers hold while the interpersonal positioning deals with how a writer becomes aware of her or his relationship with the reader. Textual positioning pertains to how writers organize their ideas through different linguistic resources. A solid authorial voice is achieved by the use of linguistic and critically grounded writing. Graduate students face cultural challenges in creating agency and a voice while seeking a balance of conforming and resisting in their own work (Canagarajah, 2002). This cultural competence plays a critical role in whether non-native speakers of English publish in international English-medium journals.

Finally, universities in Ghana must boldly address GWCs as key, and not peripheral, to the success of doctoral research education. In many English-medium universities in Ghana, writing is not, in general terms, regarded as a learning process to be deliberately supported. Rather, doctoral education often focuses on the end products. A change in such a position will lead to the provision of office space and other forms of support for the staff development and professionalization of faculty who teach academic writing. Recognizing the value of academic writing means that Ghanaian universities must be keen in recruiting full-time lecturers with qualification in academic writing, unlike the situation at the undergraduate level where the teaching of academic writing is largely handled by non-professionals. As a long-term measure, Departments of English in Ghanaian universities may be charged by their respective university managements to mount courses in academic writing at the master’s and doctoral levels, as done by University of Coventry in the UK, to provide qualified faculty for the teaching GWCs. This will depend on the capacity of the departments and institutional support.

**Conclusion**

The present paper has argued for the institutionalization of GWCs for doctoral students in Ghana. It first stressed the importance of writing as a socio-cognitive activity, drawing insights from, especially, Anglo-American settings. This provided a basis to consider the writing courses in key Ghanaian universities, which were noted to be mainly limited to undergraduate level. Three arguments were presented, followed by a discussion of the theoretical underpinning, curriculum, and related issues.

Clearly, the approach to doctoral research writing in Ghana has to be thorough enough to reflect the increasing importance several universities worldwide attach to it (Burford, 2017). Doctoral writing is inextricably linked with knowledge communities, bringing content knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, and research to bear on the challenges the world faces. Being able to write a literature review, for instance, is a complex task worthy of instruction. Research articles, monographs, book chapters, funding proposals, dissertations, and annotated bibliographies are no less critical to preparing future knowledge
workers. If writing courses are institutionalized, as argued here, doctoral students in Ghanaian universities will be able to effectively position themselves in the larger community of practice, create their professional identity with some relative ease, and be able to acquire funding for research that benefits academia.

Doctoral research writing instruction has a place in today’s Ghanaian universities. First, the envisaged GWC prepares students for the writing they will need to do later as scholars. Second, it prepares them to mentor the writing of others. For those who do become faculty, a third potential benefit exists: these interdisciplinary classrooms prepare students to become ideal Appointment and Promotion committee members because they learn about disciplinary differences in writing while doing peer reviews where they work closely with graduate students in other fields.
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The Ethnosemantics and Proverbs of *ohia*, “poverty” in Akan

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Abstract
This paper examines the concept of *ohia*, ‘poverty’ in the Akan sociocultural worldview. These include factors that cause it, the people who suffer from poverty and the implications of their condition. It identifies social, cultural, individualistic and fatalistic sources of poverty. The paper is discussed employing the theoretical framework of language ideology, which reflects people’s beliefs about their language and how they justify the language structure and practical uses. To understand the Akan concept of poverty, one must resort to their cultural beliefs, past experiences, perception, worldview and social structures. The paper employed the qualitative method, using interviews for the primary data. The secondary data was collected from Akan highlife songs, books on proverbs and oral and written literature books. The major finding of this paper is that poverty in Akan is best viewed from Akan language ideology and proverbs. It is also worth noting that despite the negativity of poverty, some proverbs console the poor, and stress that poverty is not the only adversity as other conditions in life are more stressful than poverty.

Keywords: Akan, poverty, language ideology, proverbs, marginalisation

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Mmuabọsɛm

Saa krataawa yi hwe sèdeɛ Akanfo hunu *ohia* wɔ abrabo, amammerɛ ne wiase asetena mu. Yɛbɛhwɛ mnooma a dɛ ohia ba, dɛnti a ohia ba, ne nni pa ahodoɔ a ohia ka wɔn. Nhwehwemu yi da ohia farebae ahodoɔ mnan adi, weinom ne asetena, amammerɛ, ankorrankore ne hyebere. Yɛgyinaa kasa adwenemusɛm nnyinasɔ no sa pesɛmpɛnsem nhwehwemu yi mu. Saa adwenemusɛm yi da ɔmanfo gyidie a wɔɔ wɔ ɔm kasa mu, sèdeɛ wɔtítwa gyɛ ɔm kasa nhyɛhyɛɛɛɛ ne ne dwumadie ahodoɔ. Krataawa yi da no adi pefee se yɛbete sèdeɛ Akanfo hunu *ohia* aseɛ no, gyɛ sɛ yɛgyina wɔn amammerɛ mu gyidie, abrabo mu suahunu wɔ anibusɛm, ne sèdeɛ wohunu wiase ne wɔn asetena mu nhyɛhyɛɛɛɛ. Yɛfaa sukyɛrɛ nsemmoano kwan, anim-ne-anim nsemimisa, so na nyaa mme ahodoɔ de dii dwuma yi. Afei yetasee ohia ho mme firi, Akan anom ne atwere kasadwini mme nwoma ahodoɔ ne Akanfo nwom mu. Dee krataawa yi hunuu potee ne sɛ yɛbɛtumi agyina

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1 This paper is a contribution to the debate on the sociocultural concept of poverty in Akan in the song of a renowned highlife composer, Alex Konadu (cf. Agyekum 2016).
**Introduction: Definition and Factors of Poverty**

The UN (1998) defines poverty as follows:

Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and cloth a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. (UN Statement, June 1998 – signed by the heads of all UN agencies)

The definition above is all-embracing and the Akan concept of poverty may capture some of its features. Poverty, in the view of the UN, is a multifaceted concept, denoting limited access to technological and infrastructural amenities, thus making the poor only able to survive with the absolute minimum of daily food. Poverty is extended to lack of access to social, economic, infrastructural facilities, deprivation, and remoteness, disempowerment, lack of freedom of speech and unfairness in development (Agyekum 2016). Harrison (1981) outlines issues on poverty to include lack of fertile land, denial of land, inequality, injustice, blatant ruthless and violent exploitation. Based on these definitions, poverty, in the current study, is used to mean the condition in which one lacks the necessary resources to meet socially expected ways of living.

Scholars of social inequality, such as Generalao (2005), Jordan (2004), Stephenson (2000), Smith and Stone (1989) and Feather (1974), have identified four basic causes of poverty and wealth. These are: (a) individualistic attributions, which draw attention to the behaviour and/or actions of individual people, (b) structuralist beliefs that concentrate on socio-economic factors that affect people, (c) cultural notions, which look at poverty through the culture or group of people and their beliefs, and (d) the fatalistic principles, which attribute poverty to luck and fate. Stephenson (2000), however, uses the social construction theory where social reality is the basis for the explanations and policies that cause poverty. He asserts that, “beliefs in the causes of wealth and poverty are determined by the individual’s perception of the justice of the current economic system” (p. 85).
Each of the causes of poverty are briefly discussed below.

**Factors that explain Poverty**

Studies on poverty have outlined some basic factors that act as the catalyst for poverty. In some cases, it is possible to attribute poverty to one or more of these factors. They are individual, cultural, structural and fatalistic determinants. Let us briefly look at them.

**The Individual Factor in Poverty**

Some social psychologists discuss poverty from the standpoint of the individual. In discussing the individual factor, Nilsson (2014) avers that “this approach suggests that the individual is the source of his own poverty, and other factors, such as the structures of a society are not very important. If a person is unemployed, it is the individual’s own responsibility to find a job, rather than society’s responsibility to create more job opportunities.” (p. 23)

Stephenson (2000, p. 89) did a comparative study on poverty in Russian and Estonia from 1991 to 1996. He observed that respondents predominantly blamed the poor for their poverty and identified the sources of their poverty as their loose morals, drunkenness and lack of effort (cf. Agyekum 2016; Generalao 2005; Smith and Stone 1989). This notion of the individual being responsible for poverty cannot solely explain the incidence of poverty worldwide. It is thus not wholly acceptable and has been criticised by those who allude to cultural, structural and fatalistic factors of poverty. Agyekum (2016) interrogates the concept of poverty as espoused in the song *ɛnne mɛkɔ na maba* by Alex Konadu, a renowned highlife composer. It is worth noting that while society blames the poor for being lazy, the poor exonerate themselves by saying *enye me a, ofie nnipa aye me bone, obi na ade biribi aye me*, “I am not the cause of my woes; it is caused by family members and other people”. Poverty is thus not attributed to only the individual’s behaviour. These other factors are explored in subsequent sections.

**Culture and Poverty**

Nilsson (2014) opines that “the cultural approach to poverty, explains poverty through a culture or group of people, rather than one individual…. if a person is poor, it is likely that other persons within the same culture are also poor” (p. 24). In support of this notion, Agyekum (2016) argues that

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2 He provided an example where in the 1960s, a Ghanaian church did not allow its members to be cocoa purchasing clerks fearing that they may cheat the farmers.
“the sociocultural structures in the society, the perceptions, beliefs, taboo systems may debar some people from entering into some modern entrepreneurship thereby pushing them into conservative jobs” (p. 164).2 The cultural approach postulates that a given culture has certain values and attitudes that make the culture to survive. Undoubtedly, if one is born into a culture of poverty, she can hardly release herself/himself from the vicious circle of poverty. The Akans refer to this state as ohia ntentan, ‘poverty web’, which entangles the individual. As one struggles fiercely to release oneself from the web, some of the branches push the one back to the centre of the poverty web.

Kirby et al (1997) consider the cultural factors to poverty and note how certain cultural norms, values and attitudes make the poor resign themselves to their fate. Discussing the cultural theories of poverty in Ghana, Asiedu et al. (2013) assert that among Ghanaians, “poverty or the lack of economic advancement can be attributed to demons and other spirits (the spirit of poverty) or be the result of a curse through witchcraft or sorcery” (p. 20). The belief in supernatural beings and what they can do is part of the cultural beliefs of Ghanaians and Africans.

**Structural Factors in Poverty**

The structural factor of poverty extends beyond the individual, ethnic group or the culture, stressing the structures in society (Beeghley 1988 p. 201; 3 Jordan, 2004, p. 22; Nilsson, 2014 p. 25) as the major cause of poverty. Nilsson (2014) explains:

According to the structural approach, it is not only the responsibility of the individuals to tackle poverty, but rather the structures within a state that keep individuals poor, should help them to escape from poverty. Poverty can emanate from social stratification and institutional discrimination, if the structure of a society’s economy, employment, political system, education, class, race, gender is skewed towards the disadvantage of the masses, it creates social inequality. Inequality in the distribution of the resources creates poverty. (p. 25)

Harrison (1981) discusses the structuralist notion of poverty, and posits “gross inequality is more usually the result of a deliberate and calculated attempt by the rich to increase their wealth to widen the gap between themselves and the masses [at the cost of absolute poverty]” (p. 331). Galtung (1990) describes this phenomenon as ‘structural violence’, which is considered from the basis of gender whereby women are discriminated against in most patriarchal societies.

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2 Beeghley (1988) argues that “the structure of a society could work as an indication of how people behave; if people have fewer choices on how to deal with their situation, they would also be less effective to change it” (p. 205).
In Akan communities, certain professions were traditionally the preserve of men, and women did not participate in them. These included driving, police, army, sports and lumbering. The inequality could be ethnic, racial, religious, partisan affiliation and cronyism that create a gap between US and THEM. In such a situation, where you find yourself determines whether you would be rich or poor.

Stephenson (2000) compares the individualistic and structural factors behind poverty and wealth, contending that “people who view society as operating unfairly tend to attribute wealth and poverty to societal causes and those who consider society to be fair see poverty as a result of individual deficiencies” (p. 98). If the basis of structural factors is inequality, then it is the responsibility of governments to design interventional mechanisms to reduce poverty. This is the basis for setting up welfare mechanisms to cater for the poor (Kirby et al. 1997 p. 590). In Ghana, such social interventional programmes include: Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), Ghana School Feeding Programme, Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) and Free Senior High School (FSHS).

Fatalistic Explanation of Poverty

The fatalistic factor argues that one’s poverty is not caused by the individual or the social inequalities in the society but rather by bad luck. Stephenson (2000, p. 91) argues that fatalism is partly a consequence of the growing uncertainty and risk which has become an important factor of modern societies. Sen (1992) similarly states that personal responsibility does not apply in conditions of uncertainty- “the predicament of a person due to adverse happenings over which he has no control can scarcely be dismissed on the ground of personal responsibility” (p. 149). One’s poverty could result from sickness, epidemic, disaster, fire outbreak, sudden death of one’s benefactor or a vicarious curse inherited from a previous generation.

Theoretical Framework: Language Ideology

An ideology is a body of shared and predictable beliefs, values and cherished notions of a people that are real and implicit in their everyday life situations within a period of time. In the view of Fairclough (1989), “ideologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour” (p. 2). For Silverstein (1998), “language ideologies are sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (p. 123). Language use and its interpretation are based on the linguistic ideology of the group. Speakers’ awareness about the structure and nature of their language, affects their social and rational behaviour. Verschueren (1999) states that “language ideologies are habitual ways of thinking and speaking about language and language use, which
Language ideologies are rarely challenged within a given community” (p. 198).

Irvine (1989) postulates that “Language ideologies are the cultural systems of ideas about social and linguistic relationship, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (p. 225). Language ideology effectively oscillates between language, culture, politics, concepts, perceptions, worldview, people’s intellect, psychological behaviour and sociocultural world. Rumsey (1990) opines that “linguistic ideology refers to shared bodies of common sense notions about the nature of language in the world” (p. 346). Since the beliefs are shared, their application is also predictable. Language ideology provides a sociocultural understanding of the worldview, as well as the interpretation of the political, cultural, economic, law and religious processes and people’s way of life that inform the local beliefs about language and culture (Kroskrity, 2006 p. 498).

Language ideology further links language to social identity, class, ranks, status and indexicality, gender, aesthetics, morality, epistemology, and operations of institutions of power, law and economics as we find in Akan socio-economic systems (Agyekum 2016 2010; Kroskrite 2001, p. 413; Silverstein 1998, p. 126). Interrogating language ideologies from the standpoint of law, Haviland (2003), submits that “linguistic ideology reflects the ‘ideas about language and its place in social arrangements or its use and usability for social and political ends, of which the concept of ‘language rights’ must surely be a part and a product” (p. 764). With regard to the use of language, language ideology discusses language policies in multilingual societies and choice of language in education, politics and judicial systems. The emphasis can be on the major and official languages and any attempt to use any of the minority languages in official settings will be considered as linguistic paranoia (Haviland 2003). 4

The understanding of the Akan sociocultural concept of ohia, ‘poverty’, its types and characteristics is based on the Akan worldview, society and cultural beliefs. Irvine and Gal (2000) aver that linguistic ideologies refer to “the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them” (p. 35). Participants in the linguistic environment are thus at the very centre of linguistic ideology.

Language ideology is a useful framework for the ethnographic and comparative analysis of ideological systems and communicative practices in different societies (Van Dijk 1998). The theory of language ideology has been used in many interactional concepts and studies of ethnographic topics.

4 Haviland (2003) states that linguistic paranoia “is the presumption that when co-present persons use a language you cannot understand, it can only be because they are saying something they do not want you to understand, probably because whatever is being said is “against” you” (p.771). The use of such a minority language in a multilingual society is taken as inherently insulting or threatening. There are misfeelings of insecurity since people think that they are being harassed by not knowing what is being stated.
For instance, Agyekum (2012, 2011, 2010, and 2006), employed it in his study on Akan aphorisms and proverbs on marriage, language and conflicts, language, gender and power, and Akan traditional arbitration. In these studies, it was noted how these practices are performed based on the perception and worldview of the Akan people embodied in their language ideology.

The Akan People

The word ‘Akan’ refers to both the people and their language. The Akan language has 13 dialects, namely Asante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Fante, Akyem, Agona, Assin, Denkyira, Twifo, Wassaw, Kwawu, Bron and Buem. Some Bron speakers are in the Ivory Coast. The Akan people are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. According to the 2010 national population census, 47.5% of the Ghanaian population are native Akans and has the majority of the Ghanaian population, speaking it fluently as non-native speakers.

The Akans are found predominantly in southern Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in six of the ten geographic regions in Ghana namely, Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Central, Brong Ahafo and Volta (northern part) Regions. The Akan speaking communities in the Volta Region of Ghana are sandwiched by the Ewe communities. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this paper was basically qualitative. The specific method used was interviews. The interviewees were four retired Akan lecturers of the University of Ghana, Winneba and Cape Coast. All of them are MPhil holders in Akan.

A greater proportion of the data was collected from library studies as secondary data that I picked from books on Akan proverbs, especially Appiah et al (2000) and Ayisi (1966). I also collected some of the proverbs on poverty from Akan written literature books including fiction (Brako by Adi), drama (Etire nni Safoa by Amoako) and poetry (Mewɔ Bi Ka by Adi). Furthermore, I tapped some of the proverbs from Akan oral literature materials such as recorded folksongs, proverbs, folktales and dirges.

I crosschecked the proverbs from the secondary data with the four renowned Akan speakers and fellow Akan lecturers mentioned above who gave their comments on issues. A renowned speaker in this context is one who speaks the Akan language fluently and can read, write and analyse the language. On the whole, I collected 64 proverbs on ohia, ‘poverty’ among the Akans. Some relate specifically to poverty, poor persons, money, and the power of money. The expressions are analysed from lexical, syntactic and semantic perspectives.
Proverbs in Akan

Proverbs are terse sayings that embody general truths or principles and ways of life of a people. The general truths are based on people’s past experiences, philosophy, perception, ideology, socio-cultural concepts and worldview. We will see how the Akans view poverty. Their perception cannot be separated from their experiences about poverty, and how they look at poverty and wealth through proverbs.

Oral literature scholars such as Finnegan (2012), Agyekum (2005), Okpewho (1992) and Yankah (1989) have researched extensively into proverbs. Agyekum (2005) postulates that “proverbs are interpretations of traditional wisdom based on the experiences and socio-political life of our elders” (p. 9). In Akan indigenous communication, the use of proverbs is the acknowledged mark of one’s communicative competence.5

Agyekum (2005) asserts that, in Akan, there are adages such as ebɛ ne ɔkasa mu abohemmaa, “the proverb is the most appropriate aspect of speech”, etwa asɛm tia, “it curtails matters”, enka asɛm ho a, enwie de ye, “without it, a speech does not acquire its seasoned nature” (p. 10). Akan proverbs are aesthetic devices of vitality in speech, and the salt of a language, without which the real taste of the ‘language dish’ is not felt.

Proverbs are used as verbal strategies to stave off, or contain, tense situations stemming from face-to-face communication in Akan (Agyekum, 2010; Yankah, 1989). Multiple proverbs concretise the value of language and the positive attributes of the speaker to handle face-threatening acts and to depict his politeness level. If an Akan speaker is well versed in the culture and knows the background of his/her interactants, s/he would be able to use the proper thematic proverbs as we find in this paper.

Analysis of the Proverbs on Poverty

The proverbs on poverty in this paper are analysed from the point of view of (a) conditional clauses, (b) use of causative marker ma, “let, cause”, and (c) the use of the copular verb ye, “to be”.

Use of Conditional Clauses to depict the Effects of Poverty

The proverbs under this category show that when you are afflicted by poverty there are certain negative results that dog your life. The proverbs in this section are captured in conditional clauses to indicate that the presence of the entity X calls for Y and vice versa.

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5 Speakers’ ability to use appropriate proverbs in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts depict their language competence (Agyekum 2012; Yankah 1989). For instance, in Agyekum (2016 and 2005) the composer, Alex Konadu, uses a series of proverbs to depict his competence in the Akan language. The proverbs are aesthetically woven to promote the song’s functions and confirm the artist’s creativity.

They are marked by the split conjunction (se)...a, which can denote the concept of conditionality (if) and temporality (when); both are expressed by identical lexical and syntactic forms in Akan. The first part (se) is optional but the ...a, is obligatory and it is always followed by a comma to mark the clausal boundary between the subordinate conditional clause and the main clause.

(1)  
(Se) ehiaw boni a, ɔsan epo.  
“If the white man becomes poor he crosses the ocean.” 6

Traditionally, the Akans assumed that the white man lived in a country of abundant wealth and therefore felt comfortable over there. For him to travel overseas, implies that he was driven by a certain crucial need that he felt could be only satisfied in Africa.

(2)  
(Se) ehiaw ɔbarima a, ne yere bɔ no so mpokua.  

Among the Akans, (a traditionally male-dominated society), the husband traditionally exerts absolute power and control over his wife and children. The wife should respect him because he is the breadwinner. If the man is poor and thus becomes irresponsible, and his financial duties are performed by the wife, he is not respected. The wife can control the husband. An extension of the above is captured by the expression X bɔ Y so mpokua, which means X bluffs on Y. Poverty has reduced the status, dignity and power of the man.

(3)  
(Se) ehiaw wo a, ɛnwu.  
“If you are poor do not die.” Do not despair in adversity.

This proverb consoles the poor, and stresses that poverty is not the only adversity as there are some other situations in life (sickness, bereavement, false accusation, etc.) that are more stressful than poverty. It is supported by another Akan motivational proverb; wowɔ nkwa a, na wowɔ adeɛ, “If you have life you have wealth.” In so far as there is life, there is hope.

(4)  
(Se) ehiaw wo a, woka asem pa mpo a, ɔmanfoɔ bu no nșenhumu.  
“When you are poor, even when you say sensible things, it is regarded as nonsense by the people.”

This denotes the power of money and the predicament of the poor person.

* A need is what drives people to do things and is normally referred to as adehiadeɛ, while ohia, ‘poverty’ normally refers to money and other material things. Everyone has needs which may drive them to do certain things, but not everyone is poor.
(5) (Se) ohia hia wo a, òba kwasea mpo tu wo fo.
“If you are poor, even the foolish person advises you.”

In proverbs (4) and (5), poverty is associated with folly and non-intelligence. It is assumed that the poor have nothing sensible to offer. S/he is side-lined when it comes to deliberations of important issues even in their own family. Example (5) further indicates that the poor person’s intelligence becomes evident when fools arrogate to themselves the right to advise him/her on financial issues so as to reduce poverty. The advice is not restricted to finances as it also relates to a general disregard for the poor due to their low financial social status. This is based on the concept of the individual as the source of poverty (cf. section on the individual factor in poverty).

(6) (Se) ohia hia wo a, w’anim te se akaatia, w’ano se onipa ano nso wontumi nkasa
“If poverty afflicts you, your face looks like a chimpanzee, your mouth resembles a person’s mouth but you cannot speak.”

(This proverb is cited from one of the highlife songs of the renowned composer Agyemang Opambour entitled Ohia asem.).

(7) (Se) ohia soma wo a, ebeye den na wonenkɔ?
“When poverty sends you on an errand, how can you refuse?”

(8) (Se) ohia ka wo a, na woaye mmɔbɔ.
“When you are afflicted by poverty you become miserable.”

In proverbs (6), (7) and (8), poverty is connected with silence, vulnerability and pity because of how the society perceives the poor. A poor person is downgraded to the level of an animal. S/he has all the features of a human being but does not have the human mouth and potency to participate in human communication. In the chronology of evolution, the closest animals to human beings are apes and chimpanzees. In this proverb, a poor person is equated to a chimpanzee who has some similar linguistic human features but cannot talk. The poor man’s human rights to freedom of speech are trampled upon and curtailed. This notion supports Harrison’s (1981) assertion that “the greatest tragedy of Third World poverty today is the underdevelopment of man himself. Poor people never reach their full human potential in physical strength, intelligence and well being. They are trapped in a pattern of overlapping vicious circle” (p. 212–213). In ranking the status of people in society, the poor are placed very low.

In proverb (7), poverty controls the person and decides even his/her movements. Wherever poverty sends you, you cannot refuse; poverty causes
you to do menial jobs and run errands for little money. Poverty does not respect age even in African where age is often highly respected. In proverb (6), if a person is reduced to the level of an animal, s/he is a non-entity, marginalised and despised. In present-day Ghana, young employers can engage older people and disrespect them, due to the power of money.

(9) *(Se) wo ni di hia a, wonnyae nkɔfa obi nye na.*
    “If your mother is poor, you do not put her aside and take somebody as your mother.”

This proverb is in line with the structural factor in poverty discussed earlier. When you find yourself in a certain social stratum of poverty, it is difficult to move out of it. Hence, you have to be content with what you have and who your relatives are. You cannot despise your mother because she is poor. Proverb 9 further indicates that even though poverty is negative, family and community ties are ranked higher than money. There are times therefore when the poor, on account of their social ties and good interpersonal relations, are revered despite their material status. We saw in proverb 3 that life supersedes poverty and wealth. Therefore if you have life, it is better. These two proverbs imply that poverty is not negative in all cases.

**The Use of Causative *ma*, ‘let’ in Proverbs on Poverty**

Some Akan proverbs on poverty have the causative marker *ma* to imply that poverty causes you to fall into some unpleasant situations. The causation implies that poverty is so strong that it acts as the CONTROLLER and AGENT while the poor person is the CONTROLLED, UNDERGOER and the PATIENT (cf. Agyekum, 2004 and Dua, 2013 on causation).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{OHIA (poverty)} & \longrightarrow \text{OHIANI (poor person)} \\
\text{CONTROLLER (AGENT)} & \longrightarrow \text{CONTROLLED/UNDERGOER (PATIENT)}
\end{align*}
\]

In all the Akan proverbs and ideology under this section, poverty is the powerful stimulus and the person has to respond to the dictates of its power. Poverty leads to stress, loss of one’s intellect and wisdom and suppression by the rich. Again, poverty causes the poor to reveal their expertise or sell their conscience to the rich who are then glorified. It reduces the poor person to the level of an animal (a vulture). It makes one eat unwholesome food, and deprives one of one’s favourite dish. It drives away one’s friends and makes one aware of real friends. It can finally change one’s status drastically and turn a royal into a slave.

Most of the causative sentences in the proverbs employ the focus marker *na*, ‘it is’, which implies that *ohia* is exclusive to cause the situation inherent in
the proverb. A focused item in a sentence refers to the most relevant information in a given discourse. According to Boadi (1974) in Akan, na is the basic focus marker and implies an ‘exclusive, emphatic, restricting’ item in a sentence. In Akan, an item focused with na is normally fronted and the subject is repeated after the na. If the focused item is human, it is represented by the 3rd person singular pronoun ɔ- ‘he/she’; if it is inanimate, as in poverty, it is represented by the inanimate pronoun ɛ- ‘it’, as in the examples below. Some of the proverbs indicate that poverty triggers the emotional state of the individual or make him/her act in a certain way. These examples are based on Akan folk knowledge, wisdom and experiences. In Duah (2013, pp. 212-217), ohia in proverbs 10-17, would be acting as the TRIGGER/PROMPT, which causes a voluntary or an involuntary change in the cause.7

(10) Ohia ma adwenedwene.
   “Poverty causes worrying/planning”

(11) Ohia ma awiemfoo nyansa yera.
   “Poverty makes the humble person lose his/her wisdom.”
   (Poverty lowers one’s standard (Appiah et al 2000, p. 469).

(12) Ohia na ɛma ohiani tɔn ne nyansa ma osikani.
   “It is poverty that makes the poor person sell his/her wisdom to the rich.”
   (If you are poor, you are easily influenced or deceived (Appiah et al, 2000 p. 470).

(13) Ohia na ɛma ɔdehyee dane akoa.
   “It is poverty that makes the royal become a servant.”

(14) Ohia na ɛma ɔkanni ye aboa anka enye saa na ɛte.
   “It is poverty that makes the Akan person look like a beast, for that is not his/her nature.”

(15) Ohia na ɛma ɔpete di bini anka enye aduane a ɔpe ne no.
   “It is poverty that makes the vulture eat faeces for that is not the food it likes.”
   (This is one of the lines in a song entitled Ohia asem by the highlife musician, Agyemang Opambour).

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7 In discussing causation Duah (2013, p. 217) posits that “The PROMPT and TRIGGER configurations are similar in some ways. In both TRIGGER and PROMPT, the causer is usually an event acting as a stimulus which causes the causee to undergo a change of state.”

(16) Ohia na Ema obi tua n'akɔmmɛdeɛ.
“It is poverty that lets someone abstain from his/her favourite delicacy.”

(17) Ohia da na ema wohunu nmipa.
“It is the period of poverty that makes you see people.”
“Adversity tests the sincerity of one’s friends or neighbours.”

In examples 14 and 15, we encounter the subjunctive marker anka ‘would have’ to imply that since the proposition stated is not real and practical, there is the need for circumspection. The discourse marker anka also indicates that an occurrence is based on the absence of a necessary condition that did not materialise (Agyekum 2012, p. 140). Amfo (2007) posits that anka is one of the modals in Akan.

In the translated English versions, the proverbs start with ‘it is’ which is the gloss for the Akan focus marker na. In English grammar, such constructions are labelled as cleft constructions. In Akan, they are referred to as focus constructions. Cleft sentences are used to help us focus on a particular part of the sentence and emphasise this part by fronting it, and in the Akan construction, focus sentences are treated the same way. The importance of the focus marker na in the proverbs of poverty as seen in examples 12-17 is that it focuses on the power of poverty to trigger the actions and inactions of the poor person.

Downing and Locke (2006) indicate that “In clefting, we re-organise the content of a single clause into two related parts. The effect of the resulting structures is to focus on one element, the New, which always follows a form of the verb be” (p. 250). There are two kinds of cleft: the it-cleft and the wh-cleft, and they both put the element under discussion into a strong focus. The main function of the it-cleft is to mark contrastive focus, which is very often implicit. When the focus items are highlighted the other elements are ‘given’ or ‘presupposed information.’ Downing and Locke (2006) define presupposition as a piece of information, which is assumed by the speaker, without it being asserted (p. 250).

The Use of the Copula Verb yɛ, ‘to be’ in Poverty Proverbs

In the Akan proverbs under this category, poverty is metaphorically compared to some negative social aspects of life to indicate that poverty is actually negative. Some of the negative things compared with poverty are madness, loss of reputation, unpreparedness, bitterness, etc. In some of the proverbs, the link between poverty and the negative attribute is the copula verb yɛ, ‘to be’. The metaphor implies that poverty has all the semantic attributes that come after the copula verb; X yɛ Y. The stative verbs that encode the Akan copula verbs indicate that the antecedent NP is in a state of affairs. The copula verb also connotes that the NP that comes after it, complements the antecedent and that
they both share a commonality.

(18)  *Ohia yɛ adammɔ.*  
“Poverty is madness.”

A popular Ghanaian song entitled *Sika fre bogya* by Slim Young in 2004 has the line *Ohia yɛ adammɔ,* “poverty is madness”. He then laments on poverty as follows:

(a)  *Ohia hia wo a, hwe se wiase tee.*  
“If you become poor look at how the world is.”
(b)  *Wonam baabi a, mmɔbɔɔmɔbɔ.*  
“You walk at places miserably.”
(c)  *Amanfoɔ hunu w’anim a, ewɔ dee wɔbeyε.*  
“When people see your face they behave differently”
(d)  *Wotwe wo ho nso a, ewɔ dee wɔbeyε.*  
“When you depart they do something different.”
(e)  *Abusua kɔ agyina a, yenhwɛwɛ wo.*  
“When the family goes into counsel they do not look for you.”
(f)  *Wɔka asem pɔ koraa a, ye bu no nkɔwadɔasem.*  
“When you say something very important, others consider it childish.”

The statements in a-f reflect Akans’ ideology and perceptions about the poor and how people despise and marginalise them on all fronts.

(19)  *Ohia yɛ animguaseɛ.*  
“Poverty is a disgrace.”

(20)  *Ohia nam yɛ nwono.*  
“The meat of poverty is bitter.” This implies that poverty is a cruel state of affairs.

(21)  *Ohia panin nye panin pa.*  
“An impoverished elder is not a real elder.”

(If you do not have the financial means you do not wield power)

The status of the poor elder can be changed and handed over to a younger person who is rich. A typical example is when there is a chieftaincy vacancy in the family.
Ohia nyɛ adepa.
“Poverty is not a good thing.”

