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Making light of the burden of economic hardship: A socio-pragmatic analysis of humour in Ghana's post-COVID economic crises

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Abstract

Ghana experienced worsening economic crises following the COVID-19 pandemic, but this was expected since the country was already facing economic difficulties prior to the pandemic. To deal with the increasing crises, the government sought support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in July 2022. This sparked ridicule since they had criticised the previous government for seeking an IMF bailout. This study, therefore, offers a socio-pragmatic analysis of the humour surrounding this political discourse on Ghana's post-COVID economic crises. By analysing linguistic and paralinguistic features from an under-studied context, i.e. humour research in Ghana and on crisis, we examine how netizens used humour to lighten the burden of the economic hardship and, more importantly, as a tool to critique political actors for their alleged roles in the country's socio-economic challenges. Data was gathered from Facebook and Twitter. With reference to the bifurcation of the play frame, which distinguishes between serious and non-serious framing, we argue that the political humour that characterised

Ghana's economic crisis goes beyond 'this is play' and highlights citizen's frustrations and loss of faith, not only in the current government, but also in political leaders in general. Thus, behind the veil of humour, Ghanaians reiterate the endemic nature of the problems, something which goes beyond what an IMF bailout can solve.

Keywords: Political humour; play/humourous frame; Ghana's economic crisis, multimodality, socio-pragmatics.

Introduction

As one of the developing countries in the world, Ghana has often had issues with its economy. For example, from independence till the pre-COVID period, Ghana had already gone for its 16th bailout from the IMF. This is attributed to alleged economic mismanagement and corruption scandals (Rahman, 2018; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2014). It is, therefore, not surprising that the country faces severe economic challenges in the post-COVID era (especially in 2022 and the first half of 2023). This is because the crippling effect of the pandemic on the world's economy can be felt globally. Indeed, economic giants like the US, the UK, China, among others, also reported economic challenges post-COVID. For instance, the IMF's April 2022 World Economic Outlook report indicated that inflation had reached its highest level in more than 40 years in some advanced economies, including the US and some European countries (IMF, 2022a). The October 2022 report also forecasted global growth to slow from 6.0% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022 and 2.7% in 2023 (IMF, 2022b), but the January 2023 report forecasted 2.9% for 2023 and an expected rise to 3.1% in 2024 (IMF, 2023). Unfortunately, these are still considered the weakest growth profile since 2001. Ghana was also not left out of the impact of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war. With the constant increases in fuel prices and rising inflation which stood at 53.6% in January 2023 (see Figure 1), every sector of the economy was affected, with heightened labour unrest (we return to this in Section 2).

To deal with the increasing crises, the minister of information sent a communique on July 1, 2022, about the government's intention to start negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), making it the 2nd time the government was going for relief from the institution since they assumed office in 2016. This sparked ridicule on social media, as many people shared the previous Twitter comments and videos of the president and his vice (who were then opposition candidates) in which they criticised the then government for going for an IMF bailout. This study, therefore, offers a socio-pragmatic analysis of the humour surrounding this political discourse on Ghana's post-COVID economic crises. Through the analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic features, we examine how netizens used humour to lighten the burden of the economic hardship and, more importantly, as a tool to critique political actors for their alleged roles in the country's socio-economic challenges.

Given the gravity of crises such as this, the relevance of (linguistic) humour research may not be immediately apparent to many because humour is often perceived as a means of entertainment (Ofori et al., 2021a). Some humour studies have rightly pointed out how it is often regarded as trivial, and discussions that are embedded with humour are therefore considered as partaking in that triviality (O'ring, 2003; Schnurr, 2005). Obviously, such a serious national or global crisis does not lie within the purview of humour research. However, as numerous studies have demonstrated, humour plays a crucial role in fostering solidarity, building bonds, and serving as a coping mechanism (see Fessell, 2020; Arthur, 2021; Andrew, 2012). As we shall also be arguing later, the dual nature of humour "allows speakers to convey *serious meanings*, while appearing to be *'only joking'*" (Dynel, 2011b: p.226, emphasis added). By delving into the relatively underexplored area of humour research in Ghana, particularly within the context of crisis, this paper contributes to advancing research, not only in humour studies, but also in political discourse studies. It underscores how humour can effectively highlight key national issues while simultaneously entertaining its audience.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: As a way of contextualising the study, Section 2 provides an overview of Ghana's post-COVID economic crises. Further contextualization is provided in Section 3 by situating the study within the scholarship on humour. Section 4 discusses Play Frames, Incongruity and Multimodality as useful conceptual/analytical underpinnings for the study. The data and methods are discussed in Section 5, followed by analysis and findings in Section 6. Section 7 concludes the paper.

Ghana's post-COVID economic crises

As noted above, the challenges facing Ghana's economy are not peculiar to Ghana. At the time Ghana was preparing to seek IMF support, the global economy had been described as being on a "mending path" from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (IMF, 2022a, p. xiii). Unfortunately, the global economic prospects continued to worsen since the IMF's forecast in January 2022, during which time it was projected that global recovery of economic prospects was expected to strengthen from the second quarter of 2022. However, the outlook deteriorated further because of the Russia-Ukraine war and the frequent lockdowns in China which affected the global supply chain of key manufacturing hubs. The report predicted that the conflict would significantly impede global economic recovery, slowing growth and worsening inflation (IMF, 2022a; IMF, 2022b). In Ghana, some of the effects were seen in the astronomical increases in food and fuel prices, and high inflation rates in 2022 and 2023. For instance, with a starting inflation of 13.9% in January 2022 to as high as 54.1% in December 2022, it has been reported that Ghana has had its highest inflation reading since May 2001, with a month-on-month inflation for July 2022 (when Ghana decided to go for IMF bailout) being 3.1%. Figure 1 gives additional details.

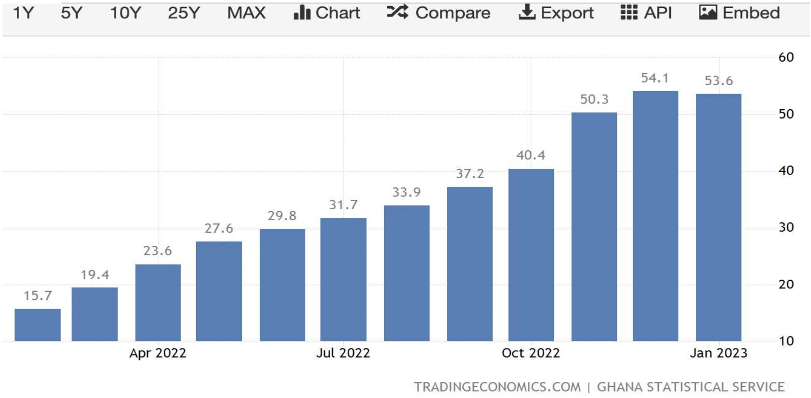

Figure 1: Ghana's inflation chart: February 2022-January 2023
Source: Tradingeconomics.com, based on data from Ghana Statistical Service[1]

The IMF reports also predicted that these increases could significantly increase the risk of social unrest in emerging markets and developing economies (IMF, 2022a, 2022b) - examples of which could be seen in the Ghanaian situation. For instance, Ghana experienced a number of labour unrest in 2022, with its peak being 4th July, when 4 teacher Unions declared a strike action, demanding for Cost of Living Allowance (COLA). This triggered more unrest as other labour Unions threatened to join if the government did not provide COLA for public sector workers across the nation. For instance, the Public Services Workers Union stated its resolve to embark on an industrial action on July 19, 2022, over the government's failure to pay them COLA. Around that same period, there was food crisis in Senior High Schools, which led to threats to close down some schools. This, according to CitiNews, was due to the government's indebtedness to the National Food Buffer Stock Company[2]. All these culminated into demonstrations by various youth groups.

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[1] Tradingeconomics.com: https://tradingeconomics.com/ghana/inflation-cpi and Ghana Statistical Service: https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/Price%20Indices/CPI%20July%202022_Rev.pdf; http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/headlines.php?slidelocks=NDQ2MDE1MDA0My42Mjg1/headlines/6388177363 (Accessed (24 February, 2023).

By November 2022, Ghana had reached its boiling point in terms of the depreciation of the cedi ($1 was GH¢14.50), which led to high increases in fuel and food prices. The impact of the economic crisis was seen in what was described by the President of Ghana Psychological Association as 'mental health inflation'[3]. It was therefore not surprising that on October 14, 2022, someone committed suicide over high living standards by climbing a high-tension pole[4]. In another development, a fight ensued between a bus conductor (popularly known in Ghana as 'mate') and a passenger over a transport fare increment of GH¢2 (i.e., $0.07) in October 2022, and this led to the passenger being beaten to death[5].

These examples suggest that the economic problem was obviously not a play issue; but as noted earlier, we would like to reiterate that humour is more than just 'play' (see sections 3 and 4 for further discussion).

(Political) humour studies

There is a plethora of studies on (political) humour from various disciplines and with different foci. From the fields of psychology, medicine and others, several studies have reiterated the therapeutic nature of humour, stressing on how it has often been used as a coping strategy or mechanism for various conditions and stresses (see Andrew, 2012; Ruch and McGhee, 2014; Fessell, 2020; Sim, 2015; Hayashi et al., 2016). It has proven effective in managing fear and anxieties associated with ageing and death (Andrew, 2012) and COVID-19 infections (Fessel 2020), elevating life satisfaction (Ruch and McGhee, 2014), decreasing behavioural problems and increasing resilience in children (Sim, 2015), as well as lowering prevalence of cardiovascular diseases (Hayashi et al., 2016). Willem's (2011) work on Zimbabwe's politics suggests that postcolonial humour does not just target the powerful, but it can also mock the powerlessness of the oppressed within what appears to be an immutable system. This serves as a coping mechanism for individuals dealing with the daily challenges posed by social and economic crises. For Arthur (2021), her work on how Ghanaians coped with the COVID-19 pandemic reiterates how humour was seen as a capsule for tension reduction and as a means of disseminating critical information during those critical moments.

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[2] https://citinewsroom.com/2022/07/shs-food-shortages-govt-owing-buffer-stock-gh%C2%A2340m-education-minister/ (Accessed 25 November 2022).

[3] https://citinewsroom.com/2022/07/shs-food-shortages-govt-owing-buffer-stock-gh%C2%A2340m-education-minister/ (Accessed 25 November 2022).

[4] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Details-emerge-on-man-electrocuted-after-climbing-Kasoa-high-tension-pole-1643183 (Accessed 1 December 2022).

[5] https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Lapaz-trotro-drivers-mates-allegedly-beat-man-to-death-over-GH-2-transport-fare-increment-1653089 (Accessed 1 December 2022).

From linguistics, Chukumah (2021) also investigates how Nigerian humourists used language, signs, and performative actions to communicate the fears and challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Goffman's (1974) concept of frames and Bateson's (1972) idea of mood-sign, the study examines the linguistic strategies employed by humourists to convey societal responses to the crisis. Through the analysis of keying events, transformations within play frames, and the use of linguistic indicators, the article delves into how humour serves as a tool for coping with disaster, reflecting social dynamics, and providing insights into human experience during global crises.

Scholars from political discourse studies have also demonstrated how language and/or visuals are often used in a humourous way to frame political actors in particular ways (see Tsakona and Popa [2011] for some of the studies; see also Tella, 2018; Billig, 2005). Through a multimodal analysis of internet memes, Tella's (2018) study on the 2015 Nigerian elections shows how supporters use humorous internet memes to portray their favoured candidates positively but portray their opponents negatively. As he rightly points out, such representations are aimed at depreciating the electoral values of the opponents while increasing the chances of their own candidates.

Through the lenses of discourse analysis, pragmatics and conversation analysis, Săftoiu and Popescu's (2014) study on humour as a branding strategy in a Romanian parliamentary discourse shows how, under the guise of humour, a member of parliament (Corneliu Vadim Tudor) used ethnic humour to shift from the serious to a play mode. They note how he succeeded in depicting himself as a populist politician, voicing his nationalistic attitudes and rebelling against the establishment. This corroborates Archakis and Tsakona's description of humour in parliamentary discourse as a way of expressing one's aggression and criticism in a mitigated manner to avoid breaking parliamentary rules of conduct. Indeed, political humour as a form of criticism allows politicians and commentators to abide by politeness norms and avoid rude behaviour (Tsakona and Popa, 2011). Wilson (2008) also reports on the rhetorical use of humour as a tool of political action in selected stand-up comedy. His findings indicate that humour functions as a tool to enact critique, serving as a lens for the audience to provide judgement between the stated, and making inference on issues such as diversion, corruption, hijacking, etc.

These studies contextualize the current study by throwing light on various aspects. But important for us also is how this study highlights the affordances of the concept of 'play frames'. It does so by focusing on a serious economic crisis that has even claimed human lives (and thus 'not play'), and how the play frame is, nevertheless, useful for analysis.

Conceptual/analytical underpinnings

This study is mainly underpinned by the concept of play/humourous frames as inspired by Bateson's (1953) seminal work on frames. According to Bateson (1953, 1972), actions can be framed in terms of play vs. non-play (i.e. non-serious vs. serious). What is considered as “this is play” is described as “these actions, in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote” (Bateson, 1972, p. 69), hence, truth is suspended when conversation participants enter a play frame. This is similar, in part, to Goffman’s (1974) concept of “keying” (p.44), which includes “make-believe” as one of the keys (p.48). As Chukumah (2021) rightly points out, one of the variants of make-believe is playfulness. To distinguish between what is play and what is not and thus avoid miscommunication, conversational participants frame their talk or text as humourous by using signals like giggles, laughter, code switching, memes, smiling emojis, LOL, lmao, etc. These suggest “this is play” and thus not to be taken serious (Coates 2007: 51; see also Dynel 2011a, 2011b).

Bateson (1972) also raises an important point about the bifurcation of the play frame, i.e., a recognition of a more complex form of play which is premised on not just “this is play” but also the question of “is this play?” (p.70). This complexity arises from the argument that what is sometimes expected to be considered as play may actually be the real thing but shrouded in a play frame. For Săftoiu and Popescu (2014), the importance of the humorous frame lies in what it reveals about the serious frame. These align with Dynel’s argument that “while it may be argued that the playful frame is conducive to the suspension of truthfulness and to deviation from norms obtaining for serious talk”, it can also be postulated that “humourous duality allows speakers to convey *serious meanings*, while appearing to be ‘only *joking*’” (Dynel 2011b, p. 226, emphasis added). In other words, what is considered play may not be play after all (Diabah, 2020; Ofori et al., 2021b). For instance, Diabah (2020) notes how male students at a public university in Ghana resort to catcalling and singing profane songs but consider them as only joking, having fun or simply destressing with no harm intended. However, a critical analysis of her data reveals how their intention is to create a niche for themselves and foreground their perceived superiority on campus.

It is from this angle of the play frame's bifurcation, i.e., non-serious vs. serious, that we would like to situate our study. We shall be arguing that the bifurcation of the play frame and the affordances of humour allow participants to have fun in a time of crisis (non-serious frame) while at the same time articulating their opinions and frustrations on this issue of national importance (serious frame).

Although the study is mainly underpinned by the concept of play frames, we find the notions of implications/implicatures and suppositions (van Dijk, 1995), incongruity (Attardo, 1994; Foot and McCreaddie, 2006) and multimodality (Kress, 2011; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) useful in our analysis since they throw light on various aspects of the study, while also working together with the play frame to reinforce the message being communicated. According to van Dijk (1995), implications/implicatures refer to when "meanings are not always explicitly expressed, but somehow semantically implied, or entailed by other, explicit expressions and their meanings" (268); and presuppositions are "the set of tacit cultural knowledge that makes discourse meaningful" (273). Both implications and presuppositions enable speakers or writers to make claims without directly stating them and, presuppositions, in particular, accept certain beliefs as given even if they may not be justified (van Dijk, 1995). These are useful in contextualising some of the comments in this study because the humour can sometimes be deduced based on the shared socio-cultural knowledge between the writer/speaker and reader/listener.