Ohia nhyɛ da.
“Poverty does not appoint its day of visitation.”

This example alerts people that there is uncertainty as to when poverty can afflict a person. A rich man can easily become bankrupt and poor; invalidity and loss of job and property can easily change the rich person for him to become very poor. In examples 21-22, the copula verb is in the negative to indicate that poverty does not match with the positive complements after it.

The concept of Ohiani, ‘a Poor Person’, in Akan

Agyekum (2016) states that “the word ohia is derived from the verb stem -hia, ‘to be in need’, plus the nominalising prefix o-; the agentive suffix -ni is added to derive ohiani, ‘a poor person’, (pl. ahiafoɔ)” (p. 165). Ohia-ni is a poor person, who is in need of money and other essentials of life to function like others in the society. S/he is a person who does not have the basic means and resources of subsistence and living. Asiedu et al. (2013 p. 19) record that where the elite perceive poverty as a lack of basic necessities and provision of social services, the rural poor see poverty in terms of the vulnerability to environmental factors that affect their livelihood including lack of food security. Even though Akan is a communitarian society where people traditionally care for one other, there is a latent economic class system whereby the poor are distinguished from the rich. The proverbs and concepts about poverty and the poor people discussed in this paper are clear manifestations of a covert class system which marginalises the poor.

When you are pushed into the vicious cycle of poverty, there is no way you can disentangle yourself. Even when there is a chance, there would be an obstacle that closes the door to prosperity and wealth. Proverb 29 refers to this situation as follows;

Ohiani benya ne ho no na bata kwan asi.
“By the time the poor man becomes wealthy, the road for monetary ventures would have ‘been blocked’.”

This is best appreciated from the viewpoint of structural violence. The semantic domains in which the poor person finds himself include pandemonium, loss of items, accusations, regret, lack of sympathy and ill-luck. Others are non-discrimination of food and accommodation, non-recognition of one’s good deeds and potentials, attachment to dirt and insects, lack of love for one’s wife/husband and lack of a befitting funeral.
Other issues portrayed by the proverbs imply that the poor should be tolerant and hide their ideas and good thoughts, for nobody takes them seriously. Proverb 26 states that Ohiani asem hwehwe nnipa aso. “A poor man’s problem is ‘wondered about’ by people.” His/her ideas, speech and thoughts are always misinterpreted such that even when he says good things they are considered bad. His wisdom resides in the hands of the rich and they can only display their wisdom in private where nobody recognises them (see Proverbs 30 and 39). When the poor person blows a melodious tune on the horn it is considered cacophonous. This is explicated by proverb 36 as (Se) ohiani hyen aben a ṣɔnnaa tiefoɔ. “If the poor person blows his/her horn s/he does not get a listener.”

The poor wear ragged clothes, are always found guilty, shunned and cheated, cannot brag in public and do not have friends (Proverbs 45 & 46). They are cursed not to be wealthy because the day they become wealthy, the State will be ruined (Proverb 48). All accusations and criminal activities are attributed to them. Finally, the poor treat their sores in a corner to avoid the gaze and sympathy of others (Proverb 51). Some proverbs depict that being poor evokes sympathy and it is painful to be poor (Proverbs 27-28).

(24) Abogyanbumbɔ a, ohiani na ne mnoɔma yera.
“In times of pandemonium it is the poor person’s goods that are missing.”

(25) Asembe se ohiani. Enti dee enni me soɔ no momfa nto me so.
“Criminal cases befit the poor, so level false charges against me.”

(26) Ohiani asem hwehwe nnipa aso.
“People wander about a poor person’s problem.”

(27) Ohiani asem ye ya.
“Issues about the poor person are painful.”

(28) Ohiani asem ye mmɔbɔ.
“Issues about the poor person are pitiable.”

(29) Ohiani bɛnya ne ho no na bata kwan asi.
“By the time the poor person becomes wealthy, the road for monetary ventures would have ‘been blocked’.”

This proverb is used when poor people miss good opportunities that could have freed them from poverty.

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8 Proverb 25 is the title of a song composed in the 1970’s by Vasco Osei Kofi, a renowned highlife artist.

(30) *(Sɛ) ohiani bu ebe a, yɛmfa.*
   “If a poor person quotes a proverb, it has no value.”

The import of this proverb is that proverbs are supposed to come from the wise people and in the Akan society it is wrongly perceived that a poor person cannot be wise.

(31) *Ohiani didi abra-abraa.*

A poor person has no choice and it tallies with the English proverb, “a beggar has no choice.”

(32) *(Sɛ) ohiani dɔ ne yere a, enhunu.*
   “When a poor man loves his wife, she does not see it.”

A poor husband cannot express his love by providing his wife with cash and gifts.

(33) *Ohiani funu nkyɛre fie.*
   “A poor man’s corpse does not remain in the house for a long time.”

(34) *(Sɛ) ohiani fura kente a, yeɛ se fura kyenkyen.*
   “If a poor person puts on a kente cloth, we say that s/he is wearing an inferior cloth.”

(35) *(Sɛ) ohiani fura kyeme a, yɛ se fura dunsini.*
   “If a poor man wears an expensive cloth, it looks like a cloth on the stump of a tree.”

(36) *(Sɛ) ohiani hyɛn abɛn a ennya tiefɔɔ.*
   “If a poor person blows his/her horn, s/he does not get a listener.”

(This proverb was tapped from a song entitled ‘Aba Saa’ composed by the late highlife musician, Dr. Paa Bobo).

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9 The family of the poor person is not ready to spend so much time, energy and funds on his/her funeral so s/he is buried very early. These days, Akans put their corpses at the morgue. They put the poor person’s corpse there for a few days/weeks but a rich person can be there for months while the family prepares for a glamorous burial.

10 Kente is a rich and expensive cloth occasionally worn by chiefs, rich people and dignitaries.
(37)  *Ohiani mfura ne ntonago mfa nni apiriripagoro.*

“The poor person does not wear his/her cloth and engages in dangerous games.” Since it is the only cloth s/he cannot afford to lose it though tough games.

(38)  *Ohiani gyaaseni ne nwansena (Appiah et al 2000, p. 473).*

“A poor person’s domestic attendant is the house fly.”

A poor person has to put up with dirt and discomfort. S/he wears ragged clothing and eats poor food where house flies hover around the food.

(39)  *(Se) ohiani ka asem a, edane asemme.*

“If a poor person says something it is misinterpreted and depreciated.”

(40)  *Ohiani kanea ne ayeremo*

“The poor person’s light is lightning.”

S/he stays in darkness and it is only lightning that provides him/her with light.

(41)  *Ohiani mfa abofu.*

“A poor person does not become angry.’ S/he has to tolerate all provocations.”

When s/he becomes angry and offends others s/he has no money to settle the case. If s/he is angry, s/he may lose favours and gifts from benevolent people.

(42)  *(Se) ohiani ne sikani goro a, ensɔ.*

“If a wealthy person befriends the poor, the friendship does not last”  
(Akrofi 1958, p. 147).

People always befriend their peers; the rich only play with their fellow rich people. He/she may over-cheat the poor friend and the poor will definitely break off. If the rich person becomes fed up with the consistent requests from the poor, the friendship breaks up.

(43)  *Ohiani mpo dabere.*

“A poor person does not refuse a sleeping place.”

(44)  *(Se) ohiani nim nyansa a, eka ne tirim. (Appiah et al 2000, p. 475)*

“A poor person keeps his/her wise ideas to himself.”

This implies that when the poor even express their wise ideas, nobody listens to them.
Prejudice is always against the poor. In the current Akan situation, the poor can only win a case if s/he can hire a good lawyer.

This is so because nobody takes the poor serious.

A poor person’s intelligence is of little use unless he/she is backed by a wealthy person.

The wisdom or ideas of the poor person are disregarded. The poor are not invited to public deliberations that involve monetary affairs.

All the above notions about the concept of poverty reflect the folk knowledge and wisdom of the Akans based on societal evidence rather than on scientific evidence.

Proverbs based on the Word Sika, ‘Money’.

This section discusses proverbs based on the Akan socio-cultural concept of money which sees poverty as something unwarranted. The presence of money marks poverty as a social canker. Some of the examples denote the humiliations
and difficulties people experience when they lack money. This is depicted by the verb *nni* (do not have). Some of the examples were adopted from Akrofi (1958), Ayisi (1966) and Appiah et al (2000). The semantic domains expressed by poverty are lack of wisdom, forced mutism, having faint ideas, rejection of one’s suggestions, complaints about hunger and small thefts. The examples are couched in conditional clauses indicating that if you do not have money, then something negative happens. They are marked by the conditional clause marker *(se)* ....*a*, ‘if/when’ as we saw in the first section.

\[(52)\] *(Se) wonni sika a, ase wonnim nyansa.*  
“If you do not have money it looks as if you are not wise.”

\[(53)\] *(Se) wonni sika a, woka asem a, yemfa.*  
“If you do not have money you are not taken seriously.”

\[(54)\] *(Se) wonni sika a, wonni ano.*  
“If you do not have money you lose your power of speech.”

\[(55)\] *(Se) wonni sika a, wose akura afa wo nam.*  
“If you do not have money you claim that a mouse has taken your meat.”

\[(56)\] *(Se) wonni sika a, wose emo mmee.*  
“If you do not have money you claim that rice does not ‘make your belly full’.”

The traditional staple food of the Akans is *fufuo*, a very heavy food; a small quantity can fill the belly, but rice is lighter. It is believed that to fill your belly with rice, you have to eat a lot, and thus you need to spend more money. A poor person who can afford to buy only a little amount of rice will complain that it does not fill the belly. He/she will rather prefer to use the small amount of money on a heavier meal that can sustain him/her for a longer period.

\[(57)\] *(Se) wo sika sua a, wo koso nam nso sua.*  
“If you have little money your share in meat is also very little.”

\[(58)\] *(Se) wo sika sua a, w'asem sua.*  
“If you have little money, you do not have much to say.”

Even when the poor have much to say, the society and the rich may not invite them or will not be ready to listen to them.
The Power of Money

Akan proverbs under this section reveal how powerful money is. The proverbs elevate money and make it more powerful and indispensable in life such that without it one is nothing. The semantic entities to which money is compared are innocence, chieftedom, power, masculinity and suppression. There is the English adage that states that ‘He who has gold makes the rules. ‘In the Bible, Ecclesiastes (10:19) states that ‘A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry: but money answers everything.’ (New King James Version (NKJV)). The latter part of the text shows the absolute power enshrined in money; it can make and unmake.

(59)  *Sika na ema ɛfɔdifoɔ di bem.*
“*It is money that makes a guilty person become innocent.***”

(60)  *Sika fre bogya.*
“*Money attracts relatives***”

The proverb literally means that money ‘invites blood.’ In Akan, the word *bogya* ‘blood’ refers to blood relations and the society thinks that if you are rich then your relatives are always ready to draw closer to you. On the contrary if you are poor, all your relatives will despise and avoid you. In a song *Sika Fre Bogya* by Slim Young composed in 2014, he compared richness with poverty and gave the accolades of money as follows:

(61)  *Sika ye ɔmama,* “Money is a dignitary”

(62)  *Sika wɔ tumi,* “Money has power.”

The power attached to money makes the rich powerful enough to control the entire family. The musician states that *Abusua anhu wo a, wɔmmɔ pɔw.* “If the family does not see you they do not take any firm decision.” *Abusua anhu wo a, wonkasa,* “If the family does not see you, they do not speak”, and finally *sebe wotumi keka dec wope,* ‘You can say whatever you like.’ The rich person is also linguistically powerful and can therefore break the decorum of communication and say what he/she likes.

(63)  *Sika ne barima.*
“*Money is the man.*” (Money is powerful.)

(64)  *Sika ne ɔhene.*
“*Money is king.*” (Money rules all.)
Conclusion

In this paper, we have considered how the Akans conceptualise poverty based on their language, culture, society and experience. We discussed poverty under language ideology, which rationalises people’s experiences, behaviours, attitudes and expressions based on their culture, beliefs, religion, philosophy, economic and political systems.

We identified four basic sources of poverty and these are individualistic, cultural, fatalistic and structural. The Akan sociocultural concept of poverty was discussed through the lenses of proverbs. The proverbs were discussed under the negative attributes of poverty. These include foolishness, disgrace, madness, de-personification, lack of speech, vulnerability, solitary life, marginalisation, stigmatisation, suppression and oppression, prejudice, lack of love and respect, and lack of intelligence. These notions and concepts about poverty in Akan cohere with Akan language ideology.

The paper sees the use of indirection through proverbs as a channel of expressing the Akan sociocultural concept of poverty. The concept still prevails in modern times even when the class system in Akan has widened on account of western education, globalisation and technology all of which have created various strata, nuances and differences between the rich and the poor. The degradation of the poor person has been worsened now that the society has become more materialistic. The economic power anchored on monetary gains is now associated with linguistic power, and the poor have to keep quiet in most sectors of public life. Ghanaian politics, civil service, other parts of the economy, religion, education and the whole society have become more materialistic. Akans, and Ghanaians as a whole, have fallen prey to the western capitalist idea of development and the society. For example, politics has become so monetary based that if one is not rich, one cannot join the main stream partisan politics since electioneering campaigns involve a lot of money. The smaller parties that are not rich have performed abysmally low in all elections. The proverbs in this paper point to the power of money and the woes of the poor and further account for why people try all means, fair or foul, to become rich.

The paper noted that poverty does not relate only to lack of money but also lack of basic items, accusations, ill-luck, non-discrimination of food and accommodation, non-recognition of one’s potentials, lack of love for one’s spouse and non-befitting funerals.

Notwithstanding the negative connotations painted by most of the proverbs and Akan ideology about poverty, the paper stresses that poverty is not negative in all aspects because some of the proverbs rate family and social ties over and above money. Again, the paper has through one of the proverbs argued that poverty is not the only adversity since there are some other conditions in life that are more stressful than poverty. Poverty then does not warrant death. We have also seen that the definition of poverty and a poor person may change from
one community to another. However, there are common denominators.


UN. (1998). Definition of Poverty (UN Statement, June 1998- signed by the heads of all UN agencies)


Young, S. (2014). *Sika Fre Bogya*. [Recorded by Faisal Helwani Records]. Accra
Personal Attribute Nominals in Akan: A Constructionist Perspective

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Abstract
This paper provides a constructionist account of Akan constructions of the form ạhọ̀dén ‘strength’ and ạsọdén ‘disobedience’ which had been previously analysed as compounds. Through the analysis of previously cited examples in the relevant literature and additional examples collected purposively from written sources, it is shown that the constructions exhibit a constellation of formal and semantic/pragmatic properties that get masked in a straightforward compounding analysis. Also posited is a constructional idiom whose formal structure is motivated by a typical syntactic construction (predicate adjective construction) and a prefixation schema, through the process of template unification. Thus, some of the properties of this construction are motivated by already existing constructions, even though their properties may not be entirely predictable from those other constructions, confirming that language is a network. It is shown that the construction has limited productivity because of some stringent restrictions on possible constituents. Finally, a broad semantic classification of the constructions is provided and some properties of the major classes discussed.

Keywords: Akan, Construction Morphology, constructional idiom, nominal compound, schema

1 I am very grateful to the editor and five anonymous reviewers of the Legon Journal of the Humanities for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper that have greatly improved on the general quality of the paper. I am solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings.
The purpose of this paper is to argue that Akan (Niger Congo, Kwa) nominals, such as \textit{àhòò děń} ‘strength’ and \textit{àsòò děń} ‘disobedience’ which had been previously analysed as compounds (cf. Christaller, 1875; Dolphyne, 1988; Obeng, 2009), are not compounds, \textit{sensu stricto}. I show that the straightforward compounding analysis masks (i) the degree of formal complexity of the nominals and (ii) the formal and semantic/pragmatic constraints on the constituents of the nominals, constraints which regular compound constituents are not subject to. I call them \textit{personal attribute nominals} (PANs).

In this paper, I present the set of formal and semantic/pragmatic properties that differentiate them from regular Akan compounds. I also provide a Construction Morphology modelling of their derivation and properties. For this, I posit a constructional idiom, which inherits its formal structure from a copular construction and a prefixation schema, through the process of template unification/conflation, the mechanism which makes it possible to combine constructions into increasingly larger ones (cf. Booij, 2005, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). Thus, some of the properties of PANs are motivated by already existing constructions in the language, even though their properties are not entirely predictable from those other constructions. The present account, therefore, differs from previous accounts not just in the constructionist perspective adopted, but also in showing that the constructions in question are not islands. Rather, they are related to other constructs in the language.

I briefly introduce Construction Morphology and the formalism to be used in this study. Next, I review literature on previous approaches to accounting for the properties of PANs. I discuss the general set of properties of PANs, as a way of motivating the proposed constructional account. I present the syntactic...
distribution of PANs and a tentative semantic classification before concluding the paper.²

Data for this study were drawn first from the published materials referred to in this paper. Additional data were drawn from a variety of sources, including a primary school reader on fishing, the Akan translations of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and an Akan translation of Plato’s Apology of Socrates. It is worth noting that the points made about the data in this study hold true for all the three major dialects of Akan – Akuapem (Ak.), Asante (As.) and Fante (Fa.). Where some property is true of only one dialect or another, I indicate this specifically with the abbreviations.

Construction Morphology

Construction Morphology (CxM) is a theory of linguistic morphology which aims to provide ‘a better understanding of the relations between morphology, syntax and the lexicon and of the semantic properties of complex words’ (Booij, 2010b, p. 543). The main tenets of CxM are a theory of the notion construction, a theory of word structure and a theory of the lexicon.

In CxM, the notion construction, characterised as a form-meaning pair (cf. Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Michaelis & Lambrecht, 1996) is employed to develop a framework in which both the differences and the commonalities of word level and phrase level constructs can be accounted for (Booij, 2010a, p. 1). Complex words are morphological constructions that may have holistic properties (e.g. semantic properties that may not come from the constituents and/or constituents that may not contribute to the meaning of the whole) and are assumed to be formed by constructional schemas, which are abstractions over sets of existing complex words, showing systematic correlation between form and meaning (cf. Blevins, 2006). For example, speakers of English observing the paradigmatic relation between the adjectives (left column) and the nouns (right column) in (1), capture the systematic form-meaning variation in terms of word-internal structure like (2).

(1) bald          baldness
big            bigness
black         blackness
British       Britishness

(Booij, 2010b, p. 543)

² Abbreviations used in this paper are: A = Adjective; Ak. = Akuapem; As. = Asante; CxM = Construction Morphology; Fa. = Fante; FUT = Future; N = Noun; NP = Noun Phrase; PAN = personal attribute nominal; PHYS = Physical; POSS = Possessive; Predicted = Predicated; PROG = Progressive; PRPTY = Property; SG = Singular; TP = Tonal Pattern; TBU = Tone Bearing Unit; TU = Template Unification.

(2) \([\text{aware}]_A \text{ness}\)_N

The pattern in (2) may in turn be conceptualized as a template or schema, like (3), which expresses generalizations about the form and meaning of existing deadjectival nouns and serves as a pattern for forming new words of comparable complexity. Thus, the speaker forms a new noun in \(-\text{ness}\) by replacing the variable \(X\) in the schema with an adjective. This is called unification, ‘the basic operation, both at the word level and the phrase level, to create well-formed linguistic expressions’ (Booij, 2010b, p. 544).

(3) \([X]_A \text{ness}\)_N ‘the property/state of A’

Constructions and the schemas by which they are formed coexist in the lexicon. Thus, the lexicon in CxM is not just the repository of irregular forms and their idiosyncratic properties (cf. Bloomfield, 1933; Di Sciullo & Williams, 1987). Rather, it is a structured repository of connected complexes, which is a generalisation over the lexical memories of speakers of a language (Booij, 2010b, p. 544; Jackendoff, 2009).

The items in the lexicon are organized into various hierarchies with constructions sharing two types of relations – instantiation and part of: A construction instantiates a dominating schema or is a part (i.e. constituent) of the dominating construction. This makes the lexicon look like a map (Michaelis & Lambrecht, 1996) and ‘the only difference between a schema and its instantiations lies in degrees of specificity’ (Lampert & Lampert, 2010, p. 38). In this sense, schemas contrasts with symbolic word formation rules that only serve as instructions for the formation of words, some of which do not actually exist (cf. Barlow & Kemmer, 2000, p. xxiii; Dąbrowska, 2000; Evans & Green, 2006, p. 546).

Each instantiation of the schema occurs as a subschema together with its idiosyncratic properties. For example, all binary-branching compounds may be represented as (4). The upper-case variables \(X\) and \(Y\) stand for the major lexical categories (N, V, & A). The lower-case variable \(a\) and \(b\) stand for arbitrary strings of sound segments, whilst \(i, j\) and \(k\) are indexes for the matching properties of the constituents of the compound and the compound as a whole.

(4) \(< [a]_{X_i} [b]_{Y_j} > Y_k ↔ [\text{SEM}]_k >\>

This schema is instantiated by a schema for N-N compounds which indicates that the compound signals a relation between two nouns in which the right-hand constituent is the dominant member, as in (5).
(5) \[<\{a\}_{Ni} [b]_{Nj} \leftrightarrow \{\text{SEM}_{i}\}_{j_k}>\]

\[<\{a\}_{Ni} [b]_{Nj} \leftrightarrow \{\text{SEM}_{j} \text{ with relation R to SEM}_{i_k}\}>\]

We can illustrate both the instantiation and part of relations with the compound doormat. The schema for the compound doormat instantiates the binary-branching right-headed N-N compound schema, whilst the constituents – door and mat – have a part of relation with (i.e., they are constituents of) the compound, as shown in (6).

(6) \[<\{a\}_{Ni} [b]_{Nj} \leftrightarrow \{\text{SEM}_{j} \text{ with relation R to SEM}_{i_k}\}>\]

\[<\{\text{door}\}_{Ni} [\text{mat}]_{Nj} \leftrightarrow \{\text{mat} \text{ for a door}\}_{j_k}>\]

\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{[door]} \\
\text{[mat]}
\end{array}\]

The part of relation is what accounts for regular processes of upward percolation (cf. Booij, 2000, 2012) where properties of the constituents are inherited and become part of the set of properties of the constructions of which they are constituents.

The advantage of the view that actual constructions and the schema they instantiate occur in this hierarchically organised constructional space, called the constructicon (Jurafsky, 1992), is that nuances in the formal and semantic properties of complex forms are not difficult to account for since they can be related to regular patterns, by positing subschemas.

Again, schemas can be unified by means of template unification (TU), through multiple inheritances. This way, we can account for the observation that the structure of a construction may be motivated by already existing constructions in the language, thus confirming the view that language is a network (Goldberg, 2006; Goldberg & van der Auwera, 2012). TU accounts for the simultaneous application of multiple processes, skipping any intermediate step(s), so that two independent processes, none of which seems to be able to occur on its own, can apply simultaneously to form a multiply complex construction that can be said to have started a life of its own (Booij, 2010a).

I assume that TU occurs freely, to the extent that the properties of the unifying schemas do not conflict, and is enhanced when one schema has an open slot, with constraints that can be fully satisfied by the properties of the other schema. This possibility of unifying constructions freely to form actual expressions, as long
as they do not conflict, coupled with the existence of constructions with open slots makes it possible to capture Chomsky’s (1957, 1965) intuitions about the creative potential of language.3

PANs in the Literature on Akan Nominals

Even though, for a long time, PANs have been noted to exist in Akan (cf. Christaller, 1875), very few studies on them exist and even those studies largely do not account fully for their set of properties, as the review of the literature in this section will show. This is because they are regarded simply as compounds. This approach masks the formal complexity of the nominals as well as the interesting restrictions on their constituents, restrictions that do not apply to regular compounds, like the similar looking noun-adjective compounds (cf. Appah, 2016).

Christaller (1875) on PANs

Christaller (1875, p. 19) describes PANs as compounds formed from ‘two or more words, with the exclusion of, and in contradistinction from, its prefix’. Christaller later discusses ten classes of Akan compounds of which the nominals in question constitute the fourth. He characterises them as ‘compound nouns of quality, made from the subject and the predicative adjective’, where the latter is nominalised and the former functions as a qualifying attribute in the possessive case (Christaller, 1875, p. 27, emphasis added). In (7), are the three examples cited in Christaller (1875, p. 19, 27).

(7)  a. à-hò-ɔ̀-dèń  b. àsò-dèń  c. à-bò-dèń
    ‘strength’          ‘disobedience’        ‘dearness, high price’

There are three formal issues with Christaller’s account. First, Christaller does not account for all the constituents of the nouns. He mentions the subject and the predicate adjective but not the intervening vowel (-ɔ̀-), which links the two but obviously does not belong to either. He, however, acknowledges it as the verb in the sentence whose subject and predicate adjective are ‘compounded’. Secondly, Christaller does not say anything about the prefix that occurs on the nominals in (7a & c) although he acknowledges that the prefix is not part of the first constituent when he writes that the subject and the predicate adjective

Booij has argued that TU does not lead to a complication of the grammar because the new template or schema is motivated by independently needed constructions in the language. However, as Appah (2013b) observes, we cannot rule out the possibility of the new schema getting entrenched and serving as the only schema known to some speakers for forming the relevant instantiating construction.
constitute a compound ‘with the exclusion of, and in contradistinction from, its prefix’ (Christaller, 1875, p. 19).\(^4\) Thirdly, Christaller’s claim that the predicate adjective forms a nominal on its own (making the nominal a right-headed noun-noun compound) does not seem to have any foundation, since the adjective occurs in its basic form with no nominalising affixes or any other marker of nominalisation. It has been shown that adjectives are nominalised either through prefixation or reduplication (cf. Appah, 2003, 2016; Osam, 1999). Additionally, Christaller is silent on how the meaning of the nominal is computed.

**Dolphyne (1988) on PANs**

Dolphyne (1988, p. 79) first presents the nominals under discussion as ternary-branching compounds that are made up of three independent stems. She cites, \(\text{ànìɛ̀ déń}\) ‘haughtiness’ which, she notes, has the stems \(\text{àní}\) ‘eye’, \(\text{yɛ́}\) ‘to be’ and \(\text{déń}\) ‘hard’. Dolphyne also categorises these nominals with compounds which have ‘a vowel affix that occurs between the two stems of the compound’ (Dolphyne, 1988, p. 80). This is an interesting twist in Dolphyne’s assessment of the number of bases in the nominal, but she observes later that what looks like an affix occurring between the first and the last constituents is ‘analysable as the copula verb \(\text{yɛ́}\) ‘to be’ which is reduced to a vowel that takes the lip rounding position of the preceding vowel’ (Dolphyne, 1988, p. 80), as shown in \(\text{ànìɛ̀ déń}\) ‘haughtiness’ and \(\text{àhòɔ̀ fɛ́}\) ‘beauty’ in (8).

\[
\begin{align*}
(8) & & \text{à-ní-ɛ̀-déń} & & \text{à-hò-ɔ̀-fɛ́} \\
& & \text{eye-be-hard} & & \text{Pref-self-be-nice} \\
& & \text{‘haughtiness’} & & \text{‘beauty’}
\end{align*}
\]

Thus, Dolphyne (1988) identifies the major constituents of the nominals, showing that the nominals ultimately derive from sentences and that it is the copula verbs in the sentences that are realised as vowels in the nominals. However, Dolphyne does not account for the vowel prefix in (8b). Again, there is some confusion in Dolphyne’s view of the status of the vowel that occurs between the two other constituents. Is it a stem or an affix?

**Appah (2003) on PANs**

Like Christaller (1875), Appah (2003, pp. 105-108) argues that the nominals we are concerned with are formed from predicate adjective constructions, through compounding and affixation, as shown in (9a-d) and (10).

\(^4\) This prefix forms abstract nominals in Akan. It usually occurs in deverbal action nominals like \(\text{à-sàw̄}\) ‘act of dancing’ and \(\text{è-dz̄idzi}\) ‘act of eating’, which are formed from \(\text{sàw̄}\) ‘to dance’ and \(\text{dz̄idzi}\) ‘to eat’ respectively.

(9) a. \( \text{Né } \text{bó } \text{yɛ } \text{dzën } \rightarrow \text{àbò̀dzén} \) ‘dearness’ (Fa.)
   3SGPOSS price be hard
   ‘It’s expensive (lit. Its price is hard)’

b. \( \text{Nè } \text{àsó } \text{yɛ } \text{dèn } \rightarrow \text{àsò̀dén} \) ‘stubbornness’ (As.)
   3SGPOSS ear be hard
   ‘she is stubborn (lit. His/her ear is hard)’

c. \( \text{Nè } \text{àsó } \text{yɛ } \text{mmèrëw } \rightarrow \text{àsò̀mmèrëw} \) ‘obedience’ (Ak.)
   3SGPOSS ear be soft
   ‘She is obedient (lit. His/her ear is soft)’

d. \( \text{Nè } \text{tírí } \text{mù } \text{yɛ } \text{dèn } \rightarrow \text{àtirimùdén} \) ‘wickedness’ (As.)
   3SGPOSS head in be hard
   ‘She is wicked’ (lit. The inside of his/her head is hard)

(10) \( \text{S} \)

\( \text{NP} \)
\( \text{POSS } \text{Né} \)
\( \text{VP} \)
\( \text{N } \text{àsó } \text{yɛ } \text{m̩m̩m̩m̩er̩w } \)
\( \text{AP} \)
\( \text{mm̩m̩er̩w} \)

Appah argues that, in forming the nominal, all the constituents of the construction, except the possessive are compounded and the copular is also reduced to \( [ɔ/ɛ] \), as the diagram in (11) shows.

(11) ‘Syntactic structure’

\( \text{S} \)
\( \text{NP} \)
\( \text{N } \text{aso } \text{yɛ } \text{mm̩m̩er̩w } \)
\( \text{VP} \)
\( \text{AP} \)
\( \text{mm̩m̩er̩w} \)

Èsò-ò-mm̩er̩w ‘obedience’ (Appah, 2003, p. 106)
Crucially, Appah (2003) argues that the constituents of the predicate adjective constructions which become part of the nominal are necessary not just for the formal makeup of the nominals, but their individual meanings are also central to the semantic composition of the nominal. However, this assumption of direct compositionality cannot be sustained given the fact that literally, the predicate adjective expresses a physical property predicated of the body-part in subject position, but the meaning of the nominal is that of an attribute of the possessor of the body-part which is external to the construction. Again, it is not clear what semantic contribution the reduced form of the verb is purported to make to the meaning of the whole construction. Finally, even though Appah notes that the formation of the nominals involves affixation, the diagram in (11) does not show where the prefix actually features in the derivation.

The Problem with Previous Accounts

The foregoing literature presents PANs as formally and semantically transparent, and that is largely the case. However, there are a number of quirky things about PANs that escape accounting for if we assume strict compositionality. For example, what looks like a linking vowel occurring between the two prominent constituents of what scholars have tended to classify as compounds does not seem to contribute to the meaning of the nominal as its place in the construction is questionable, if the constructions are indeed compounds. This is because previous accounts do not show which of the other two constituents the vowel forms a constituent with. This is important because of the fact that Akan compounds are invariably binary-branching (Appah, 2013b). Thus, the vowel must necessarily form one constituent with one of the other constituents either to its left or its right. This means that there are two possible ways of slicing the putative compound àsò-ɔ̀-dèń ‘stubbornness’ as shown in the table below, neither of which is felicitous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituent 1</th>
<th>Constituent 2</th>
<th>Compound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[[ àsò]-[ɔ̀]</td>
<td>[dèń]</td>
<td>[[ àsò-ɔ̀] [dèń]]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ àsò]</td>
<td>[[ɔ̀]-[dèń]]</td>
<td>[[ àsò] [ɔ̀-dèń]]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the morphotactics, and possibly, the semantic transparency of the nominals are somewhat compromised by the presence of a formal unit which does not contribute to the overall meaning of the construction. The meaning of the construction is thus, at best, only partially compositional. In addition, only a limited class of words with stringent restrictions on their individual properties can occur as constituents of the construction, restricting the productivity of the construction.
The General Properties of PANs

In this section, I explore further the formal make-up as well as the semantic/pragmatic properties of PANs that prime them for constructional analysis. I argue that given their set of properties, we have to posit a separate construction that is different from compounds. This would allow for an insightful account of all the properties of the nominals because, from a constructionist perspective, the correspondence between form and meaning is not expected to be one-to-one. Therefore, the presence of additional formal material like the intervening vowel, which does not contribute to the meaning of the construction, is not a problem to the extent that it can be shown to be a gestalt property of the whole nominal.

As noted above, PANs are formed from predicate adjective constructions (Appah, 2003, p. 105; Christaller, 1875, p. 19), which are constructions in which the main semantic content is embodied in the adjective because the verb is semantically vacuous (cf. Payne, 1997). In the case of the class of constructions we are concerned with, the verb (yɛ ‘to be’) simply specifies the relationship between the subject and the predicate adjective.

In the nominal that is formed, it is a phonetically reduced form of the copula yɛ, realized as [-ɔ/-ɛ-] which occurs, linking what may be characterised as two open slots. The first open slot is filled by the subject noun (or NP), which designates a body-part, such as kòkò ‘chest’, èní ‘eye’, ìtsí́r ‘head’, àsó ‘ear’, hó ‘self/skin’, etc. The only example that does not involve a body-part is the price of a commodity (9a) which may be said to have a similar kind of inalienable relation to the item as the body part to the human possessor. The second open slot is filled by a predicate adjective which expresses a physical attribute of the noun in subject position. These adjectives, including hàr ‘swift’, dèǹ ‘hard’, dùrù ‘heavy’ and hyèẁ ‘hot’, are all physical property adjectives (Dixon, 2004, p. 4; Osam, 1999).

Abstracting away from the individual nouns and adjectives that occur in the specific examples, the parts of the nominal may be summed up informally as (12). This shows that the nouns are schematic, with variables in the schema that can be substituted by specific words of the appropriate categorial and semantic description.

(12) \([\text{body-part}]_N + [\text{TO BE}]_V + [\text{physical property}]_A\]_S

The selection of nominals in (13) exemplifies the structure and tonal pattern of the nominals. The right column shows the internal structure of each nominal.

(13) a. à-kòkò-ɔ̀-dúrò
    NMLZ-chest-be-heavy
    ‘courage/bravery’
Thus, the only element that gets phonologically reduced in the nominal, compared to the same form in isolation or in the predicate adjective construction, is the copular which surfaces in the noun as a morphomic linker between the noun and the adjective in the first and second open slots respectively. The realisation of the copular is subject to the vowel harmony rules of Akan (Dolphyne, 1988). Thus, where the nearest preceding vowel is [-round], -ɛ- is chosen and where the nearest preceding vowel is [+round], -ɔ- is chosen.

It is not completely clear to me what triggers the reduction in the form of the copular verb. However, it seems to me that the reduction in form is aided by the semantic vacuity of the verb. That is, because the copular does not contribute much semantic information anyway, its formal reduction does not cause any comprehension difficulties.

Another interesting phonological feature of PANs is that they have a characteristic tone melody, where all the tone bearing units (hereafter, TBUs)
preceding the adjective bear low tones whilst the TBUs in the adjective bear high tones. This tonal melody seems to be typical of lexical items in Akan (cf. Dolphyne, 1988, pp. 120-123).5

The variables or open slots noted to occur in the schema in (12) signal the potential productivity of the construction (cf. Appah, 2013b, in prep). However, there are further noteworthy formal and semantic restrictions on the individual nouns and adjectives that occur in the predicate adjective construction which tend to restrict the productivity of the nominal that is formed from it. I point out some of these below.

First, the body-part noun that fills the first variable slot cannot be modified by an adjective. Hence, even though the construction in (14) is acceptable on its literal reading, it is completely ill-formed, if it is meant as the construction underlying the formation of the nominal ètsírò́mùɔ́ dzéń ‘wickedness’ which occurs to the right of the arrow.

\[
(14) \quad \text{Ìtsír kɛ̀ sé mù yɛ̀ dzèǹ} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{è-tsír-m-ɔ̀ dzéń}
\]

‘inside the big head is hard’

Secondly, the noun cannot be definite. Hence, the marginally acceptable sentence in (15a) cannot be said to underlie the formation of the nominal that occurs to the right of the arrow. The same can be said for sentence (15b), even though the construction itself is acceptable.

\[
(15) \quad \text{a. Kòfí né kò kò nò yɛ̀ durù} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{à-kòkò-ɔ̀ dúr} (\text{AS.})
\]

‘The chest of Kofi is heavy (≠ Kofi is brave)’

5 Dolphyne identifies two types of Akan compounds based on their surface tonal melodies. In the first type (those with tonal pattern 1 [TP1]), all the TBUs in the first constituent bear low tones whilst the second constituent retains its underlying tonal melody. In the second (those with tonal pattern 2 [TP2]), the constituents seem to retain their underlying tonal melodies. Clearly, the constructions at issue pattern tonally like the first type of compounds identified by Dolphyne. This tonal melody could be one of the reasons why most previous accounts treated PANs as compounds. I believe, however, that TP1 is more aptly construed as a lexical tonal melody, so that if the speakers of Akan regard the construction as lexicalised, then they apply this tonal melody to it. In (1) below, the form anibue may bear either TP1 (a) or TP2 (b) and the choice seems to correspond to the extent of lexicalisation, as the meanings show. Hence, I call TP1 the lexical tonal melody. The claim here is that Akan seems to have a lexical tonal melody. This claim needs a more extended study which is beyond the scope of the present paper.

\[
(1) \quad \text{a. ànì-bùé} \quad \text{b. ànìbùé}
\]

‘civilisation’

‘eye-open’

‘act of opening the eye’
b. àní nó yé déń => ànì-ɛ̀ -déń (As)
      eye DEF be hard
      ‘The eye is hard’
      eye-be-hard
      ‘haughtiness’

It seems to me that a definite noun makes the construction lose the sense of idiomaticity. If that is the case, then it shows that PANs are actually formed from underlying idiomatic expressions. In other words, PANs are the nominalised versions of idiomatic predicate adjective constructions. This would be consistent with Mensah’s (2003) treatment of such forms as body-part idioms.⁶

Thirdly, the predicate adjective, as indicated above, has to express a physical property which is predicated of the body-part noun in the subject position of the predicate adjective construction. If any other semantic class of adjectives (e.g., colour, value, dimension, etc. (Dixon, 2004)) fills the second slot, the sentence would be felicitous but no corresponding PAN can result from it. Hence, the nominals in (17), which have dimension and colour adjectives respectively in the second slot, are ill-formed, although those in (18) which have the same constituents but exclude the phonologically reduced copular, are well-formed. This is because the examples in (18) are simple cases of noun-adjective compounding (Appah, 2016).

(16) a. Kwàámè né tsír yè kèsé (Fa.)
    Kwame 3SGPOSS head be big
    ‘Kwame’s head is big’

b. Ádwóá né ényìm à-yɛ̀ sákóó (Fa.)
    Adwoa 3SGPOSS face PERF-be pale
    ‘Adwoa’s face has become pale’

(17) a. *itsír-ɔ-kèsé
    head-be-big
    ‘big head’

b. *ènyìm-ɔ-sákóó
    face-be-pale
    ‘pale face’

(18) a. itsír-kèsé (Fa.)
    head-big
    ‘big head’

b. ènyìm-sákóó (Fa.)
    face-pale
    ‘pale face’

In effect, the presence of this compounding alternative means of nominalizing the nouns and adjective restricts the productivity of PANs.

* The challenge with arguing that the presence of the definite determiner makes the construction lose its idiomatic feel, however, is that definite nouns do occur in idioms in other languages. An example is English kick the bucket ‘to die’ in which the definite determiner must occur in the idiom, so that *kick bucket is ill-formed as an idiom.
The data in (17) and (18) show that PANs are not compounds. Indeed the properties discussed so far make the constructions look like encoding idioms (Makkai, 1969, 1972), idioms whose meaning the speaker can work out on hearing, even if s/he may not be able to predict its conventionality (Evans & Green, 2006, p. 644). They are also like idioms of encoding in the restrictions they impose on the types/classes of words that can occur in them and the strict order in which they must occur in the construction (cf. Booij, 2010a; Booij, 2010b).

Fourthly, although the compositional meaning of the predicate adjective construction is that of a body-part about which a certain physical property is predicated, the complex nominal expresses an attribute of the possessor of the body-part that occurs as the subject in the predicate adjective construction. In other words, the meaning of the nominal is that of a property of a human referent (except àbòdèni ‘dearness’) who is the possessor of the body-part named in the construction. Thus, the referent of the nominal has only an indirect semantic link to one of its constituents. Again, although the body-part nouns in the first slots are concrete nouns, PANs are abstract nouns. Thus, the meaning of the construction is definitely not a strictly compositional function of the constituents. Outside of this construction, the words kòkò ‘chest’ and dúr(ú) ‘heavy’, when collocated, will express a physical property predicated of that body-part.

These facts mean that the meaning of the nominal has to be stated as a holistic property of the construction, much in agreement with the view that morphological constructions can have holistic properties (cf. Booij, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b).

In terms of pragmatics, it is worth noting that PANs are highly conventionalized constructions which may be used to express either negative or positive evaluation of the entity that possesses the attribute expressed by the nominal. For instance, the word ànièdèni (13b) which has undergone further derivation in (19) could be interpreted as ‘haughtiness’ or ‘bravery’ depending on the context of usage.

(19)  a. àbòfrá ànièdèni-foò  b. àbòfrá ànièdèni-foò
    child bravery-NMLZ [person] child haughtiness-NMLZ [person]
‘a brave child’ ‘a haughty child’

Thus the two different meanings of the expression in (19) are felicitous renditions of the same structure, depending on whether the attribute leads to the child in question fighting off an attack on his/her parents (19a) or exhibiting insubordination/insolence toward the parents (19b).
The Proposed Constructional Account

As observed above, taking the three main constituents of the predicate adjective constructions into account, the internal structure may be represented as (12), repeated here as (20), for ease of reference.

(20) $\left[ \text{body-part}_N \right] + \left[ \text{TO BE}_V \right] + \left[ \text{physical property}_A \right]_S$

Again, based on the examples in (13), the internal structure of the individual instantiating nominals can be schematised as (21), which shows that the only constant element of the construction is the phonologically reduced form of the copular $\text{yɛ́}$, realized as [-ɔ/-ɛ-]. The other slots are variable, but constrained.

(21) a. $[a-[koko]]_N [ɔ] [dururu]_A \leftrightarrow \text{‘bravery’}$ (As.)
b. $[[ani]_N [ɛ] [den]_A]_N \leftrightarrow \text{‘haughtiness’}$ (As.)
c. $[a-[ho]]_N [ɔ] [har]_A \leftrightarrow \text{‘swiftness’}$ (As.)
d. $[[aso]_N [ɛ] [den]_A]_N \leftrightarrow \text{‘stubbornness’}$ (As.)
e. $[a-[ho]]_N [ɔ] [den]_A \leftrightarrow \text{‘strength’}$ (As.)

We see prefixes occurring before the noun in the first open slot in some of the constructions in (21). Those that do not seem to have the vowel prefix do have initial vowel sounds of the same quality as the vowel prefix(es). Thus, I assume that each construct in (13) and (21) bears a vowel prefix which is realised as $a$-or $e$-, but gets realised as zero (or deleted) when the noun constituent has an initial vowel that is identical in quality to the vowel prefix.

To account for these properties of the construction, I posit a constructional schema with only the phonologically reduced form of the copular pre-specified, as in (22).

(22) $\left[ \{a-/e-, ø-\} \left[ [N]_{\text{BODY-PART}} [ɔ/ɛ] [A]_{\text{PHYSICAL PROPERTY}} \right]_S \right]_N$

This schema is an abstraction over the observed similarities among individual instances of the construction; a course-grained image of the set of structures in (21). It results from the unification of the template for the predicate adjective construction and a prefixation schema, which yields a noun, as shown in (23).

(23) $\left[ \{a-/e-, ø-\} \left[ x \right]_S \right]_N \rightarrow \left[ [N]_{\text{BODY-PART}} [ɔ/ɛ] [A]_{\text{PHYSICAL PROPERTY}} \right]_S$

$\left[ \{a-/e-, ø-\} \left[ [N]_{\text{BODY-PART}} [ɔ/ɛ] [A]_{\text{PHYSICAL PROPERTY}} \right]_S \right]_N$
The schema in (23) is paired with a specification of the general meaning of the construction, as shown in (24). It states that whatever meaning the whole construction has (SEMq), is true of the entity which possesses the body-part named by the constituent that is indexed ‘i’. It could also be true of any entity that possesses a body-part similar to the one named in the first open slot. In other words, I assume that the attributes named by the nominals (stubbornness, swiftness, strength, etc.) are predicated primarily of the possessor of the body-part in the first open slot. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of the nominal referring to any other entity in the universe of discourse, including non-human entities, as we find with the price of commodities – àbòsðén ‘dearness’.

(24)<[[N]i ♦[A]j [s/E]] ♦[PHYS_PRPT]j] ♦[SEMq predictd of poss. of SEMi]q>

The schema in (24) is a constructional idiom, a multi-word expression that is idiomatic in nature but not completely fixed since one position in the schema is lexically filled whilst other positions are left open (Jackendoff, 1997, 2002).

Taylor (2003, p. 224) observes that constructional idioms are similar to idioms like by and large which exhibit unusual syntax and therefore cannot be generated by regular phrase structure rules. However, PANs are generally very regular, as the discussion of the general properties of PANCs shows. What is somewhat unusual is the assemblage of stringent restrictions on their possible constituents and their partial compositionality.

Taylor further observes that constructional idioms are productive, because different items can fill their open slots. With PANs, the stringent restrictions on the items that fill the open slots means that their productivity is severely restricted. Their productivity is further restricted by competition from the schema for N-A compounding, especially in the Fante dialect of Akan.

The relationship between the constructional idiom and the individual instantiating constructions is aptly captured in the hierarchical lexicon assumed in CxM. The idea of a hierarchical lexicon suggests that there can be ‘intermediate schemas in between the individual words and the most abstract word formation schemas, which express generalizations about subsets of complex words of a certain type’ (Booij, 2007, p. 24). In the hierarchical lexicon, ‘properties of the higher nodes are percolated to lower nodes, unless the lower node has a contradictory specification for the relevant property’ (Booij, 2009a, p. 206). This is the mechanism of default inheritance, by which the specific properties of the instantiating constructions override those of the dominating construction. Thus, the constructions inherit only their non-unique features from the constructional

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7 I use a superscript index where a subscript semantic specification is likely to mask a subscript index.
idiom in (24). This is illustrated in (25) and (26) with àkòkòdúró ‘bravery’ and àsòòdèn ‘stubbornness’, in which we find an overt affix and a null affix respectively represented.

(25) $[[N]_\text{BODY-PART} [θ/e] [A]_\text{PHYS_PRPY}]_{\text{SEM}} \leftrightarrow [\text{SEM}^a \text{ predictd of poss. of SEM}]_{\text{SEM}}$

- $[α-[koko]_{\text{NI}} [ɔ] [duru]_{\text{AJ}}]_{\text{NK}}$ ‘bravery’

(26) $[[N]_\text{BODY-PART} [θ/e] [A]_\text{PHYS_PRPY}]_{\text{SEM}} \leftrightarrow [\text{SEM}^a \text{ predictd of poss. of SEM}]_{\text{SEM}}$

- $[α-[aso]_{\text{NI}} [ɔ] [den]_{\text{AJ}}]_{\text{NK}}$ ‘stubbornness’

As noted above, constructions may inherit properties from their constituents by means of the ‘part of’ relation existing between constructions and their constituents, as illustrated in (27), where the two relations – ‘instantiation’ and ‘part of’ – obtain. The nominal àkòkòdúró is an ‘instantiation’ of the constructional idiom at the top of the tree whilst the lexemes kòkò & dúró form ‘part of’ àkòkòdúró ‘bravery’.

(27) $[[N]_\text{BODY-PART} [θ/e] [A]_\text{PHYS_PRPY}]_{\text{SEM}} \leftrightarrow [\text{SEM}^a \text{ predictd of poss. of SEM}]_{\text{SEM}}$

- $[α-[koko]_{\text{NI}} [ɔ] [dúró]_{\text{AJ}}]_{\text{NK}}$ ‘bravery’

- $[koko]_{\text{N}}$ ‘chest’ $[dúró]_{\text{A}}$ ‘heavy’

The Distribution and Nominal Status of PANs

This section shows that the constructions at issue are nouns. This is clear from their syntactic distribution, which I illustrate with the nominal àhòòfè(ó) ‘beauty’ in (28).

I indicated above that the nominal refers to an attribute of the possessor of the body-part in subject position. However, the nominal may be used as a proper name without a change in form and may undergo further derivation by suffixation, yielding nominals that refer to the possessor of the attribute rather than the attribute per se. For example, the nominal Àhòòfè ‘beauty’ in (28a & 28bii) is the name of a person. Àhòòfè(ó) in (28c), (28d) and (28e) refers to an attribute, but in (28bi), Àhòòfè could refer to an attribute or the possessor of the
attribute. This might be seen as a metonymic extension of an attribute to refer to the possessor of the attribute. However, if we created a context in which (28bi) followed from (28a), then, given the fact that the referent in (28a) is engaged in some movement, the possessor of the attribute interpretation would be favoured.

(28)  a. Subject of the verb (As.)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Àhòɔ̀fɛ́} & \quad \text{bè-bá} & \quad \text{há} & \quad \text{ɔ̀kyéná} \\
\text{Beauty} & \quad \text{FUT-come} & \quad \text{here} & \quad \text{tomorrow}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Beauty (<the beautiful one) will come here tomorrow’

b. Predicate nominal (As.)

i.  Ė̀-yɛ̀ ̀àhòɔ̀fɛ́

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{it-be} & \quad \text{beauty} \\
\text{‘It is beauty’}
\end{align*}
\]

ii.  Mè  diùn dè  ̀àhòɔ̀fɛ́

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{My name be.called Beauty} \\
\text{‘My name is Beauty (<the beautiful one)’}
\end{align*}
\]

c. Object of the verb (Fa.)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Áraba} & \quad \text{wɔ̀} & \quad \text{àhòɔ̀fɛ́} \\
\text{A. be_in_possesion_of beauty} \\
\text{‘Araba has beauty (Araba is beautiful)’}
\end{align*}
\]

d. Possessed element in a possessive construction (Fa.)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ámma} & \quad \text{n} & \quad \text{àhòɔ̀fɛ́} & \quad \text{dà} & \quad \text{èdzì} \\
\text{A. 3SGPOSS beauty lie open} \\
\text{‘Amma’s beauty is evident’}
\end{align*}
\]

e. Focused element in a focus construction (Fa.)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{àhòɔ̀fɛ́} & \quad \text{nà} & \quad \text{5-wò} \\
\text{beauty FM 3SG-have} \\
\text{‘It is beauty she has’}
\end{align*}
\]

The examples in (28) do not bear any derivational affixes (The forms with final /w/ in (28c, d, e) are dialectal variants, not inflectional or derivational). The nominal in (29), however, undergoes further derivation by means of the human identity suffix (-fóɔ́) so that the resultant nominal just refers to the human possessor of the attribute designated by the base àhòɔ́fɛ́.
(29) a. Áraba yè ɔ̀-hòɔ̀fɛ́-fóɔ́ (As.)
Araba be SG-beauty-NMLZ_{[person]}
‘Araba is a beautiful person’

b. ɔ̀-hòɔ̀fɛ́-fóɔ́ nó rè-bá (As.)
SG-beauty-NMLZ_{[person]} DEF PROG-come
‘The beautiful person is coming’

The Akan nominal suffix [-fóɔ́] and its distinctly singular counterpart [-nyí] is attached to only nominal bases to form human nouns and so any form that serves as a base for -fóɔ́- derived nouns, is a noun prima facie (cf. Appah, 2013a, 2013b). Thus, one of the clearest signs of the nominal status of PANs is the fact that they can function as bases for -fóɔ́- derived noun in Akan.

Let us note that the prefix in (29) changes to ɔ́- which marks singularity. Because the prefix a- derives/marks abstract nominals in Akan, this change in the prefix signals a change in the semantic class of the nominal from an abstract noun to a concrete noun. The presence of the human identity suffix calls for this particular prefix in the singular. For this reason, Abakah (2004) has analysed the ɔ…-fóɔ́ sequence as a circumfix. However, that cannot be right because if they formed a circumfix (a single affix), we would expect the two to occur together all the time. But this is not what we find. Either affix may occur alone or in combination with other affixes. Indeed, the plural of ɔ̀-hòɔ̀fɛ́-fóɔ́ (29) is à-hòɔ́fɛ́-fóɔ́, where plurality is marked by the prefix a- but the suffix remains the same. We note that this plural [a-] is different from the abstract nominal prefix [a-] as found in a-hoɔfɛ́ ‘beauty’ in (28).

The distribution of the affix sequence described above fits Fábregas and Scalise’s (2012) characterisation of a process called parasynthesis, which they describe as “the situation where two different affixes – normally a prefix and a suffix – seem to be added simultaneously to the same base” (Fábregas & Scalise, 2012, p. 62). Thus, we may say that the attachment of the affix sequences is a case of parasynthesis rather than circumfixation.

A Tentative Semantic Classification of PANs

Given the semantics of PANs, we may group them into four classes, as shown in (30) – two major classes and two minor ones. The nominals in (30a) express physical attributes of the possessors of the body-parts in the first slots. The second (30b) expresses attitude or human propensity. The third expresses value (30c), while the outlier (30d) expresses emotional disposition.

(30) a. Physical attribute (appearance)
   i. àhòɔ̀fɛ́(v) ‘beauty’
   ii. àhòɔ̀dén ‘strength’
iii. àhòòháré ‘swiftness’ (e.g., of movement)
iv. àhòòmmerévé ‘infirmity/frailty’
v. ànimùònyáím ‘glory’

b. Attitude/habit (Human propensity)
i. àsòòdéñ ‘stubbornness/disobedience’
ii. àsòòmmerévé ‘flexibility/pliability/malleability’
iii. ànièdèñ ‘haughtiness/bravery’
iv. ètsiìmùòdzéñ ‘wickedness’
v. ànisòòhyéw ‘intrepidity’
vi. àkòòdùrò ‘boldness/courage’
vii. ànimùòháré ‘flippancy/frivolity’
ix. àhòòhyáw ‘envy’

I observed above that PANs are generally not very productive and that their limited productivity is linked to the restriction on the kinds of items that can occur in them. This becomes even clearer in this section, as the size of the class reflects the restrictedness of the class of nouns that can fill the first open slot in the schema. Also, the body-parts involved in the formation of the nouns in the various classes seem to be associated with particular sections of the body.

We cannot say very much about the nouns that occur in the two small classes (30c-d), because of their limited numbers. However, regarding the two major classes, we can say that the nouns involved profile slightly different parts of the body with the base changing for members of different classes. For example, for the nouns that express physical attribute (30a), the body-parts involved tend to refer to broad areas of the exterior of the human frame, including hó ‘skin/exterior’ and âní ‘face’. These profiled broad areas of the body also have other organs situated thereon. For example, the profiled body-part âní ‘face’ in ànimùònyáim ‘glory’ carries other body-parts like ànó ‘mouth’ and ànì ‘eye’, which may, on their own, form part of PANs. The body-part nouns involved in the formation of the nominals that are classified as attitude/habit (human propensity) generally profile specific parts of the body, such as ànì ‘eye’ as against ànì ‘face’, tiri-mù ‘inside the head’ (lit. head-in) as against tiri ‘head.’

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It is not totally clear at this stage whether these classes exhibit any more internal semantic coherence (shown by shared semantic properties) beyond the broad categories posited – physical property, attitude or human propensity, value and emotional disposition. It is again not clear to me whether members of the various classes have particular syntactic preferences in terms of adjacency or restriction on what morphological operations they may undergo. For example, although I mentioned above that PANs may undergo further derivation by the suffixation of -fóɔ́, yet this is true of only the members of the two major classes of PANs in (30a-b) but not the two other classes in (30c-d). Further research should reveal additional class-specific properties.

Conclusion

I have discussed a class of Akan nominals that had previously been treated as compounds. I have shown that the nominals have properties, including their partial semantic and formal transparency, that get masked in a straightforward compounding account, but are better accounted for in a constructional approach. I posited a constructional idiom in which the reduced form of the copular, realized as [-ɔ/-ɛ-], is pre-specified as a constructional property.

Before presenting the constructional account, I discussed the properties of the individual constituents as a way of motivating the constructional analysis and showing that the construction at issue is not an island because its properties are motivated by other independently needed constructions in the language – predicate adjective construction and a prefixation schema. This is consistent with Goldberg and van der Auwera’s (2012) perceptive observation that cases of constructions motivating other constructions are indicative of the fact that a given language is a system and not an idiosyncratic list of factoids.

I have noted that the productivity of PANs is affected by the stringent restrictions on the limited number of items that can fill the open slots in the constructional idiom. Another reason for the restricted productivity of PANs is the fact that there is competition between PANs and N-A compounding to nominalize the same set of constituent.

Finally, I have attempted a very course-grained classification of PANs. I hope that further research will reveal more significant patterns that can refine the tentative classification presented here.
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Introducing Nkami: A Forgotten Guang Language and People of Ghana

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Abstract
This paper introduces a group of people and an endangered language called Nkami. I discuss issues concerning the historical, geo-political, religious, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds of the people. Among others, it is shown that Nkami is a South-Guang language spoken by approximately 400 people in a resettlement community in the Afram Plains of Ghana. The overwhelming factor that preserves the language and holds its speakers together is the traditional institution of Afram (deity). Linguistically, Nkami is distinct from other regional languages. The data for the study were extracted from a large corpus collected from a documentation project on the language and people. In addition to introducing Nkami, this study also provides valuable data for future research as well as deepens our knowledge of other Guang and other regional languages.

Keywords: Nkami, Guang languages, Kwa language family, endangered undocumented language, areal-typological linguistic features.

Introduction
The purpose of this article is to introduce to the world of knowledge a group of people and a language called Nkami. The paper discusses issues concerning the historical, geographical, political, religious, demographical, social, economic and linguistic backgrounds of the people. Among other things, it is shown that Nkami is a South-Guang language spoken by about 400 people in a resettlement community, Amankwa (also known as Amankwakrom), in the Afram Plains of the Eastern Region of Ghana. The greatest factor that maintains the language and unites its speakers is the institution of Afram (deity). As expected, Nkami shares in the majority of the areal-typological features of neighbouring languages (e.g. Akan, Ga, Ewe and Guang languages). However, among its unusual typological

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1 This figure does not include those who live in the Nkami diaspora.

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of my article, the editor of the Legon Journal of the Humanities (LJH), the participants of 2017 WACL/AG conference and Charlotte O. Laryea, for their helpful comments and suggestions. To the people of Nkami, this is yours.
features is the fact that a head noun of a relative clause construction is never modified by a definite determiner (cf. Asante and Ma, 2016). It also shares with Akan as being the only two Kwa languages described (at least, as far as I am aware of) that obligatorily employ a resumptive pronoun strategy to mark the default slot of an object NP in focus. However, unlike most Guang (and Kwa) languages which show evidence of stem-controlled rounding harmony in regressive direction, Nkami shows evidence of progressive affix-controlled rounding harmony (cf. Akanlig-Pare & Asante, 2016).

The data for the discussion include observations in Amankwa, the spoken community, and spontaneous spoken and elicited texts, collected from about a hundred speakers of varied backgrounds in a period of one year (2013/2014). Annotation and verification of data were carried out in conjunction with a team of two adult speakers of Nkami, Enoch Akuamoah and Kwaku Ketewa, and several other consultants.

The rest of the paper is divided into two main parts. The first part discusses non-linguistic issues including history and geography; leadership and governance; festivals; land, resources and settler communities; population; education and infrastructure; and economy. The second part concentrates on linguistic issues, where Nkami’s socio-linguistic background, factors that threaten/boost its continuous existence, and existing works and language development. Finally, it provides a typological profile of the general grammatical features of Nkami, and then brings to the fore some of its revealing features that are of cross-linguistic typological and theoretical interests.

Non-linguistic Issues

This part of the paper discusses non-linguistic issues including history and geography; leadership and governance; festivals; land, resources and settler communities; population; education and infrastructure; and economy of the people of Nkami.

History and Geography

The name ‘Nkami’ refers to the language and the people who speak it. Legend has it that the name was derived from the expression ŋkɛɛ mɪ ‘I remained here.’ Thus, due to wars, like other Guang language speaking groups, they had to migrate from down south to settle at several different places before

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2 Portions of this article are taken from a doctoral dissertation which forms part of a larger documentation project on Nkami. The documentation project was sponsored by the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP), SOAS (grant: IGS0228).

3 Much of the information provided here is common knowledge shared by the majority of the ordinary people of Nkami. I am, however, indebted to Nei Ama Asiedua I, Nei Ama Aseidua II, Na النبي Kwasi Anto, among others, for their beautiful narrations.
they finally landed at Nkami Dīdalɔ ‘Old Nkami’. It is said that when they finally arrived there, the chief priest declared: ŋkɛɛ mɪ, meaning, ‘this is my (our) last point, I (we) have nowhere to go again.’ Prior to that, the people of Nkami believe that, together with other Guang groups, they had originated from Kenya as one people.4 In Ghana, the Nkamis first settled at a place called Nyanoase, which is close to Nsawam in the Eastern Region. At Nyanoase, they lived under the leadership of a chief called Sakyi, after whom a town called Sakyikrom in the Eastern Region, was later named. Presently, the people have Amankwa (also known as Amankwakrom) as their home of abode. Before 1964, they lived on some archipelagoes, close to Kpando and Nkonya, most of which have been submerged by the Volta Lake.5 At that time, four communities made up the Nkami State, i.e. Nkami Dīdalɔ ‘Old Nkami’. The four communities were Nkami (capital), Bivitàwé, (O)Hetekuase and Ėbosomano. The Google map in the next page gives a rough indication of the locations of Nkami Dīdalɔ on the Volta Lake and their present abode, Amankwa.

(1) A Google map indicating the previous and present locations of Nkamis

Key:

- Nkami (capital)
- Bivitàwé
- (O)Hetekuase
- Ėbosomano
- Ėbosom River

The location of Nkami Dīdalɔ (indicated by the oval geometrical figures) covered the region on the Volta Lake, close to Kpando to up north close to Nkonya and the adjoining river to the left called Ėbosom.

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4 This historical account appears to be quite similar to that of other Guang speakers (cf. Ackom, 2005), who generally claim to have originated from Western Sudan around the White Nile. It seems that these accounts provide a clue to why the Guang languages have a (decayed) noun class system akin to that of the Eastern African languages. Any future comparative work that critically examines the linguistic features of the two language groups, Guang and Bantu, may be necessary.

5 The Volta Lake is the largest man-made lake in the world by surface area, and the third largest artificial lake worldwide in terms of volume (cf. Gyau-Boakye, 2001).
In order to give way for the construction of the Volta Lake, in 1964 the Nkrumah government resettled them at Amankwa, which is about eight kilometers away from the lake but about 30 kilometers away from their original settlement, Nkami Didiako. Apart from Amankwa, there is a sizeable number of Nkamis living in nearby communities such as Asikasu, Donkorkrom, Adeembra, Asempanaye, Abomasarefo, Samanhyia and Apesika.

Administratively, the Nkamis belong to the Kwahu North District and the Afram Plains North Constituency, with Donkorkrom as its head. The Nkamis are bounded on the south and west by the Afram River, in the north by the Ṣbosom River, and on the east by the Volta Lake. Beyond the water bodies, they are bounded in the west by the Kwahu, on the east by the Ewes (Kpandos) and Nkonyas, on the south by the Anums, and on the north by the people of Akloso and Bono. The geographical reference for Amankwa, their current settlement, is Latitude 7°03’09.24 and Longitude 01°32.22 (Google Earth).