Incongruity emphasises "the absurd, the unexpected, and the inappropriate i.e., the out-of-context situations as the source of humour" (Foot and McCreaddie, 2006, p.295). According to Attardo (2008), incongruity theorists generally agree that humour arises from mismatch between expectations and what is actually realised. It often occurs when a speaker violates the expectation of his audience to create laughter (Morreall, 2012; Dai et al., 2017; Dynel, 2011a). As we shall be discussing later, the violation of the expectations, which may sometimes be implied, underlies the humour generation in this paper

Lamidi (2017) describes a mode as a channel (e.g., written, oral, graphic, gestural) through which a message is presented. Multimodality, which is rooted in social semiotics theory (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996), is therefore defined as “the use and combination of different semiotic elements, including design, layout, images, photographs, film, colour and scent” (Zebrowska, 2014, p. 9); and they are subsequently integrated to communicate a particular message (Kress, 2011; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). But it is important to note, also, that all modes can be treated as distinct and equal in their capacity to contribute meaning to a complex semiotic entity. In its application to this study, we shall show how the written texts, images (emojis, memes, photographs, cartoons) and postures all work together to communicate or reinforce a particular message. This is also important because in generating humour in multimodal texts like ours, the incongruous is often found not just in a single mode but a combination of them - for instance, when there is a disconnect between a written text and an accompanying image (see Section 6.2.3).

Data and methods

Data for this study were sourced from Facebook and Twitter between 1st July and 30th November 2022. To generate the relevant dataset, phrases and sentences like “Ghana’s economic crises; Ghana-IMF bailout; Ghana goes to IMF etc.” were used in our search. Through purposive sampling, we took screenshots of humourous posts on the economic crisis by award-winning journalists and the comments/reactions of netizens on these posts (where humourous posts here refer to incongruous texts, including emojis, memes, pictures, cartoons, etc). We considered posts from popular journalists like Bridget

Otoo, Manasseh Azure Awuni, Nana Aba Anamoah and Tilapia Da Cartoonist (an award-winning cartoonist). For copyright reasons, we focused on Facebook and Twitter handles that were set to 'public'. We have, however, taken an extra step to anonymise the comments on the various posts, by covering the names and images of the participants who commented.

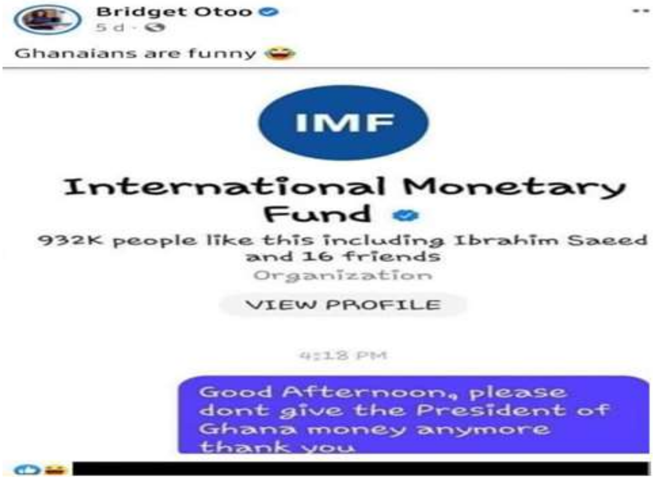
In all, 170 texts that address our research aims were selected for analysis, but 35 were cited here as examples since the rest reinforce already identified themes. We categorised the data into various themes through (a) pre-coding: by going through both written texts and images several times to get a general sense and noting down initial ideas (b) generating initial codes: by giving specific labels – e.g. the economy as war – to the ideas in the data that address our research aim; (c) collating the data relevant to each code or label; and (d) clustering units of meanings to form themes. For instance, the theme of 'humour as a political critique' is a cluster of meanings that focus on humour as a tool to critique political actors (see similar approaches by Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The captions for the sub-themes in 6.2 were however taken from participants' text.

Analysis and findings

Findings from this study were categorised under 2 major themes: (1) humour as a tool for lightening a serious problem and (2) humour as a political critique, with the following sub-themes: the economic war; economy on steroids and 'we have the men'.

Making light of a serious problem

One of the emerging themes is making the burden of the socio-economic crisis in Ghana 'light' by creating humour out of it. By drawing on the notions of incongruity and play frames, the data for the study show how netizens downgrade the seriousness of the increasing economic crisis in Ghana. For instance, in a post on Ghana's IMF bailout that went viral, a renowned journalist notes the humour in the original post (Figure 2), thereby downgrading the seriousness of the situation. It is worth noting how she evokes a play frame by combining various modes (the text 'funny' and a smiley emoji with tears of joy) to communicate her message.



Bridget Otoo
5 d ·
Ghanaians are funny 😂

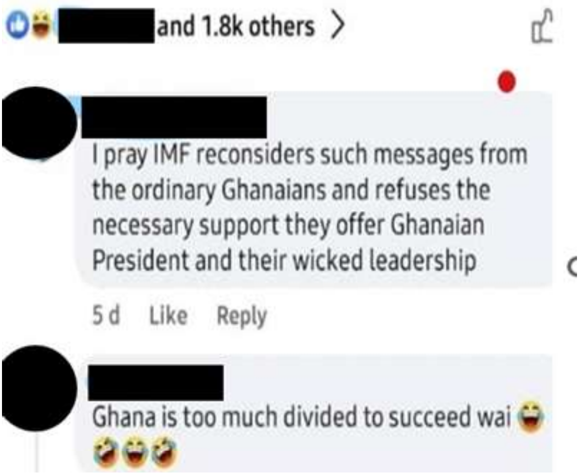
International Monetary Fund
932K people like this including Ibrahim Saeed and 16 friends
Organization

Good Afternoon, please dont give the President of Ghana money anymore thank you

[redacted]

Figure 2: Ghanaians are funny

The above post is considered incongruous (see section 4). Based on Ghana's economic crisis sketched out in Section 2, i.e. a serious problem that requires urgent attention, the expectation is that the citizens would rally behind the government in their quest for relief from the IMF. However, this expectation was cut short by rejecting the needed 'solution' (Figure 3 describes it as "*necessary* support") and advising the IMF not to give the government any money, hence humourous. The abruptness and straightforwardness of the message also adds to its humorous nature. But drawing on the bifurcation of the play frame, we argue that beyond the veil of humour, the author sends across a very subtle but important message, i.e., loss of faith in the leaders to use the money for its intended purpose. This argument is based on an assumption of a shared socio-cultural understanding by the post. This shared understanding is reiterated in some of the comments posted on Figure (2). We reproduce the comments here as Figures (3) and (4).



[redacted] and 1.8k others >

[redacted] [redacted]

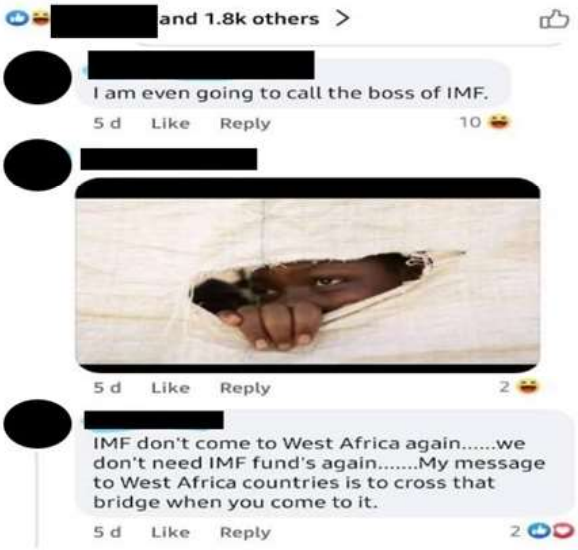
I pray IMF reconsiders such messages from the ordinary Ghanaians and refuses the necessary support they offer Ghanaian President and their wicked leadership

5 d Like Reply

[redacted] [redacted]

Ghana is too much divided to succeed wai 😂 🤣😂🤣

Figure 3: Ordinary Ghanaians vs. wicked leaders



[redacted] and 1.8k others >

[redacted] [redacted]

I am even going to call the boss of IMF.

5 d Like Reply 10 😆

[redacted] [redacted]

5 d Like Reply 2 😆

[redacted] [redacted]

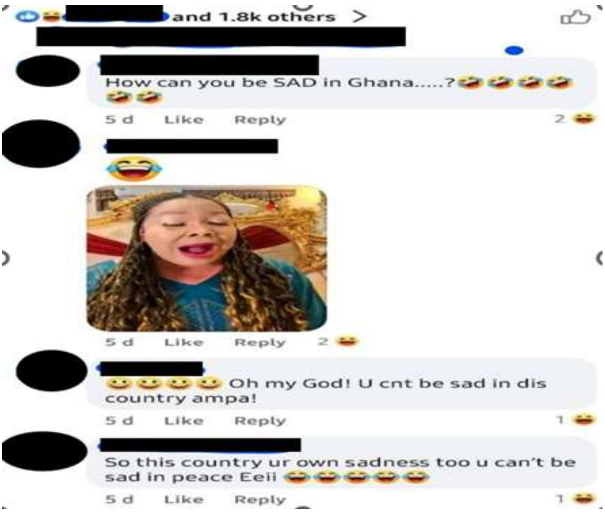
IMF don't come to West Africa again......we don't need IMF fund's again.......My message to West Africa countries is to cross that bridge when you come to it.

5 d Like Reply 2

Figure 4: A plea to IMF

In discussing the above posts, we draw on the discourse semantics properties of presupposition and implication as discussed by van Dijk (1995, see section 4; see also Grice, 1975). Implied here is the shared knowledge that 'ordinary Ghanaians' (Figure 3) is always contrasted with 'corrupt politicians' in Ghanaian political discourse. The rejection of an IMF bailout (which will be paid later through the taxes of the ordinary Ghanaian) is therefore justified because the politician is allegedly corrupt and "wicked" (Figure 3). Figure (4) even raises the bar higher and extends it to West Africa by advising the IMF to "cross that bridge when you come to it". The use of an adverb of frequency 'again' in "we don't need IMF funds again" presupposes a misuse of previous funds. Indeed, the issue of corruption in Africa is not new (see Driessen, 2019, for two jokes that highlight how corruption is deeply entrenched in Africa).

Still sharing in the humour of Figure (2), some netizens allude to humour as a tool for making light of the burden associated with Ghana's increasing economic crisis. Figure (5) illustrates this (see also the last comment of Figure 10).



[redacted] and 1.8k others >

[redacted]

[redacted] [redacted]

How can you be SAD in Ghana.....?🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣

5 d Like Reply 2 😆

[redacted] [redacted]

😂

5 d Like Reply 2 😆

[redacted] [redacted]

😃😃😃😃 Oh my God! U cnt be sad in dis country ampa!

5 d Like Reply 1 😆

[redacted] [redacted]

So this country ur own sadness too u can't be sad in peace Eeii 🤣🤣🤣🤣🤣

5 d Like Reply 1 😆

Figure 5: How can you be SAD in Ghana?

Through the use of laughing emojis, a meme and a rhetorical question “how can you be SAD in Ghana …?”, the authors of the above comments evoke a play frame in a way that suggests lightening the burden or pain (represented here as ‘sadness’) Ghana’s economic crisis brings. First, they identify that there is a problem which is expected to bring sadness, but they cannot be sad because Ghanaians are making humour out of it. For instance, the rhetorical question in the first comment and “ur [your] own sadness” in the last comment work together to suggest that although they should be sad ordinarily, they cannot because of the humour being created. Thus, humour may be seen here as a coping strategy. As shown in the literature on humour, especially from the fields of psychology and medicine, using humour as a coping strategy or mechanism is one of the key functions of humour (see section 3 for some reviews). By creating humour out of a situation, people downgrade its seriousness, which can therefore help in coping.

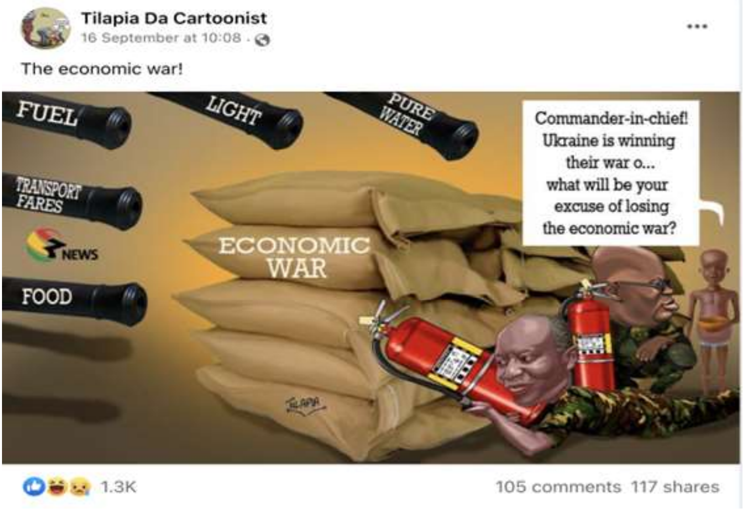
Drawing on the bifurcation of the play frame (serious vs. non-serious; see Dynel, 2011b; Coates, 2007), however, we argue that the use of the upper case in “SAD” (what Bouvier [2020, p. 191] refers to as “shouting”) *also* reiterates the seriousness of the problem. This is evidence of how even though people may be having fun (non-serious), they are equally highlighting or ‘shouting’ that there is a ‘serious’ problem that needs attention.

Humour as a political critique

The second theme, which is the major focus of the participants, is when humour is used as a tool to critique political actors. Participants rely on various literary devices to paint a vivid picture of the economic crisis and how the leaders have handled it. Emerging sub-themes include conceptualising the economic crisis in terms of war, drawing an analogy between the economic problem and a medical problem, and trolling the government for lack of competence.

The economic war

In one of the posts from a renowned Ghanaian cartoonist[6] (Figure 6), the economic crisis is described using a war metaphor. With reference to our multimodal discourse analytic approach (Kress, 2011; Jones, 2013), it is worth mentioning that the cartoonist conceptualises the crisis in terms of war, not only through verbal texts like "economic war", but also through images that depict a war zone. Such images include grenades, sandbags for fortification, and the finance minister and the president (commander-in-chief) attired in military outfit.



Tilapia Da Cartoonist
16 September at 10:08

The economic war!

FUEL
LIGHT
PURE WATER
TRANSPORT FARES
NEWS
FOOD
ECONOMIC WAR
Commander-in-chief! Ukraine is winning their war o... what will be your excuse of losing the economic war?
TILAPIA
1.3K
105 comments 117 shares

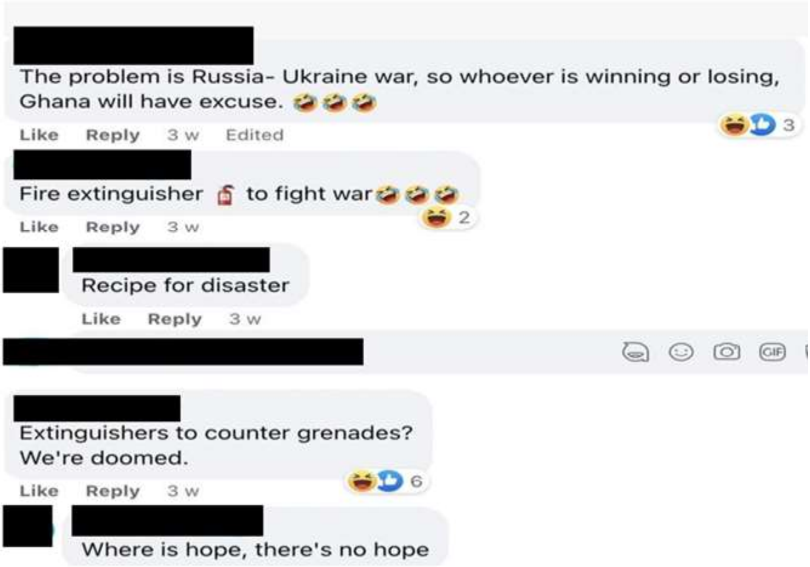
Figure 6: Economy at war

As a metaphor of war, certain indicators of the economy like food, fuel, and transport fares are mapped onto grenades whilst the minister of finance and the president are mapped onto soldiers at war (see Lakoff and Johnson, 2003; Gibbs, 2006) with fire extinguishers as their ammunitions. This is incongruous to a war situation and, thus, humourous.