**Leadership and Governance**

Nkami has three major traditional leaders: *Nkami Bleɲaw* ‘paramount chief’, *Ɛhima* ‘queen’, and *Aframhɪmaa* ‘wife of Afram’. The *Nkami Bleɲaw* doubles as the *Ɛmanhene* ‘paramount chief’ of Kwahu Traditional Area in the several islands around the eastern border of Kwahu. Before the Nkamis settled at Nkami Didiako ‘Old Nkami’, the land belonged to the Kwahu. However, as a result of their successful exploits in past wars and good relationship with the Kwahu, an agreement was reached between the two groups for the people of Nkami to represent the Kwahu across their eastern border. As a result of that pact, the *Nkami Bleɲaw* assumed the overlordship of Kwahu’s eastern territory. It is reported that in order to seal the pact, some Nkami women, mostly royals, were married to some Kwahus in some Kwahu traditional states such as Tafo, Obomeng, Asaaka and Abetifi. In view of that, and in order to reunite with their descendants from the diaspora to help in the development of Nkami, in recent times, some of these royal descendants have been installed as *Nkami Bleɲaw* ‘paramount chiefs’. Precisely, all the last three successive paramount chiefs, Okuntun Diawuo, Agyepong Messah and Okuntun Sakyi, have come from their royal descendants in Kwahu. Unlike other Guang groups such as Krakyi, Nkonya, Efutu, Awutu, and Gonja, the Nkamis practise the matrilineal system of inheritance. As with Akans, nephews inherit and ascend the thrones of their uncles when the latter are no more. Like many other cultures of Ghana, the paramount chief of Nkami has other sub-chiefs who support him to lead his people. These include the *Krontihɪnɪ, Akwamuhɪnɪ, Ṣfɪami, Dʒaasɪhɪnɪ, Adɪʃɪɛhɪnɪ, Twafʊhɪnɪ, Benkumhɪnɪ, Barimhɪnɪ, Nifahɪnɪ, Mmrantɪɛhɪnɪ* (*Asafʊatʃɛ*), etc.

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6 This appears to be one of the many things that the Nkamis have ‘borrowed’ from the Akans.

7 All these chieftaincy titles are likely loans from Akan, a dominant language and culture in Ghana. Synchronically, I consider them as Nkami words that is why I represent them in Nkami orthography, and not in Akan.
The *Nkami Ohmaa* ‘queen’ is revered as the ‘mother’ of the paramount chief, and she nominates the heir to his throne. She serves as an adviser to the paramount chief and spearheads the development of women and children in the community.

The *Aframhima*, ‘wife of Afram’, is the spiritual leader of Nkami. Afram is the name of both a river and a powerful deity/shrine in Ghana. As the spiritual wife of Afram, the *Aframhima* heads the Afram shrine. Unlike the *Nkami Bleɲaw* and *Ohmaa*, the selection of the *Aframhima* is not done by mortals; *Naaɲimi Afram*, ‘Afram deity’, does it by himself. In a form of a spirit, *Naaɲimi* Afram pokes whoever he decides on as his wife. Before installation, the designated woman is later taken through some traditional rites and customs upon the death of a sitting *Aframhima*. In real life, the *Aframhima* can marry another man after the performance of some rituals. All meetings between the two must be sanctioned spiritually and ritually. Like the *Bleɲaw*, the *Aframhima* also has a group of elders who help her to carry out the activities associated with her position. The most authoritative is the chief priest, who is responsible for carrying out all the routine activities at the shrine. It is noteworthy that the language for the worship and service of Afram is strictly Nkami.

**Festivals**

Like the Akans, the Nkamis celebrate the *Akwasida* festival which comes off every forty days. In between the *Akwasida*, there are other minor celebrations such as *Wukuda*, *BmadaDapaa* and *Fofie*. Besides these, there is a bigger festival called *Odʒodʒi* ‘yam-eating’, which is normally held annually in the month of September. The significance of *Odʒodʒi* is to thank *Naaɲimi* Afram ‘Afram deity’ for providing them with good harvest, and to offer him reverence by allowing him to have the first bite of the new harvest. As a result, before the *Odʒodʒi* is celebrated, all Nkamis are forbidden to eat newly harvested yams. During the period, the *Aframhima* sits in a palanquin, moving to-and-fro Amankwa and the Afram River. There are several mysteries and taboos surrounding the *Odʒodʒi* festival. Among other things, it is said that it rains all day anytime *Odʒodʒi* is celebrated. During the celebration of *Odʒodʒi*, only women are permitted to play a particular type of drums called Afram drums, as any man who dares to play them develops hernia. Secondly, men can dance to the drums but can only do so by dancing backwards, not forwards. Moreover, during the matching to-and-fro Amankwa and the Afram River, anyone who slips and drops to the ground does not live to see the following *Odʒodʒi* festival. When the queen sits in the palanquin, no one is permitted to take photographs of her. People who act contrarily usually receive one or more of the following as punishment: (i) the image of *Aframhima* never appears, (ii) the camera could get damaged, and (iii) the photographer could suffer serious consequences such as illnesses or even death.

**Land, Resources and Settler Communities**

As the occupant of the Kwahu Mponoa stool, Nkami has large resources and several settler communities within and around the Volta Lake to the north of the Òbosom River, and to the south of Anum. There are at least thirty four (34) settler communities that come under Nkami’s authority. These communities pay timely homage to them by offering cattle, sheep, drinks, etc. All 34 settler communities are listed below with some briefs about them. The list is categorised into four major groups in the following order: (a) inland settler communities, (b) settler communities around the bank of the Volta Lake, (c) settler communities on the Volta Lake (island communities), and (d) settler communities around the Òbosom River and close to the borders of the Brong Ahafo Region.

A. Inland Communities: The inland communities total 4 comprising:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Asikasu</td>
<td>It is close to Donkorkrom, the district capital. There are pockets of Nkami speakers in Asikasu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Apesika I</td>
<td>It is also known as Seebia Akura. It is close to Abomasarefo (Kwahu dominated town). There are a few Nkami speakers there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Asɛmpanaye</td>
<td>It comes after Amankwa on the main Amankwa-Donkorkrom road. The occupants are mainly Dagaabas, originally from the Upper West, with a handful of Nkamis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Apiabra</td>
<td>It comes after Asɛmpanaye on the main Amankwa-Donkorkrom road. The Asafoatie of Nkami, Naanini Anokye Kimpo, doubles as the chief of Apiabra.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Around the bank of the Volta Lake: There are a total of seventeen settler communities constituting this group. They are mainly people who speak Ewe (Gbe)-related languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Amankwa Tornu</td>
<td>It is close to Amankwa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Agɔdeke</td>
<td>It is close to Teacher Korpe and Wɔfa Korpe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*8 I am indebted to Wɔfa Akuamoah, one of my language consultants, for leading the research and gathering most of the data here.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iii</td>
<td>Nyuinyui I</td>
<td>It is close to Nyuinyui II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv</td>
<td>Nyuinyui II</td>
<td>It is close to Agɔđɛkɛ and Nyuinyui I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v</td>
<td>Bubu</td>
<td>It is close to Andi Korpe and Alɛkpo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi</td>
<td>Andi Korpe</td>
<td>It is close to Alɛkpo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii</td>
<td>Agɔňɔmey</td>
<td>It is on the north of Bubu, and close to Andi Korpe and Alɛkpo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii</td>
<td>Zikpo</td>
<td>It is close to Nyuinyui I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix</td>
<td>Teacher Korpe</td>
<td>It is close to Agɔđɛkɛ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>Wɔfa Korpe</td>
<td>It is close to Agɔđɛkɛ.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xi</td>
<td>Didiada</td>
<td>It is close to Wɔfa Korpe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xii</td>
<td>Alɛkpo</td>
<td>It is close to Bubu. Alɛkpo is under the tutelage of the Twafőhĩn of Nkami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiii</td>
<td>Salepe</td>
<td>It is close to Meikpor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiv</td>
<td>Awonakorfe</td>
<td>It is close to Salepe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xv</td>
<td>Meikpor</td>
<td>It is close to Salepe, Amankwa and Kpala Island.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xvi</td>
<td>Agege</td>
<td>It is close to Meikpor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xvii</td>
<td>Bɔkina</td>
<td>It is close to Agege</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Island communities: These communities are located on some islands on the Volta Lake. They are fourteen in number and they include remnants of two of the four Old Nkami towns, Nkami and Bɛwɔbɛw. The current occupants are mainly Ewe (Gbe)-related speakers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Old Preda</td>
<td>It is the original location of today’s residents of Preda in Amankwa (see map 2 below).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii.</td>
<td>Old Biebiwe</td>
<td>It is the location of a former traditional state of Nkami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii.</td>
<td>Old Nkami</td>
<td>It is the location of the former capital state of Nkami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv.</td>
<td>Kpöve</td>
<td>It is close to Nkonya Mangoase/Dafɔ. It is under the tutelage of the Krontihim of Nkami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v.</td>
<td>Basampa</td>
<td>It is close to Old Nkami.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi.</td>
<td>Agyei Boso</td>
<td>It is also known as Agyei Bosom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii.</td>
<td>Kpala</td>
<td>It is close to Preda and Agyei Boso.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viii.</td>
<td>Akakpo</td>
<td>It is close to Kpala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ix.</td>
<td>Anakpokpo</td>
<td>It is close to Akakpo and Kpala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x.</td>
<td>Tjetjekpo</td>
<td>It is on the same island as Djakpata and Drẹnle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xi.</td>
<td>Drẹnle</td>
<td>It is on the same island as Djakpata and Tjetjekpo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xii.</td>
<td>Djakpata</td>
<td>It is on the same island as Drẹnle and Tjetjekpo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiii.</td>
<td>Akpagyakpo</td>
<td>It is close to Djakpata.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiv.</td>
<td>Alemanɔ</td>
<td>It is close to Akpagyakpo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Around the Obosom River: There is only one settler community in this group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i.</td>
<td>Apesika II</td>
<td>It is close to the border of the Brong Ahafo Region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There are a few Nkami speakers there.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Population

Judging from the fact that Nkami occupies the Kwahu Mponoa throne coupled with its large size of land resources, it should not be difficult to predict that Nkami had, at least, some few thousands of people in the past. However, a census conducted by my team (consisting of the two consultants and I) on the field indicates that there are less than four hundred\(^9\) Nkamis living currently in Amankwa,\(^{10}\) though there are about twice or more of them living in neighbouring communities and in the diaspora, especially Accra, Kumasi and Nkawkaw. It is believed that their evacuation from Nkami Didielɔ on the Volta Lake caused them to lose their belongings, farms and livelihoods, and that might have accounted for their penchant for economic migration into the cities. The good thing, however, is that the majority of them still keep in touch with their families back home. Many of them frequently visit home, especially during Odʒodʒi ‘yam festival’, funerals, Christmas and Easter.

Education and Infrastructure

Nkami can be said to be one of the well-endowed non-urban communities in Ghana in terms of availability of and accessibility to educational facilities. It has structures that accommodate pupils from pre-school to high (technical) school level. Its technical school, Amankwakrom Fisheries, Agricultural and Technical Institute (AFATI), is reported to have been earmarked by the Nkrumah government to be one of the hubs of technical and agricultural training at the high school level in Ghana. Unfortunately, owing to lack of commitment by successive governments, that dream is yet to be realized. Because of the availability of educational facilities in the community, most Nkamis have been to school and have some level of formal education. The community has produced a handful of trained teachers, and these teachers represent the class of people who have attained the highest level of education in the community. Unfortunately, however, like many other non-urban domains in Ghana, education appears to be on the decline in Nkami. For instance, all the trained teachers of Nkami are over 50 years, and presently, very few children advance to the senior high school while the majority of them are unable to complete junior high school. The disparity between the education of girls and boys is conspicuously witnessed in Nkami. For instance, none of the trained teachers is a female and very few girls go beyond the upper primary level\(^{11}\)

\(^9\) This figure does not support estimates from others such as SIL, Ethnologue, who put it around 7000, and describe the Nkami’s status as vigorous.

\(^{10}\) Unfortunately, time did not permit the author to analyse the detailed demographic information gathered from the census.

\(^{11}\) The reason for this is not readily known though it is likely that, as in many other cultures of Ghana, the people of Nkami placed/place more emphasis on men’s formal education than on women’s. The high rate of teenage pregnancy in the community could also be a factor.
Since the mid-2000’s, the community has had access to electricity. There are about three boreholes in addition to a locally dug dam, named Ṣhimi Abura, that provide water to the about 3000 inhabitants of Amankwa. The road from the district capital, Donkorkrom, to Nkami and many parts in the district is not asphalted.

Economy

The main economic activity in Nkami is agriculture. Cassava and yam are the two major crops they invest in. They also do some maize, groundnut and beans farming. Goats, sheep and pigs are generally reared on free-range basis. As in many areas of Ghana, the greater majority of Nkami farmers practice subsistence farming. Gari-making is also a major business in Amankwa.

Linguistic Issues

The remaining part of the paper concentrates on linguistic issues. It establishes the linguo-genetic classification by positing that the language belongs to the southern group of the Guang languages. Secondly, it looks at Nkami’s peculiar socio-linguistic situation as a language spoken in a resettlement community of multiple languages. It also discusses some factors that threaten/boost its continuous existence, in addition to some existing works and language development. Finally, it provides a typological profile of the general grammatical features of Nkami, and then brings to the fore some of the most prominent issues of Nkami that are of cross-linguistic typological and theoretical interests.

Linguo-genetic Classification of Nkami

The genetic and linguistic classification of Nkami has undergone some conjecturing or speculation until Asante (2016a) finally confirmed it through research. For instance, in his trip report to the Afram Plains in 2005, Peacock guessed that Nkami might be a North Guang language. Thus, he notes that “no language data was collected, but I would guess that Nkami is a Northern Guang language, closer to Nkonya than Chumburung, Kaakye or Gikyode” (Peacock, n. d., p. 2). Beyond that, the Nkami people have always considered themselves a group that belongs to the Guang language family. Some other Guang speakers such as Nkonya and Gwa (Anum) speakers I interacted with also corroborated this belief. Having worked on the language for a while, I was able to confirm their belief. Thus, with my working language competence in Nkami now, I am able to make some meaning, however insignificant, from speakers of other Guang languages or, at least, I can determine who is either or not speaking a Guang language. To cement this belief, my team undertook a miniature study to compare Nkami and some neighbouring languages: Ewe, Akan, Nkonya and...
Anum (the last two are also Guang languages). The results firmly indicated a strong relation between Nkami and the other Guang languages. It revealed that Nkami is closest to Nkonya, closer to Anum, less close to Akan, and least close to Ewe. See example (2) for some cognates showing the similarity between Nkami and some other Guang languages.

(2) Some cognates of Nkami and some other Guang Languages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Gonja</th>
<th>Chumburung</th>
<th>Navuri</th>
<th>Gwa (Boso)</th>
<th>Nkonya</th>
<th>Nkami</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>kò-nò</td>
<td>ká-nò</td>
<td>gò-nò</td>
<td>áŋo</td>
<td>ñh-ñò</td>
<td>ñ-nò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>ku-mú</td>
<td>ku-ŋú</td>
<td>gu-mú</td>
<td>ŋú</td>
<td>ŋwú</td>
<td>e-ŋú</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breast</td>
<td>kí-ŋápö</td>
<td>kí-ŋápö</td>
<td>gi-ŋápö</td>
<td>áho</td>
<td>ḃápö</td>
<td>ḃagô</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
<td>dʒì</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow</td>
<td>dāŋ</td>
<td>dāŋ</td>
<td>dāŋ</td>
<td>de</td>
<td>dā</td>
<td>dā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be ill</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die</td>
<td>wu</td>
<td>wū</td>
<td>wū</td>
<td>wʊ</td>
<td>wʊ</td>
<td>wʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wet</td>
<td>pɔ̄</td>
<td>pɔ̄</td>
<td>pɔ̄</td>
<td>hɔle</td>
<td>fɔ̄</td>
<td>fɔ̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>kà-tʃé</td>
<td>ka-ke</td>
<td>gà-ke</td>
<td>nʃí</td>
<td>nké</td>
<td>aká/atʃé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sore</td>
<td>ɛ-lò</td>
<td>lò</td>
<td>ɔ-lò</td>
<td>alŋe</td>
<td>ɔ-lò</td>
<td>ɛ-lò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>ɛ-fɔ̄</td>
<td>ɔ-fɔ̄</td>
<td>ɔ-fɔ̄</td>
<td>_almost</td>
<td>ɔ-fɔ̄</td>
<td>ɔ-fɔ̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thief</td>
<td>o-yu</td>
<td>o-yú</td>
<td>o-yú</td>
<td>áyuû</td>
<td>o-yu</td>
<td>o-yû</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>dʒisà</td>
<td>kí-dʒisè</td>
<td>dʒisà</td>
<td>dʒibá</td>
<td>dʒɔpí</td>
<td>e-dʒe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You (sg.)</td>
<td>fù</td>
<td>fù</td>
<td>fù</td>
<td>wú</td>
<td>fɔ̄</td>
<td>wo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recording can be accessed online from Nkami’s collections at ELAR of Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP), SOAS, via the title “nkami_languagecomparison_12041”.

With the exception of the Nkonya and Nkami’s cognates which are mine, and those of Gwa (Boso) which are from Michael Obiri Yeboah, all the others are taken from Snider (1989a).
Thus, there is no doubt at all that Nkami is a Guang language. Any speaker or linguist familiar with Guang languages will easily make this fact out. See in (3) a map indicating the location of Nkami in relation to other Guang languages.

(3) A map showing the present location of Nkami in relation to other Guang Languages
Nkami has no distinct dialects though it is possible that it had in the past when they (the Nkamis) lived on the four different archipelagoes in Nkami Dídalo ‘Old Nkami’. For instance, synchronically there are a few variations in the realization of some forms such as the marking of the habitual aspect when the subject of a clause is the 1PL pronoun, which some speakers attribute to former geographical associations. Thus, the clause ‘we (habitually) dance’ may be realized as either of the following:

(4)  a. **anɪ-tʃa**  
     1PL-HAB.dance  
     ‘We (habitually) dance.’

     b. **anɪ-ɔɔ-tʃa**  
     1PL-HAB.dance  
     ‘We (habitually) dance.’

A critical observation of the speech of speakers, however, shows that neither of the two realizations is exclusive to any particular group.

**Is Nkami a North or South-Guang Language?**

Having settled on Nkami’s classification as a Guang language, I set myself the task of determining which of the two Guang groups Nkami belongs to. Thus, does Nkami belong to the North-Guang division including Gonja, Chumburung, Krachi (Kaakyi), Gichode, Nawuri, etc.; or the South-Guang division including Larteh, Cherepong, Gwa (Anum/Boso), Awutu, Efutu, Nkonya, etc.? I posit that Nkami belongs to the South-Guang group based on two parameters, linguistic and geographical closeness.

Geographical location has been one of the key factors for classifying languages into language families, since speakers of languages or dialects found spatially close to each other usually tend to show more similarities in terms of their linguistic properties than those found farther apart. On this note, a careful look at the position of Nkami Dídalo ‘Old Nkami’ in (1) and Amankwa ‘New Nkami’ in (3) seems to indicate that Nkami is geographically closer to the South-Guang languages than the North-Guang languages. Consequently, it may not be wrong to predict that Nkami is more likely to belong to the South-Guang division than the North-Guang division.

More instructively, in examining the literature on Guang languages, one notes that there are six major linguistic innovations/features that have been used to distinguish the North-Guang languages from the South-Guang languages (cf. Stewart, 1970; Reneike, 1972; Snider, 1989a, 1989b, Snider, 1990a, 1990b; Asante, 2009). As we shall shortly observe, Nkami behaves similarly to the South-Guang languages in all six innovations/features. The innovations/features are grouped into two: (i) four innovations/features that unite the North-Guang languages, and (ii) two innovations/features that unite the South-Guang languages.
languages. We will start with the former and continue with the latter. After each innovation, examples are given to indicate that Nkami belongs to the South-Guang but not the North-Guang group.

**Features that Unite the North-Guang Languages**

First, the North-Guang languages do not have phonemic /ĩ/ and /ʊ̃/ due to vowel mergers in Proto-Tano (cf. Stewart, 1970; Snider, 1989a, b, 1999a). However, as the examples in (5) show, /ĩ/ and /ʊ̃/ are phonemic in Nkami and so, based on this parameter, Nkami is distinct from the North-Guang group.

(5) Non-nasal Nasal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bo</th>
<th>‘be.LOC/have’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bõ</td>
<td>‘crow, smell/sniff’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efi</td>
<td>‘leaf, bush, skin/husk’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>efi</td>
<td>‘rubbish, dirt’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, the alveolar nasal /n/ of Proto-Guang (PG) is realized as a palatal nasal /ɲ/ when it precedes front high vowels in the North-Guang languages (cf. Snider, 1990a). This is schematised as:

(6) PG *n → ɲ (North-Guang)

\[\begin{array}{c}
+\text{Nasal} \\
+\text{Cons} \\
-\text{High} \\
\end{array} \rightarrow [\text{+High}] / ____ i\]

However, synchronically Nkami has several words that have front high vowels following the alveolar nasal consonant, as (7) exemplifies.

(7) ni ‘move’ nina ‘cook’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ni</th>
<th>‘this.is, clausal linker’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nani</td>
<td>‘walk’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bim</td>
<td>‘be.cooked, be.near’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bani</td>
<td>‘to acquire something for free’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here too, Nkami does not behave like the North-Guang languages.

Thirdly, Snider (1990a) observes that the post-coda voiceless velar stop /k/ in Proto-Guang has totally assimilated to a preceding velar nasal in the North-Guang languages, as (8) schematises.

(8) \( \text{PG} *\eta k \rightarrow \eta \eta \) (North-Guang)

\[
\begin{align*}
&{+}\text{Back} \\
&{+}\text{Cons} \\
&{-}\text{Nasal}
\end{align*}
\rightarrow \ [+\text{Nasal}] / [+\text{Nasal}] __
\]

However, as exemplified in (9), there are many Nkami words that show the sequence of /ŋ/ and /k/. As a result, Nkami does not also share this innovation with the North-Guang languages.

(9) \( \eta k\text{ami} \) ‘Nkami’
\( \eta k\text{ila} \) ‘shin’,
\( \eta k\text{a} \) ‘afternoon greeting’
\( \eta k\text{ò} \) ‘different’
\( \eta k\text{ita} \) ‘light soup’
\( \eta k\text{lèo} \) ‘beside’

Fourthly, the voiceless velar stop /k/ has become approximant intervocalically in the North-Guang languages (Snider, 1990a), as (10) illustrates.

(10) \( \text{PG} *k \rightarrow w \) (North-Guang)

\[
\begin{align*}
&{+}\text{Back} \\
&{-}\text{Cont} \\
&{-}\text{Nasal}
\end{align*}
\rightarrow \ [+\text{Cont}] / V __ V
\]

However, as we find in (11), Nkami has several words that have the voiceless velar stop /k/ occurring between two vowels. Consequently, Nkami does not share this innovation as well with the North-Guang languages.

(11) \( \text{òkisi} \) ‘god’
\( \text{akosi} \) ‘yam mound’
\( \text{ak\text{toa}} \) ‘groundnut’
\( \text{òka} \) ‘wife’
\( \text{nsòkò} \) ‘chewing stick’
\( \text{òkolì} \) ‘one’

Thus far, we have seen that Nkami does not share any of the four innovations that unite the North-Guang languages. Now, we turn to the two innovations uniting the South-Guang languages.
Features that Unite the South-Guang Languages

One of the prominent features that separates the two groups is that whereas the South-Guang languages drop off the initial $K$ of some nominals beginning with $KV$ nominal prefixes, the North-Guang languages do not (cf. Reneike, 1972). This is illustrated in (12).

(12) Mouth Head
PG *kɔ-nɔ̃ *ku-ŋũ
Gonja kɔ-nɔ̃ ku-mũ
Chumburung kɔ-nɔ̃ ku-ŋũ
Krachi ka-nɔ̃ ku-mũ North-Guang
Gichode gɔ-nɔ̃ gu-mũ
Nawuri gɔ-nɔ̃ gu-mũ

Larteh a-nɔ̃ ø-ŋwũ
Cherepong a-nɔ̃ ø-ŋwũ
Gwa a-nɔ̃ ø-ŋwũ
Awutu a-nɔ̃ e-nũ South-Guang
Efutu a-nɔ̃ ø-nũo
Nkonya\(^{14}\) ø-nɔ̃ e-ŋwũ
Nkami ø-nɔ̃ e-ŋũ

\(^{14}\) Snider (1989a, p. 117) places Nkonya in the North-Guang group. However, I have here placed it in the South-Guang because it is adequately shown in Asante (2009) that Nkonya is closer to the latter than the former. Nkami’s insertion is also mine.

Thus, whereas all the proposed North-Guang languages maintain the $KV$ nominal prefixal system, all the South-Guang languages elide the $K$ and retain only the $V$. As we observe from Nkami’s cognates, both ønɔ̃ ‘mouth’ and eŋũ ‘head’ have their $K$ deleted while retaining only the $V$. Thus, Nkami behaves like the South-Guang languages.
Lastly, one of the features Snider (1989a, 1990a) assigns to the North-South Guang division is that whereas the North-Guang languages maintain their \(VN\) (vowel-nasal consonant) forms from Proto-Guang, the South-Guang languages do not. In the South-Guang languages the final \(N\) has been elided. However, before deletion, its nasal feature was transferred to the preceding \(V\).\(^{15}\) This is exemplified in (13).

(13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bite</td>
<td>*(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonja</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chumburung</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krachi</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gichode</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawuri</td>
<td>(\text{duŋ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larteh</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherepong</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwa</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awutu</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efutu</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkonya</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkami</td>
<td>(\text{dũ})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at this innovation too, one observes that Nkami behaves similarly to the South-Guang languages since it has also transferred the nasal quality from \(N\) to \(V\) in \(VN\) forms.

In sum, we have seen from the foregoing that Nkami shares with the South-Guang languages in all six linguistic features that are used to categorise the Guang languages into North and South divisions. This strong empirical evidence gives substance to the position that Nkami should be placed in the South-Guang group. The tree below provides a detailed genetic classification of Nkami.

\(^{15}\) Presently, the nasalised \(V\) is phonemic in the South-Guang languages.

(14) A tree representing the classification of Nkami’s language family

Niger Congo
  ↓
Atlantic Congo
  ↓
Volta Congo
  ↓
Kwa
  ↓
Nyo
  ↓
Proto Tano
  ↓
Guang

North Guang:
  Gonja, Chumburung, Krachi, Gichode, Nawuri, etc.

South Guang:
  Nkami, Larteh, Cherepong, Gwa, Awutu, Efutu, Nkonya, etc.

This notwithstanding, following Asante (2009), I propose that future work that thoroughly looks at the whole classification of the Guang languages may be necessary because of the following two reasons. First, as far as I am aware, no single work, besides this, assembles more than four linguistic resources to support the North-South Guang classification. For instance, in an attempt to justify the North-Guang group, as opposed to the South-Guang group, Snider (1990a) notes the following:

Among the innovations discussed are three which support the genetic unity of the North Guang branch. Until the present, the validity of claims which support the existence of this node has rested upon only a single innovation, i.e., that first proposed in Stewart (1970) and confirmed by Snider (1989b). This greatly strengthens, then, the claims for the North Guang branch. (p. 37)

Thus, by implication, if he (Snider) had been successful in his project, then, the validity of claims for the unity of the North-Guang languages, as opposed to the South-Guang languages, would have increased to four from the initial one from Stewart (1970). Thus, relying on just six linguistic resources to justify the classification of a major language family into two groups may be inadequate.
Secondly, a critical look at the evidence adduced above for the classification also shows that all six linguistic features are phonologically related, i.e. they involve either sound change or deletion. Since language is not all about sounds (phonology), a more comprehensive study that expands on the phonological differences and also looks at other variations pertaining to other aspects of the grammar, e.g. morphological, syntactic and semantic variations, of the Guang languages would be appropriate.

**Socio-linguistic Background**

The socio-linguistic situation of Nkami is quite interesting. As mentioned before, the Nkamis were resettled in Amankwa in order to make way for the construction of the Volta Lake. And as common with most resettlement communities, Nkamis do not live in Amankwa alone. In fact, Amankwa (Amankwakrom) was named after a Kwahu\(^{16}\) hunter by name Amankwa, who first settled in the area. Thus, before the resettlement, there were a number of Kwahus living in Amankwa. Apart from the Kwahus, several other different groups also live in Amankwa. Notable sub-communities in Amankwa are Agbelitime (Ewe-related speakers), Bakpa (Ewe-related speakers), Asabi (Anum/Gwa speakers), Sodzi (Ewe-related speakers), Preda (speakers of Northern languages including Gruma, Chamba, Sisaale, Kotokoli), Kyeiase (Kwahu speakers), Sakadaa (Ewe-related speakers), Dadiase (Ewe-related speakers), and Old Town/Zongo (speakers of Northern languages). Four different sub-communities make up the Nkami spoken community within Amankwa: Nkami, Bɛwɛwɛ, Ɛbosomano and Nkami New Town.

The sketched maps (15) and (16) in the next two pages respectively depict the different designated sub-communities within Amankwa and the languages spoken by their inhabitants.

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\(^{16}\) Kwahu is the name of a dialect of Akan (Kwa, Niger Congo) and the people who speak it.
A map showing the location of the different ethnic groups in Amankwa.
A map showing the location of speakers of the different languages in Amankwa.
It must be noted that though the locations of all these sub-communities are well designated, obviously, in reality due to factors such as free movement, intermarriage, and economic need, each sub-community has occupants that originate from other ethnic groups.

In terms of population, the speakers of Ewe (Gbe)-related languages constitute the largest group followed by the Nkamis. The population of the Ewes is about twice that of the Nkamis. After the Nkamis come the Asabis (Anums), the Northern groups and the Akans.

More crucially, as a result of the large population of Ewes in Amankwa and within the Afram Plains, the proximity of the Afram Plains and the Volta Region, the economic might of Ewes in the Afram Plains, especially in trade, fishing and education, and intermarriages between Ewes and Nkamis, almost every adult Nkami gets to speak Ewe. Some Nkamis speak Anum and Nkonya languages too because of intermarriages as well as their cultural, linguistic and geographical affinities. Furthermore, presently the majority of young Nkamis first acquire Akan before they acquire their own language. This is probably so because of the strong historical relations between them and the Akans, specifically the Kwahus.

In fact, many Nkami speakers will identify themselves as Kwahus due to the fact that their grandmothers or great grandmothers were married to Kwahus (refer to the pages above on historical relations). Moreover, their resettlement from Old Nkami to Amankwa in 1964 appears to have accentuated the situation. Unlike Amankwa, where they share the same community with people from different language groups, in Old Nkami they lived alone as one Nkami nation though they were always in contact with other ethnic groups through trade, fishing and wars, among others.17 Here, it is fair to note that it is not only Nkami speakers who learn to speak other languages: some members of other ethnic groups also acquire Nkami. Thus, it is possible to find a number of people from almost all the identifiable ethnic groups in Amankwa who are competent in Nkami somehow. Generally, however, non-Nkamis may pick ‘some’ Nkami when they marry or befriend them, or live within the Nkami designated sub-communities for a long period. One of such people is Agbo, an Ewe corn miller in Amankwa, who picked Nkami from his Nkami close friends he attended elementary school with.18

Factors that Threaten Nkami’s Continuous Existence

The first factor that threatens the continuous existence of Nkami is the fact that the Nkami people live in a small community with speakers of other dominant communities. Thus, unlike Nkami Dìdalɔ where they lived alone as one Nkami nation, in Amankwa they share the same small space with other dominant groups, particularly the Akans and Ewes. In this way, Nkami competes with the other

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17 See the next section for some factors that threaten Nkami’s continuous existence.
18 A video recording of an interview the researcher had with Agbo in Nkami titled “nkami_foreignersspeaknkami_agbo_310714” can be accessed online from Nkami’s collections at ELAR, SOAS.
dominant languages for usage and this has forced it to be mainly used in domestic settings.

Relatedly, because of the peculiar socio-linguistic setting of the speakers of Nkami, intermarriages between Nkamis and speakers of dominant communities are very common in Amankwa. In fact, it appears that in every home there are one or more people who have spouses from other ethnic groups. Generally, the risk of losing Nkami by children is higher when intermarriages are contracted within members of the dominant language communities and vice-versa. Usually, such children identify more with the dominant language group. It appears to me, therefore, that the question of who is an Nkami, especially for children of intermarriages, largely depends on where they reside with their families. If blood was the only means to determine the linguo-ethnic identity of an individual, then, there may be no single individual now who is a ‘true’ Nkami. Not only is the level of intermarriages high, but they have lived with it for a very long period. In fact, the oldest man in Nkami now, Naarı́m Kwasi Anto, the Barimhımı of Nkami (over 100 years), is a product of intermarriage. I believe he, like others, considers himself an Nkami largely because he lived in Nkami.19

Further, the current status of the language which renders it a domestic language and failure to use it as a medium of instruction or a subject taught at school is also a major threat. High levels of economic migration to the cities due to lack of interest in agricultural activities by the youth and the inadequacy of other economic activities in the area are also another challenge to the survival of Nkami. The vast majority of children of these migrants do not acquire the Nkami language.

Another factor is the unwillingness of many parents, even in Amankwa, to pass on Nkami to their young ones. The common reasons for their use of Ewe or Akan, instead of Nkami, as the medium of communication with their children often boil down to socio-economic considerations: that their children would be better off socially and economically speaking the dominant languages than Nkami.

Factors that Boost Nkami’s Continuous Existence

The first factor that holds the Nkami people together and preserves their language is the institution of Afram (Afram shrine/deity). It is the single most important reason that unites and solidifies the Nkamis as one people. Almost every Nkami in and outside Amankwa takes pride in Afram because he is generally seen by Nkamis, irrespective of their religious inclinations, as a protector, and a good, compassionate and benevolent parent. As a result, most Nkamis happily and willingly associate with it and consult it in times of need.

19 Naarı́m Kwasi Anto was the father of my hostess, Nei Christiana Awuabea. He passed on some weeks ago, just after the completion of the doctoral dissertation on the grammar of Nkami in 2016. May his soul rest in peace.
And since the language of communication with Afram is strictly Nkami, people who do not even speak Nkami with their children at home are compelled to do so when they go before him (Afram deity). Indeed, one may not be wrong to say that the existence of Nkami, as a language and a group of people, is tightly linked with the continuous existence of the institution of Afram.

Ironically, one factor that may be seen as a threat to Nkami’s existence also serves as a ‘blessing’ to its existence. This is the derision, threat and intimidation that Nkami speakers receive from speakers of other dominant groups. Living as a minority group with other majority groups within the same community is not an easy task; however, the fear and realisation of being an endangered ‘species’ encourages most to keep their language. Thus, Nkamis consciously or unconsciously recognise their language as an important ‘asset’ that can be used as a language of ‘secrecy’ or ‘security’ to talk about others and/or issues they deem confidential.

Last but not least, re-settling Nkami speakers at specified locations (i.e. Nkami, Bwebew and Ọbosomano) in Amankwa, rather than mixing them up with other ethnic groups, is also another parameter that has helped to keep the language and people together. The observation is that children who live in these Nkami sub-communities generally end up speaking Nkami, while their counterparts who reside in non-Nkami sub-communities fail to do so.

Existing Works and Language Development

Before 2013/2014, no (in-depth) work had been done on the language. Language researchers including eminent Ghanaian language documenters were not even aware of the name ‘Nkami’. This is, for instance, captured in the report by Peacock (n.d., p. 2) on his 2005 trip to the Afram Plains when he records that “Nkami has not been referenced in any literature that I am aware of. The language map contained in Kropp-Dakubu’s The Languages of Ghana shows the entire Nkami area as speaking Akan”.

Thus, not even the phonemes or orthography had been described. Accordingly, the language is used neither as a medium of instruction nor as a subject taught at any level of formal schooling. It also does not enjoy any newspaper, radio or television broadcasts.20 Peacock, however, in 2009 requested for a new code element [nkq] in ISO 639-3 for the language. Prior to that, in 2005, he had made a trip to verify the existence and status of the language, and subsequently collected cognates from Nkami residents at Nkonya, based on the wordlist of Swadesh21, for the categorisation of the language. Additionally, an international Christian organisation, namely, Global Recordings Network, has shown interest in the language and is appealing for support to have audio bible stories recorded in the language. From 2013/2014 the documentation of Nkami commenced.

20 The majority of the languages of Ghana (e.g. Ahanta, Efutu, Sefwi, Wala, Nkonya, etc.) also do not enjoy this right.
This has culminated into a doctoral dissertation on the grammar of the language (Asante, 2016a). Others, such as Asante and Akanlig-Pare (2015), Akanlig-Pare and Asante (2016), Asante (2016b, c), and Asante and Ma (2016), have also studied the language.

**Linguistic Features**

In this section I shall first attempt to provide a conspectus of the general grammatical features of Nkami, and then highlight some of the revealing issues of Nkami that are of cross-linguistic typological and theoretical interests. Nkami displays most of the areal-typological linguistic features shared by regional languages. Like other South-Guang, but unlike North-Guang languages, Nkami has in its inventory both phonemic oral and nasal vowels. Articulation of consonants is made at seven different places of articulation, and it possesses only the phonemic voiceless double-articulated labio-velar stop, /kp/, unlike some Guang languages which have the voiced counterpart, /gb/, as well.22

There are two basic level tones (high and low), which manifest both grammatical and lexical functions of tone. As with other Guang languages, functional high tone morphemes typically trigger high tone spread to following syllable(s). It has a dominant CV syllable structure with other minor types: V, CVC and VC (where final C is a nasal, /w/ or /Ɂ/) in descending frequency. There is evidence of three major vowel harmonic processes, ATR, labial, and height, where the last two are secondary to the first. Just like most Guang languages (cf. Casali, 2002), [+ATR] is the dominant feature, manifesting prototypical regressive assimilation within and across word boundaries (cf. Akanlig-Pare & Asante, 2016). The deletion of word-initial ɛ-/e-, word-final /o/ and the syllable mo are among the most widespread segment and syllable deletion processes in the language. Other syllable structural processes such as syllabic nasal formation, insertion, deletion, compensatory lengthening, free variation, and metathesis are also observed. With regard to assimilatory processes, Nkami, like other neighbouring languages, shows evidence of segmental and tonal processes including labialisation, palatalisation, labiopalatalisation, nasalisation, tone stability and flotation, and tonal sandhi.

Words belonging to the major and minor word classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, adpositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and specifiers are all available in the language. Paralinguistic vocalizations such as ideophones, interjections, routines and particles are also pervasive, showing up everywhere in the language of speakers. Like Akan, but unlike many Kwa languages including Ewe (Aboh, 2010), it shows residues of a decayed noun class system; for instance, number may be marked on the noun stem. Like many regional languages23, such as Akan and Ewe (cf. Ameka, 2003; Ameka & Essegbey, 2006),

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22 A reviewer notes that in Leteh/Larteh the voiced counterpart, /gb/, exists in loan words only.
23 A ‘regional language’ here refers to a Kwa or Gur language spoken in Ghana and/or neighbouring countries.
Logba (Dorvlo, 2008), Gurene and Chakali (Brindle & Atintono, 2012) and Tafi (Bubuafor, 2013), linguistic forms that synchronically function as postpositions in Nkami are diachronically traceable to nominal sources that index body parts and environmental/landscape terms. Affixation, compounding, and reduplication are the dominant morphological processes. Verb features are expressed by prefixes and verbal particles, just like most Kwa languages (cf. Dakubu, 1988).

Nkami is a configurational language, just like other regional languages, and so grammatical relations of arguments (A, S or O) are primarily determined by constituent order and optionally strengthened by cross-referencing of the subject (A, S) on the verb. Nominal modifiers, both word and clause-level, occur after nominals. Coding of ‘predicative’ property is prototypically expressed through possessive/locative constructions (and less via adjectives, verbs and nouns), while ‘attributive’ property is mainly expressed through relative clause constructions. Similar to the majority of the world’s languages (cf. Dixon, 2010), transitive (AVO) and intransitive (SV) clauses constitute the most common clause types in Nkami. Copula clauses are also widely employed by Nkami speakers to indicate three distinct sets of semantic relations between the Copula Subject (CS) and Copula Complement (CC): identity, attribution and possession. Besides, Nkami also has other minor clause types such as possessive, existential and locative clause constructions - all of which exhibit identical structures; thereby supporting the observation that the notions of existence, location and possession are generally couched in identical structures (cf. Clarke, 1978; Payne, 1997).

Further, Nkami exhibits archetypical cases of constructions involving multi-verbs and clause combinations, such as serial verb, relative clause, complement clause, adverbial clause and coordinate clause constructions. For example, like most regional languages (cf. Welmers, 1973) such as Akan (Amfo, 2007) and Ewe (Dzameshi, 1998), Nkami has functionally distinct conjunctive coordinators, na and nɪ, for phrasal and clausal coordination respectively. Contrary to the fairly widespread view (cf. Nylander, 1997; Dimmendaal, 2001) that prototypical serial verb construction languages do not have inherent trivalent verbs, Nkami, like some regional languages such as Ewe, Likpe, and Akan (cf. Ameka, 2013), does.

**Linguistic Features of Typological Interest**

Besides the general grammatical features discussed, Nkami also manifests distinct features of cross-linguistic typological and theoretical interest. They include the following phenomena:

- Unlike other Guang languages described, which show evidence of stem-controlled rounding harmony in regressive direction, Nkami shows evidence of progressive affix-controlled rounding harmony (cf. Akanlig-Pare & Asante, 2016).
• Like many of the world’s languages, the 1st and 2nd singular subject personal pronouns behave similarly by being the most vulnerable/amelable to partake in phonological processes in the language (cf. Asante, 2016a).

• Nkami is one of the very few languages including Mandarin Chinese (cf. Haiman, 1985, Nichols, 1985), Ewe (Ameka, 1991), and Nkonya (Asante, 2009) that code kin terms in an inalienable structure in possessions, while other semantic types of nominals including body parts (assumed to be the most inalienable and permanent possessum of the possessor) are coded in alienable structures (cf. Asante, 2016a).

• Nkami shows remarkable evidence of animacy distinctions especially in forms and behaviours of pronouns, demonstratives, nominal affixes, nominal modifiers, and dispositional verbs in basic locative construction (cf. Asante & Akanlig-Pare, 2015).

• Nkami manifests the very rare feature of relative clause constructions, known to occur in a handful of languages (probably less than ten universally and mainly Kwa languages, e.g. Akan, Babungo, Logba and Urhobo), where the resumptive pronoun strategy is employed to obligatorily state relativized NPs in subject function within the relative clause (cf. Asante & Ma, 2016).

• Unlike other Kwa languages including Akan, Ewe, and Ga, the head noun in relative clause construction is never flanked by a definite determiner (cf. Asante and Ma, 2016).

• Nkami employs a ‘bracket strategy’ (cf. Kuteva and Comrie, 2005) in relativisation and focus formation, where two enclosing relative/focus markers are simultaneously placed at the ends of the relative/focus clause.

• All lexical words/phrases including nouns, verb/verb phrases, nominalised verbs, adjectives, adverbials, interrogative words, coordinate NP structures, postpositional phrases, and possessive phrases can be preposed for focus in ex-situ focus constructions in Nkami.

• Nkami joins Akan as the only two Kwa languages described in the literature (cf. Ameka, 2013) that exhibit the very unusual property of focus clause constructions, where the default slot of an animate object NP in ex-situ focus is obligatorily marked by a resumptive pronoun.
• Unlike other regional languages, Nkami employs two distinct complementisers, yɛɛ and bɛɛ, to introduce complement clauses. While the former generally collocates with utterance verbs, the latter collocates with all other complement-taking verbs. Both complementisers are also multi-functional and are traceable to the verbs yɛɛ ‘say’ and dʒi bɛɛ/ɛ ‘be like’ respectively (cf. Asante, 2016b).

• Moreover, in addition to the vacuous verb, bʊ ‘be.located’, Nkami has an inventory of over twenty verbs that are used to localize entities (Figures) in relation to their reference objects (Grounds) in Basic Locative Construction (BLC) (cf. Asante, 2016c).

• Many of the grammatical items in Nkami are multi-functional and show evidence of several grammaticalization paths. For example, the form ni functions as a clausal conjunctive coordinator, a relative marker and a focus marker and it is likely to have derived from the form, ni - the proximal predicative demonstrative (PPD), ‘this is’. Likewise, the proximal directional prefix and the future tense prefix share the same form, bɛ-, which is diachronically traceable to the basic deictic motional verb ba/bee ‘come’.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to introduce a group of people and an endangered language, called Nkami, to the world of knowledge. The data for the study were extracted from a large corpus collected from a documentation project on the language and people. I talked about the historical, geographical, political, religious, demographical, social, economic and linguistic traits of the people. Among other things, it has been established that Nkami is a South-Guang language spoken by about 400 people in a resettlement community in the Afram Plains of the Eastern Region of Ghana called Amankwa. Several others also reside in neighbouring communities and in the diaspora, mostly Accra, Nkawkaw and Kumasi. I have also argued that the greatest force that holds the Nkami people and language together is the institution of Afram (Afram deity). Expectedly, Nkami shares the majority of the area-typological linguistic features of neighbouring languages. However, its unique typological features include the fact that a head noun of a relative clause construction is never modified by a definite determiner. It also shares with Akan as being the only two Kwa languages (at least, as far as I am aware of) that obligatorily employ a resumptive pronoun strategy to mark the default slot of an object NP in focus. Further, unlike most Guang languages which show evidence of stem-controlled rounding...

harmony in regressive direction, Nkami shows evidence of progressive affix-controlled rounding harmony (Akanlig-Pare and Asante, 2016). Moreover, the reader may have been overwhelmed by the striking (e.g. grammatical, cultural) similarities between Nkami and Akan. Looking at the dominance of Akan in the Nkami-speaking area such that presently some young Nkamis first acquire Akan before learning Nkami, it may be interesting to undertake comparative studies in the future to determine how many of the similarities are due to diffusion and how many to cognate forms and structures. Lastly, as adequately discussed in this paper, due to the inadequacy of the linguistic features that support the classification of the Guang languages into two, North and South, future work that thoroughly looks at the whole classification of the Guang languages may be necessary.
References


Multimodal Code-pairing and Switching of Visual-verbal Texts in Selected Nigerian Stand-up Comedy Performances

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Abstract
This study examines multimodal pairing and switching of codes as features of visual-verbal texts and how they are used as strategies for evoking humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy performances, an area that has not attracted much scholarly attention. Data were obtained through purposive random sampling and analysed through content analysis. Six DVDs (Vols. 3, 7, 8 & 28 of *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*; Vols. 27 & 28 of *AY LIVE Happiness Edition*) and 6 video clips (downloaded from the Internet) all totalling 8 hours and 20 minutes of play were selected for the study. Incongruity, Layered Meaning and Visual Semiotics serve as theoretical framework. The study identifies different multimodal strategies such as code-pairing and integration in different forms of oral codes, gestures, costume, and symbols; intertextuality; incongruous translations/deliberate misinterpretations; and mimicry, quotes and paralanguage used to elicit laughter. It suggests that these features are also useful in other speech-making events, and concludes that the integration of codes and modes of communication serves as an effective strategy in evoking humour and laughter in stand-up comedy.

Keywords: Nigerian stand-up comedy, code-pairing, visual-verbal texts, paralinguistic features, multimodality

Introduction
This study is located within the precincts of contact linguistics. Contact linguistics is the study of relations between languages in contact and outcomes thereof. According to Myers-Scotton (2002, p. 5), contact linguistics deals with the ‘varied situations of contact between languages, the phenomena that result, and the interaction of linguistic and external ecological factors in shaping these outcomes.’ These include ‘the diverse kinds of mixture, change, adaptation, and restructuring that result from interaction between (the users of) different languages…’ especially ‘the social aspects of contact between different linguistic groups.’ This means that contact linguistics involves contact between social and grammatical relations between different languages.
In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, languages and cultures often come in contact. Nigeria has many indigenous languages as well as some international languages such as English, French and Arabic. Sometimes, however, the languages are mixed in different proportions to yield values, such as borrowing, language interlarding, and language mixing, which subsume inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. Inter-sentential code-switching refers to a change of language that occurs at a clause or sentence boundary, where each clause or sentence is in one language or the other. Intra-sentential code-switching, on the other hand, refers to switches that occur within a clause boundary, i.e., switching at clause, phrase or word level (Appel & Muysken, 1986; Romaine 1989). Although there is a difference between inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, the difference has no effect on the analysis presented in this study. Since code-switching is a generic term for the two phenomena (Clyne, 2003, p. 71), the term is adopted in this study. As a corollary to this, we adopt the definition of code-switching as ‘the use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker in the same conversation’ (Thomason 2001, p.132).

Contact linguistics also involves different channels of communication. The fact is that effective communication is not limited to oral communication. Speakers often use face, costume and gesticulations (including mimicry) to make their speech more clearly understood. Hence, different channels are combined for the purposes of effective communication. In some cases, symbols and signs are used, especially when such are current in the society. This study investigates how these features are used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in their performances.

Many studies on humour such as Taiwo (2013), Chik et al. (2005) and Laineste (n.d.) have concentrated largely on monomodal texts, to the detriment of paralinguistic features. Some studies on stand-up comedy have also been from the perspectives of sociopragmatics (Archakis & Tsakona, 2005) as well as monomodal or code-switched still images (such as oral and written texts) (Aranda, 2014; Nadia, 2014). In addition, visual-verbal texts, involving a multimodal combination of different Nigerian indigenous languages, paralinguistic features, as well as costume, in moving texts, have received less attention from scholars. This study therefore attempts to fill this gap in contact linguistics scholarship by showing that, aside from contacts within verbal codes, other paralinguistic codes and costume can also be paired and integrated to communicate and achieve an intended feedback. Hence, it finds a meeting point between multimodality, translation and contact linguistics. The aim of this study is to identify the strategies for conveying humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy and discuss how visual, verbal and paralinguistic codes are used in different combinations as strategies to elicit laughter. In this vein, the study examines the codes that are normally used, the combinatorial possibilities of the codes and how they are used to elicit laughter. In pursuing these goals, the study explores
(1) which codes are used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in performances, (2) how the codes are paired, switched or integrated to elicit laughter, (3) what roles visual semiotics plays in the comics’ strategies and (4) what multimodal strategies are used to elicit laughter.

**Multimodality**

Communication, whether verbal or visual, requires the use of a code and at least a mode. A code is the language or variety (Clyne, 2003) used for communication in a society. Such a language must express meanings and have rules of interpretation in the society. The mode on the other hand is the channel through which the message is presented. Such channels may be written, oral, graphic (in form of symbols, cartoons, caricature or symbols) or gestural. What matters is that they are understood to convey some meaning. Thus, both code and mode are related in the sense that while the code contains a message, the mode is the channel through which the message in that code is presented. Sometimes, however, the mode may serve as both a code and a channel as in the case of a universal symbol such as that for love. The symbol of love means ‘love’ wherever it is used. Members of a community, say Russia, Japan or Nigeria, can interpret the sign in their own indigenous languages. Thus, universal symbols serve as a meeting point between a code and a mode since both are united into one entity.

Communication can be monomodal (as in a news bulletin), bimodal (as in oral and visual communication) or multimodal (involving many channels like language, images and symbols). It follows that any mode can be adopted by language users in the context of communication. Members of a community can convey information through only one single mode of communication, for instance, either by waving a hand or saying *bye bye* to a friend embarking on a journey. This is monomodal communication. Two monomodal codes can also be paired, such that one balances the other. This is referred to as code-pairing. Code-pairing entails the coming together of two or more different codes with each part conveying only part of the intended meaning and one part balancing or completing the meaning or sense of the other code (Lamidi, 2016). The following example from Still Ringing (a comedy group in Nigeria) shows code-pairing between two monomodal texts.

1. Preacher: Tell your friend: cheer up! (English)

   Translator: Sọ fun ọrẹ rẹ : ju ọsi sókè! (Yoruba)

   ‘Tell your friend: throw up a chair!’
In this example, there are two codes, English and Yoruba. The preacher used the English monomodal code while the interpreter used the Yoruba monomodal code. Although both texts are from different codes (English and Yoruba), the supposed translation is inaccurate (it is actually a deliberate mistranslation) and therefore forms the punchline of the joke. The crux of the matter is that the mistranslation has to be taken together with the original text to form a joke. This necessary combination is referred to as code-pairing, since the absence of one part of the text makes the other incomplete. In this way, texts in both codes are paired to provide an intelligible text: a joke.

Bimodal communication occurs when the language user combines two modes of communication to convey a message. Such modes can be a combination of speech and gesture, written words and a symbol, a photograph and a written description, etc. It may be inevitable that code-pairing also occurs between different channels or modes of communication. Here is an example:

![Figure 1](Image)

Figure 1 contains the English expression *I love Allah*: *I*, a symbol for love and a proper noun *Allah*. The three expressions become meaningful when the meaning of each is taken into account, in the sense of compositionality.

The third form is multimodality. Multimodality is ‘the use and combination of different semiotic elements, including design, layout, images, photographs, film, color and scent’ (Zebrowska, 2014, p. 9) and they are subsequently integrated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In this sense, more than two modes of communication are combined and integrated for effective communication. Consider Figures 2 and 3:
Figure 2. Simple Code-pairing and Multimodality (Source: www.nairaland.com)

Figure 2 depicts an English word I plus the symbol of love and a sketch of two hands whose fingers describe the act of making love. This is a simple combination of orthography, symbol and a drawing where each mode is clearly spelt out. These different modes and codes are combined and integrated to communicate an idea. The idea being put across in the image is that the person that wears the vest loves the act of making love.
The multimodal text can also be complex, involving different modes and codes.

Figure 3 starts with a thesis that Africa should stay away from female football and adds a picture. The picture balances the written text, and without it, the thesis statement would be incomplete. In the picture, there is evidence of multimodality. There are a set of females in jerseys and soccer boots, which are indexical that they are sportswomen. In the picture too, females are seen clearly breastfeeding their babies or being surrounded by children in casual dresses. The import of this is that the players are breastfeeding their babies at half time. This picture completes the sense in the thesis statement when the author directs us to look at what happens at half time. The implication is that such a team with nursing mothers is not likely to excel, and therefore African football should discourage female participation.
Multimodality in Still and Moving Texts

Multimodality also involves the integration of talk and non-verbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). Sometimes, the codes are combined in a compositional manner such that we note the contribution of each. Zebrowska (2014) has also observed that multimodality can combine auditory modality, such that there is interaction of phonetic, facial and gestural components. Normally, according to Bonachi (cited in Zebrowska, 2014), verbal components are accompanied by para-verbal, extra-verbal and non-verbal ones to create a multimodal expression system. Hence, in multimodality, three interacting systems can be identified: the visual, the auditory and the non-visual systems (Zebrowska, 2014). Thus, multimodality occurs in still and in moving texts.

Different scholars have examined multimodality in still and moving texts. On still texts, Wu (2014) and Jayasuriya (2015) discuss the multimodal visual-verbal texts in their respective publications. Wu (2014) presents the relationship between text and image and shows the extensions of the interpretation of the bimodality in the collaboration. These are augmentation, distribution and divergence. While Wu examined picture books, Jayasuriya (2015) investigated the use of multimodality in posters advertising spoken English classes in Sri Lanka. The designers of the posters are said to be creative, using language, visuals/images and ideology in an attempt to outdo one another and then recruit many students. These papers are relevant to the discussion here as they are multimodal in nature. However, they differ from the current study because they are restricted to the visual/image, verbal/text and ideological codes, while this paper includes spoken words, gestures, signs, costume and other paralinguistic features, but excludes ideology.

The studies on moving texts reviewed here, based on their relevance to the study, are Snellinx (2009), Ngamsa (2013), Aranda (2014) and Nadia (2014). Snellinx (2009) discusses humour in a television series. Apart from looking at different types of humour (linguistic and sociolinguistic) in the series, it also explores the multimodal triggers of humour and the effect the humour has on different cultures. Ngamsa (2013) examines intersemiotic cohesion in between visual and linguistic texts in three films and finds out the linguistic items that refer to objects in the films. He then identifies patterns of visual-verbal synchrony where exophoric reference items function as discourse pointers and connectors for meaning-making to readers, viewers and listeners. Place and person deictic items are also said to improve and develop patterns of intersemiotic cohesion for referential explicitness which provides a direct connection between implicit lexical items and their corresponding explicit visual composition. This paper is relevant to the present study as it discusses bimodality and visual verbal text. The first two goals in Snellinx (2009) also tally with the focus of the present paper. This present study, however, differs in the subject of research (stand-
up comedians), the context (Nigeria) and the data collected (comedians’ live performances). Snellix (2009) discusses only *Sex and City*, but data for the current study were drawn from a variety of stand-up comedy performances in Nigeria. In Ngamsa (2013) too, the elements of synchrony and cohesion are useful ingredients in code-pairing and code-mixing, which are areas of focus for the current study. However, it differs in the sense that it does not deal with stand-up comedy performances.

Aranda (2014) and Nadia (2014) have discussed the use of code-switching in stand-up comedy in California and Algeria, respectively. While Aranda examines Gabriel Iglesias’ stand-up comedy, Nadia analyses Abdel-kader Secteur’s. Both authors argue that code-switching is used as identity and comedy markers in their respective comedians’ shows. Aranda examines Iglesias’ use of techniques such as exaggeration, ridicule, repetition and coincidence, but Nadia (2014) observes that switches can be triggered by change of setting, interlocutors and context in order to assign specific functions and pragmatic meanings to texts. These studies are in the same field as the current study. However, they are limited to individual stand-up comedians while the current work cuts across different Nigerian stand-up comedies. In addition, while they investigated the use of code-switching as identity and comedy markers, the current study investigates the use of code-pairing, code-switching and visual-verbal integration as strategies to elicit laughter.

Similar to the foregoing is Tabaru and Lemmen’s (2014) study of ‘raised eyebrows’ in two American television-series: *House M. D.* and *The Big Bang Theory*. The study is multimodal in nature, arguing that facial expressions pertaining to hyper-understanding and sarcasm accompany humorous utterances. The study illustrates how raised eyebrows function as gesture triggers and convey explicit and implicit humorous meanings to hearers. Tabaru and Lemmen’s work (2014) is very much in line with the current study. They are on the same pedestal, except that their subjects and areas of focus are different.

The current research is a further development of the ideas in Lamidi (2016) which explored code-pairing and code-switching of written texts and images used as comments on the Facebook Forum. This new study presents another dimension in the use of multimodality (by moving from still to moving texts). It examines the use of verbal codes (including code-switching and (mis) translation) and audio-visual codes (including costume, signs, gestures and other paralinguistic features) which are used simultaneously for communication in audio-visual records of comedians’ performances. Thus, it hopes to push further research in contact linguistics by investigating the different codes and how they are used to communicate humour. It also tests and confirms the effect of the strategies used by collecting natural data from stand-up comedians’ performances where audiences react positively by laughing and clapping.
Visual-verbal Texts and Intertextuality

Visual texts are those that are perceived by the sense of sight. They are either moving or still. The fact is that they communicate meaning when they are seen. The authors of visual texts lay premium on its ability to convey intended messages. This they do by carving out specific forms, sometimes using computer simulation (photoshop). Sometimes too, actors in a play contort their faces, wear specific costume or walk in a particular manner to ensure a particular message is put across; and the audience is expected to pick some meanings from the cues given, even when the actor has not spoken. Verbal texts are expressions delivered in an oral form, using any language accessible to the audience. Sometimes, however, verbal texts may be written to be spoken (as in poems, plays and chat texts in online forums). Visual texts may also be combined with verbal texts to constitute an integrated visual-verbal text.

Texts can also be intertextual such that references are made to texts/situations outside the visual-verbal texts. Intertextual texts can be interpreted based on the context of culture, context of occurrence and context of speech. There may be co-texts, such that within a text, we may find allusions to different texts (literary allusion, biblical allusion, etc.). In addition, the environment plays important roles in the realisation of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). This is because the authors and the receivers of the text fall back on their shared background to encode/decode the text.

Another aspect of the intertextuality of texts is in the realm of translation where a text is presented and translated into another language for the benefit of language users or for humour, as this study hopes to show. Mimicry and parody are also possible means of making multimodal texts intertextual. In multimodality then, all shades of communication and inferences can be used to achieve success in communication.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is eclectic due to the multivariate features in the stand-up comedian’s performance. One part of the performance is incongruous, another part is verbal while yet another is visual/paralinguistic. Hence, the study adopted a blend of Incongruity Theory, Layered Meaning Theory and Visual Semiotics Theory.

Incongruity Theory accounts for the inconsistency in the logic of expressions in a text. It deals with the conflict between what the speaker of a joke says and what the listener expects (Veale, 2004; Jensen, 2006). Usually, humour texts consist of expressions with a punchline that serves as the turning point in the humour text. The punchline brings a twist that is incongruous to the logic presented at the beginning of the text and thus serves as the trigger of humour and laughter. This feature manifests in several scenes in the stand-up comedies
under investigation as the analyses below hope to show.

The second aspect of the framework is Clark’s (1996) Theory of Layered Meanings. In this theory, it is assumed that texts have different layers/levels of meaning. There is the surface level, found in the denotational meanings of expressions, and there is the underlying meaning, arrived at through implicature or imputed meanings. These levels of meaning are very important in unravelling both the deep and surface structures of still texts as well as the dramatized versions of moving texts. There must be a clash between what is said and what is intended/expected before a humour text can be successful. There will also be some intervening background knowledge, which serves as a link between the layers. We may interpret this intervening knowledge or dividing line between the layers as the punchline, which demarcates the layer and allows readers to decipher the literal meaning and the joke aspect. In essence, there is a cognitive aspect to this theory. In this case, the layers have to be linked through the listener’s or decoder’s cognitive ability. Thus, a humour text inevitably has two layers, with a clash between them. When decoders listen to this, they exert their cognitive ability guided by the background or punchline, to interpret it as humour.

The third aspect is Visual Semiotics Theory. Visual Semiotics deals with the interpretations of signs. Signs can be in indexical, iconic or symbolic relationship with a referent (Sharp 2011, p. 2). Signs refer to items with specific meanings. This might be in form of gestures, images or inscriptions. The main requirement is that it must be meaningful in the society. Signs are indexical if they have an inherent relationship, such that there is a link between the sign and what it represents. Hence, storm is indexical of rain. Iconic signs have a direct relationship with the referent. Thus, a photograph or caricature is iconic, pointing out the referent directly. The final item is the symbol. This involves an arbitrary relationship between a referent and the symbol. A ready example is the flag representing a particular country. The arbitrariness involves the fact that the flag may be changed as there is no rigid connection between the two. Once the ideology behind the flag is disowned, the flag becomes an ordinary piece of cloth.

These three theories are relevant to the current study. The Incongruity Theory accounts for the illogicality between verbal expressions, Visual Semiotics examines the gestures displayed by the comedians and Layered Meaning explores the different layers of meaning inherent in comics’ art as presented in the data.

Methodology

Data were collected from two major sources. Digital video discs (DVDs) containing stand-up comedy performances were bought and video clips of stand-up comedy performances were downloaded from the Internet. Relevant performances were selected from both sources through the purposive random sampling method. While DVDs and video clips were randomly selected, only
those performances that involved the use of multimodal communication were
purposively selected for the study. The stand-up comedians featured in the data
spread across different cadres of stand-up comedians and across the three major
ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and a few others. These
are Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, Helen Paul, Omo Baba, Gordon, Gandoki, AY,
Funnybone and Still Ringing. Hence, the data were considered representative
of different categories of stand-up comedians in Nigeria. In all, six DVDs (Vols. 3,
7, 8 & 28 of Nite of a Thousand Laughs and Vols. 27 & 28 of AY LIVE Happiness
Edition) and six video clips (downloaded from the Internet) were selected for
the study. The total period of play was 8 hours and 20 minutes. The data were
transcribed and relevant portions are analysed below through content analysis.

Code-pairing Involving Translation from a Verbal Code to Another

Translation is often used in stand-up comedy to make people laugh. Translation
may be conceived as the transfer of a message from a source language
to a target language. In the context of humour, translation involves conveying
the sense of humour from one language to another. Scholars have identified
untranslatability as a major problem associated with humour translation. This
untranslatability is traced to language, culture, history and words (Vandaele
2010, Day Translations Blog, 2016). For linguistic untranslatability of humour,
denotation and connotation are the culprits as concepts may differ from a
language to another. Cultural untranslatability and history also cause problems
to translators because of differences in history, culture and social relations.
Finally, according to Day Translation Blog (2016), ‘words may constitute the
core of a joke, especially in dry humour, a subgenre of comedy in which there
is practically no physical expression’. In this sense, a joke may depend on some
kind of wordplay of the original language such that it is impossible to translate
it (Day Translations Blog, 2016). Nevertheless, one area that is overlooked is
the translation that is itself the cause of humour. In other words, the humour was
not in the original text but it is introduced in the course of translation, especially
through wordplay. In essence, the punchline is located in the translation. This
feature is discussed in this section.