---

[6] "Tilapia Da Cartoonist" is an award-winning Ghanaian cartoonist affiliated with TV3 Network. He features his cartoons on social, economic and political issues on his Facebook page, TV3 and their online portal 3news.com. https://www.facebook.com/TilapiaCartoons?mibextid=ZbWKwL.

To get a better sense of the political critique, we reproduce some comments on the above post as Figures (7) and (8).



[redacted]

The problem is Russia- Ukraine war, so whoever is winning or losing, Ghana will have excuse. 🤣🤣🤣

[redacted]

Fire extinguisher 🧯 to fight war🤣🤣🤣

[redacted] [redacted]

Recipe for disaster

[redacted]

[redacted]

Extinguishers to counter grenades?
We're doomed.

[redacted] [redacted]

Where is hope, there's no hope

Figure 7: Allusion to Russia-Ukraine war

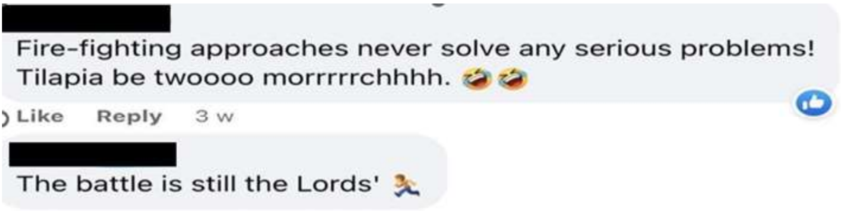
The second comment in 7 draws attention to the incongruous nature of the depiction of Ghana's crisis. Although the author (including the cartoonist) makes fun of the situation, he is also subtly criticising the government for their inadequacies in dealing with the problem. The subsequent comments reiterate this point in more stronger terms by perceiving the ironic use of fire extinguishers not only as a "recipe for disaster", but also as a sign of hopelessness and damnation. This is reinforced by the rhetorical question in the last comment ("where is hope"?) and its supposed response ("there is no hope"). These emphasise loss of faith in the government's ability to deal with the situation. Another point which also ties in with the loss of faith is in the first comment, where the author makes allusion to the Russia-Ukraine war. This allusion is first seen in the ironic question posed (in Figure 6) by a somewhat malnourished person who seems to represent 'the ordinary Ghanaian' - the one at the mercy of the economic hardships (note the discussion on Figures 3 and 4). This allusion is also considered humorous because the government is often criticised for playing the blame game by blaming their perceived inadequacies and failures on the Russia-Ukraine war[7]. The question in Figure (6) then ridicules the government since there had been reports at the time that Ukraine (with the support of some economic giants) was making progress in resisting the Russian intrusion[8]. But even more interesting is how through the bifurcation of the play frame, the first comment in 7 (which can be interpreted as a response to the question in 6) does not only share in the humour (note the use of smiley emojis for the suspension of truth/seriousness, Dynel 2011b), but it also reiterates loss of faith and irresponsibility on the side of government. Through the use of discourse semantics properties of implicatures (see van Dijk, 1995, Grice, 1975), it can be argued that since the fight is between Russia and Ukraine (not Ghana), irrespective of who wins or loses, there will always be someone to blame for Ghana's problems.

Similarly, the last comment of Figure (8) uses allusion to reinforce the issues of loss of faith and lack of responsibility. The author alludes to a popular phrase by the president in his COVID-19 state of the nation broadcasts - he always ended with "the battle is the Lord's". By arguing that the battle is *still* the Lord's, the author implies that this is a government who is not ready to fight (not to talk of winning); after all, it is the Lord's, *not his*.

[7a]. https://www.myjoyonline.com/blaming-economic-crisis-on-covid-19-and-russian-ukraine-war-is-propaganda-prof-gyampo/ (Accessed 7 November, 2022)

[b]. https://www.myjoyonline.com/no-data-shows-ghana-is-worst-hit-by-russia-ukraine-situation-bright-simons/ (Accessed 7 November, 2022).

[8] https://theconversation.com/unexpected-ukrainian-resistance-continues-to-thwart-russias-initial-plans-for-quick-decisive-victories-189507 (Accessed 20 April 2023)



[redacted]

Fire-fighting approaches never solve any serious problems! Tilapia be twoooo morrrrchhhh. 🤣🤣

[redacted]

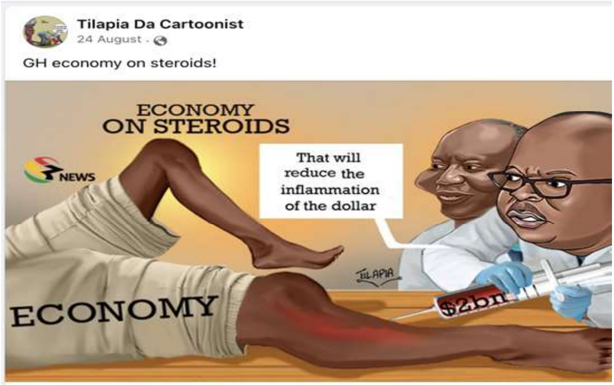
The battle is still the Lords' 🏃

Figure 8: The battle is the Lord’s

While sharing in the humour, the author of the first comment in Figure (8) *also* points out criticisms often labelled against African governments (Mbandlwa 2020, Atti and Gulis 2016). They are often accused of using reactive (firefighting) rather than proactive measures in dealing with problems. The comment reiterates the government’s lack of foresight. That is, they fail to think ahead of time or anticipate problems and proffer the necessary solutions. They instead wait for the problems to come and then tackle them with measures that do not measure up to the magnitude of the problem (i.e., fire extinguishers against grenades).

Economy on steroids

The second sub-theme uses an analogy from medicine, where the economic problem is viewed as a medical problem/ condition. Figure (9) illustrates this further.



Tilapia Da Cartoonist
24 August ·
GH economy on steroids!

ECONOMY ON STEROIDS
NEWS
That will reduce the inflammation of the dollar
TILAPIA
ECONOMY
$2bn

Figure 9: An economy with a medical problem

From a multimodal discourse analytic perspective, it is important to note how both the written text and the images work together to communicate a particular message. First, the image has the picture of a smiling minister of finance (note the hyperbole - an amplified pointed cheek) and the governor of the central bank acting as the 'doctor' injecting steroids (2 billion dollars). It is worth commenting that the leg with the injected money/steroids actually looks healthier, thereby confirming the governor's claim that "that will reduce the inflammation of the dollar".

The connection between the economic problem and the medical problem is seen in the fact that steroids are anti-inflammatory drugs, so the cartoonist draws on this to highlight one of the discourses around the economic crisis, i.e., the government's claim that an IMF loan will boost the economy. Injecting 2 billion dollars into the economy, akin to using steroids to reduce inflammation, will reduce inflation and stimulate economic growth (note the use of the wordplay – inflammation vs inflation).

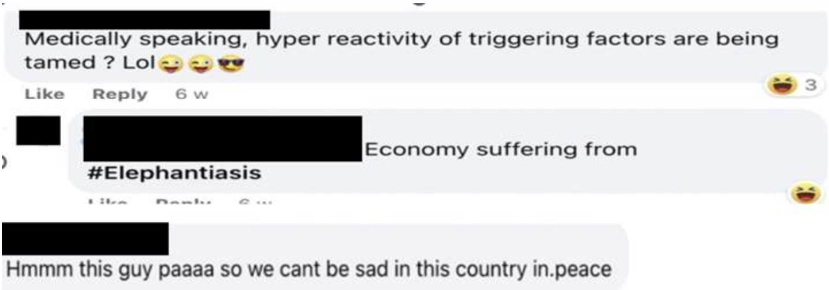
This cartoon can be interpreted as a ridicule to the government; thus, sarcasm or irony was intended. Indeed, there have been reports from various economic analysts that an IMF loan is not the solution to Ghana's problems, and that austerity measures from the fund will rather worsen the situation[9]. It was based on such arguments that the announcement to go for an IMF bailout triggered more labour unrest in July 2022.

The perceived sarcasm/irony is reiterated in many of the comments that followed the post, some of which are reproduced here as Figures (10) and (11).

---

[9] a. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/New-IMF-deal-will-not-fix-Ghana-s-problem-Prof-Hanke-reiterates-1642253 (Accessed 17 February, 2023)

b. https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/c72ekvke8rvo (Accessed 5 March 2023).



[redacted]

Medically speaking, hyper reactivity of triggering factors are being tamed ? Lol😜😜😎

[redacted] [redacted] Economy suffering from #Elephantiasis

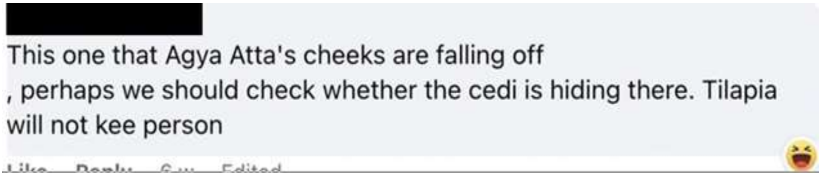
[redacted]

Hmmm this guy paaaa so we cant be sad in this country in.peace

Figure 10: Comparison between economy and elephantiasis

The ridicule in Figure (10) is more pronounced when we consider how the author uses a rhetorical question to highlight a medical situation that appears impossible. He questions how hyper-reactivity of triggering factors can be tamed, implying the economic crisis is beyond repairs.

The author of the second comment also uses a medical jargon in a way that points accusing fingers at the ruling party. Worth noting here is the fact that the totem of the ruling party is an elephant. The author therefore uses wordplay to suggest that the elephant (conceptualised here as a sickness, **elephantiasis)** is the cause of the economic suffering. This could perhaps be linked to the comment in Figure (11) which alludes to corruption.



[redacted]

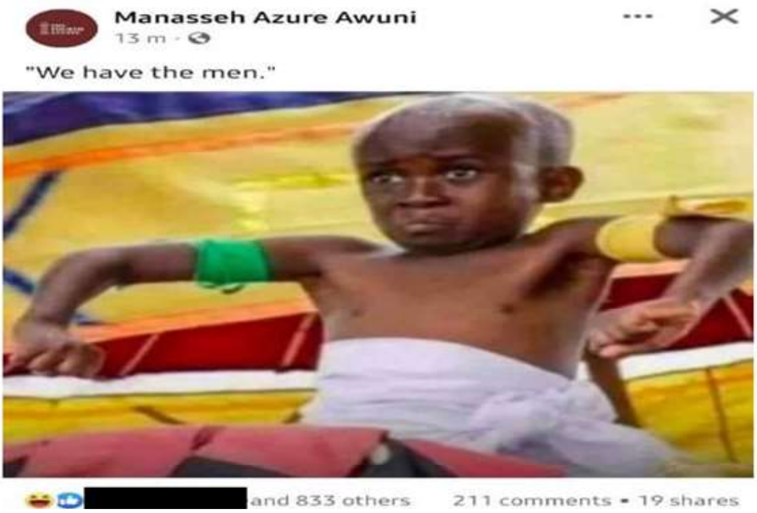
This one that Agya Atta's cheeks are falling off
, perhaps we should check whether the cedi is hiding there. Tilapia will not kee person

Figure 11: Allusion to corruption

The author here references the amplified cheek of the minister for finance (see Figure 9), which, in itself, is humourous. From the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, fat cheeks are symbolic of good-living. The author's comment, therefore, implies corruption – that the minister, and by extension the government, has misappropriated Ghana's money by fattening themselves. As noted above, such corruption accusations are not new (see Rahman, 2018; Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2014).

'We have the men'

On 4th September 2015, the President of Ghana (then in opposition), tweeted that they have the men and women to properly manage the affairs of the nation[10]. The message was retweeted on 4th October 2016[11], and it became a trending campaign messages towards the 2016 general elections. After they won the election, however, it became a criticism each time Ghanaians felt the government had failed to live up to expectation, an example of which is the increasing economic crisis discussed above. Unlike in previous times, this one took a humourous turn, as shown in a post by a very popular journalist in Figure (12).



Manasseh Azure Awuni
13 m ·

"We have the men."

[redacted] and 833 others 211 comments • 19 shares

Figure 12: When the 'men' are 'boys'

From a multimodal discourse analytic perspective, the text "we have the men" and the photo of the boy (including the facial expression and posture) work together to communicate a particular message in a humourous way. The post is incongruous for the following reasons: (a) one would have expected the picture of a man, not a boy to accompany the message "we have the men", (b) the facial expression and the posture both exude power, control, authority and strength (key characteristics of manliness), but there seems to be no sign that the government has power and is indeed in control of the economic hardship (hence the need for IMF bailout). The facial expression and the posture of the boy are symbolic of what we say in Akan as *yɛ akɛsesɛm* 'to fake power, authority and importance', which reinforces the humour in the post. Following Hempelmann and Samson's (2008) point about cartoon humour, this iconic picture (culled from a picture of the paramount chief of Akyem Abuakwa during a festival[12] in Kyebi) has a dual nature: the pictorial representation and the symbolic, and both must be understood in order to "get the joke" (p.609).

---

[10] https://twitter.com/NAkufoAddo/status/639744021376684032?lang=en (Accessed 20 November 2022).

[11] https://twitter.com/NAkufoAddo/status/783348790656954368 (Accessed 20 November).

Ironically juxtaposing this image with the government's own campaign message is intended to ridicule them. The significance of doing a multimodal analysis here, as indicated earlier, is in the fact that the incongruous is not found in one mode but a combination of modes.

In response to the above post, a number of people made comments which reinforce the ridicule and, more importantly, raise various questions about the government's ability to fulfil its own campaign promises. Examples of these are reproduced as Figures (13), (14), (15), (16), and (17).

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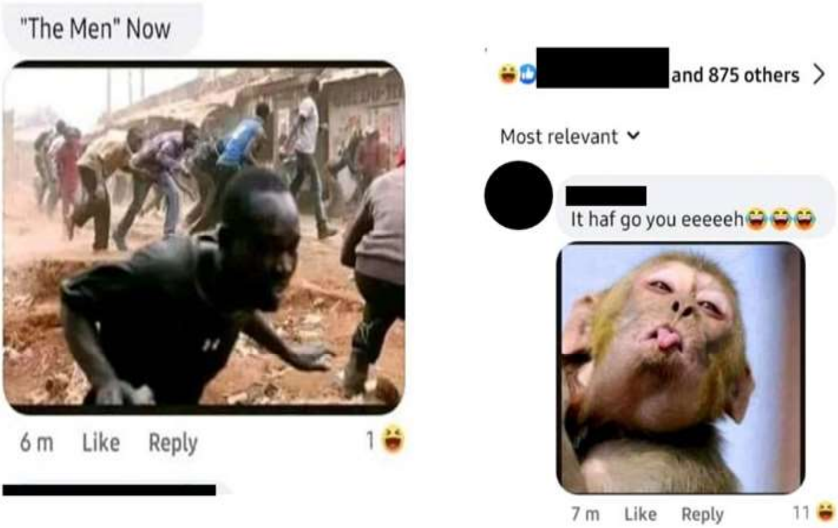
[12] It is typical of Akan paramount chiefs to attend functions with children sitting in front of them in their palanquins and dancing (like the child in this picture) to suggest that power and authority belong to the paramount chief.