In addition, translations, especially of humour texts, are susceptible to
typing mistakes (in case of subtitling), censoring and mistranslation. These
were demonstrated by Okyayuz (2016) in the study of the American sitcom Two
and a Half Men. According to him, translations may be creative to bring out
humour more clearly in a text or censored if it belongs to any of the classes
of political satire, strange culture/language, offensive expressions, controversial
issues and incomprehensible humour, among others. Mistranslation of materials
from a language into another implies a deficiency in the art of interpreting/
subtitling. However, another aspect that is relevant to this study is deliberate
misinterpretation. In Nigeria, the comedians renowned for this feature are
the Still Ringing duo. Their performance is based on a preacher-interpreter relationship in a church setting. The preacher preaches in English while the interpreter interprets in Yorùbá. It means that two languages are involved in the performance. In this manner, they become meaningful as a humour text. The interpretation is deliberately made inaccurate, so as to make people laugh. The humour text can also be monolingual or bilingual. If monolingual, it is only in Yorùbá; if bilingual, it involves code-switching (CS) between English and Yorùbá languages. This is part of contact linguistics: two languages coming into contact, especially in communication. The two languages bear different texts and different meanings individually. However, they are combined to render a new text: code-pairing. Consider the following data:

2. Preacher: ...because the host of angels are set.
   Interpreter: E șóra fún àwon ǎńgéli tó ŋ ji handset.
   ‘Beware of angels that steal handsets/cell phones.’

3. Preacher: Thanksgiving is the foundation of this ministry.
   Interpreter: Àwon ènìyàn f’órí ru tank nígba táà ŋ șe foundation șooṣí yii.
   ‘People carried (water) tanks on their heads while we were constructing the foundation of this church.’

4. Preacher: Gratitude is what makes you keep scaling higher altitudes.
   Interpreter: Grà-grà tẹ́ẹ máa ŋ șe ló jè kẹ́ẹ máa ta pure water ti ò tutù
   ‘Your grandstanding caused you to sell sachet water that is not cold.’

In these examples, the preacher presents ideas in English, and the interpreter recasts them in Yoruba or CS. It probably would not have been remarkable if the translations were correct, but the interpreter deliberately created humour out of the translations by infusing incongruous mistranslations into the process (note the bolded sections). In the context of this paper, a blend of the original text and their assumed translations form a code-paired text which is used to evoke laughter from the audience. Without either of the English text and its Yorùbá mistranslation, the audience would probably not perceive any humour. Again, we see two layers of interpretation here. The preacher preaches sensibly, the interpreter translates inaccurately. The human cognition and shared background
will have to process the utterances by the two comedians and conclude that the text produced is actually a joke.

**Code-pairing of Costume, Gesture and Verbal Texts**

The use of costume plays a major role in eliciting laughter from audiences. The comedian or clown may dress in an awkward manner to elicit laughter from the audience. This awkward dressing often presents the comedian as uneducated, backward or downright silly. This is a means of deprecating self to elicit laughter. It belongs to the class of monomodal communication. In our data, comedians used a combination of costume, gestures and verbal codes to elicit laughter. One of the instances is the combination of AY, one of the Still Ringing duo (Ayo OgunSina) and Helen Paul. They all dress in the long white robes for which members of some Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are known. AY’s dress is very spectacular for its marked flamboyance. His robe is embroidered. On his embroidered cape is written *Baba Alakoso* ‘the (Father) Controller’, which ultimately makes him the head of the supposed clergy and congregation. Helen Paul also has a beret on her head, but Ayo OgunSina does not wear a cap. The trio easily fit into the Nigerian context as such churches often have a husband and his wife operating as prophet and prophetess, respectively, with the regalia suitable for their offices. The husband preaches while an interpreter, a third person, interprets. The white robes communicate their respective statuses to the audience. They are a prophet (AY), a prophetess (Helen Paul) and an interpreter (Ayo OgunSina).

Accompanying the costume are paralinguistic features. They all sing and dance onto the stage with their robes flying around them. The preachers swirl and jump; an indication that they are possessed by the Holy Spirit. Helen and AY also speak differently (Helen especially spoke ‘through her nostrils.’) to depict spirit possession. The statements, prayers or ‘revelations’ by AY are normal, but the translations are quite ludicrous! They are incongruous with the original statements. For instance, let us consider the following data:

5. AY: Lord, transform their lives!

   Still Ringing: Olúwa, ṣ gbé *transformer* silé ayé won!

   ‘Lord, install transformers into their lives!’

6. Prophetess Helen: .....Ahaannh! Ayé burú. *Life people are wicked. I see Mama Patience...going back to Enugu...èyíbààah...Wòlii! I see... Osinbajo should grow taller o! ...When he was receiving his certificate, camera did not see him o
In text (5), the translation is way off the intended message presented by AY. This brings in the elements of incongruity, layered meaning and cognition. In text (6), Helen Paul makes a ‘revelation’ about a public figure whose husband, Goodluck Jonathan (former president of Nigeria), has just lost an election and another one, the current vice-president of Nigeria, that is too short. She sees a ‘vision’ that the first will return to her hometown and (suggests) that the second should grow taller because when he was receiving his certificate of election into the public office he currently occupies, the camera could not find him! From the foregoing, intertextuality is at play. Text (6) makes reference to the major players in Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election. Only people who could relate the joke to the last presidential elections in Nigeria would infer the butts of the joke. Further, three codes have been combined for effective communication which evokes laughter among the audience. These are costume, paralinguistic features of gambolling and speaking through the nose, and other verbal texts. There is also a pairing of three codes to form a composite whole that evokes humour and consequently elicits laughter from the audience.

In another text, the Still Ringing duo play a similar role in a real church setting, with the congregation fully in attendance as the audience. The comedians were dressed in suits, typical of some Pentecostal churches (the suit has become a uniform of sorts for church officials in some of these churches, hence the costume). On the pulpit, they have sheets of paper (probably texts of their jokes!) from which the ‘preacher’ reads and says things in English. As the ‘preacher’ moves about, the ‘interpreter’ follows him about like a typical interpreter and actually interprets into code-switched Yoruba-English texts. He comes across as a half-baked interpreter/bilingual who understands Yorùbá but just gets by in English. Hence, he provides incongruous and humorous mistranslations of the preacher’s message; and when the preacher suspects a wrong interpretation, he convinces him that he (the interpreter) is right. Here are samples of his interpretation:

7. Preacher: Tonight is your chance.
   Interpreter: Wọn ní lèníi, è ti wò one chance.
   ‘He says today, you’ve got into a one-chance vehicle (trouble).’

8. Preacher: Illuminants are scarce in the market of life.
   Interpreter: Àwón Ilumináti ñ ta black market lénu’jó méta yìí.
   ‘The members of Illuminati were selling (fuel) at a black market rate recently.’
Preacher: Hén? (‘What?’)

Still Ringing: Mo ràá nígbà táà ŋ bọ̀ now.

‘I did buy it (fuel) while we were coming.’

9. Preacher: But right now, I see you in the wilderness.

Interpreter: Hà-háà, wón ní è tún ŋ mugbó!

‘Ha-haa, he says you also smoke weed!’

In (7) ‘your chance’ is misconstrued as one-chance, a parlance for commercial vehicles used to commit crimes, such as kidnapping people and extorting money from them. In (8) illuminants (whatever it means) is rendered as Illuminati (a supposed group of powerful cultists) and market of life is rendered as black market. The translation of (8) is therefore incongruous. In (9) wilderness is translated as weed, possibly because of the sound similarity of the initial syllable, wild; and the remaining part of the sentence is made to collocate with it. What one sees here, then, is that comedians use setting, space/gesture (movements), costume and verbal expressions in different combinations as parts of the strategies deployed in stand-up comedy to evoke humour.

**Code-pairing Involving Code-switching**

Code-switching often occurs where the Still Ringing interpreter’s inaccurate interpretation ensues, and this causes laughter. Apart from that, the way he keeps a straight face as if he was oblivious of the havoc he wreaks on the message being interpreted is also funny. Sometimes, his face may be contorted to match his statements/translation:

10. Preacher: There is no alternative shortcut.

Interpreter: Òtá ò lè wọ native lóri bum short.

‘The enemy cannot wear a native dress on a bum short.’

11. Preacher: You will make impact.

Interpreter: Wàá ta spare parts.

‘You’ll sell (vehicle) spare parts.’
12. Preacher: Our political weather is about to change.

Interpreter: Kò sí politician tó máa gbe’ṣẹ fún welder tí ò ní dúró gba change.

There’s no politician that will give a job to a welder and would not wait to collect change.

In these translations, the interpreter uses sound similarity (usually homophonic pun) to arrive at his translations. Alternative is rendered as ‘enemy’ and native ‘mufti/native dress’ and shortcut is rendered as bum short (a type of fashionable pants usually worn by females). The unexpected incongruity in the meaning of the code-switched translations is the harbinger of humour and laughter. Notice that this appeals to only bilinguals in English and Yoruba. In these examples too, two verbal codes are being used: Yoruba (normal typeface) and English (italics). These are convenient means of recasting the preacher’s expressions to engender humour and elicit laughter from the audience.

We also note that this style of interpretation thrives on substitution of names, concepts or terms that have sounds with some semblance of similarity, either in part or in whole. In the above example (12), weather is deliberately misrepresented as welder; and the meaning of change in the original statement (transformation) is different from that in the translation (balance of money paid). The direct switch and the disparate meaning of weather compared to welder as well as that of change caused the audience to roar in laughter.

Let us consider the following datum too:

13. Preacher: Why are you dancing shockingly to the tune of Ahitophel?

Interpreter: Kílódé téé njó Shoki s’órín Ayéfélé?

‘Why are you dancing Showkey (style) to Ayefele’s song?’

The words shockingly and Ahitophel are the markers of humour in the translation. They are changed to Shoki and Ayefele, which happen to be names of popular Nigerian musicians: Daddy Showkey and Yinka Ayefele. The other words are added just to make the sentence complete.

Further, let us consider (14). Helen has just made a powerful political figure the butt of a joke and AY warns her:

14. AY: Helen, you are on your own o! Eko la wà.

‘Helen, you will bear the consequences of your statements alone. We are in Lagos’
AY’s statement is a code-switched text from the Nigerian variety of English into Yoruba. Helen Paul had ridiculed a high-ranking government official in her joke. In (14), AY tries to absolve himself from blame, pragmatically telling Helen that, should there be a reprisal, she would bear the consequences of her jokes alone. His fear probably emanated from the fact that the performance was staged in Lagos where the butt of the joke lived.

Another aspect of code-switching occurred when AY, Still Ringing and Helen Paul sing as they dance to the stage as prophet, interpreter and prophetess, respectively. AY leads the song in Yorùbá and code-switches with glossalalia / esoteric language.

15. Alagbárá l’Ólóhùn mi o, alagbárá ni Jesu mi o; bóbá ti sóró bée náà lò ń rí. Jáh hilohim, jáh hilohim, jáh hilohim...

‘My God is powerful, my Jesus is powerful; when He says something, it comes to pass. Jáh hilohim, jáh hilohim, jáh hilohim...’

16. Prophetess Helen: .....Ahaannh! Ayé burú. Life people are wicked. I see Mama Patience...going back to Enugu...èyibààh...Wòlì! I see... Osinbajo should grow taller o! ...When he was receiving his certificate, camera did not see him o!

When AY invites Helen to deliver her ‘revelation’, she switches between English, glossalalia and Yoruba (as in 5 above, repeated as 16). This means that two verbal codes are used in the speech.

**Code-pairing, Code-switching and Intertextuality**

Part of the intertextuality is that jokes can be built round members of the audience. Deploying the same preacher-interpreter style, Still Ringing effectively identifies members of the audience, such as Austin Okocha (a former Nigerian soccer star), Funke Akindele (a Nigerian actress), Mrs Fashola (the wife of the then Lagos State governor), Ali Baba (a comedian) and a host of others. Here are examples:

17. Preacher: You will catch a rhema by his mercy when you come under attack.
   Interpreter: Combination Neymar àti Messi kò dáá ní counter-attack.

‘The combination of Neymar and Messi is not suitable for counter-attack!’
18. Preacher: …to enable the government fashion out a way.

Interpreter: Ìjòba Fashola ọ like kéèyàn máa gba one-way!

Fashola’s government does not like people contravening the one-way traffic law!’ (Still Ringing)

In (17), the comedians sight Austin Okocha, a former Nigerian soccer star. They promptly invoke the strategy of intertextuality by making reference to Neymar and Messi who are current soccer stars. This is made possible because the words rhema and mercy occur in the ‘preacher’s statement and they have similar sounds with the players’ names. The interpreter also changes under attack in the preacher’s speech to counter attack so as to collocate with Neymar and Messi, and be meaningful to the audience. In the second example (18), the comedians see a State governor’s wife and twist their joke to make her laugh. The preacher mentions fashion and a way, which the interpreter misconstrued as Fashola, the governor’s name, and one-way, which clearly has a meaning difference from away. The interpreter’s versions in the two examples are also code-switched expressions. The statement makes the audience reel with laughter. It follows that a combination of costume, code-pairing and intertextuality is also a strategy that comedians use.

**Code-pairing of Verbal and Paralinguistic Texts**

Another aspect of code-pairing in stand-up comedians’ art is a blend of gestures and verbal expressions. In a joke, Ali Baba explains that when he went to South Africa, a member of the audience asked him if he was Jenson Washington or Darling Glover. The audience sneers, and he feigns anger and retorts:

19. Ali Baba: ‘Your father! Your father! Your father!’

In saying this, he simultaneously faces the audience with an open fist: an indirect insult to their mothers in the Nigerian context. Because he is holding the microphone in one hand, he cannot use both hands to demonstrate fully the intended insult to the audience. So, he removes one of his shoes and stretches one leg out so that the sole also faces the audience. In Nigeria, when the user has no means of retaliating an insult, the gesture of directing one’s open fist at another is normally invoked as an insult to the person’s mother. It is considered more intense when one uses two hands. Ali Baba has brought creativity into it by adding his foot. These are done simultaneously as he complements them with Your father!... This is a pairing of a verbal code with a gestural code.
Omo Baba, another comedian, also tells a joke involving gestures and verbal texts. He first warns the audience not to gloat on the fact that he is ugly, that they are not the first to tell him so. Then he narrates how he saw a pretty lady and blew her a kiss. The lady dodged the imaginary kiss, struggled and caught the kiss, put it under her foot and rammed it into the ground with the statement: ‘God punish you!’ Each action supposedly performed by the imaginary lady is demonstrated by Omo Baba. In this joke, we see a combination of verbal and paralinguistic features.

### Mimicry, Quotes and Paralanguage

Generally, comedians often mimic other people’s actions, and quote their statements with exaggeration or with parody. These features are accounted for under visual semiotics. Gordons, for instance, demonstrates how his father beat him when he (Gordon) woke up in the middle of the night, ostensibly to attend to nature’s call. The father used a combination of slap, kick, punch and knock with matching verbal expressions to punish Gordon, who had woken up in wrong timing ‘at a wrong time’ in their one-room apartment.

20. Any day [SLAP] when you wake up [BACKHAND SLAP] anyhow

[KNOCK ON THE HEAD] in wrong timing, say you wan piss [PUNCH IN THE STOMACH], na dat day [KICK] you go piss last [BACKHAND SLAP].’

‘Any day you wake up at a wrong time saying you want to urinate, that would be the last time you urinate.’

In this example, the quotation from the father is paired with different gestures: knock, slap, punch and kick. The visual data show that the old man paused each time he delivered his punch, knock or kick on the boy. Hence, Gordons imitates and combines his father’s paralinguistic features with the verbal outbursts to elicit laughter.

In the same vein, Funnybone compares how girls behave when they are being wooed. He compares the behaviour of traditional girls to that of modern girls. He mimics how traditional girls shyly answer questions posed by their admirers, whereas modern girls boldly ask their suitors what they want, making the suitors uncomfortable.
21. Suitor: What’s your name?

Traditional Girl: (faces her imaginary friend) Chioma, he’s asking my name!

Suitor: Do you like me?

Traditional girl: I don’t know o! (shyly hiding part of her face behind her cocked hand).

22. Modern girl: (Looking boldly into the imaginary suitor’s face) Hello!

What is it? Do you like me?’

Boy: (scratching his head) Hey, my sister, I don’t know o!

In this mimicry, there is also a combination of verbal and paralinguistic features. We should also note that the comedian changes his voice to suit the traits of the person that he mimics. The combination creates the desired effect of evoking laughter.

In another joke, Omo Baba, creates different voices for football commentaries by foreigners in Nigeria. He mimics the voices and states how the Pope and the Imam run football commentaries. He also mimics how different people sing the popular nursery rhyme, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*. He starts with the percussion, using his mouth. Then, he adds a chorus *Walahi, shege!* In essence, he is the lead, the chorus and the drummer (the audience later serves as the chorus).

23. Omo Baba: Twinkle twinkle little star.

Audience: *Walahi, shege!*

Omo Baba: How I wonder what you are!

Audience: *Walahi, shege...*

Then, he changes to Yoruba:

24. Omo Baba: Twinkle twinkle little star...Ìyáa won, won-òn tì pò tó!

*Wàiwài lòní sáná.*

‘...To hell with their mothers! They’re still not enough!...’
This is combined with verbal percussion and gestures as he moves about on the stage like a musician. This means that the comedian can shift between codes and between styles to make people appreciate his jokes. All these fall under visual semiotics.

Another comedian, Basket Mouth, tells a joke about violence in Warri. He states that the war in Warri is not fought by able-bodied men, but by the cripple. Then he demonstrates how cripples walk and talk when they are about to engage in violence:

25. [Addressing an imaginary fellow] See am, en? E go rough. Anyone wey do anyhow, e go see anyhow... My guy, you just wan implicate yourself. Dis one you dey follow me so, if yawa come, you go fit run?

‘See, it will be rough. Anyone that misbehaves will be dealt with... My friend, you just want to put yourself into trouble. As you now follow me, can you run if there is trouble?’

He says this while he wobbles to and fro on the stage, swinging his arms. He shows, especially, how cripples use the bad legs to walk away very fast. In this joke, the comedian merges the speech with the mode of walking that could be associated with cripples. One also notices incongruity here: a war is fought by the cripple rather than by able-bodied men and a cripple, confident of his own ability, asks if a normal biped can run in case there is trouble!

In another act, Basket Mouth tells a joke about a friend who always visited his house whenever food was almost ready. He narrates the incident of a particular day when he and his sibling had insufficient food and this same friend came. Basket Mouth and his sibling cleverly devised a linguistic means of excluding the visitor from the beans meal on fire. They were playing draughts when the visitor arrived and they played language tricks to edge him out, but he got them:

26. Basket Mouth: See where e be you suppose chop from now...you dey do head like food wey don done.

‘Look at the place where you could have won some points... your head (is shaped) like food that is ready.’

Sibling: (pretending to take offence) Bright, mind the way you talk to me. I’m your elder brother. You dey craze? You wey do mouth like person chop beans remain for person.

‘Bright, ...Are you crazy? You with a mouth like one that eats beans and leaves some for someone.’
Visitor: Bo, una too dey distract me o! Wey una do eye like person... people wey wan chop beans for person back.

‘Friends, you are distracting my attention too much! Your faces look like those of someone...people who want to eat beans behind another person.’

In this joke, Basket Mouth matches his words with actions. He poses differently as the two brothers, engaged in the game of draughts, as well as the unwanted visitor. In the first place, he points at the imaginary draughts board as he speaks. In the second, he plays the role of the ‘brother’ as he plays the game; and in the third, he plays the game as he speaks like the ‘visitor’. In all, he combines the actions of playing draughts, going to and from the kitchen to cook beans, and making relevant statements at each action he makes. The audience is able to ‘visualise’ all the actions as Basket Mouth combines his speech with gestures.

Finally, Gandoki tells a joke about how to avoid police harassment in Nigeria. He suggests two ways of doing this. First, he advises motorists to park when asked to do so. Then they should pretend to be deaf when policemen question them. They should first remain silent and later blurt out statements in the form of deaf speaking. He demonstrates these: parking the car, speaking like a deaf person and finally being allowed by the police to leave. In the second joke, he advises motorists to park their cars. When a policeman says ‘come down,’ they should not budge; they should hesitate. When the policeman insists, they should alight and walk like a lame person. These actions are demonstrated in a funny manner. We need to know that in the context, verbal and paralinguistic texts are merged to evoke laughter from the audience.

In all the examples in this section, the comedians play specific roles and make relevant speeches demanded by the jokes. They show physical activities, such as changing their accents, wobbling, walking (Basket Mouth; Omo Baba), slapping/knocking (Gordons), imitating sounds of singing and percussion (Omo Baba), role-changing (Funnybone; Basket Mouth) and playing deaf and dumb (Gandoki). The members of the audience are able to see these actions on stage, listen to the speeches/songs and interpret them based on shared background. The subsequent laughter shows that the comedian has indeed achieved his/her aim.
Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, we can infer that the codes used by Nigerian comedians include verbal codes of different languages such as Pidgin (Funnybone, Basket Mouth), English (all comedians) and Nigerian indigenous languages, especially Hausa (Omo Baba), Yoruba (Still Ringing) and Igbo (Funnybone). However, due to the multilingual nature of Nigeria, the comedians often use Pidgin, which is understood by most Nigerians. This is followed by English. The indigenous languages are either code-switched with English or used for specific tasks. This is very important since the comedian wants a large audience to enjoy his/her jokes and create an avenue for further patronage. Another code is the combination of costume and symbols (though, sometimes, they may occur independently). The costume creates a specific identity intended by the comedian. It might also be necessary to put a symbol as an index or a marker of such identity (as in AY’s church costume discussed above). Furthermore, the comedian uses paralinguistic features such as the movements of legs and arms, to achieve a particular goal. Often, these are exaggerated for the audience to notice and laugh.

Given these communication resources identified above, the comedians devise several strategies to evoke laughter among the audience. One of these is the use of texts code-paired with incongruous mistranslations. As we saw in the analysis, the preacher’s utterances and the mistranslation form a code-paired text. In addition, the resultant illogicality of the incongruous mistranslations evoked laughter. In addition to the code-paired text, the strategy of code-switching is also used. This enables the interpreter to construct humorous sentences which are built on similarity of sounds between English and Yoruba words/expressions. The code-switched structures in the code-paired text facilitate laughter among the audience. Thus it becomes another strategy for comedians. The comedians also used gestures constantly. The visual codes of paralinguistic features are merged with costume and integrated with speech for effective communication. These observations lead us to the conclusion that the oral codes, gestures and symbols all combine as multimodal strategies used by comedians in their performances. The multimodal codes are integrated in different ways to elicit laughter.

Having explored different aspects of the Nigerian stand-up comedy performance, this study concludes that the integration of codes and modes of communication serves as an effective strategy in evoking humour and laughter in stand-up comedy. Hence, such strategies may be effective in other speech-making events such as teaching, radio/TV jingles and political campaigns to catch the attention of listeners, retain their interest in the discussion and put across intended messages. Finally, the study extends the frontiers of contact linguistics to issues of code-pairing and multimodality in humour research.
References


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‘I just said It, I didn’t mean anything:’ Culture and Pragmatic Inference in Interpersonal Communication

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Abstract
Socio-cultural practices and the economy of expression, which generally characterise human communication, significantly widen the gap between linguistic meaning and speaker’s meaning. What the hearer does is to construct hypotheses about the speaker’s meaning based on contextual and background assumptions and the general principles that speakers are supposed to observe in normal circumstances (Kecskés, 2009, p.106). Drawing examples from spoken data selected from interpersonal interactions and analysed within the relevance-theoretic framework of inferential pragmatics, this paper demonstrates how cultural considerations function as inputs to the cognitive process, and how the human capacity for inference is crucially important in interpersonal communication.

Keywords: culture, pragmatic inference, interpersonal communication, relevance, cognition.

Introduction
This paper is essentially an application of pragmatics to the study of interpersonal communication and its main focus is on how cultural norms and the human capacity for inference bridge the gap between encoded linguistic meaning and speaker’s meaning which are often at variance. It is based on the Relevance-theoretic framework of pragmatics and as such, it emphasises the cognitive aspects of interpersonal communication. It argues that within specific communities of practice, cultural considerations are necessary inputs to the cognitive process, and that the human capacity for inference is crucially important in interpersonal communication in these contexts. Generally, communication involves ‘the transmission of messages between individuals acting consciously and intentionally for that end’ (Harder, 2009, p. 62). It is an integral part of our
daily lives and it is so pervasive that we often do not realise how much we depend on it for survival. As Wood (2010, p. 57) has argued, ‘we communicate to develop identities, establish and build relationships, coordinate efforts with others, have impact on issues that matter to us, and work out problems and possibilities.’ In an interpersonal communication, participants relate with one another in a face-to-face context and the contents of their interaction, according to Hartley (1999, p. 20), should ‘reflect the personal characteristics of the individuals as well as their social roles and relationships.’ Arundale (2013) explains that interpersonal communication is a sub-discipline of Communication that has flourished in North America since the 1970s. He describes it as ‘a complex interactional process of at least two participants placing utterances adjacent to one another’s in sequence’ (p. 21).

The foundation of interpersonal communication is built on human relations, a situation in which participants recognise the personhood and the uniqueness of the individual within the ambit of the interaction (Stewart, 2009). It has also been noted that research in interpersonal communication is currently pushing the boundaries, going beyond traditional notions of creating social relationships to include conflict and cooperation and even the use of technologies in interaction (Knapp & Daly, 2011).

As illuminating as these studies on interpersonal communication might be, most of them have not emphasised the significance of cultural peculiarities and the role of pragmatic inference in the communication process. Yet, these are essential in creating understanding and appropriate responses that facilitate the achievement of interactional goals. Antos et al. (2008, p. 9) explain interpersonal communication as a means by which ‘interactants manage to exchange facts, ideas, views, opinions, beliefs, etc. by using the linguistic system together with the resources it offers.’ But apart from the exchange of facts, ideas, views, etc., participants in interpersonal encounters create contexts or situations that reflect the fact that communication is a form of action, and that understanding such actions requires appropriate inference. According to Sperber and Wilson, ‘human beings are efficient information-processing devices’ (1995, p. 46). Such processing capability leads to the emergence of meanings not previously conceived or prefigured. The ability to attribute intentions, attitudes and thoughts to the communicator in a given instance is a necessary condition for effective communication. Crucially, the entire process is mediated by the cultural practices which form the background in which participants interact. As Knoblauch (2000) has also observed, ‘it is by way of interactions that cultural meanings are negotiated. Since these negotiations are performed by communicative actions, the social-cultural world of everyday life is not only being continuously constructed, it is essentially cultural’ (p. 24). This study explores the role of culturally-conditioned practices and pragmatic inference in interpersonal communication. Although it draws insights from other notions
such as (im)politeness, face (work) and the Gricean principle, its main focus is the cognitive aspects of interaction as mediated by cultural considerations in a given community of practice (Senft et al, 2009).

The data analysed in this study are a part of collections mainly based on personal experiences of the authors’, as documented over time and recreated for the present purposes. They represent diverse situations and experiences, among family members, commuters and colleagues in the work place. Three texts are selected, the third constructed from authors’ knowledge of local conversation in a specific context. Two of them are situated within domestic settings, where participants know each other well. The other has a non-domestic setting, conflictual in nature, and the participants have less knowledge of each other. The outcome of the analyses is the product of the researchers’ intuitions based on the pragmatic theory applied. The procedure is also emergent in nature because the conclusions drawn from the analyses of the data simply emerge in the process of theoretical application and analysis. In the sections that follow, we examine the nature of culture, communication and pragmatic inference; the notion of interpersonal pragmatics and its relationship with interpersonal communication; our theoretical framework and finally data presentation and analyses.

**Culture, Communication and Inference**

Culture is a notion with multiple meanings. Spencer-Oatey (2000) explains culture as some fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs and patterns of behaviour including basic assumptions and values which a particular group of people share and which ultimately influence how they see and interpret the world. Culture is a cognitive as well as a social phenomenon. As a cognitive phenomenon it enables us to interpret the world (Knoblauch, 2000, p.24). As a social phenomenon, culture includes all the valuations and systems of orientation that come into the communicative act. In this regard, it embodies ‘discourses, texts, symbolic practices and communicative events that constitute the on-going stream of social life’ (Knoblauch, 2000, p. 25). This presupposes that culture is inseparably linked to interpersonal communication. Hill et al. (2007) argue that:

> the communicative process is an integral part of the culture in which it takes place. The signs, symbols and codes that are the building blocks of the interpersonal communication process are located in cultures. The meanings they convey rely to a considerable extent upon shared cultural understandings. (p. 1)

As this study demonstrates, many of the elements that inform interpersonal communication are invariably motivated by cultural understandings. For example, the notions of face, (im)politeness, self-identity construction and the like are developed ‘within the larger web of culture’ (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 28).
In normal communication encounters, meaning is often generated through an inferential process which combines new information with the information already stored in memory. Weber (1998) refers to the information stored in the mind as ‘cognitive models or schemata.’ These are simply sets of beliefs, assumptions and expectations, and they are stored in chunks or modules, not individually (p. 115). Generally, a schema is ‘a structure in semantic memory that specifies general or expected arrangement of a body of information’ (Carroll, 2004 p. 171). As ‘well-integrated packets of knowledge about the world’ (Eysenck & Keane, 2010, p.401), schemata are usually derived from experience and they vary from person to person. Shared cultural experiences can result in the overlap of schemata in some people, which ultimately influences discourse processing (Culpeper, 2011 p.11). Speaker and hearer find it easier to communicate when their schemata are similar, when they share many or a set of assumptions. For this reason, we can say both belong to the same ‘interpretative’ community. Weber (1998, p. 115) states that ‘such a set of shared presumptions, assumptions, beliefs, values and cultural practices constitute a world-view, a version of reality which comes to be accepted as common sense within a particular community,’ and which, in remarkable ways, facilitates interpersonal communication. Divergent schemata or cognitive models are products of differences in cultural orientation, and these naturally lead to communication breakdown in many conversational interactions (Peeters 2015; Sharifian 2015; Storey 2015; Kecskes 2015).

The Notion of Interpersonal Pragmatics

As works by Stewart (2009), Baxter and Braithwaite (2008), Locher and Watts (2005, 2008), Locher and Graham (2010), Spencer-Oatey (2007, 2011), Arundale (2006, 2010a, 2010b, 2013), O’Driscoll (2013) show, interpersonal pragmatics and interpersonal communication interface in many ways and research in both areas has flourished within the last decade. From a lay person’s point of view, the etymology of the word ‘interpersonal’ which modifies the two concepts presupposes some form of relationship or relating between two or more entities. Interpersonal pragmatics captures the essence of linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour of participants in the context of one-on-one interaction. Locher and Graham (2010) explain it as the study of the ways in which ‘social actors use language to shape and form relationship in situ’ (p. 1).

According to Arundale (2013), the present interest in interpersonal pragmatics can be traced to Leech’s (1983) concept of interpersonal rhetoric, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) polemic on politeness, and Locher and Watts’ (2005, 2008) relational work approach to the notions of face and politeness, to mention but a few instances. Like the general field of pragmatics itself, the ideas in interpersonal pragmatics have emanated from several areas of interest. This perhaps accounts for the divergent notions and perceptions about the workings of interpersonal pragmatics. For instance, Locher and Bousfield (2008) view the
interactions that occur in interpersonal pragmatics within a relational context (p. 5). They share the same notion with Locher and Watts (2008) who explain relational contexts as ‘all aspects of the work invested by individuals in the construction and transformation of interpersonal relationships among those engaged in social practice.’ (p. 96). Spencer-Oatey (2007) views this relationship in terms of rapport management while for Jim O’Driscoll (2013), language is secondary in the analysis of interpersonal pragmatics. He stresses this fact by providing a defamatory account of language in his analysis of an interpersonal encounter. According to him, ‘if we are serious about a participant perspective on interaction, our analysis need to remove words from their traditionally central position,’ as the ultimate aim of analysing interpersonal encounters should not be ‘the understanding of language but rather that of human social relation’ (p. 174, 175). Arundale (2010) conceptualizes interpersonal pragmatics in terms of ‘Face Constituting Theory’ (FCT). Most importantly, he argues that since there is much overlap between research in interpersonal communication and the research interest in (im)politeners, face (work) and the like, interpersonal pragmatics should not be conceived of as a sub-discipline independent of interpersonal communication, which Fisher and Adams (1994, p.18) define as ‘the process creating social relationship between at least two people by acting in concert with another. ‘Arundale (2013) proposes an interpersonal pragmatics which primarily offers ‘a pragmatics perspective on interpersonal aspects of communication and interaction,’ an interpersonal pragmatics directed at building ‘bridges between the fields of pragmatics and communication and other related fields’ (p. 2). To this extent, interpersonal pragmatics is conceived of as interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary.

To echo Arundale here, this study actually offers a pragmatics perspective on interpersonal communication. Although the notion of face and its many manifestations, including relational work and identity construction are important elements in interpersonal pragmatics and communication, this study privileges cultural and even familial expectations and norms from which participants draw inferences that regulate linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour and interactions in specific contexts.

Relevance

Relevance theory is a cognitive theory of meaning which explains how we comprehend and interpret information in given contexts. It is inspired by H.P. Grice’s inferential communication model and it shares Grice’s intuitions that utterances raise expectations of relevance (Grice, 1989, pp. 30-31). In Grice’s view, communication is a rational and cooperative endeavour, and the reasoning process is governed by this cooperative principle and four maxims, which he termed Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner (1989, pp. 30-31). Speakers may fail to adhere to these maxims in many different ways and thus, produce

Relevance theory questions the rationale behind Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP) and the maxims, especially the role of deliberate maxim violation, and the treatment of tropes as violation of the maxim of truthfulness. Relevance theory argues that the expectations of pertinence raised by an utterance are precise enough to guide the hearer towards speaker’s meaning (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, p. 250). The major claims of the theory are that the decoded sentence meaning is capable of being interpreted in a number of different ways in the same context. Further, it argues that these interpretations are not equally accessible to us and that we rely on a rather powerful criterion when selecting the most appropriate interpretation – that is, the most accessible, which ultimately cancels out other interpretations in the context (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, p. 250; Yus, 2009, p. 854). As a cognitive theory of meaning, relevance is arguably best suited for the interpretation of inferential processes. The theory is anchored on two principles: the cognitive principle, which states that human cognition is designed to maximize relevance, and the communicative principle, which states that every ostensive communication comes with a presumption of its own relevance (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, p. 254).

Sperber and Wilson (1995) further state: ‘a communicator who produces an ostensive stimulus is trying to fulfill two intentions… the informative intention, to make manifest to her audience a set of assumptions…and the communicative intention, to make her informative intention mutually manifest’ (p.163). Relevance theory sees communicative interaction as a matter of adjusting mutual cognitive environment. The claim here is that since meaning is associated with the speaker’s intention, it is the speaker’s duty to make manifest his or her intention to communicate a particular piece of information in some way. What the hearer does then is to pin down the speaker’s meaning based on the evidence that conveys the speaker’s intention as provided in the utterance. These are the principles on which interpersonal communication and pragmatics are anchored. The section below is on data presentation and analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Text One: ‘I didn’t mean anything, I just said it.’

(In the text below, a woman reports an encounter with her mother-in-law a few hours before she (the daughter-in-law) came to the office. For convenience, participants in the encounter are renamed as follows: the woman as NGOZI, her mother-in-law as MOTHER and the third participant as EZE. The utterances are numbered for ease of reference.)
1. EZE: You don’t look happy this morning, Ngozi. Hope everything is all right.

2. NGOZI: Well, I don’t know. (Whispers) Let me tell you something. My mother-in-law made me afraid this morning. I’m terribly worried. In fact, I don’t know what to do.

NGOZI apparently loved her mother-in-law who was already 87, and had been visiting for about four weeks. It was time for the mother-in-law to go back to Lagos where she lived. That morning she called her daughter-in-law and began:

3. MOTHER: I still remember what happened during your marriage to my son – everything your family did. I love them all…When I’m gone, please take good care of my son. Be a mother to my son. He should also be a father to you. Never allow anything to come between both of you…

4. NGOZI: Okay Mama. But why are you telling me all this?

5. MOTHER: Don’t worry. Just continue to be good. Let me go and pack my bags.

6. NGOZI (to EZE): I’m afraid. This kind of talk seems to show that she may not be long with us. Is she going to die soon? What do you think?

7. EZE: Well, I’m not in a position to know such things, but what actually happened between both of you before this solemn advice? What did you say to her?

8. NGOZI: (She paused, and then sighed) I only told her to come and pose for a photograph, and then I remarked that when Papa (her husband) died it was difficult for us to find a good photograph for his obituary publication. But I didn’t mean anything, I just said it.

Before we examine what transpired between these two women, which is our main focus, we need to briefly look at the beginning of NGOZI’S meeting with EZE. The first pragmatic inference is made by EZE, and this happens before she even uttered a word. It is based on EZE’S observation of her looks as he wondered whether everything was all right with her (1). This shows the close
relationship both share as colleagues and explains the reason she could stop over in EZE’S office for a chat. EZE’S inference here is based on his observation of her emotions which is part of the requirement of interpersonal communication - to treat interactants as persons or unique individuals as opposed to communication that is ‘based on social roles and exchanges that minimise the presence of the communicator’s personal identities’ (Stewart, 2009, p. 32). In 2, ‘well, I don’t know’ is an indication of her inability to interpret her feelings at the time. Then, she whispers as if to avoid being overheard; meanwhile, there was no third party around. This again indicates the level of her fears. In this community, for some unknown reason, certain important matters are often discussed in whispers even where there is no threat of a third party or someone listening in. Such linguistic behaviour, however, produces in the hearer, a sense of gravity with which to regard the matter at stake. A similar action is repeated in 8 as ‘she paused and then sighed’, ‘this time, as a kind of anticipation of her probable culpability in the entire drama. These situations appear to support O’Driscoll (2013), who stresses the preeminence of actions and moves over the use of language in interpersonal interactions.

Now we come to what transpired between NGOZI and MOTHER. As Wilson and Sperber (2002) argue, “our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our memory retrieval mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions, and our inferential mechanisms tend spontaneously to process them in the most productive way” (p. 250). Generally, photographs are meant to preserve memories and they are often delightful objects among family treasures. This is the real world knowledge which the participants share. But photographs could also be a source of worry. For example, sometimes they remind you of how old you have become and how powerless you are against the aging forces. They can even recall memories you wish to forget. For the elderly, especially in the Southern part of Nigeria, where the death of old persons is celebrated with pump and pageantry as part of the culture, asking an old woman to come for a photograph (especially if the request is made by her children) could be a reminder of her mortality. So, ordinarily, in the above case, NGOZI’S request could give rise to a few contextual assumptions by her mother-in-law:

a. My daughter-in-law loves me very much and wants to remember me.

b. Everybody in the family wants to cherish the times we have had together.

c. Perhaps my daughter-in-law thinks my time is near.

d. This gesture is part of the preparation for my death and funerals.
In a normal communicative situation within this culture, a-c could be activated to a certain degree, with c most likely to be more relevant to the speaker’s meaning. But the situation here is rather marked because of the remark about her late father-in-law and the difficulty of finding a suitable photograph for his obituary announcements. We observe here that whether old or young, we all do have the ability to attribute mental states, thoughts and intentions to the speaker in the process of interpersonal communication. This is part of our cognitive endowment. The intention of NGOZI matches the interpretation of MOTHER in d, and naturally leads to the parting words in our text which became a source of worry to NGOZI.

We are looking at communication as an inferential activity that is somewhat mutual in the sense that both the speaker and the hearer are engaged in the process. Although NGOZI’S remark about her father-in-law was an aside, it was intended for the addressee to recognise and process in order to see the urgency or even the necessity of the action requested. MOTHER recalls the marriage of her son and this woman with some nostalgia. She does not say what happened on the occasion, or what her in-laws did. But by saying ‘I love them all,’ NGOZI can infer that they did well. Next, we observe the remark, ‘when I’m gone.’ Two contextual assumptions may be relevant to NGOZI here and she is likely to make her inferences accordingly. (a) “when I have returned to Lagos” (b) “when I am dead.” Although MOTHER was preparing to return to Lagos that morning, (a) is likely to be less relevant to NGOZI than (b). Once again the idea of culture comes into play. In this part of Nigeria, death is seen as a journey to another world, where life continues. This is why, during traditional burials, so much sacrifice is made to pave the way for the dead. And if there is any suspicion that the cause of death is not natural, weapons are provided in the grave - weapons the dead person could use to attack his/her killer. So, based on the context of the utterance, NGOZI should understand it as in (b). Furthermore, the utterance, ‘Be a mother to my son’ also shows she was speaking of her death. Since it is not naturally possible to have two mothers at the same time, NGOZI should see this responsibility as something that should come after the death of her mother-in-law.

Finally, we come to NGOZI’S last statement: ‘I didn’t mean anything; I just said it.’ We begin by enriching two indeterminate items in the utterance namely, ‘anything’ and ‘it’. In relevance-theoretic terms, enrichment picks a particular lexical item in the context and strengthens the concept it encodes (Carston, 1996, p. 62; 2002, p. 57; 2010, p. 217). Put mildly, ‘anything’ here means anything harmful, so that the sentence could read: ‘I didn’t mean anything harmful.’ ‘Anything’ could also mean ‘death’. Then, ‘it’ in the context anaphorically picks up her remarks about her father-in-law, and thus identifies the main bone of contention. A cognitive view of culture sees culture as a learned behaviour, as one’s knowledge of the world. This means that members of a particular culture
share some things in common – patterns of thought, ways of understanding the world, making inferences, and predictions (Duranti, 1997, p. 27). Following Wilson and Carston (2008), we can schematise the inferential process of MOTHER as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hearer's Interpretive Assumptions</th>
<th>The Bases for the Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) NGOZI has said to her mother-in-law: ‘When Papa died it was difficult to find a good photograph for the obituary announcements.’</td>
<td>Decoding of NGOZI’S utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) NGOZI’S utterance is optimally relevance to the hearer</td>
<td>Expectation raised by the recognition of NGOZI’S utterance as a communicative act, and the acceptance of the presumption of relevance it automatically conveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) NGOZI’S utterance will achieve relevance by providing a reason why the hearer should accede to the request for a photograph of hers to be taken.</td>
<td>Expectation raised by (b), together with the fact that such explanation would be most relevant to the hearer at this point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Good photographs are necessary for obituary announcements.</td>
<td>First assumption to occur to the hearer which, together with other appropriate premises, might satisfy (c).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) At present she does not have a good phonograph.</td>
<td>Accepted as implicit premise of NGOZI’S utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) When Papa [her husband] died and the children needed to make his obituary announcement, they could not find a suitable photograph [of his] for the announcement, [a situation her daughter-in-law does not want repeated]</td>
<td>(An explanation of) the first enriched interpretation of NGOZI’S utterance as decoded in (a) to occur to hearer which, together with (d) and (e), might lead to the satisfaction of (c), interpretation accepted as NGOZI’S explicit meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) She needs this photograph for her own obituary announcement.</td>
<td>Inferred from (d) and (e), contributing to the satisfaction of (b) and (c), and accepted as an implicit conclusion of NGOZI’S utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) She needs to begin to prepare for her death/ her daughter-in-law believes the hearer’s time is near/ her daughter-in-law is unfeeling to remind the hearer of her mortality.</td>
<td>Inferred from (e), (f) and (g), contributing to the satisfaction of (b) and (c), and accepted as some of the several weak implicatures arising from NGOZI’S utterance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Wilson and Sperber (2002) argue, the comprehension process such as the one just described need not proceed sequentially. Interpretation is often carried out ‘online’, and usually begins ‘while the utterance is still in progress’ (p. 237). What the hearer does is to continue to make hypotheses and adjustments of the line of interpretation provided by the speaker as the process continues. One principle that guides the entire process here is ‘accessibility.’ The more accessible a particular interpretation is in relation to others, the more relevant that interpretation is to the hearer. On the whole, the emergence of meaning that ultimately meets the hearer’s expectation of relevance is a function of the interaction of cultural sensibilities and cognitive dispositions, which, as we have seen, are crucially linked. Many of our utterances acquire their meanings from these domains, whether we are conscious of it or not. In fact, we are hardly aware of how far or how much our thought patterns, ways of seeing the world, things we say or do, are moulded or influenced by our culture or our collective consciousness or what Weber calls ‘cognitive models or schemata.’ No matter how different the effect of our utterances seems to be from what we think we intended originally, chances are that the so-called cognitive models have such powerful influences on our intentions so that the outcomes of our utterances are nearly always what a member of the same speech community thinks them to be, even though they do not have direct access to our intentions. Therefore, NGOZI’S motivation for the ostensive behaviour of asking her mother-in-law to take a few photographs, her actions in the context, and the remarks about her father-in-law, lies buried in her consciousness as a member of a culture in which certain inferences about old persons and death are made salient (Underhill 2012).

Text Two: The Bus Conductor

In Nigeria, bus conductors are generally despised by members of the public. This is because many of them are considered rude, mercenary or even crime-prone. On this particular occasion, one of them had a clash with a young woman in the bus as they commuted from one part of the city to another. In the transport system, fares are usually negotiable. The encounter is recreated here.

1. CONDUCTOR: Woman, your money.

2. WOMAN: I’ve paid already. Let me have my change, please.

3. CONDUCTOR: What change? I told you it’s a hundred naira before you boarded.

4. WOMAN: No! You never said anything.
5. CONDUCTOR: But you’re supposed to know even if I don’t say anything.

6. WOMAN: This short distance? *(standing up)* Please my change.

7. CONDUCTOR: Woman, behave yourself. Don’t disturb my job.

8. WOMAN: *(long silence, just staring)* Useless people. This is what you always do.

9. CONDUCTOR: I’m doing my job, if you disturb me you’ll regret it *(begins to sing)*.

10. WOMAN: Job indeed! Bus conductor. So you call this a job. Can’t you see your mates?

11. CONDUCTOR: At least it’s better than prostitution.

12. WOMAN: *(furious)* What? Who are you calling a prostitute...eh? It’s your grandmother that is a prostitute...

13. CONDUCTOR: Woman, you know where you dey come from?


This verbal assault continued from both sides with greater and more damaging invectives as passengers drew close to the last bus stop. 13 and 14 are rendered in the local Pidgin. 13 (‘You know where you are coming from?’); 14 (‘Where am I coming from? Isn’t it a market that I went to? It’s your grandmother that’s coming from a brothel’).

This is a conflictual situation and it is typical of what many people encounter daily as they commute from one place to the other. Sometimes, such encounters even result in physical assault. In this encounter, the verbal mechanism or strategy that initiates the conflict is crucial, as also is the role of pragmatic inference in exacerbating the conflict. This verbal strategy is impoliteness, described as communicative strategy designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony (Culpeper et al., 2003, p. 1546). In 1 above, the conductor addresses her as ‘woman.’ Most young women here consider this offensive, apart from the fact that the speaker does not employ any politeness strategy to mitigate his direct request. Although her preferred self-image has been harmed in some way, her response in 2 is polite. The conductor does not argue the fact that she has paid as she claims in 2, giving rise to the inference
that he may have intended to extort money from her by requesting her to pay again. ‘Anything’ in turn 4 simply means anything like a hundred naira as the fare. This is an example of explicature occasioned by the indeterminacy of the expression (Carston, 2002). In 7 the conductor issues out a threat: ‘Woman, behave yourself...’, a ‘face-aggravating act’ (Locher & Bousfield, 2008, p.3), which prompts the lady to use an all-inclusive impolite expression, ‘useless people’ in 8 (referring to a class of people known as conductors) thereby completing the cycle of the verbal aggression. Thereafter, there is a gradual rise in the tempo of the verbal aggression. Threat is repeated in 9: ‘...if you disturb me you’ll regret it’ and in response to this the young lady attempts to maximise her social harm by attacking the credibility of the conductor’s job as well as his personality in general (turn 10). As Tedeschi and Felson (1994, p. 171) have argued, social harm involves damage to the social identity of the target persons and a lowering of their power or status. The lady demeans not only the conductor’s job but also his person as the situation becomes competitive and creative. According to Culpeper (2011), there is some element of creativity in the verbal assault in a conflictual situation which makes it entertaining. ‘If one is attacked, one responds in kind or with a superior attack. And to achieve a superior attack requires creative skills’ (p. 234). Needless to say that the other passengers felt entertained as they listened in carefully and perhaps anticipated the turn from which would eventually emerge the ‘winner’ of the conflict.

The last four turns form a climax in the interaction, and here pragmatic inference plays a crucial role. In response to the scorn of the young woman, that is, to the idea of he being a mere bus conductor and being a non-achiever as a result, the conductor says in 11: ‘At least it’s better than prostitution.’ How does the young woman connect what she said in 10 with the idea of prostitution in turn 11? According to Relevance theory, in comprehending an utterance, the hearer must find an interpretation which the speaker must have expected to be optionally relevant to the hearer, and this involves the ‘setting up of a context of assumptions within which to access the cognitive impact of the utterance’ (Carston, 2002, p. 43). Some background information is necessary here in accessing the meaning intended by the speaker. This encounter took place in the Nigerian city of Benin which is believed to be notorious for trafficking young ladies for the purpose of prostitution. The trade is held in utter disdain by members of the public who spare no effort to ridicule those involved. To call any young woman there a prostitute is a most demeaning and devastating verbal assault. But the speaker does not overtly call the young woman a prostitute in turn 10. He merely states that even if his job has a very low regard, it is better than prostitution. However, she is able to arrive at his meaning by making inferences based on the principle of relevance. First, she assumes she is the target of the utterance. Second, she assumes the conductor is not referring to himself as not being a prostitute, because in Benin men are not known to practice the trade.
Third, she also assumes the utterance is not a mere contrast between the two jobs as that would negate the spirit of communicative aggression which it intends to achieve in the context.

For the young woman, the most plausible interpretation therefore is that the conductor thinks that she is a prostitute. In terms of processing efforts and cognitive effects, this inferential path is less costly, more accessible, and relevant in the expected way, leading naturally to her vituperation in 11. Now to counter the effect of 10, she takes her invectives way beyond the conductor, bypassed his mother, and went straight to his grandmother. The attack on the grandmother is a way of finding the strongest word ever to ease the pains she feels, and an attack on the conductor’s extended positive face. Turn 13 echoes 11 as the conductor implicates the woman is coming from a place where, many believe, prostitution is practised. This puts the lady on the defensive as she asks in desperation: ‘where I dey come from? Nobi market I go?’ Once again through pragmatic inference she arrives at the conclusion that the conductor thinks she is coming from a brothel thus reinforcing the accusation that she must indeed be a prostitute. In retaliation, she transfers that conclusion to the conductor’s grandmother. Thus the interplay of cultural sensibilities and pragmatic inference could be observed at the background of the interaction.

Text Three: *O bughi ihe n’eche* (It’s not what you think)

It was about 8 pm. Nneka, a female student, had not returned from her tutorial class that ended at 5 pm. Her mother, Ogechi, was waiting impatiently in front of their apartment. There had been some shooting at the end of the street, and people had begun to shut their doors out of fear, as cases of gang fights were not uncommon in the area. Then suddenly, she sighted Nneka crossing over to their gate. They are Igbos. Code-switching is a common phenomenon in Igbo conversation.

1. OGECHI : *(furious)* Nne, *Kedu ihe jidere gi nilo rue ugbua?* (What kept you outside till this time?).

2. NNEKA : *E nwetaghim taxi n’oge.* (I… didn’t get taxi on time)... and when I got there I had to hide somewhere for sometime...*maka egbe agbara*(because of the shooting).

3. OGECHI : *Unyahu o bu mmiri zoro, taa o bu taxi.* (Yesterday it was rain, today it’s taxi). What if any stray bullets had hit your enemy? Eh? Together with what we are in now...*Nne bia, I ghaghi egbum n’ulo a* (Nne, come. You will not kill me in this house.)
4. NNEKA: Ozuela (It’s enough). Am I not here now? (She attempts to walk past her mother.)

5. OGECHI: Nneka bia ebe a (Come here). By the way, who was the man that walked you down to this gate and then turned back?

6. NNEKA: <silence>…

7. OGECHI: Yes, I saw both of you. Was that the taxi?

8. NNEKA: O bughi ihe n’eche (It’s not what you think). I just met him there.


The above text is a conversation between a mother and her teenage daughter. Ogechi is angry and tired of Nneka’s excuses for returning late every day from her tutorial classes, especially in view of the security challenges in their area. Once again, culture, pragmatic inference and the common knowledge shared by these participants are crucial elements in understanding their utterances. As expected, Ogechi demands to know why Nneka has stayed late. Nneka equivocates. First, she quickly blames the transport system, and then her vague employment of spatial deixis, there and somewhere, and unspecified time, sometime, all raise some suspicion and help Ogechi to infer that she has made up the stories. Her conclusion is evident in 3 when she says: ‘Yesterday it was rain; today it’s taxi.’

How does the hearer understand the second sentence in 3? ‘What if any stray bullets had hit your enemy?’ The answer is located within the culture of the participants. It is generally believed, especially in the southern part of Nigeria that one should not associate oneself with evil or misfortune, because by doing so, that evil or misfortune will eventually happen to the speaker. As a result, instead of saying, for example, ‘they planned to kill me,’ members of this culture would say, ‘They planned to kill my enemy, or they planned to kill a tree in the forest.’ Therefore, in this context, Nneka should understand ‘your enemy’ here as a kind of ‘euphemistic irony’ which indirectly points to her. This indirect way of referring to an interlocutor could pose a big problem to hearers from different cultural backgrounds.

Still in turn 3, we take note of the utterance, ‘Together with what we are in now.’ A non-participant hearer of this utterance, who perhaps does not share the same encyclopedic knowledge with Ogechi and her daughter, might find this extremely difficult to comprehend. But Nneka in this context can infer that her mother refers to the present problem in their family, caused by her father’s stroke which has left him bedridden. If a stray bullet had met her daughter that would
have been too much of trouble for her in view of her husband’s illness. In response to that imagined situation, she exclaims: *I ghaghi egbum n’ulo a* (*You will not kill me in this house*). Again, this is another way of avoiding the attribution of misfortune to herself according to their cultural practice. Following the Speech Act tradition, this statement should serve as a warning to her daughter not to create situations that could exacerbate her troubles and frustration in the family.

Finally, we come to turns 5-9 where pragmatic inference plays a major role. A young man had walked Nneka down to the gate and then sneaked away. Ogechi asks: ‘*By the way, who was the man that walked you down to this gate and then turned back?*’ Nneka’s silence in the next turn indicates that she has been completely taken unawares. Ogechi’s next turn is sarcastic: ‘*Was that the taxi?*’ In other words, was that the taxi you couldn’t get on time and therefore returned late? The attribution of thoughts and attitudes in this conversation is mutual. Ogechi thinks her daughter is being dishonest and that is reflected in the echoic, ‘*Was that the taxi?*’ This utterance echoes turn 2: *Enwetaghim taxi n’oge* (*I didn’t get taxi on time*). According to Noh (1995, p. 109) and Radford (1988, p. 463), generally, an echoic utterance repeats what was said in a previous sentence within the discourse situation. In the relevance-theoretic framework, an echoic utterance is a representation that reports what someone else has said or thought, and that expresses an attitude to it (Carston, 1994, p. 332). The echoic utterance achieves relevance by conveying the speaker’s attitude to the thought expressed (Wilson, 2002, p.148). Such attitudes range from agreement to complete disagreement. The speaker may be puzzled, angry, amused, intrigued, skeptical, sarcastic, etc. or any combination of these. Given their reflexivity, echoic utterances enhance communicative actions which produce the appropriate contexts in which meanings are negotiated.

Nneka’s response in turn 8: *Obughi ihe n’ech* (*It’s not what you think*) expresses a deeper level of attribution of thought to her mother. In this case, she does not report verbatim, her mother’s words, but attributes to her what she thinks her mother thinks about her in a metarepresentational way, and negating that thought and also expressing an attitude to it (Carston, 1994, p. 323). These processes are entirely inferential. In turn 9, Ogechi upholds her disbelief and skepticism as she once again echoes her daughter’s vague reference ‘*there*’ in turn 8. Ogechi’s last word, ‘Eziokwu’ is ironical. In relevance theory, verbal irony is a variety of echoic, interpretive use, specifically, echoic dissociation or rejection of attributed thought (Sperber and Wilson, 1986/95). Ogechi knows her daughter is lying, yet uses the word ‘truth,’ thereby ending the discussion without faith in her daughter’s explanations.
Concluding Remarks

We have just examined some of the ways in which the process of interpersonal communication is mediated by cultural norms and practices that form the background on which participants interact, using examples from specific socio-cultural settings in Nigeria. Interpersonal communication is a highly inferential activity that is mutual in operation because both the communicator and the listener are involved in the process. As listeners in a particular communicative interaction, our powerful cognitive endowments together with the overwhelming influence of the culture in which we are immersed can lead to the generation of meanings that may not have been fully anticipated by the speaker, but which none the less cannot be wished away. Moreover, every communicative encounter comes with its own unique expectation of relevance and appropriateness of language, which if violated in any way may create problems similar to those found in inter-cultural situations. Therefore, understanding the influence of culture and the workings of our minds as we have shown in the Nigerian situation is crucial for a successful interpersonal communication.
References


Language, Education and Linguistic Human Rights in Ghana

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Abstract
The use of the familiar language of learners as medium of instruction (MoI) promotes quality education. However, sixty years after independence, Ghana is still grappling with the issue of which language to use in education. Currently, the language policy of education in Ghana mandates the use of the child’s first language as MoI only up to Primary Three. This paper uses both primary and secondary sources to argue that the current language policy violates the Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) of the Ghanaian child. To end this violation, the paper argues for the addition of more L1s as MoI, the cultivation of a positive attitude towards the use of L1 as MoI, the constitutional provision on the obligatory use of L1 as MoI, the establishment of structures to monitor the implementation of the language policy and a sociolinguistic study of language representation in the lower primary classroom.

Keywords: linguistic human rights, human rights, education, language policy, Ghana

Introduction
Every individual, irrespective of gender, race, or ethnic background, educational background, and country of origin has rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of the United Nations, people of all walks of life have the right to own property; including language and that nobody has the right to obstruct the realisation of this right without good reason (United Nations, 2010). Additionally, every human has the right to have his/her education in a language of their choice. The last article of the UDHR stresses that no person or society should violate the rights enshrined in the declaration. As Philipson, and Skutnabb-Kangas and Rannut (1995, p. 2) succinctly indicate, ‘the principle underlying the concept of universal human rights is that individuals and groups, irrespective of where they live, are entitled to norms which no state can be justified in restricting or violating’.

1 I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers immensely for their very constructive contributions to the completion of this paper. I also wish to express my gratitude to the editor of Legon Journal of the Humanities for painstakingly going through this paper to ensure that it meets the required standard.
An aspect of the UDHR which is crucial to this paper is Linguistic Human Rights (LHR). LHR was developed from the UDHR to protect minority language groups. By this assertion, LHR becomes a basic human right. The rights enshrined in the LHR declaration include language and culture. The extension of rights enshrined in the LHR is that every child has the right to have education in his/her mother tongue. LHR marks language as a distinct right because of its importance to success in education and human development. LHR, most importantly ensures that people, especially minorities have their basic education in their mother tongue and that this right should not be violated by any state (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). Notwithstanding this provision in the LHR, many African countries, including Ghana violate these rights in their educational programmes. It must be noted that if a country fails to educate its citizens in their first language (LI) or mother tongue, they are likely to lose their identity and experience little success in education. Not using children’s LI in education at all or to an appreciable level to enhance their academic capabilities is a violation of their linguistic right. This paper critically examines the language policy of education in Ghana to establish how it violates the LHR of the Ghanaian child and then suggests ways that the language policy of education in Ghana can be implemented to promote the Linguistic Human Rights of the Ghanaian school child. The paper used both primary and secondary sources to investigate the matter. The primary (original) sources include the Universal Human Rights Declaration (1948) and Linguistic Human Rights (1994), and Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996), while the secondary (studies by other researchers) sources include published books and journal articles on the topic under investigation.

**Literature Review**

Language and education are two interrelated concepts which cannot be divorced because education information is disseminated through language and language endures and thrives through education. Language of education is a determinant, crucial to academic success. Educational objectives are likely to be achieved when the language used is the L1 of the child. This assertion has been a major driving factor behind UNESCO’s declaration on the use of the child’s L1 as medium of instruction in schools, especially at the basic level (UNESCO, 1953). According to Minority Rights Group (2009), the choice of a language for education should reflect the rights of people to develop their own language and culture. Despite the positive effects of using the child’s L1 as medium of instruction in education, many multilingual countries in Africa, including Ghana, use a language of education which is not the L1 of the child. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2008), only 13 percent of African children receive their education in their native language. Though some African countries including Ghana have fashioned out language policies which emphasise the use of the child’s L1 as medium of instruction, little effort is put in place to ensure that
such policies work or are implemented. Additionally, the policies have escape clauses that make their violation very easy (Bamgbose, 2000). For example, the current language policy of education which was recommended by the Anamuah-Mensah Education Committee Report and accepted by the government indicates that

Where teachers and learning materials are available and linguistic composition of classes is fairly uniform, the children’s first language must be used as the dominant medium of instruction in kindergarten and lower primary school. (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2004)

The tenets of this policy are not far-reaching enough to guarantee the observance of the linguistic rights of the Ghanaian child in the educational system. In the first place, educational policy implementers use the excuse of lack of textbooks and inadequate teachers to resort to the use of English as medium of instruction. Additionally, the multilingual situation of the country and some of its classrooms is used as a pretext to deprive the Ghanaian child of using his/her L1 as medium of instruction. Little effort is made by government and educational planners to confront the problems inherent in this policy and ensure that the Ghanaian child’s LHR are upheld. According to the Asmara Declaration (2000), all African children have the unalienable right to attend school and learn in their L1 and therefore, every effort should be made to develop African languages at all levels of education. However, this important declaration to uphold the LHR of the African child in general and the Ghanaian child in particular is not strictly adhered to in the education of the child.

Much research has been undertaken on the language policy of education in Ghana (Dzameshie, 1988; Andoh-Kumi, 1999; Dzinyela, 2001; Anyidoho & Anyidoho, 2003; Ansa, 2004; Owu-Ewie, 2006, Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014; Opoku-Amankwa, Edu-Boandoh & Brew-Hammond; 2014; Osei, 2015; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). However, these studies have concentrated on language use in the classroom, language attitude, language policy implementation, debates on L1/L2 use as medium of instruction and the perception of Ghanaian on the use of L1 as medium of instruction. Little attention, however, has been paid in these inquiries, to how the language policy of education violates the Linguistic Human Rights of the Ghanaian child. This paper therefore examines the current language policy of education in Ghana by juxtaposing it against the tenets of the Linguistic Human Rights of the Ghanaian child to see how such rights are violated or otherwise.
Ghana’s Linguistic Landscape and Contemporary Language of Education Policy Issues

Ghana is a multilingual country with divergent ethnic groups and languages. According to the United States Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016), the current population of Ghana is about 27.7 million and is made up of about 75 ethnic groups. Research has not been conclusive on the precise number of languages spoken within the borders of Ghana. For example, Bamgbose (2000) specifies that there are fifty-seven mutually unintelligible speech forms but the Ghana Statistical Service (2002) and Gordon (2005) indicate that there are 83 languages in Ghana. In another instance Simons and Fennig (2017) report that there are about 81 languages in Ghana of which 73 are indigenous and 8 non-indigenous. The discrepancies in the exact number of languages in the country have come about as a result of certain factors and perceptions, prominent among which are difficulty in distinguishing between language and dialect, lack of clear-cut definition between ethnic and linguistic identities, limited and outdated data on many Ghanaian languages, and attitude (Owu-Ewie, 2013). Despite the discrepancies, one fact remains: the indigenous languages of Ghana belong to the Niger-Congo language family and subdivided further into Kwa and Gur groups. Added to the indigenous languages are English (the ‘official’ language of Ghana) and Hausa (Chadic-Afro-Asiatic). Besides, there exist pockets of Mande language group (Lighi, Zamarama/Bambara and Bisa) and Moore.