"The Men" Now

6 m Like Reply 1😆

[redacted]

😆👍 [redacted] and 875 others >

Most relevant

[redacted]

[redacted]

It haf go you eeeeh😂😂😂

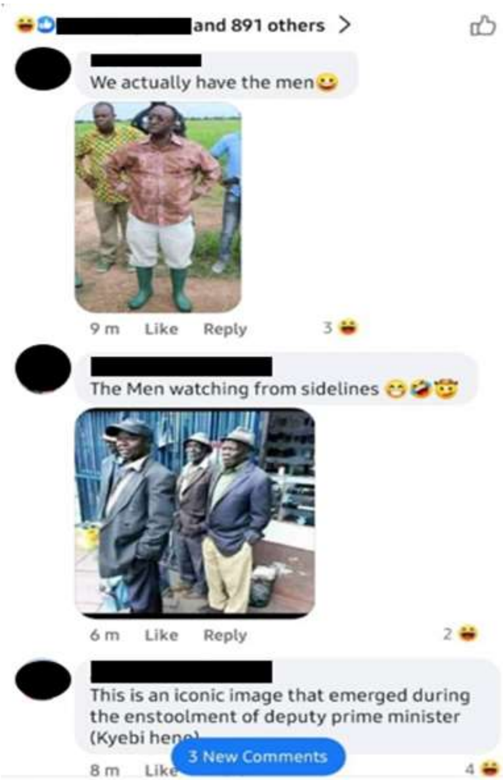
7 m Like Reply 11😆

Figure 13: Allusion to unmanliness

Like the original post in Figure (12), the combination of the written text "'the men' now" and an image of men running for cover in Figure (13) highlight the incongruity, hence humourous.

The use of the quotation marks in this example can be interpreted in two ways. First, it could be normal quotation marks, which suggests that "the men" is a direct quote from the campaign message. Secondly, and more important for understanding the humour here, it could be a scare quote which seeks to question whether indeed they have the men. This interpretation is only valid from a multimodal analytic perspective. In other words, when we juxtapose "the men" with the image of men running for cover, we get the sense of the humour, that these are not 'real men'. This is important when viewed from the sociocultural context of the Ghanaian people, as to what constitutes manliness. For instance, in their study of masculinities in Akan proverbs, Diabah and Amfo (2018) argue that the Akan proverb Ɔbarima *ne deɛ* ɔako *akɔ n'anim,* ɛnyɛ *deɛ* ɔako *adwane* [A man is he who fights to the end, and not he who fights and runs away] suggests that "what makes a man is his ability to fight (whatever storms there may be) to the end, even if it means dying in the process" (p.186). Obviously, running for cover in the face of trouble, as the above image suggests, is a sign of unmanliness. Situated within the context of the economic crisis, this humour suggests the government's ineffectiveness in dealing with the situation. The reinforcement of the ridicule can also be seen through the use of a ridiculing meme, laughing emojis and a text which translates (from broken English) as 'it has really pained you'.

The perceived incompetence is again emphasized in the following comments in Figure (14), which centres on lack of relevant ideas and solutions.



😆 [redacted] and 891 others >

[redacted] [redacted]
We actually have the men😉

9 m Like Reply 3😆

[redacted] [redacted]
The Men watching from sidelines 😁🤣🤠

6 m Like Reply 2😆

[redacted] [redacted]
This is an iconic image that emerged during the enstoolment of deputy prime minister (Kyebi hen

3 New Comments

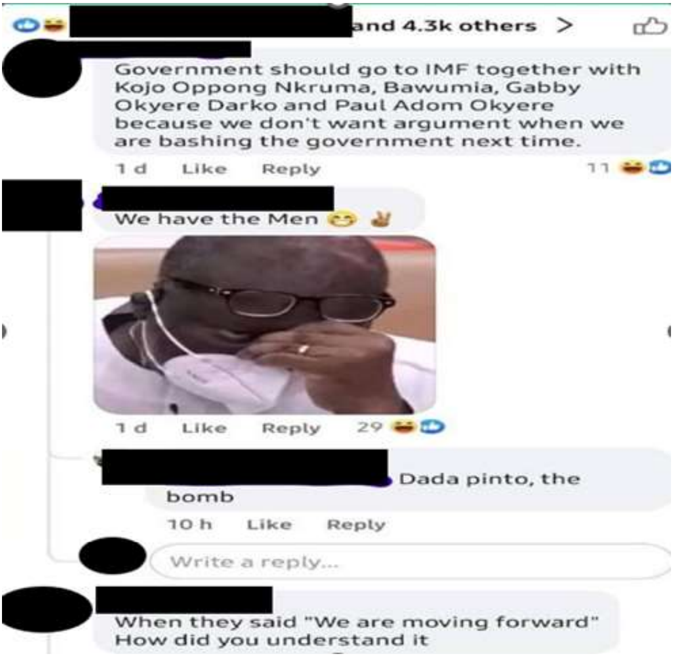
8 m Lik 4😆

Figure 14: Allusion to lack of foresight

In the first comment from Figure (14) is the picture of the Minister of Agriculture, who looked dumbfounded and lost for words when he visited a group of farmers who had some challenges. Juxtaposing this picture with the text "we actually have the men" and a smiling emoji is incongruous. It is a ridicule which questions whether they indeed have men with the relevant solutions to the country's problems. The perceived answer is 'no', as suggested by the second comment which indicates that the so-called men are "watching from the sidelines". This statement is an indication of lack of vision/foresight and, thus, incompetence.

Again, from a multimodal discourse analytic perspective, the postures, and the facial expressions of the men in both images are significant for our analysis. In the first case, all three men having their hands on their waist and the facial expressions connote helplessness and frustration. These are not signs of manliness since, according to the Akan, "Ɔbarima *na* ɔnom *aduro a* ɛyɛ *nwono* [It is a (real) man who takes bitter medicine; a courageous man faces up to any situation]" (Appiah et al., 2007, p. 22). Similarly, all the men have their hands in their pockets in the second image. This posture and the accompanying statement are indications of standing aloof, unconcerned or not willing to do anything. All these suggest incompetence and a failure on the government's part to fulfil their own promises.

Perhaps, it is in line with these that the picture of the Minister of Finance in Figure (15) will make sense and hence humourous, i.e., a failure to fulfil promises brings shame and embarrassment.



[redacted] and 4.3k others >

[redacted]

Government should go to IMF together with Kojo Oppong Nkruma, Bawumia, Gabby Okyere Darko and Paul Adom Okyere because we don't want argument when we are bashing the government next time.

1 d Like Reply 11

[redacted]

We have the Men 😁 ✌

1 d Like Reply 29

[redacted] Dada pinto, the bomb

10 h Like Reply

Write a reply...

[redacted]

When they said "We are moving forward" How did you understand it

Figure 15: Trolling government officials

Juxtaposing the text “we have the men” with this picture suggests as though he is bowing his head and covering his face from shame for not delivering on their promises, thus questioning their competence.

In another example (Figure 16), the author alludes to a comment believed to have been made by a District Chief Executive (DCE). The DCE said he was ‘dead’ when a journalist asked about his whereabouts, since his assembly members complained about his persistent absence during meetings[13].

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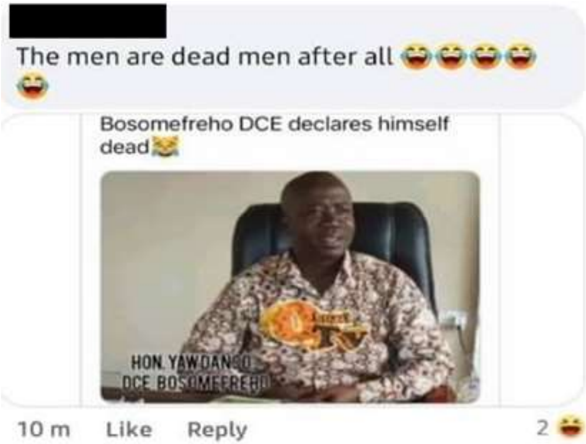
[13] https://www.facebook.com/joe.tetteh.31/videos/801044780809393/?mibextid=Nif5oz) (Accessed 9 December 2022).



[redacted]

The men are dead men after all 😂😂😂😂😂

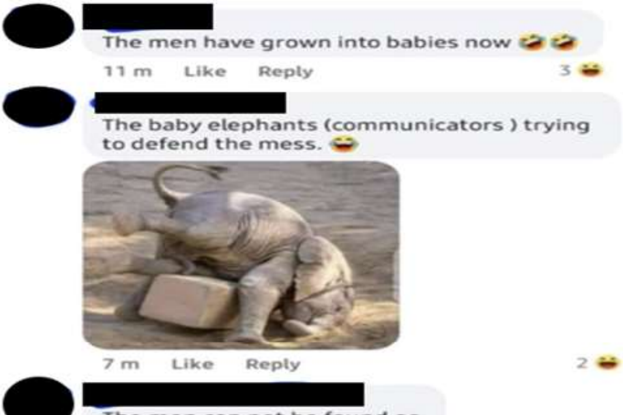
Bosomefreho DCE declares himself dead😹

10 m Like Reply 2😂

Figure 16: The men are dead

Using laughing emojis and the text “the men are dead after all”, the author reinforces the humour while at the same time questioning the competence of the government since dead men cannot work and achieve anything.

Like in the previous examples, the authors in Figure (17) use various literary devices to not just create humour but also reinforce the message of the perceived incompetence.



[redacted] [redacted]

The men have grown into babies now 🤣🤣

11 m Like Reply 3😂

[redacted] [redacted]

The baby elephants (communicators) trying to defend the mess. 😂

7 m Like Reply 2😂

[redacted] [redacted]

The men can not be found oo

Figure 17: The baby elephants

Through a combination of laughing emojis and a paradoxical statement "the men have grown into babies", the first author reinforces the 'we have the men' humour. The absurdity of men growing into babies is what reinforces the humour. But beyond the humour, the author, more importantly, reiterates the recurring argument about the government's incompetence, since babies are incapable of taking care of themselves, let alone a whole nation. This is further strengthened by the second comment, which combines text and image in an integrated way to foreground the message of the perceived incompetence. It is also worth noting that the elephant is the emblem of the ruling party and the baby elephant here is perceived as the young Minister of Communication who always needs (and sometimes struggles) to do damage control for the party. The imagery of a baby elephant tumbling on its head and struggling to carry its load signifies the government's perceived incompetence. All these work together to question their ability to fulfil their own campaign promise.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper set out to do a socio-pragmatic analysis of the political humour on Ghana's economic crisis after the COVID pandemic. Through the analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic features, the study shows how netizens use humour to make light of the burden of Ghana's economic hardship. While this does not provide practical solutions to the problem per se, it does offer momentary relief to participants, a key ingredient to keeping their sanity in the face of such harsh economic conditions. Indeed, many studies, especially in clinical psychology and psychotherapy, have noted the therapeutic nature of humour, hence its use as a coping strategy for various life issues (Andrew, 2012; Arthur, 2021; Sim, 2015; Ruch and McGhee, 2014).

Drawing on the concept of play frames (see Dynell, 2011b), and corroborating other studies (e.g., Coates, 2007, Dynell, 2011b), this study has also reiterated how humour, despite its so-called triviality, provides avenues for reiterating serious issues of national importance – and a critical analysis of linguistic and paralinguistic forms is key to connecting the dots between the non-serious and serious. To borrow the words of Săftoiu and Popescu, “the significance of the joking frame lies in what it tells us about the ‘serious’ frame” (2014, p. 314). Tsakona and Popa (2011, p.1) also argue that although politics is serious and humour funny, the boundaries can be blurred because “politics can be represented in a humorous manner and humour can have a serious intent”. For instance, by providing a distinct lens on political matters, humour not only prompts the audience to scrutinize the efficacy of political choices and norms but also functions as a tool for challenging political oppression and addressing social injustices. Similarly, Kuhlmann (2012) opines that while political jokes, cartoons and other satirical forms typically aim to elicit laughter, they concurrently seek to evoke what Billig (2005) terms ‘unlaughter’, thereby drawing attention to the gravity of everyday struggles such as social and economic hardships, or the weight of political oppression.

With reference to the bifurcation of the play frame, therefore, we conclude by arguing that the political humour that has characterised Ghana’s economic crisis goes beyond the veil of humour and, more importantly, highlights citizen’s frustrations and loss of faith, not just in the current government, but in political leaders in general. Acheampong (2022) states emphatically that the economic crises tell a story of government’s recurrent failure to effectively fortify the economy against internal and external shocks. He further argues that Ghana’s persistent lack of fiscal discipline, coupled with its recent reliance on foreign financing, renders the nation susceptible to fluctuations in investor confidence and subsequent selloffs in portfolio investments. Thus, behind and beyond the veil of humour, Ghanaians reiterate the endemic nature of the country’s problems: corruption, greed, non-performance, vain talk or political promises, lack of foresight, etc. These are issues which go beyond what an IMF bailout can solve. They are problems that need to be tackled at the roots through the leaders' own introspection and by implementing structural reforms and policies to root out corruption and other vices.

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Examining Sino-Ghana relations and the role of the Chinese community in Ghana through (Auto) biography as a historiographic approach

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Abstract

Although reference to the presence of the Chinese in Ghana might currently evoke instant thoughts on illegal mining activities and not so positive reactions, the relationship between China and Ghana transcends this sphere. China and Ghana have a longstanding six-decade history of political, economic, trade, and cultural exchanges. This research employs (auto) biography as a historical method to explore the personal narratives of Chinese individuals living in Ghana and their influence on Sino-Ghanaian relations. By taking a transcultural approach, the study examines these interactions at a micropolitical level, emphasising the Chinese community's strategic contributions and cultural insights in shaping bilateral ties. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of Ghana's political, historical, and sociocultural evolution through the lived experiences of Chinese residents. Utilising a mixed-methods strategy, the research integrates a systematic review of six decades of journalistic discourse with five in-depth case studies of Chinese people in Ghana. The results reveal the profound impact of Sino-Ghanaian relations on Ghana's post-independence changes. Politically,

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China's emphasis on unity and shared anti-colonial traditions has strengthened their friendship and influenced Ghana's national development. Economically, the introduction of Chinese technology and products has propelled modernisation. However, the long-term suitability of the "Chinese model" in Africa appears relatively favorable as one of the options for development. This study underscores the necessity for Ghana and other African countries to carefully select development paths and partners, balancing opportunities from China's rise with the need for national sovereignty. The enduring historical connection between China and Ghana, marked by a community of a shared future, provides a robust foundation for bilateral relations grounded in mutual respect and cooperative development. The study contributes to Sino-Ghanaian scholarship and offers valuable insights for enhancing public diplomacy efforts between the two nations.

Keywords: China, Ghana, Overseas Chinese, Transcultural Communication, Micropolitical perspective

Introduction

The experiences of the Chinese in Ghana hold profound historical and cultural significance. (Auto)biographical accounts are not merely records of events. In the current study, they serve as a lens to understand the complexities of historical contingency and its impact on the relationships between the Chinese and Ghanaian people. The arrival of European colonists reshaped the perception of blackness in Africa, establishing a racial hierarchy that placed whites above blacks. This disrupted existing social structures in Ghana, marginalising local histories and cultures by portraying African achievements as inferior to European standards. This historical erasure led to a disconnect between Ghanaians and their past, influencing their attitudes toward foreigners, particularly those from former colonial powers.

The Chinese presence in Ghana represents a partnership unburdened by the colonial baggage many Western countries carry. This allows for relationships based on mutual respect and trust. The Chinese approach, distinct from traditional Western methods, brings unique solutions and draws from a rich heritage of wisdom and modernisation. This approach is refreshing and invigorating for Ghanaians, who are eager to collaborate on projects to transform their country into a modern nation. The growing belief among Ghanaians that Africa's future is closely tied to China underscores the importance of studying the experiences of Chinese expatriates in Ghana. This relationship is viewed economically and as a cultural and social exchange that can benefit both sides. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for appreciating the evolving landscape of Ghanaian-Chinese relations.

Recent academic research has started to delve into these complex interactions. Amo-Agyemang (2021) emphasises the need for African states, including Ghana, to utilise their relationships with China for mutual gain. This perspective is supported by studies such as Teye (2022), which argue against oversimplified views of Chinese migrants. They emphasise the diversity among Chinese expatriates and the role of social networks and peaceful environments in facilitating migration. Additionally, Ndenguino-Mpira (2013) investigated how media and official discourse influence Ghanaian perceptions of the Chinese, indicating a significant impact on public opinion and policy. Lastly, research by Amoah (2020) recognises the potential for mutual benefits and harmonious interactions despite existing concerns regarding competition and labour issues.

These studies provide a detailed insight into the Sino-Ghanaian relationship, indicating that despite existing challenges, there are significant opportunities for positive engagement that could serve as a model for broader Sino-African relations. This research investigates the experiences of Chinese expatriates in Ghana, offering a comprehensive understanding of their substantial contributions to the country's development. It goes beyond merely assessing the economic impact and exploring how these expatriates have formed meaningful relationships with Ghanaians. These relationships are based on shared values and aspirations, reflecting a mutual vision for the future that transcends cultural differences.

The present research delves into the personal stories of Chinese individuals in Ghana, revealing how they integrate into Ghanaian society, thereby driving economic growth and promoting social and cultural interactions. This deeper integration bolsters a stronger bilateral relationship, paving the way for immediate benefits and long-term collaborative goals. Consequently, the personal narratives of Chinese expatriates are vital for a comprehensive understanding of their influence in Ghana, illustrating how their personal and professional engagements merge to form a solid and dynamic intercultural relationship. Consequently, this paper seeks to explore how the personal stories of Chinese individuals living in Ghana, analysed through (auto)biography as a historiographic method, mirror the political, economic, and cultural aspects of Sino-Ghanaian relations over the past sixty years.

The paper is divided into six parts. The first part introduces the topic, offering a historical overview of Ghana's shift from a colonial to a postcolonial state, highlighting the natural opportunities that enabled Chinese engagement, and introducing an alternative development model. The second part outlines the theoretical framework, emphasising (auto)biography as a historiographic method and transcultural communication as a political, social, and cultural re/territorialisation process. The third part reviews the development of Sino-Ghana relations from 1960 to 2020. The fourth part presents five case studies of the Chinese diaspora in Ghana, demonstrating how Chinese wisdom and development models have been applied locally. The fifth part discusses the theoretical implications, focusing on the impact of Sino-Ghana relations on Ghana's political, economic, and sociocultural transformations post-independence. The sixth part concludes the paper and offers prospects for future studies.

Theoretical framework

This paper integrates two theoretical frameworks: the (auto)biographical approach and transcultural communication theory (Jia & Wang, 2023). The former examines the personal experiences and perspectives of the researcher over 19 years, emphasising the significance of comprehensive micro-level factors in the evolving relationship between China and Ghana. By adopting a transcultural perspective, the paper also explores potential avenues for enhancing international relations, particularly in building a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind." (Xi, 2017). This analysis is exemplified through an examination of the Sino-Ghanaian relationship.

(Auto)biography as a historiographic approach

The French historian Fernand Braudel was among the first scholars to employ (auto)biography in historiographic research. He used his personal experiences and family background to illuminate the cultural and economic transformations in the Mediterranean region (Braudel, 1976/1972). Similarly, the British historian Edward Gibbon (1981) employed his personal experiences as a lens for his examination of Roman history, offering a unique perspective on the subject.

Aurell (2006) observed a significant increase in historians who utilised autobiography as a research tool beginning in the 1970s. This trend coincided with growing complexity in the approaches historians used to engage with the events they had previously analysed from a critical distance. Popkin's (2005, 2017) recent book, *History, Historians, and Autobiography*, delves into this phenomenon by exploring the connections between history and autobiography. Popkin utilises historians' autobiographical accounts to understand their experiences and professional positions, emphasising the role of life-writing texts as a source for knowledge of historians' experiences and perspectives (Popkin, 2021).

These autobiographical texts can serve as more than a window into historians' professional practices; they can also offer insights into how historians shape our understanding of the past. By examining these texts, one can gain a deeper understanding not only of history itself but also of how history is written. The parallels between history and autobiography extend beyond their shared structural elements; they invite us to consider how their narratives of events might intersect. This way, we can enhance our comprehension of history and its historiography.

As a research approach, (auto)biographical accounts have gained popularity in historiographic studies, offering a unique perspective for exploring and understanding history. By presenting personal accounts, these accounts serve as a window into both personal and social aspects of historical events.

Firstly, (auto)biographical accounts provide historians with critical personal perspectives. The unique perspective is essential in historical research as it offers insights into individual experiences, thoughts, emotions, and motivations. By examining (auto)biographies, historians gain a deeper understanding of personal life experiences and growth processes, as well as the role and influence of individuals in historical events. These unique perspectives often fill gaps in traditional historical records, offering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of historical events.

Furthermore, (auto)biographies serve as a reflection of social values and norms. Beyond mere personal accounts, (auto)biographies offer insights into the time’s social context and cultural norms. Historians can glean society’s expectations and evaluation criteria for individuals, as well as individuals’ sense of identity and belonging within society. This information enriches historians’ understanding of historical events’ social structure and cultural backdrop.

Moreover, (auto)biographies provide unique perspectives and insights into historical events and figures. Given that the authors of (auto)biographies often have personal experience with the events and characters they describe, they offer unique observations and interpretations. These insights can provide fresh perspectives and angles for historians to consider, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of historical figures and events.

Using (auto)biography in historiographic studies has numerous benefits. It offers personal perspectives that enrich our understanding of history, reflect social values and norms, and provide unique insights into historical events and figures. By incorporating (auto)biography into historiographic research, historians can better understand history and its personal and social dimensions.

Incorporating autobiography into historiographic studies offers a deeper, more nuanced understanding of history, as it introduces personal perspectives that illuminate social values and provide unique insights into historical events and figures. However, this method also poses significant limitations due to the inherent subjectivity of autobiographies, which personal biases, selective memories, and subjective experiences can influence. Additionally, autobiographies may suffer from anachronism, where modern beliefs and values distort the representation of past events. To overcome these limitations, historians should critically analyse autobiographical sources, cross-referencing with other historical documents to ensure a balanced and accurate understanding of the past. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, historians can effectively leverage autobiographies to contribute to a comprehensive and accurate historiography.

It must be noted that this method has its limitations. While providing valuable personal insights and perspectives, it carries potential biases that can impact the accuracy and reliability of historical research. These biases include subjectivity and personal bias, where autobiographies reflect the author's views and emotions, often portraying themselves favourably; selective memory, which leads to emphasising certain events while forgetting others; anachronism, where past events are interpreted through contemporary values; narrative construction, where life stories are shaped to fit specific themes; and cultural and social influences, where the author's background affects their interpretation. The current paper takes a series of measures to mitigate these biases, including:

1. cross-referencing autobiographical accounts with other primary and secondary sources,
2. applying critical analysis to understand the context and motivations,
3. placing autobiographies within broader historical, social, and cultural contexts,
4. incorporating multiple perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding and
5. openly acknowledging the limitations and potential biases of autobiographical sources.

By employing these strategies, the author has sought to achieve a more balanced, accurate, and comprehensive understanding of historical events regarding the relationship between China and Ghana.

Transcultural communication as a political-social-cultural de/reterritorialisation

The concept of transcultural communication is multifaceted and interdisciplinary, evolving from the contributions of scholars across various schools of thought. Its origins can be traced back to the 1970s when American cultural scholar, Hall (1973) first introduced the notion of intercultural communication in his seminal work *The Silent Language*. Hall emphasised the significance of cultural differences and similarities in communication processes. Since then, numerous scholars have built upon this concept, contributing to the development of transcultural communication theory.

In a recently published article, Jia and Wang (2023) further elaborate on the nature of transcultural communication. They posit that transcultural communication entails a process of cultural de/reterritorialisation, where different cultures engage in a dynamic exchange that forms new artistic territories. This process involves the reconfiguration of cultural networks, the integration of diverse elements, and the emergence of new cultural forms under various conditions and circumstances.

The author's discussion of overseas Chinese stories' historical and sociocultural actualisation further exemplifies the micropolitical aspect of transcultural communication. These stories serve as a critical lens for understanding the transcultural dynamics in Sino-Ghana relations. By examining the intricate stories and relationships within the Ghanaian Chinese community, one can better understand the evolving ac/enculturation processes and the shared psychosomatic experiences among global citizens.

Transcultural communication is a dynamic, multifaceted concept that involves multiple disciplines. It emphasises cultures' fluidity and mutual influence in communication processes, highlighting the importance of understanding cultural differences and similarities in fostering meaningful cross-cultural engagement.

Overview of the development of Sino-Ghana relations: 1960 to 2020

In this section, the researcher gathered data and statistical information from the news archives of local Ghanaian news websites.

Following World War II, the emergence of the United States and the Soviet Union marked the decline of African colonies. On March 6, 1957, Ghana became the first independent nation in West Africa under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, its inaugural president. On July 5, 1960, diplomatic relations between China and Ghana were officially established, making Ghana the second country to forge diplomatic ties with China. That same year, Ghana opened an embassy in Moscow and established relations with other Eastern European nations. However, relations were disrupted in October 1966 due to a military coup in Ghana. Normal diplomatic relations were resumed in February 1972.

The early Chinese settlers in Ghana hailed from Hong Kong, with roots tracing back to the 1940s. Chinese mainlanders arrived in Ghana in droves following the country's reform and opening. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hong Kong migrants-built factories employing many local Chinese. However, regarding their national identity, these early Chinese did not consider Ghana their home.

After Ghana established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, a group of Chinese was dispatched to Ghana in the 1960s for military support and to maintain political and military engagement. Following this, numerous Hong Kong families migrated to Ghana, joined by a wave of immigrants from Shanghai. The early Chinese industries in Ghana encompassed various sectors, such as tobacco, kitchenware, batik production, and steel manufacturing. However, following the military coup in Ghana, many Chinese settlers returned to their homeland. It was not until the 1980s, with China's economic reform and opening policies, that a genuine wave of official and individual Chinese benefits began to populate Ghana.

In general, the Chinese population in Ghana has deepened its economic involvement, contributing to the economic prosperity of both China and Ghana. However, this growth has not yet significantly impacted cultural integration and educational penetration. The mutually beneficial economic development between the Chinese and Ghana is primarily due to Ghana's consistent status as a peaceful nation since 1972. This stability has positively impacted the legitimate financial investments made by the Chinese. In 2018, Ghana ranked 57th in the global peace index, compared to 112th for China and 121st for the United States, highlighting its high level of peace and security.

Jerry John Rawlings, founder of the National Democratic Congress Party (NDC) in 1992, served as president of the Fourth Republic of Ghana from 1992 to 2001. Several significant contributions marked his presidency: 1) ensuring political and economic stability within Ghana and neighbouring countries; 2) enhancing education, healthcare, and infrastructure; and 3) implementing an excellent foreign policy.

From the early 1980s to the mid-1990s, Chinese from the Chinese mainland primarily came to Ghana to station through state-owned enterprises like the China National Construction Engineering Corporation and China Water Corporation. As both Ghana and China are developing countries, China primarily aided Ghana in developing its infrastructure. When the Chinese first arrived in Ghana, conditions were extremely challenging. Located north of the equator, Ghana experiences extreme heat with substandard living conditions, sanitation issues, frequent power outages, and various mosquito-borne diseases. Additionally, more trained personnel and construction hardware were needed. Daily life was also challenging, as Chinese personnel could only visit their families every two years. Despite these hardships, the Chinese constructed the Chinese Embassy in Accra in 1986, relying on their ingenuity. They progressed from building sheds in their early days to renting dormitory buildings and eventually purchasing land to establish offices and living quarters. Through their diligence and intelligence, the Chinese have completed numerous projects in Ghana, ushering in a new era of revitalisation.

In the early days of China's reform and opening, the Chinese who went to Ghana were primarily translators and practitioners, facing numerous challenges and hardships. These individuals were instrumental in bridging cultural divides and promoting development in Ghana, using their youth and wisdom to contribute to the country's growth. This research report explores the pioneering experiences and diverse contributions of the Chinese people in Ghana during this period.

During this time, the Chinese people in Ghana were not limited to those working in state-owned enterprises. Many Chinese immigrants, including Hong Kong residents and some mainlanders, were also present in the country, engaging in various industries such as production, restaurants, hospitals, and photo studios. These individuals were crucial in promoting economic development and cultural exchange between China and Ghana.

As China's reform and opening deepened in the mid-1990s, more Chinese mainlanders migrated to Ghana. This migration was further facilitated by increasing official political and economic interactions between China and Ghana. In November 1997, China's Xinhua News Agency and Ghanaian news organisations established direct news exchanges, leading to a surge in public discourse about China and Asia in the Ghanaian media. This opened up opportunities for Ghanaians to engage with oriental countries directly and acquire a global perspective. Additionally, Ghana's status as an African emerging market attracted numerous foreign investors, including those from China.

The early British colonisers had established Ghana's primary production resources, such as cocoa and timber, which became significant exports to China. As a result, China has been a substantial importer of these products, further strengthening economic ties between the two countries. To support Ghana's media sector, the Chinese Embassy provided the necessary equipment to improve the operations of Ghanaian news organisations. Furthermore, China International Hydropower Corporation signed a contract with the Ghanaian government to assist in providing electricity to 106 townships in the Volta Region. This project was funded by a concessionary loan of US$29 million from China, with interest rates waived for the first three years and a ten-year repayment period at 2% annual interest.

The most significant milestone in establishing diplomatic relations between China and Ghana occurred in 1999 when Vice President Hu Jintao led a 30-member delegation to Ghana. This visit marked the most significant Chinese delegation to Ghana since Premier Zhou Enlai's visit 35 years earlier. During this visit, Hu Jintao emphasised the close ties between China and Ghana, particularly in agriculture, science, health, trade, and commerce. Economic cooperation agreements worth 50 million RMB were signed during this visit, further solidifying the economic partnership between the two countries.

In 2000, the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Ghana marked a significant milestone. This anniversary signalled the conclusion of the initial historical phase of the Chinese presence in Ghana and ushered in a new era. Throughout this period, high-level officials from both countries actively engaged in discussions and exchanges.

In January 2000, Lu Yongshou, the Chinese Ambassador to Ghana, met with President Rawlings to commemorate the four decades of Sino-Ghanaian relations and Macao's return to Ghana to support the One-China principle. Shortly after that, Chinese State Councilor Wu Yi also met with Rawlings, who praised China's science and technology and expressed hope that China would utilise its technological expertise to support Ghana's development efforts.

In March, Lu Yongshou discussed increasing the utilisation of traditional Chinese medicine in the Ghanaian health system with Ghanaian Health Bureau Director General Danso Bauer. Bauer expressed interest in scaling up production and establishing a training school for acupuncture. Additionally, the Chinese delegation visited the Ghanaian Atomic Energy Commission to collaborate in food safety, traditional Chinese medicine production, cancer treatment, and environmental protection.

In July, Ghanaian Vice President Mills visited China to celebrate the 40 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He hoped for deeper cooperation in agriculture, trade, and other sectors. Also, in July, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries hosted parliamentary delegations from Ghana to discuss education, cultural exchange, and international relations.

In August, China assisted the Ghanaian police in upgrading and expanding their training facilities. This assistance was built upon previous cooperation between the Chinese and Canadian police forces. As China's engagement with Ghana deepened across various fields, its support in strengthening Ghana's police capabilities contributed to enhancing its security.

In the agricultural sector, China, Ghana, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations entered a tripartite agreement to send Chinese farming experts and technicians to West Africa to enhance food production capabilities. In September, the Ghana-China Friendship Association (GHACHIFA) was established to promote social, cultural, educational, and trade exchanges. October witnessed the signing of an agreement on cooperation in higher education between the Ministry of Education of China and Ghana. This agreement saw China providing 50 minicomputers worth $200,000 to the University of Ghana and establishing advanced laboratories on campus.

Between 1990 and 2000, in addition to official diplomatic exchanges between China and Ghana, a cultural phenomenon deeply engraved China and its culture into the hearts of the Ghanaian people. Ghanaian state television's broadcast of the complete series of *The Journey to the West*, a Chinese television drama, was a critical factor in this cultural influence. The show, which aired in Chinese with English subtitles, captured the Ghanaian public's imagination with its colourful depiction of the East, the wisdom of survival in distress, and the moral spirit of pursuing the true meaning of life.