The history of education in Ghana reveals that the country has over the years grappled with the challenge of what language to use as medium of instruction in its educational system, especially at the lower primary level. During the colonial era (1925-1957), Ghana (then known as the Gold Coast) had a stable language policy of education which emphasised the use of the child’s L1 as the medium of instruction at the lower primary level (P1-3)* and English as MoI from Primary Four onwards (Owu-Ewie, 2013). The situation became unstable when Ghana gained independence. For instance, immediately after independence Ghana resorted to the use of English as medium of instruction from primary one until 1966 when the policy was changed to the use of L1 as medium of instruction from primary one to three and English afterwards. This policy arrangement continued with no effective implementation and monitoring procedure until 2003 when the policy was reviewed in favour of the use of English as medium of instruction from Primary One. However, the policy of using all-English medium of instruction was changed to the use of L1 as medium of instruction in 2007. This review was based on the Anamuah-Mensah Education Reform Review Committee Report in 2004 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2004). Currently, the language policy of education mandates the use of the child’s L1 as medium of instruction from the kindergarten (KG) to Primary Three and English thereafter. At the lower primary, English is learned as a subject while Ghanaian
language becomes a subject of study from Primary Four to Junior High School. Though this policy is in existence, most Ghanaian children learn in a language which is not their L1 because their L1s are not part of the eleven Ghanaian languages selected by the government as media of instruction. Besides, most schools still use English as medium of instruction as early as the kindergarten stage. The policy is not strictly adhered to. It is obvious then that the language policy is neither enforced nor adhered to. This disregard of the policy constitutes a violation of the linguistic rights of most Ghanaian children.

**Language Rights Protection: Universal Human Rights (UHR) and Linguistic Human Rights (LHR)**

This section examines certain portions of UHR and LHR documents and how they relate to language rights protection in education. The UHR declaration which was adopted in 1948 is an international document that stipulates the basic rights and fundamental freedoms to which all human beings are entitled. In plain language, UHR are the inalienable rights of all people, irrespective of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language or any other status. Though it is not binding on all countries because it is not a treaty, it has had profound influence on the development of international human right laws (Australia Human Rights Commission, 2008). Two articles of the UHR relevant to this paper are Articles 17 and 22. Article 17 indicates that everyone has the right to own property and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his/her property. Language, according to Chomsky (1983), is property owned by humans because we acquire language as we acquire other types of property and use them to our benefit. The implication of this in relation to Article 17 of UHR is that every individual has the right to own a language and use it to his/her advantage. Article 22 also states that every citizen of the world has the right (among other things) to social and cultural rights of people which are indispensable in human dignity and free development (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1996). Since language is a key component of culture, Article 22 encapsulates the individual’s right to his/her language. These two articles make it an inalienable right for people to own language and use it in education (Owu-Ewie, 2009).

On the other hand, Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) are captured in a document developed from UHR to ensure that the language rights of all people are protected. LHR in the larger framework of the UHR is a subsidiary set of rights which brings to the fore the protection of language rights of individuals.

***The pre-tertiary education system in Ghana is made up of 2 years Kindergarten, 6 years primary (3 years lower and 3 years upper), 3 years Junior high school and 3 years Senior high school***
It is crucial at this point to look at Linguistic Rights and Linguistic Human Rights. Linguistic Rights are the human and civil rights concerning the individual and collective right to choose the language or languages for communication in a private or public atmosphere (Extra & Yagmur, 2004). The most basic definition of linguistic rights is the right of individuals to use their language with other members of their linguistic group, regardless of the status of their language. Linguistic Human Rights, on the other hand is defined as ‘only those language rights . . . which are so basic for a dignified life that everybody has them because of being human; therefore, in principle no state (or individual) is allowed to violate them’ (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008, p. 109). It must be noted that there is distinction between Language Rights (LR) and Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) because the former concept covers a much wider scope as not all LR are LHR. However, all LHR are language rights. What distinguishes LR from LHR is between what is necessary and what is enrichment-oriented (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Both give people the right and freedom to own and use their languages freely (United Nations Human Rights, 1992). LHR is a declaration which aims at dealing with conflicts surrounding multilingualism (Ricento, 2006). The most important point of LHR is that all people have the right to express and develop their culture, language [emphasis added] and rules of organisation (The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, 1996). This implies that all humans have the right to use their language in education and any practice contrary to this is a violation of their linguistic right. In this paper, LHR is used as the framework.

Diversity of Positions on Linguistic Human Rights

This section discusses the various approaches to dealing with LHR in multilingual societies. It is crucial in this discussion because it gives an idea of how the choice of language in a multilingual society can be handled to satisfy the language rights of individuals. There are three main theories which underpin language rights debates for improving LHR in multicultural multilingual societies. These theories are the Liberal Multiculturalist Approach of equal recognition (Patten, 2003a), the Liberal Neutralist Approach of language consolidation (Levy, 2000) and the Democratic Liberal Approach of Familiarisation (Valadez, 2001).

Liberal Multiculturalist Approach of Equal Recognition

According to Patten who proposed the Liberal Multiculturalist Approach of equal recognition, people of minority languages must have equal treatment in a liberal state and they should also have their languages used in public institutions (e.g. schools), public services and public businesses as the majority languages. This proposition is anchored on three motives; fairness, the significance of
language for individual identity and equal access to opportunities. The aim of this approach is to create some parity between the different majority and minority languages. Though this proposition is ideal in a multilingual society, Mantouvalou (2009) argues that it does not mean equality of respect for individual identities and equal access of opportunities for minority members. Other critics of the proposition indicate that for minority speakers to have access to equal employment, they should speak the majority language. It also creates discrimination against minority speakers because they often speak the majority language with an accent and are therefore easily identified as non-native speakers of the majority language (Patten, 2007; Mantouvalou, 2009).

**Liberal Neutralist Approach of Language Consolidation**

The second perspective is the Liberal Neutralist Approach of language consolidation (Levy, 2000). In Levy’s view, for individuals to be equally treated in a multilingual society, the State should not explicitly endorse a particular identity (e.g. language) or culture over others. Levy, however thinks that an official language can be legitimately endorsed without violating the principle of State neutrality because of its instrumental values. There are three reasons for this approach (Levy, 2004). Firstly, the use of a common language is necessary because it ensures equal access to opportunities among citizens of the State. The second reason is that it is a fair policy which enhances citizen’s participation in politics and controls how State institutions function. Lastly, this approach ensures efficiency, which increases stability within the state. Despite these positives, this approach has attracted some backlash since some linguistic minority people may feel that they belong to a State which is linguistically, historically and culturally different from the majority. Such minority groups are likely to break away and form an independent state (Mantouvalou, 2009). It is also argued that such approach is ‘ahistorical’ and ‘apolitical’ (Mantouvalou, 2009). May (2003, 2005) indicates that the consolidation approach may result in the minority losing their identity since the imposition of an official language for instrumental reason is done without considering the silent identity component that is inherent in it. This approach is what the language policy of education in Ghana is portraying. English is used as the official language and only eleven indigenous languages are promoted leaving over 70 plus indigenous languages relegated to the background. English is promoted over the other languages because of its instrumental value to the detriment of the indigenous languages. Additionally, eleven indigenous languages are given hegemonic status to the neglect of many indigenous languages. This means that children of these neglected languages (minority languages) are likely to lose their identity because they are being educated in a different language. Their languages are seen as having no value to them.
Democratic Liberal Approach of Familiarisation

The Democratic Liberal Approach of familiarisation proposed by Valadez (2001) requires the effective participation of minority members under conditions of non-denomination in common institutions. In the view of Valadez, language is a medium of communication that familiarises citizens with each other’s beliefs and views in a pluralist society (2001 cited in Mantouvalou, 2009, pp. 477–506). As a democratic principle, familiarisation entails giving equal participation to all. It is a situation where the State gives fair chance to all members of the various groups (minorities) in order to reduce the external and internal forms of domination (Leborde, 2008). This implies that in a multilingual State like Ghana, all languages are to be promoted and used in schools as MoI and subjects of study. Embracing all languages for education impedes the exclusion of minority language speakers. According to Mantouvalou (2009), this approach empowers minority languages to express their cultural affiliations without any other imposed on them. The current language policy of education in Ghana goes against this theory and against LHR because most Ghanaian languages are excluded from being used as medium of instruction in the educational system.

Linguistics Human Rights vis-à-vis Language Policy of Education in Ghana

This section of the article juxtaposes some articles enshrined in the UHR and LHR declarations with the language policy of education in Ghana to see how LHR is adhered to or violated in the education of the Ghanaian child. For readers’ appreciation of the discussion in this section, Articles 17 and 26 of the UHR, the concept of LHR in general, Article 27 of The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Article 2 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities promulgated in 1992 will be used. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly with resolution 2200A (XXI) on 16 December 1966, and came into force on 23rd March, 1976.

The articles are paraphrased below:

a. UHR Article 17: Everyone has the right to own property (including language) and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his/her property.

b. UHR Article 22: Every individual has cultural rights indispensable for his/her dignity and the free development of his/her personality.
c. UHR Article 26: Everyone has the right to education and such education shall be free and compulsory at least at the basic and fundamental stages and parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

d. ICCPR Article 27 and Article 2(1) on Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities guarantee e. the rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language freely and (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966; United Nations, 1992).

A synthesis of the above articles indicates that individuals have the right to use their languages in their education. The implication of this is that educating children in a language which deviates from their own is a violation of their Linguistic Human Rights.

Ghana practices the early exit transitional bilingual system of education. It is argued that the use of the child’s L1/mother tongue in instruction at the early grade level (KG-P3) improves learning and academic performance (Benson, 2004; Trudell, 2005; Mangxamba, 2006, Kosonen, 2009). However, such transitional model is premature and abrupt (Owu-Ewie, 2009). It has detrimental effect on children’s learning (Cummins, 1981). It must be noted that after lower primary education, there is a dramatic difference between the levels of L2 (English) language needed to conduct everyday classroom learning, and the amount and complexity of L2 needed to deliver and understand lessons. At this point, learners struggle to cope with lessons especially when classes get more abstract and demanding. This results in frustration on the part of learners thus causing them to fail in academic work and drop out of school.

Ghanaian children, per the statutes of the UHR and LHR, have the right to education in their L1 without intimidation or deprivation. However, Ghanaian children have no right to use their L1 in the learning process beyond Primary Three. They are punished for using their L1/mother tongue in school. This is not only a Ghanaian phenomenon as most African countries and some developed
countries do the same. In Wales, United Kingdom ‘Welsh speaking children were formerly banned from speaking their languages at school. If they were caught doing so, they would wear a placard around their necks…the child who last wore the placard was beaten with a cane’ (Baker, 2001: 370). Though this practice is no more, it gives an idea of how children’s linguistic rights were violated. The practice of punishing children for using their L1 in schools is documented in various studies as coping strategies to maximise the use of English by students (Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Mwinsheikhe, 2009; Prah, 2009). In some schools in Ghana, signposts reading Do not speak vernacular here, Speaking Ghanaian language is prohibited, Speaking Ghanaian language is strictly prohibited, and Speak only English are openly displayed (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Boandoh, 2014).

Often, learners who violate these inscriptions are punished. However, teachers use the Ghanaian language in the school without any punishment. This is social injustice and a violation of the children’s rights to language use. The punishments come in various forms; translating what was said in the L1 several times to English, doing extra homework, running round the school field several times, showing of red card to culprits to leave the classroom, having bizarre objects (e.g., snail shell, egg shells, dried lizard or frog) hung around the neck of the culprit, insults, and standing up in class for a period of time. In extreme cases, violators are corporally punished. According to Kwarteng and Ahia (2013), in some Ghanaian schools, both private and public, there are policies which prohibit the speaking of any Ghanaian language. Stiff penalties are meted out to violators. This school level arrangement is justified on the theoretical basis that the prohibition makes students to practice and perfect their proficiency in English. There is serious psychological unintended consequence to this arrangement (Kwarteng & Ahia, 2013) and this goes contrary to the principles of the democratic liberal approach of familiarisation to the minority language debate. It causes pupils to perceive their culture in general and their language in particular in a negative light. In some cases, it leaves a deep, indelible psychological scar which the students carry throughout their lives. The absurdity of the policy is this: it is only in Africa that learners are punished for merely speaking their own languages in the name of English literacy development. The Ghanaian child, by this arrangement, is forcefully transferred from their linguistic group (Ghanaian language) to another group (English). This has caused serious mental harm to many Ghanaian children. This is a form of linguistic genocide (United Nations General Assembly, 1948; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). The excessive use of English over Ghanaian language in school has resulted in many Ghanaian children despising their own language because their indigenous languages are not deemed appropriate for education.

The practice of language use in education where priority is given to English has alienated Ghanaian children from their cultural heritage/indigenous languages. As Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1994) indicates, the use of colonial languages
in all endeavours of life, especially in education in Africa constitutes a form for
the colonisation of the mind. Ansre (1979) thinks that the minds and lives of
Africans, including those of Ghanaians, are dominated by a colonial language
(e.g. English) to a point where they think their indigenous languages are not fit
to be used to transact advanced aspects of life like education. Ansre sees this
phenomenon as linguistic imperialism. It has contributed to the enslavement
of the African mind and has alienated the educated African, including the Ghanaian
from his/her own culture and language. The African child has been made to think
like the English, Spanish, French, etc. wherever and whenever these languages
are used as colonial languages. The Ghanaian child has been forcefully removed
from his/her linguistic base to another which is a form of linguistic genocide
(Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). The use of L2 in Ghanaian schools to the disadvantage
of L1 has forced many Ghanaian children to assimilate and change identity.
This approach is underpinned by the Liberal Neutralist Approach of language
consolidation (Levy, 2000) which is not in the best interest of Ghanaians because
many Ghanaian languages are relegated to the background. This is a violation
of LHR.

Language of education has been noted as a factor to school dropout. It has
deprived many children of the world, especially in Africa of quality education,
a right they are entitled to. Skutnabb-Kangas (2008), referring to United
Nation’s 2004 Human Development Report, notes that placing a limitation on
people’s ability to use their indigenous languages is likely to exclude them from
education. Language of instruction used in schools is a factor with the potential
of influencing the rate of pupils’ dropout. King and Schielmann (2004) report that
in educational settings where there is a discrepancy between the languages used
at home and school, children face many language challenges when they enter the
school environment. Pupils see themselves as aliens in the school system when
their native language is not used and this results in school dropout. According
to Skutnabb-Kangas (2008), more than 30 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa use
a language of education which is different from their native language adding
that only 13 percent of children receive their primary education in their native
language. Global Campaign for Education also estimates that 50% of the world’s
out-of-school children live in countries that use a different language to the one
used in the local school (Global Campaign for Education, n.d.). This has been
corroborated by other studies that report that the use of an unfamiliar language
in education is among the factors responsible for school dropout (Colclough, et.
al., 2000; King & Schielmann, 2004; Brock-Utne & Halmdottir, 2004; O-saki &
Obeleagu, 2004; Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook & Hunt, 2010; Ntumwa &
Rwambali, 2013).

The language policy of education in Ghana, which puts premium on the
excessive use of English to the detriment of the use of indigenous Ghanaian
languages, has been found to be a factor in school drop outs (Yokozeki, 1997).
Though statistics is currently not available, there is enough evidence from the literature that the use of unfamiliar language is a cause of school dropout, especially in rural schools in Ghana. Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) confirms this when she notes that the limitation of people’s ability to use their native language can exclude them from education. It becomes obvious then that many children in Africa, including Ghana, experience deep frustration and disappointment in academic work leading to dropout not because of physical or monetary barriers, but because they are taught in a language which they do not understand. Such children are deprived of education; a clear violation of UHR as a result of LHR violation (Tomasevski, 1996; Megga, et. al., 2005). In this case, language is used as an exclusionary tool in education; a violation of Article 26 of UHR.

Another area in the language policy of education worth examining is the exclusion of some Ghanaian languages from being used as MoI. Ghana has over 60 languages but only 11 are officially sanctioned to be used as MoI. In this paper, all languages outside the use of the 11 languages of education and English are termed minority languages. This approach is anchored on the Liberal Neutralist Approach (Levy, 2000) where only a few languages are consolidated over the minority ones (May, 2003). The question is what happens to children whose L1 are not part of the 11 languages. These children are forced to learn in English or in a Ghanaian language which is not their L1. They spend their time in school struggling to understand the language of instruction instead of building new knowledge (CfBT Education Trust, 2009). The children are deprived of using their L1 in their education. This phenomenon goes against the right of the child to have education in his/her L1 or mother tongue. The use of English or another Ghanaian language as MoI for such children removes them from their ethnic/language groups causing them mental, emotional and developmental harm. This is a typical example of linguistic genocide, a violation of the linguistic rights of the child. From the discussions in this section, there is no doubt that the language policy of education in Ghana goes against the LHR of the Ghanaian child. Ghanaian children are prematurely transitioned to learning a foreign language and using it to learn other subjects to the detriment of their L1, learning in a different Ghanaian language because their language (L1) is not used as MoI and being punished for using their L1 in school.

**Improving Linguistics Human Rights in Ghanaian Schools**

According to Leontiev (1995), any educational policy aimed at making linguistic rights practicable in a given society should address the following issues: the choice of languages as medium of instruction, teaching of non-L1s/mother tongues and teaching the L1 or mother tongue. This statement implies that there is the need to blend the use of L1 and L2 in a way that will ensure the total development of the child linguistically to satisfy their linguistic rights. This calls for the adoption of the late-exit model of bilingual education. In
this approach, the child has the opportunity to use both the L1 and the L2 in the learning process. The two languages are seen as crucial in the educational process of the child. In this way, the child matures in the L1 and appreciates its use and how it works in the learning process before transferring to the use of the L2 as MoI. At this point, the child should be allowed to study and use the L1 up till the Senior High School level. In effect, the study of a Ghanaian language for every child in the Senior High School should be compulsory.

Another means by which the Linguistic Human Rights of the Ghanaian child can be guaranteed in the educational system is ensuring that every child starts his/her education in the L1. Ghana as a nation should employ the Democratic Liberal Approach of familiarisation principle whereby every language within the national borders of Ghana is developed and used in schools as medium of instruction. In the current arrangement, many children start their education in a second Ghanaian language because the government has sanctioned the use of only 11 Ghanaian languages as MoI in schools up till the third year. This goes against the Linguistic Human Rights of such children. A bold attempt should be made to develop the other Ghanaian languages to be used as MoI in addition to the existing 11 Ghanaian languages currently used as media of instruction. This is bound to be costly to the nation but the benefits thereof far outweigh the cost. The colonialist pedagogy of using only 11 indigenous languages as media of instruction should end. The government of Ghana, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service of Ghana should do a language mapping of our schools, especially the lower primary classrooms and select informants from the districts to develop early childhood instructional reading materials for many more languages and educate para-educators or bilingual aides to assist with the use of indigenous languages as medium of instruction. As a sovereign nation, Ghana should develop bilingual high frequency readers based on its many indigenous languages for use in the lower primary classroom. It is easy and cheap to develop such materials for use in schools. The people and government of Ghana need to stop arguing that they cannot produce literacy instructional materials in local languages for learners. Ghana should rather seek to become a model in this endeavour to other multilingual countries in Africa.

There has been financial support from United State Agency for International Development (USAID), Department of International Development (DFID) and other organisations to develop literacy through the use of L1. For example, USAID in partnership with the Ghana Education Service through Family Health International (FHI 360) (consortium-led), Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Olinga Foundation, and the Ghana Institute of Linguistics Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), is spending a colossal amount of $71 million to develop literacy through the Ghanaian languages. It is to support early grade reading and literacy improvement activities in Ghana. This donor funding supports the use of L1 in schools through the production of
Ghanaian language materials and training of teachers in the use of L1 as medium of instruction in lower primary schools. The project aims to develop 2.8 million lower primary teachers to use L1 as medium of instruction. In addition to this, the project through the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages Education, University of Education, Winneba, has completed a language mapping in 100 districts in Ghana. This mapping collected data on KG- Primary Three pupils and teachers to identify their L1 and L2 (if applicable) to see the viability of using the L1 as medium of instruction in those districts. However, these efforts are geared towards the development of the eleven government sponsored Ghanaian languages and English thus reinforcing the hegemony of these languages to the detriment of other languages. According to Simmons and Fennig (2017), there are sixty (60) plus indigenous languages that are left without funding to develop instructional reading materials in these languages. These donor funds should also be used in developing some of the indigenous languages in terms of literacy primers to bring them to the level of been used for instruction in schools.

Children with a solid educational foundation in their indigenous languages guarantee a future generation that will ensure substantial development in the country. One is not arguing for inclusion of every single language spoken in Ghana to be used as MoI in schools. It would have been the ideal thing but most of these local languages are not ready because they do not have teachers, teaching and learning materials, and standard orthography. There is the need to set criteria which will bring many more languages in as media of instruction in schools. The criteria include the following:

a. Acceptable standard orthography

b. Availability of body of written resources

c. Availability of qualified teachers

d. Evidence of a sustainable population of learners

The responsibility now lies on the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages of the College of Languages Education, Ajumako of the University of Education, Winneba, the Department of Linguistics of the University of Ghana, Legon, and the Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics of the University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, to research into and develop the undeveloped languages in Ghana. These institutions should collaborate closely with the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) which is currently working on some of these languages.

Language attitude plays a key role in either facilitating or obstructing LHR in many multilingual societies. In countries where positive attitudes are cultivated
towards indigenous languages and multilingualism, LHRs are embraced and promoted but in situations where there is negative attitude towards the use of indigenous languages and multilingualism, LHRs are violated. The violation of LHRs in Ghanaian schools is partly as a result of negative attitude towards the use of L1/mother tongue in education (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Boandoh, 2014). People see the promotion of multilingualism and promotion of LHRs as divisive. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2008), the use of mother tongue/L1 as medium of instruction in schools is perceived as a disintegrative factor in nation states. As a result of negative attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages in education, Ghanaian children are asked to drop their L1 as medium of instruction from Primary Four. The Ghanaian child coming to school with knowledge in arithmetic, science or reading is not asked to forget such knowledge or not to use it in class. Yet the Ghanaian child is told not to use his/her L1 in school or stand the risk of being punished. This is unfair to the Ghanaian child and a violation or denial of the LHRs of the Ghanaian child. The L1 is the greatest asset the Ghanaian child has to succeed in education. To ensure that the LHRs of the Ghanaian child is upheld in education, there is the need to cultivate a positive attitude towards the use of L1 as MoI at least during the entire basic education (KG-JHS 3). It is when a positive attitude is cultivated that stakeholders in the education enterprise will become committed to ensuring that the LHRs of the Ghanaian child in education are protected. All Ghanaian languages should be given value and should be used in education. Educational authorities in Ghana hide behind social and political excuses as well as the pretext of inadequate financial and material resources not to develop and use other languages outside the 11 approved in education.

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, though not far-reaching enough, guarantees the use of Ghanaian languages. Article 26 (1) of the same constitution guarantees right of each Ghanaian citizen to language when it states ‘Every person is entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language [emphasis added].’ Further, Article 39(3) also says clearly that ‘The state shall foster the development of Ghanaian languages and pride in Ghanaian culture.’ However, the means and strategies to foster the development of the indigenous languages were not stipulated. These provisions in the constitution relating to indigenous Ghanaian language use should see practical application in the Ghanaian educational system. It should also be explicitly enshrined in the constitution that the use of Ghanaian language as MoI at least at the basic level (KG-P6) is mandatory. This then will fulfill Article 26 of UHR and Article 2(1) of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minority. Ghana should also abide by and implement the Cultural Charter for Africa adopted in 1976, Organization of African Unity’s Language Action Plan of 1986, and the Asmara Declaration of 2000 (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995; Bamgbose, 1991; Asmara Declaration, 2000). These declarations all aim
to foster the teaching of national languages, use of African languages as media of education and promote the right of children to attend school and learn in their mother tongue. Implementing and enforcing these declarations will promote the linguistic rights of the Ghanaian child in education.

To ensure that the language policy of education in Ghana guarantees the LHRs of the Ghanaian child, the Ghana government should put in place structures that will enhance the smooth implementation of the policy. In the first place, there should be the establishment of National Language Council (NLC) (Owu-Ewie, 2013) to oversee the effective planning and implementation of language policies in the country. The membership of the council should include eminent educationists, renowned linguists, language experts and language right activists. Besides, there should be a National Education Language Council (NELC) which will plan, implement, monitor, supervise and evaluate language use in education. At the regional and district levels, there should be a Regional and District Education Language Committee (RELC/DELC) which will be responsible for language issues of education in the regions and districts. This should be headed by the Regional/District Language Coordinator. At the school level, there should be a School-Based Language Management Committee (SLMC) headed by a language coordinator. This means that schools should be empowered to select a Ghanaian language or languages as MoI in collaboration with parents, learners and all stakeholders in the locality. There should also be an effective school-based monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that the language policy of education is enforced. Such identifiable groups should be made to function and not to just exist in name like the Pan South Africa Language Board (PANSLAD) (Perry, 2004).

Another area that can be used to improve the Linguistic Human Rights of the Ghanaian child in education is to conduct a sociolinguistic study of schools, especially at the basic level. This study will look at the Ghanaian language representation in each classroom, especially at the lower primary level. This will help the government and educational planners to know which languages are used in which areas and schools in order to facilitate proper language demarcation and distribution of appropriate teachers to schools where their L1s are used. It will also help in sending the right books to the appropriate schools. Currently, the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages of the University of Education, Winneba with support from the Learning Project of the USAID has conducted such a study in 100 out of the 216 Districts in the country.
Conclusion

According to Prah (2009), education in Africa, including Ghana, should be in the mother tongue. However, in Ghana, children are educated in a language which is alien to them. LHR is routinely ignored and violated in Ghanaian schools. This article has unequivocally indicated that the Linguistic Right of the Ghanaian child is violated in the educational system. This violation has forced some children to drop out of school, has alienated Ghanaian children from their heritage/indigenous languages and identity, and has forcibly transferred Ghanaian children to another linguistic/cultural group. This is a typical example of linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006; Magga, Nicolaisen, Trask, Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2005). The paper has also argued that to improve this situation the following should be observed: cultivation of positive attitudes towards the use of L1, expansion of the list of 11 Ghanaian languages as media of instruction to include other languages, establishment of structures to ensure effective implementation of the language policy of education and a sociolinguistic mapping of schools. The fundamental challenge about language use and language policies on education in a multilingual society such as Ghana is essentially one of achieving a balance between the languages used in education and the indigenous languages of the child. Such a balance should take into consideration social unity, access to education and respect for and toleration of diversity. In conclusion, it must be recognised that Ghanaian children have rights which include the use of their language in their education. It is time for all Ghanaians to also recognise the risk that education poses (the better to obviate it) as well as the immeasurable ameliorative possibilities it offers. Appreciating that the Ghanaian child has rights and that these rights include Linguistic Human Rights, is a good starting point.
References


BOOK REVIEW


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Well-known for her socio-political commitment ever since her first work, Latérite (1984), a collection of earth-bound orality-inspired poems, the Ivorian writer, Véronique Tadjo, has just come out with a novel, En compagnie des hommes (“In the company of humans”), on the Ebola pandemic that ravaged Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone from 2014 to 2016. The narrative tracks the quinary evolution of the epidemic from incubation to temporary resolution through the prodomal stage, acute stage, and intervention. The title can be understood in at least five ways. First, the invitation of the virus by humans into their fold, through the hunting and consumption of bats. Two, the humanization of the virus. Three, the anthropomorphization of Nature, the Baobab, and the Bat. Four, the mobilization of teams of actors, both local and international, to confront the pandemic. Five, the union of humans and non-humans for the protection of nature.

Much in the vein of Camus’ The plague (1948), Tadjo’s epic on Ebola foregrounds the siege on life by inimical forces, the incurability of the virus, and the need for permanent vigilance to confront the threat of extinction. When widespread celebrations (deafening music, Azonto dance, fireworks, binge drinking, etc.) erupt after politicians and policy makers officially declare the eradication of the Ebola epidemic, a worried old woman, acutely aware of the fragility of earthly life and the transience of human victory, cautions merrymakers against undue complacency, stressing the importance of respecting life. Appropriately dedicated first, to the victims of Ebola in the three countries, and second, to all humans involved in its management, the novel is divided into 16 chapters (each with a heading) and a terse epilogue. The 16 chapters are recounted by a motley of narrators: a third-person omniscient storyteller (three chapters), the sacred Baobab (two chapters), a doctor, a nurse, a gravedigger, a survivor who doubles as a counselor, a district administrator, an international volunteer, a grandmother, a poet, a Congolese researcher, the Ebora virus, and the Bat. The personal and professional accounts that healthcare providers give of
the epidemic are corroborated by the other human narrators who have survived the tragedy, trauma, and stigmatization. In the storytelling role of the Baobab can be discerned the multifaceted figure of a chorus: witness and commentator, critic and authorial voice, conscience of the public and representative of nature. While empathizing with humans, the Baobab situates the outbreak of Ebola and the threat to life within the larger context of the wanton degradation of the environment by humans. For its part, the Ebola virus, exonerates itself of all blame, exculpation which is staunchly contested not only by the Bat, the arboreal vector of the virus, but also by the pristine Baobab, planted in ancient times to serve as the link between nature and humans (p. 28).

If the variegation of voices and the absence of a structuring transversal character mar diegetic cohesion, the disarticulation resonates with the postmodern project of inscribing a multiplicity of angles into the storyline and delegitimating hegemonic master narratives and centripetal perspectives. Equally striking is the use of generic names at the expense of specific anthroponyms. The anonymity of characters, the non-specification of the locale and demonyms, the recourse to non-human narrators, all combine to free the story from the narrow confines of solipsism and national borders, the better to ease it into the fluid contours of a transgeneric narrative, interpretable as, but transcending, a fable, an allegory, a tragedy, a satire, a faction, a roman à thèse, a testimony, a modern-day apocalyptic art, a messianic creation... Without a doubt, Tadjo takes the collective heroism in The plague, built around Caucasian actors, to a higher level by extending it not only to the coalition of cosmopolitan actors but to other faunesque players (other than humans) and floral stakeholders, as she imbues the Bat and the Baobab with a high sense of social responsibility, collective consciousness, and axiological wisdom. The emphasis then in this narrative of pathology is not on individual destinies but on the communautarian, the heterogeneous, the dialogic, and the interstitial. If the Ebola epidemic emerges from this diversity as the cohering thematic and actantial force, it also unwittingly imposes on animals, trees, and humans a call to arms, i.e. the duty of ceaselessly and vigilantly combatting Ebola and other epidemics.

The novel’s pretension to the status of a postmodern pastiche is further boosted by its plethoric intertextual/intermedial references: epigraphs from works by Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Jean-Pierre Siméon, quotations from the Bible, allusions to the concept of a non-epiphanic hidden God, historical accounts on civil wars and the Ebola disease, Kenneth Toa Nsah’s Juvenalian poetry, and Gabriel Okoundji’s dirge. Steeped in orality and ancient lore, Tadjo’s novel is a response to the warning of the Malian sage, Amadou Hampaté Bâ that the death of the last tree will coincide with the death of the last human on earth.

On many occasions, the mythical Baobab, in its conative and incitative address to the general public, describes itself as a primeval tree, the eternal tree and the tree-symbol (pp. 23, 25, 163). Combining the functions of a diviner,
an ancestral spirit, and a chorus, it laments the pathological self-destructive streak in humans through the desecration of life-giving nature. The jubilatory celebration of the past pantheistic union between humans and nature gives way to the threnodial indictment of prevalent degeneracy, characteristic of civil wars, political machiavelism, and the unbridled destruction of creation. While the healing and Phoenix-like tree evokes memories of the mythical and mysterious baobab in Bugul’s haunting autofiction, *The abandoned baobab tree* (1991), it, at the same time, marks its distance from the alienation-prone bewildered alter ego of the protagonist in the hypotext, by reason of its palpable agency and vocality. In Tadjo’s narrative, the iconic Baobab has the last word: even if the wheels of misfortune and joy never cease to revolve, from the Ebola disaster can sprout the tenacity of renewal that would make it possible to envision a collective future merging the destiny of humans with that of nature.

In our contemporary era of anarchic extraction of mineral resources, depletion of forest cover, and climatic catastrophes, Tadjo’s novel on the fatal disconnect between the various inhabitants of the universe serves to reiterate the imperative of environmental protection and ecological equilibrium, while reminding humans that they are not the only inhabitants of the planet.
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