The Ghanaian audience, from children to adults, was captivated by this weekly series. Many gave up their Sunday activities, even preceding church attendance, to eagerly await each new episode. The story of the monk Tang Sanzang and his three disciples on their journey to retrieve the Buddhist scriptures from the ancient Indian world resonated deeply with Ghanaian viewers. This resonation was not limited to the storyline;

Ghanaian society also developed a fondness for Chinese TV dramas, stories, and songs.

The impact of this cultural exchange on Ghanaian society has been profound and long-lasting. Nearly 20 years after the broadcast of *The Journey to the West*, random surveys of Ghanaian adults aged 30 to 60 found that the majority still remembered being deeply moved by this Chinese classical literature and that the memory retained its potency over such a long period. This TV series sparked curiosity about China among many Ghanaians, fostering dreams of exploring the oriental world.

This case study highlights that the influence of one nation on another does not solely stem from political or economic cooperation. The power of cultural industries, primarily classic literary works and film and television productions, cannot be understated. Their traditional content can evoke shared emotions and aspirations among all humanity. In historical examples, such as early European Christianity, education, language, and culture played a pivotal role in a nation's "soft colonisation" influence, whose impact persisted beyond the colonial era. The Ghanaian reception of *The Journey to the West* demonstrates China's robust cultural heritage and its importance in facilitating cultural exchanges and communication during cultural collisions.

Next, the researcher will delve into the second phase of the Sino-Ghana relationship from 2001 to the present. In 2001, John Kufuor, leader of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in Ghana, became the nation's president, a position he held until 2009. His tenure marked the first peaceful transition of power in Ghanaian political history since 1957.

Kufuor's presidency was marked by his dedication to developing modern agriculture, enhancing social services, and vigorously pursuing infrastructure development. He contributed significantly to healthcare, education, finance, communication, and sports. The successes under his leadership were partially attributed to China's support of Ghana, mainly as China played a pivotal role in Ghana's modernisation process.

The Chinese Embassy has consistently provided material support to the Ghanaian government, but the scale and quality of these donations have been more robust since 2001. What is particularly noteworthy is the unprecedented economic cooperation between China and Ghana across various sectors of the economy, including agriculture and fisheries, infrastructure and manufacturing, the chemical pharmaceutical industry, tourism, military defence, education, and sports.

Learning Chinese was seen as a natural way to enhance cultural and linguistic connections further and solidify the cultural bond between China and Ghana. Ghana thus initiated Chinese language courses in 2007 through the Language Centre and Professional Research Institutions. Ghanaians recognised that learning Chinese would benefit personal and professional development with China's impending status as an economic superpower. Additionally, the influx of Chinese investors and expatriates into Ghana post-2001 further emphasised the need for language proficiency. In May 2007, the Minister of Human Resources even proposed introducing Chinese language courses in all secondary schools in Ghana. These efforts aimed to propel all facets of Sino-Ghana relations forward by fostering an educational groundswell. It was believed that learning Chinese would not only spread technical knowledge but also instil a valuable perspective on how the Chinese approach problem-solving and their work ethic—critical aspects for societal and economic advancement.

In August 2008, the Chinese government doubled the annual scholarships available to African students, increasing them to 4,000. For the 2008-2009 academic year, 34 Ghanaian students were recipients of Chinese government scholarships, signifying a deepening of the friendship between the two nations. More African students are expected to seize opportunities to study in China, further strengthening cultural and educational ties.

China-Ghana relations have experienced unprecedented growth over the past eight years since President John Kufuor assumed office in 2001. This positive trend is primarily attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the Republic of Ghana has enjoyed political stability, attracting significant foreign investment in various sectors. Secondly, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, China has achieved rapid development across multiple fields, becoming a global powerhouse. Notably, China hosted the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 and marked the 60th anniversary of the founding of New China in 2009. As of 2008, China's foreign exchange reserves exceeded $1.95 trillion, making it the world's largest holder of foreign exchange reserves. By 2008, China's GDP had reached US $4.3977 trillion. It is estimated that China's growth in the global economy contributed to approximately 20% of overall growth until 2008. China has transformed from a predominantly agricultural country to the world's third-largest industrial producer, with the "Made in China" label becoming synonymous with global production. With China's economic growth, its transportation, energy, and telecommunications infrastructure have thrived. China is gradually transitioning from meeting basic needs to becoming a well-off society. These are remarkable achievements in China's reform and opening. China's development is evident to the world, as its experience, technology, capacity, and funds in infrastructure construction are invaluable to African countries. In terms of political relations, as a leader among developing countries, China has always upheld the principles of "friendship first, mutual benefit and win-win, and common development" in its relations with Ghana. Ghana has benefited from China's economic and technical support in various fields such as agriculture, science and technology, healthcare, military affairs, tourism, sports, education, and more. Ghana recognises the long-term strategic value of friendship and cooperation with China based on trust, stability, sincerity, equality, mutual benefit, and peaceful development.

As a developing country, China still faces numerous challenges in its development efforts. Nevertheless, it has consistently provided economic support to Ghana, including various subsidies, interest-free loans, concessionary loans, supply of various commodities, and human resources development assistance. Amidst the global financial crisis, China has maintained its commitment to investing in Ghana's growth. Over recent years, China has registered 387 projects in Ghana, which cost US $235,180,000. Trade between China and Ghana has grown steadily, with China becoming Ghana's second-largest export destination. President Kufuor's tenure laid an excellent foundation for China-Ghana relations and economic cooperation. Building upon this foundation, China-Ghana relations have fostered a positive mechanism for continuously exploring new opportunities and development. The 10th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Ghana Friendship Association was celebrated in 2009. This association has played a highly positive role in non-governmental business cooperation, particularly in joint ventures, cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, and business networking. Currently, the focus of China-Ghana relations remains on government-to-government partnerships; however, there is a growing need for closer cooperation between civil society and enterprises.

Although China and Ghana have made significant progress in economic cooperation, numerous challenges persist. These challenges are primarily rooted in cross-cultural communication obstacles and language barriers. Considerable disparities exist in language and culture between the Chinese and Ghanaian people. China and Ghana must prioritise investing in education and cultural exchange to develop their relationship further. When foreign companies such as those from Europe, America, or Japan conduct business in China, they often expect their Chinese employees to adapt to international standards, including operating according to the company's specific rules, regulations, and language preferences, typically requiring proficiency in

English or Japanese. However, this adaptation is not one-way. For example, Chinese companies operating as foreign-funded enterprises in Ghana must also adapt to the local business practices and cultural expectations while requiring Ghanaian employees to align with some of the Chinese operational norms and language requirements. This highlights the bilateral nature of cultural and operational adjustments in international business settings, where employers and employees may need to make concessions and learn from one another to achieve effective communication and business success.

A thorough understanding of China is paramount to establishing a solid corporate culture and system. Even if Chinese companies utilise English as the primary language of communication, Ghanaian employees require a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and systems. The company should provide ample opportunities for learning Chinese and exploring Chinese culture. Educational institutions should offer more Chinese courses and collaborate with Chinese companies to facilitate cultural exchange. Learning Chinese and understanding Chinese culture should be a benefit provided to their employees by Chinese companies. Sending outstanding employees to headquarters in China for training and cultural immersion is also crucial for enhancing cross-cultural communication. China should establish Ghanaian studies and language programs at language universities or international politics departments. To foster more profound exchanges between China and Ghana, academic research collaboration will play a pivotal role. As an economic powerhouse, China should be more inclusive in academic research.

The compilation of these news discourses reflects the evolving relationship between China and Ghana over the past 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations. These accounts are not told from the perspectives of China, Europe, or America but serve as objective narratives of Ghana's experiences. There is no external political or ideological influence in these accounts. Original research data attests to the peaceful international relations between China and Ghana, characterised by benevolence, mutual assistance, and equitable dialogue. This relationship between China and Ghana represents more than just communication between the third-world countries; there is no history of colonialism or racial discrimination between them. However, in the West, mainly Europe and the United States, Sino-African relations have long been framed through a post-colonial lens, leading to misunderstandings. The author of this study seeks to clarify common misconceptions by examining the bilateral relationship between China and Ghana as a case study. This research aims to show that this partnership is driven not by exploitative motives, as often speculated, but by principles of benevolence, mutual assistance, and equitable dialogue, reflecting broader Chinese diplomatic principles. However, it is essential to recognise that this case study may only represent some facets of China's interactions with other African nations. Due to diverse historical, economic, and political contexts, China's relations with different African countries can vary significantly. Therefore, while this study provides valuable insights into the China-Ghana relationship, these findings should be considered and interpreted objectively within the broader and more complex panorama of China-Africa relations.

Case studies of the overseas Chinese in Ghana

The migration patterns of Chinese individuals to Africa have been widely studied at various academic levels. Nevertheless, fundamental questions remain unanswered. Specifically, why do Chinese individuals choose to live and work in Africa? How, where, and when do they migrate? Moreover, what are the consequences of these migrations on both the migrants and the local population?

In the pre-reform and opening-up era, individuals from Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan regions migrated to Ghana as entrepreneurs, investing in and establishing factories. Post-reform and opening-up, state-owned enterprises from the Chinese mainland have executed various infrastructure projects in Ghana, including roads, construction, public facilities, hydropower, and other large- to medium-sized projects. Beginning in the 1990s, an increasing number of mainland business people have started their entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana through personal investments. Since achieving independence, Ghana, like many African nations, has faced significant challenges in urbanisation processes. These include developing adequate infrastructure, securing reliable water and power supplies, enhancing education and healthcare systems, advancing technology, boosting agricultural production, and ensuring the availability of daily necessities. While substantial progress has been made in these areas, ongoing efforts are necessary to address these challenges further (Opoku, 2018; Honorati, 2016).

This study takes a unique approach to exploring the micro-level realities of China-Ghana relations through an auto/biographical narrative perspective. The researcher and his family, Ghanaian overseas Chinese, have extensive experience living in Ghana and have personally participated in and witnessed the history of China-Ghana relations. The researcher hopes to make a humble contribution to studying China-Ghana relations.

The researcher then narrates the story from a first-person perspective or through a personal narrative. This narrative is divided into two distinct stages: The first is the researcher's nostalgic recollections of his time in Ghana. The second involves his return to Ghana after a 19-year hiatus to conduct research.

Part 1 Early years in Ghana

In July 1986, Wang Lizu, the father of John Qiong Wang, was dispatched to Ghana by the overseas department of China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch. At that time, John was only four years old. His father's image always remained in his heart during his upbringing, as his mother primarily raised him. Nowadays, fathers often hold significant roles in their children's lives, as it may be easier for fathers and sons to understand each other as they grow older. However, as John grew, he came to appreciate the significance of his father's departure for Ghana. The state assigned his father to the task of establishing the Chinese embassy. As China's reform and opening began to take shape, Wang Lizu, at the age of 35, arrived in Accra, Ghana's capital. He contributed to establishing the embassy of the People's People's Republic of China on Ghanaian soil, marking a pivotal juncture in the diplomatic history between China and Ghana.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, living and working conditions in Ghana were basic. Initially, Wang Lizu and two colleagues, all pioneers of Chinese enterprises in Ghana, set out for Ghana to bid on projects, establish companies, and seek opportunities. At that time, there were very few Chinese in Ghana; many were elderly overseas Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan regions. The China Construction Corporation was the first Chinese mainland company to enter Ghana. They introduced Chinese business practices and management styles to Ghana by establishing one of the first Chinese mainland companies in the country. They adapted to local challenges adeptly, utilising Chinese regulatory frameworks and innovative problem-solving techniques to tackle material scarcity, equipment shortages, and limited financial resources. Despite these hurdles, they demonstrated exceptional perseverance and commitment, contributing to their business goals and Ghana's national development. This approach went beyond mere business operations; it was about building local capacity, fostering bilateral relations, and demonstrating a spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit. Through these efforts, they exemplified Chinese wisdom and solutions, helping to pave the way for future Chinese investments in Ghana.

In 1985, the Gansu Construction Engineering Group collaborated with China State Construction Engineering Corporation to construct the Chinese Embassy in Ghana under the name“China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch. A specialised embassy construction team was formed for this project. This marked Gansu Construction Engineering Group’s first independently managed and self-financed project abroad and their first embassy construction project. After ending their partnership with China State Construction Engineering Corporation, Gansu Construction Engineering Group, they established the Hualong (Ghana) Group Corporation in China. The primary aim of this new entity was to continue and expand construction initiatives at the Chinese Embassy in Ghana.

Hualong (Ghana) Group Corporation evolved from China State Construction Ghana Limited, established on September 9, 1987, and registered with the Ghana Investment Promotion Center. This registration signified the entry and growth of one of Ghana’s first Chinese-funded enterprises from Gansu Province. Over the ensuing decades, the Gansu Construction Engineering Group and its affiliated companies made significant progress in Ghana, demonstrating tenacity and courage in overcoming challenges and building an entrepreneurial legacy. Over more than 20 years, Hualong (Ghana) Group Corporation independently undertook 99 projects (excluding the Ghanaian Embassy and non-governmental organisation offices), completed a total construction area of 363,553 square metres, and generated approximately $146.53 million in revenues.

Chinese Embassy in Ghana Project

The construction of the Chinese Embassy in Ghana encompassed an area of 5,440 square metres and had a budget of $2.886 million. The project was carried out from May 1985 to January 1988. The primary contractor for this project was Gansu Yijian (Gansu No. One China Construction Corporation), a subsidiary of Gansu Construction Engineering Group, with Xia Kaiyang serving as the project leader. Located approximately 3.5km northeast of Accra, the capital of Ghana, the embassy sits on a plot of 12,000 square metres with an L-shaped perimetre measuring 126.8 metres from east to west and 121.4 metres from north to south. The construction contract for the embassy was signed by the Economic Aid Department of the China Construction Corporation with the Embassy of Ghana. The China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch was given full operational control, financial autonomy, and responsibility for the project's profitability. The architectural design was provided by Ghana's Ofu Design Firm.

In late 1987, a joint inspection team comprising representatives from the Foreign Affairs Real Estate Department of the Chinese Embassy in Ghana, the Infrastructure Department of the Ministry of Economic and Trade, and the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch conducted a comprehensive review and assessment of the project. The project was rated excellent following this evaluation. Consequently, the construction quality of the building complex, including its primary structure, architectural finishes, and landscaping, met the high standards expected for an embassy project, achieving a highly satisfactory rating.

The National Theatre

In January 1992, Mr. Qian Qichen, former State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China visited Ghana, and one of the inspection projects involved the construction of the National Theatre in Ghana. The National Theatre of Ghana was built in 1990 with funding from the Chinese government. It covers an area of 15,500 square metres with a total construction area of 11,896 square metres.[2] The theatre is a multi-purpose facility with clear zoning and complete amenities. By the end of 1992, the National Theatre of Ghana had been completed and put into operation, becoming one of the symbolic landmarks of the city of Accra.

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[2] Source: www.nationaltheatre.gov.gh/history/

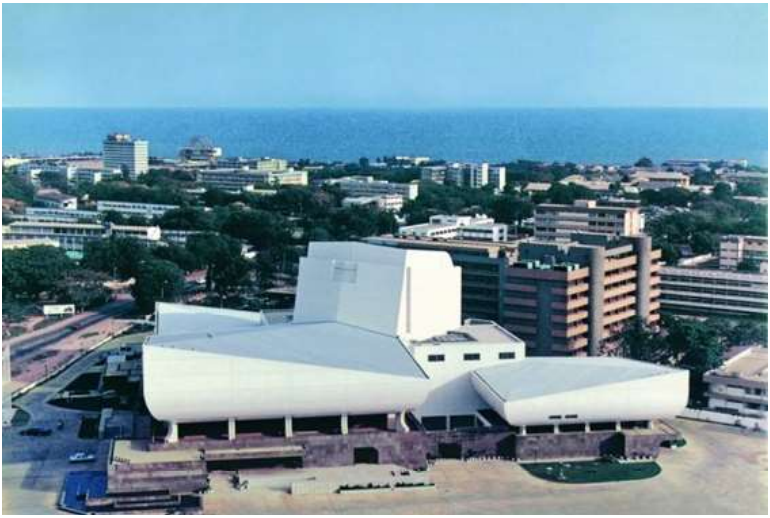

Figure 1: The National Theatre

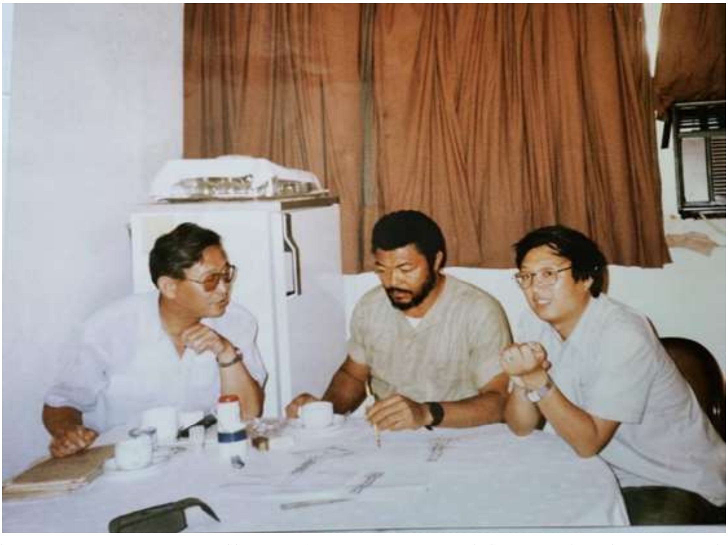

Figure 2: J.J. Rawlings (Former President of Ghana, middle), Wang Daocheng (Head of the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch, Left), Wang Lizu (Deputy Head of the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch, Right)

Figure 3: Wang Lizu(left) and Qian Qichen (right)

First Photo Studio in Ghana

In 1988, Mao Lingli, an English teacher from the Foreign Languages Department at Lanzhou University, followed her husband, Wang Lizu, to Ghana, where the China State Construction Engineering Corporation Gansu Branch employed him. Assigned as an interpreter for the project, Mao Lingli soon found herself involved in establishing a photography studio for Mr. and Mrs. Wang, a Chinese couple from Shanghai. Starting from scratch, this studio became the first in Ghana and a symbol of modernisation. It attracted numerous photography enthusiasts and families eager to purchase cameras and develop photos.

The establishment of Ghana's first photography studio by Mr. and Mrs. Wang marked a significant milestone in the country's journey towards modernisation. This studio did more than introduce new technology; it played a pivotal role in reshaping Ghana's social and cultural landscape.

As a medium, photography offers a visual documentation of change and progress. For many Ghanaians, the introduction of the photography studio was their first opportunity to engage directly with this form of art and communication. It enabled individuals and families to preserve personal and historical moments, a practice that was previously less accessible to the general population.

The studio's presence also symbolised a broader shift towards more global and modern ways of living. It was a manifestation of Ghana embracing and integrating technological advancements into everyday life. This transition was not just about capturing images; it was about capturing the essence of a society in flux, reflecting aspirations and new possibilities.

Moreover, the studio influenced lifestyle changes among Ghanaians. It became a hub where people learned about and interacted with photographic technology, leading to a growing interest in visual arts and media. This, in turn, fostered a greater awareness of global cultures and trends, as people were exposed to styles and ideas brought in by Chinese expatriates and other foreigners. The studio thus became a place of cultural exchange and a beacon of new opportunities, encouraging Ghanaians to explore and express their identities in novel ways.

In essence, the introduction of the photography studio was more than a commercial enterprise; it was a conduit for modernisation that touched on various aspects of Ghanaian life, from art and personal expression to cultural understanding and technological engagement. This studio captured images and the transformative spirit of the era, marking a significant chapter in Ghana's modern history.

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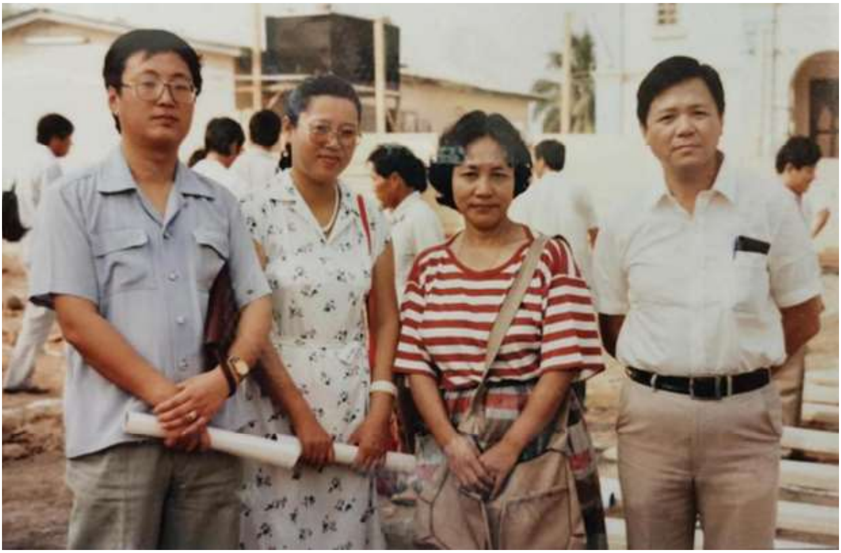

Figure 4: Wang Lizu (Left 1), Mao Lingli (Left 2), Mr. and Mrs. Wang(Right 1); the picture's background is the photo studio construction site.

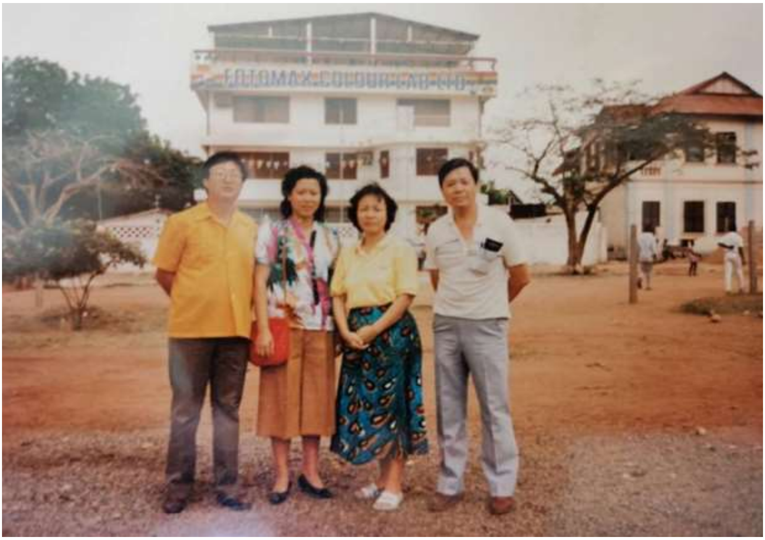

Figure 5: The background of the photo studio building.

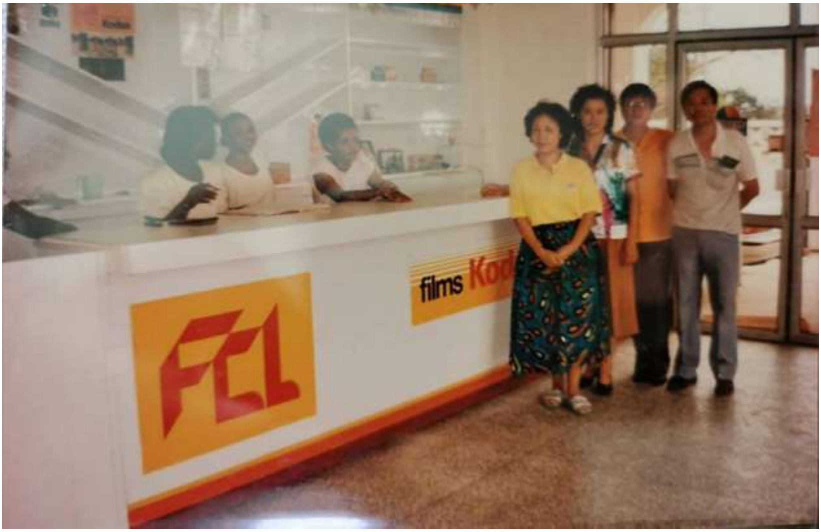

Figure 6: The interior lobby of the photo studio building

Part 2 A return visit after 19 Years

On August 15, 2019, Professor John Qiong Wang flew with Air China from Dubai and then transferred to Emirates for his research in Ghana. When he was a teenager and travelled to Ghana with his parents, he flew with British International Airways, KLM, and Aeroflot, among others. Emirates was a new experience for him. Africa and Ghana have a long history, and for over 20 years, he has been eagerly anticipating the midway transition process as it allows him to engage with the culture of Europe or the Middle East.

This journey to Arabian countries rekindled his fond memories of studying and living in Africa, where Arabs were among the largest ethnic groups alongside the Chinese. The cultural intersection in Africa enriched his life, leading to many friendships with Arabs. His profound appreciation for Arabian culture largely stems from his experiences in Ghana, where Chinese and Arab immigrants have created a rich tapestry of cultural integration and interaction.

What sets this journey apart from previous ones is that he travelled abroad as a public researcher on this occasion. Every aspect of the journey resonated with memories of his 19-year-old self. However, there was a significant difference: he is now a member of the Communist Party of China. His experiences as a teenager and his current identity as a party-member teacher shape a unique perspective. In the past, his patriotism stemmed from being one of the few Chinese children who had the opportunity to set foot on African soil, knowing where he came from and what his country represented. Today, his motivation is different. He aims to utilise his cross-cultural experiences to foster friendship and cooperation between the people of China and Ghana, as Ghana holds a special place in his upbringing.

On his way to Ghana, he felt a sense of calmness as it was not a foreign land to him, almost like returning home. His only regret was not being able to bring his parents, who were former overseas Chinese in Ghana, along on this journey. Their connection to the country runs more profound than his own as they had worked there in the past, while he had only visited as a child. Upon landing, he was greeted by the sight of the newly constructed airport in Ghana, next to the familiar old airport. His friend who picked him up at the airport was a Chinese man from Hubei who worked in a hotel that caters to the newer generation of Chinese immigrants in Ghana. This hotel often hosts visitors from China, provides Chinese food and beverages, and serves as a convenient drop-off point for Chinese people in Ghana.

Accra, the capital, has witnessed significant growth in the past two decades by constructing numerous new buildings, resulting in a landscape dominated by high-rise structures in the city centre. However, most street environments and amenities have remained relatively unchanged. Ghanaians are renowned for their exuberant hospitality towards foreigners, creating an atmosphere welcoming to visiting foreign friends. While most buildings may not be tall, the main commercial thoroughfare, “Oxford Street,” remains vibrant and bustling. This street is home to various goods and services, including numerous Chinese and Arab restaurants. “Oxford Street” in Accra is Ghana’s most representative commercial district. John vividly remembers residing in this area with his parents over a decade ago. His experiences here are imbued with sentiments.

Chinese advertisements are omnipresent on the streets, particularly in Chinese restaurants. There has been a significant increase in Chinese restaurants compared to 19 years ago, with Chinese restaurants found in every district of the Greater Accra region.

This research activity was facilitated by local friends in Africa who provided him with a research assistant, a vehicle and driver, and office amenities. Most of the scientific data were collected at the University of Ghana. Following his visit to the University of Ghana, he toured various institutions on campus, including the Language Centre, Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana, the Department of Sociology, and the Institute of African Studies.

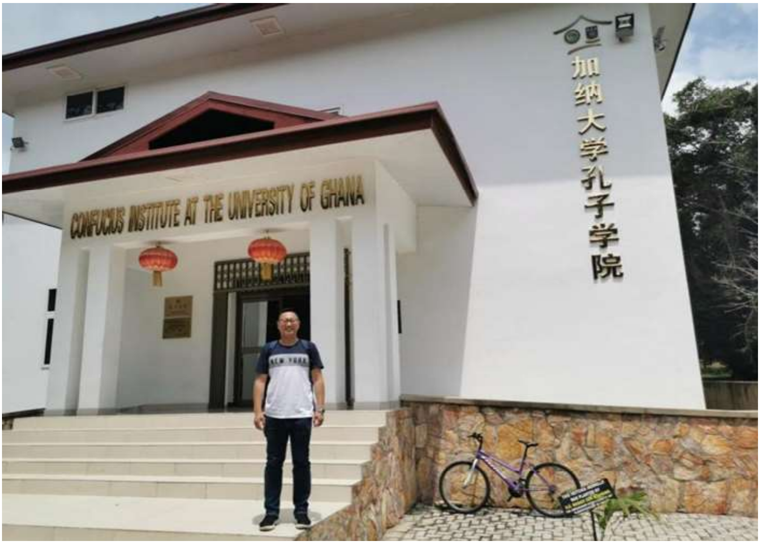

Figure 7: Confucius Institute at the University of Ghana

In addition to data collection at the University of Ghana, he also interacted with various Chinese groups, including those involved in the hospitality, catering, medical, production, and high-tech industries.

Ping Kang Clinic, a clinic established by a younger generation of Chinese in Tema, was one of the institutions he visited. In recent years, the number of Chinese immigrants in Tema has gradually increased, establishing numerous institutions catering to the Chinese population. Due to time constraints, he could only gain a cursory understanding of the clinic at that time. The doctor on duty that day was a female practitioner from Hubei. Her family remained in China, yet she had travelled thousands of miles to live and work in Ghana. She arrived in Ghana in April 2019 and spent three years working there, yet she has not been able to return home due to the pandemic.

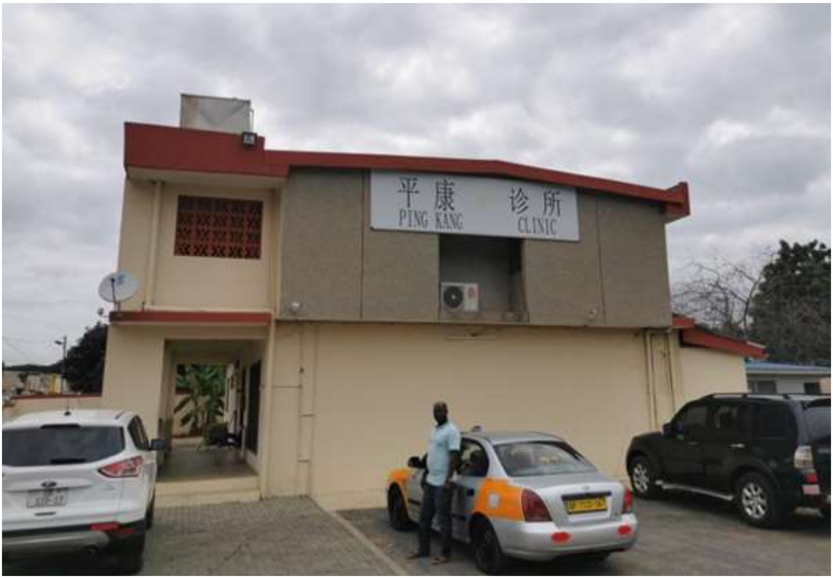

Figure 8: Ping Kang Clinic

Figure 9: Chinese Doctor from Hubei

On August 18th, 2019, John received a phone call from Dr. Xiao Bo on the third day of his arrival in Ghana. In the name of the Ghana-China Friendship Association (GHACHIFA) and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, he was invited to a luncheon at the Tang Palace Hotel. This phone call was particularly inspiring as Uncle Xiao had watched him grow up and had been there for him during his illnesses, including malaria when his father would drive him to Uncle Xiao's clinic for treatment. The existence of a Chinese clinic provided a sense of comfort for many Chinese people in Ghana.

The guests at this unusual party were diverse and included Tang Hong, the president of the GHACHIFA and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Xiao Bo, the vice president; Zhou Lin, the vice president of the staff of the Chinese Embassy in Ghana; and senior representatives of various Chinese institutions in Ghana. At the dinner, Uncle Xiao raised his glass to introduce John to everyone, marking a significant milestone in his research work and establishing a solid foundation for his future endeavours.

Figure 10: At the Tang Palace dinner party, Vice President Xiao Bo raised a glass to introduce his research work.

Dr Xiao Bo, along with two other vice presidents, posed for a group photo at the dinner party. All three are long-term overseas Chinese residents who have lived in Ghana for more than 30 years. Interestingly, the individual on the left is Shen Hanming from Hong Kong, China, while President Xiao in the middle hails from Beijing, and President Zhou next to him is from the Chinese Taiwan Region. Standing alongside these three elders, who have collectively spent over half a century in Africa, has given him a sense of unity among Chinese people working together for the common cause within the integrated organization that represents the "Chinese people."

If an individual embarks on an overseas journey, each Chinese person from different regions of China embodies the essence and spirit of the Chinese people. These three elderly "uncles", presumably retired, felt that their mission had not been completed. Therefore, they continue to gradually contribute to the China-Ghana relationship. In the broader context of numerous grand historical narratives, it can be difficult to understand these individual stories that contribute to the complex relations between China and Ghana. Among the three, Uncle Xiao and Uncle Zhou left a deep impression on him. Uncle Shen mentioned that he had also seen him when he was a child, although he may not remember clearly. For John, 19 years is not just a specific period or a significant distance; it appears that he is using this time to reminisce, express gratitude, and explore his feelings towards the Chinese diaspora. Time is not merely a measure but an experience of the present moment. However, currently, we feel a connection that drives us to contribute to our country in our own way and to discover the bonds of overseas Chinese as we mature.

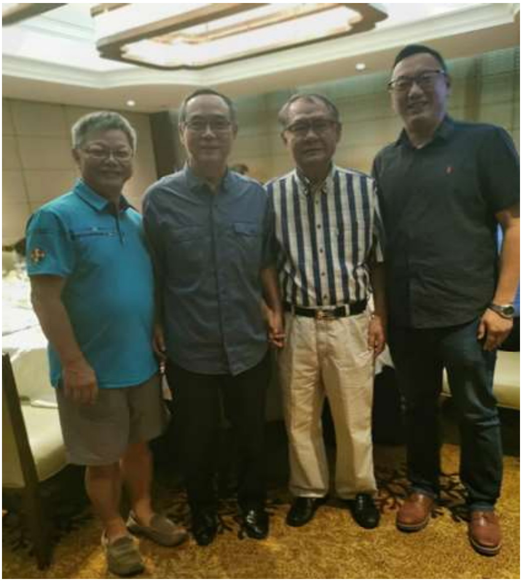

Figure 11: Left 1 Shen Hanming(Hong Kong SAR), Left 2 Xiao Bo (Beijing), Right 2 Zhou Senlin (Taiwan Region) and Right 1 Prof. John Qiong Wang

Some may question how an individual raised abroad, without the benefit of extensive patriotic education, could develop a deep sense of patriotism, perhaps even surpassing that of those raised in their homeland. This individual believes that his profound patriotism is largely influenced by his early life in a military family, which instilled in him the core values of loyalty and duty. Furthermore, his time spent in Ghana allowed him to witness the inherent goodwill of the Chinese community, reinforcing his national pride and identity. Observing the positive impact and benevolence of Chinese individuals abroad helped validate and deepen his sense of patriotism, proving that his feelings are well-founded despite his upbringing outside his home country. They are more united, helping one another and sharing a fundamental sense of responsibility. The Chinese can establish roots in a foreign country not only due to their benevolence but also because they extend this benevolence to the hearts of the native Ghanaian people. To prosper in Ghana, people must consider Ghanaians as essential partners. Only by building a shared future for all can we truly achieve the goal of global harmony. Chinese and overseas Chinese excel because they possess a hardworking spirit and know how to conduct business based on benevolence and mutual benefit. They understand what social ethics and a sense of responsibility mean. All this is derived from the exceptional traditional culture of Chinese civilisation, which forms the foundation of every Chinese individual.

Case 1: Mr. and Mrs. Lu from Regal Restaurant

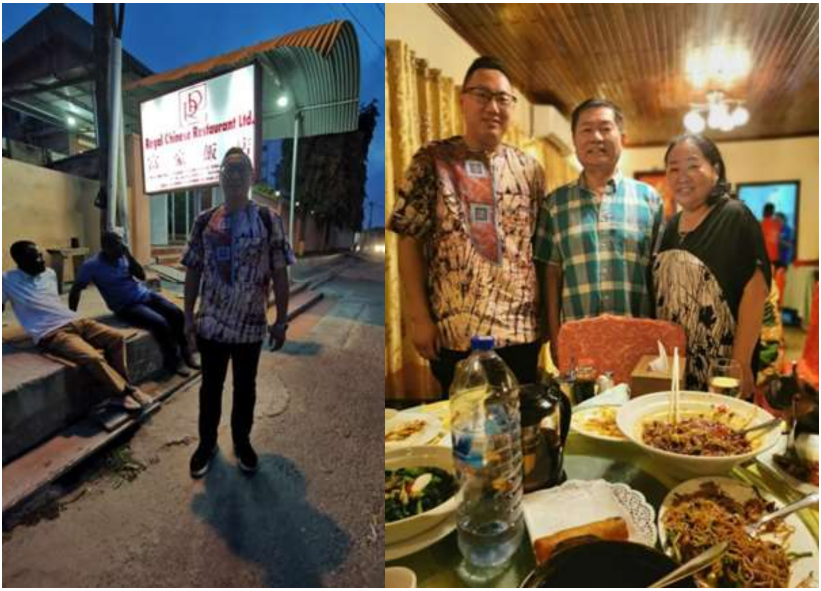
Regal Chinese Restaurant Ltd.
富豪飯店

Figure 12: The owners of Regal Restaurant, husband and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Lu

In the heart of Accra, Ghana, nestled within the cityscape, lies a unique Chinese restaurant that has become a local favourite and a must-visit for foreign tourists. For the Wang family, it is more akin to a cherished old friend who holds memories of countless lunches and dinners shared within its walls. This is the renowned Regal Restaurant.

John and his parents once lived nearby, and the Regal Restaurant was a monthly fixture in their routine, a tradition that instilled within John a sense of belonging like no other. Back then, Chinese restaurants were scarce in Ghana, making the Regal Restaurant a quasi-home away from home for the Wang family.

The Regal Restaurant's founder, Mr. Lu, was a diligent and farsighted middle-aged man. In 1970, he journeyed from China to Ghana to work in an iron can factory owned by a Hong

Kong entrepreneur. His responsibilities primarily involved printing patterns on the factory's iron cans, such as the pictures of biscuits on the blue cans exported to Hong Kong. However, over time, the factory's fortunes began to wane. Yet, faced with adversity, Mr. Lu refused to be defeated. He harboured dreams of attaining a more illustrious career than the one he had found himself in.

In January 1991, Mr. Lu and his friends boldly decided to open a Chinese restaurant in Ghana, a rare venture at the time. The Regal Restaurant quickly became a sensation due to its authentic Chinese cuisine and exceptional service. Mr. Lu's restaurant provided Ghanaian residents with a novel food experience and allowed them to savour the allure of Chinese culture.

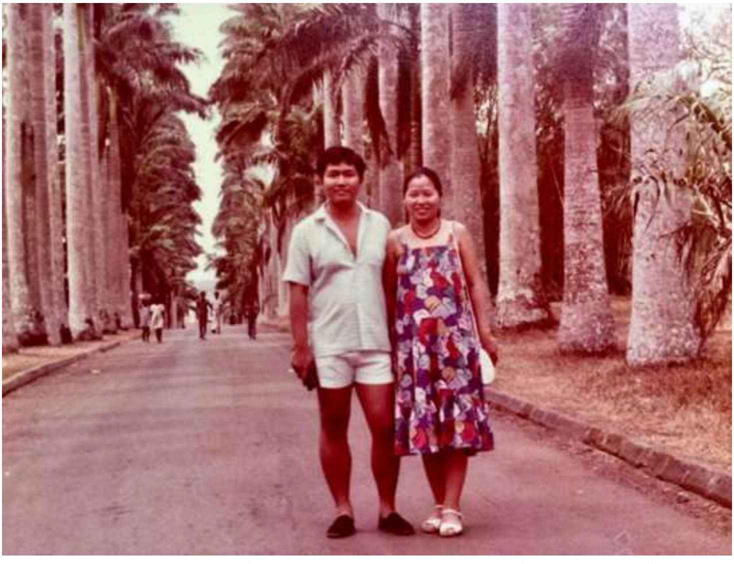

Figure 13: In March 1983, Mrs Lu was three months pregnant. Photo taken at the Ghana Botanical Garden.

Since September of last year, Mr. & Mrs. Lu have retired to Shanghai. They expressed their utmost gratitude to Ghana: "We are extremely grateful to Ghana. Although we were not affluent during those years, we could send our two sons to college in the United States. None of this would have been possible without years of hard work and dedication in Ghana.” Currently, the restaurant is being operated by a distant relative who has resided in Ghana for over 20 years. He has worked at the establishment for several years and is intimately familiar with all operations.

Since they arrived in Ghana in 1970, Mr. and Mrs. Lu have invested nearly half a century of their youth and wisdom into Ghana. They played a significant role in popularizing Chinese cuisine in their local area of Africa, skillfully blending culinary practices with cultural exchanges. During this extensive period, they established themselves in a foreign land, providing numerous employment opportunities for locals and contributing to the development of the local economy. Their success is not accidental but rather the culmination of hard work and perseverance. Their narrative is one of tenacity, dedication, and gratitude.

Presently, the Regal Restaurant has become a renowned tourist attraction in Ghana. It offers delectable Chinese cuisine, a cosy family atmosphere, and exceptional service. For the John family, it is more than just a restaurant; it is a repository of memories and emotions. Whenever they mention the restaurant, their gratitude overflows.

At this elegant restaurant, Mr. Lu, his family, and his staff are dedicated to delighting every customer with exquisite Chinese cuisine and genuine hospitality. It is a perfect destination for enjoying delectable dishes and immersing oneself in Chinese culture. Here, patrons can indulge in authentic Chinese flavours while admiring the dedication and passion of the Chinese people.

Mr Lu’s success story is not only about his achievements but also a microcosm of the struggles endured by Chinese individuals overseas. His narrative teaches us that if we harbour dreams, exhibit courage, and exert effort, we can overcome all obstacles and achieve our objectives. Additionally, his success underscores the significance of cultural exchange. By introducing

Chinese cuisine to Ghana, he offers locals novel food options and fosters cultural exchanges between China and Ghana.

Individuals who pursue careers abroad and achieve success are admirable. Worldwide, there are numerous other heartening Chinese stories of incremental prosperity. Chinese people depend on their abilities to prosper, remain grateful to their homeland and relatives, and emphasise treating local employees respectfully and integrating with their culture. By fostering cultural exchange and cooperation, these individuals contribute significantly to society.

Mr. Lu's narrative is an enchanting account of wealth and success. His success is a personal achievement and a contribution to the larger community. His flourishing restaurant has become integral to the daily lives of Ghanaians, providing residents with a sense of belonging.

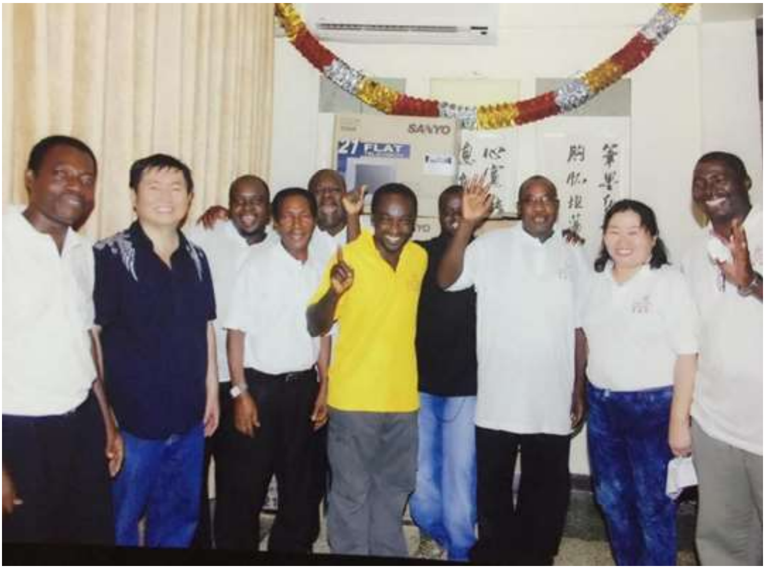

Figure 14: The photograph was taken ten years ago. The restaurant has been in operation for twenty years. Most of the employees shown in the photograph are still working at the restaurant.

Case 2 Dr Xiao Bo from the Chinese Acupuncture Clinic

Located on the road from Ashaiman to Nungua in the Greater Accra Region, there is a unique clinic known for its distinctive approach to diagnosis and treatment, led by its owner, Dr. Xiao Bo, a Chinese physician. Xiao Bo, a native of Beijing, arrived in Ghana in the early 1980s. He brought with him not only the knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine but also a profound respect for life and a commitment to humane care. In 1988, he opened a Chinese clinic in Ghana, becoming the first foreign doctor in Ghanaian history to be allowed to practice.

Initially, the Ghanaians had a limited understanding of the concept of traditional Chinese medicine. All they knew was that a Chinese doctor was practising medicine. At that time, there was only one Chinese doctor in Ghana. Following the clinic's opening, it gained senior local officials' attention. Former Ghanaian President JJ Rawlings faced a challenging recovery after falling from his horse and injuring his arm. Despite initially seeking Western medical treatments without significant improvement, he turned to alternative solutions. At the recommendation of his advisors, President Rawlings sought the expertise of Dr. Xiao, a practitioner of Chinese medicine. This consultation marked a turning point in his recovery, highlighting the potential benefits of Chinese medical practices when traditional Western methods proved ineffective. Dr. Xiao's interview account of this event serves as a notable example of the positive impact of Chinese medicine. This account is based on an interview with Dr. Xiao. Using acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine physiotherapy, Dr. Xiao effectively alleviated President Rawlings' pain and soon achieved remarkable healing results. Word spread quickly, and more and more individuals came to him seeking traditional Chinese medicine treatment, especially for debilitating limb injuries.

Dr. Xiao's reputation increased, and his clinic became a beacon of hope for many who suffered from chronic pain or debilitating conditions. His dedication to his patients and his commitment to traditional Chinese medicine were inspiring. His story is a testament to the power of conventional medicine and its impact on individuals seeking a more holistic approach to their well-being.

Figure 15: Chinese Acupuncture Clinic, Photo taken with Dr. Xiao

Nineteen years after John's initial visit, he returned to Uncle Xiao's clinic. Unlike the luxurious hospitals he had become accustomed to, Uncle Xiao's clinic was simple. The gate, courtyard, building, flowerbeds, and even the trees in the yard were all etched in John's memory. Remarkably, the clinic had not changed over the past 19 years, just as he remembered it. John was astounded that, despite the myriad changes in his parents and himself, Uncle Xiao's clinic had continued to operate smoothly according to its original principles. Chinese patients were still frequent visitors, and many local Ghanaians sought medical attention there.

The doctor’s paramount duty is to heal the patient. As a Chinese herbalist who had practised medicine in Ghana for decades, Uncle Xiao had treated thousands of Ghanaians. This benevolent act of medicine, encompassing different cultures, countries, and ethnicities, profoundly contributed to the friendship between China and Ghana. Unassuming and introverted, Uncle Xiao had established himself as a benevolent Chinese doctor in the hearts of the Ghanaian people. Chinese doctors personified the spirit and character of the Chinese people: they were unafraid of difficulties and complex conditions, taking one step at a time to forge a reputation in Ghana. Few knew Uncle Xiao’s name in Ghana, but everyone respected him because he had used his precious skills to safeguard the lives of both Chinese and Ghanaians. He firmly believed that the Chinese and Ghanaians shared a future. His clinic was egalitarian; all lives were treated equally.

Uncle Xiao’s clinic may have been small, but it received a steady stream of patients daily, including local Ghanaians and patients from other African countries. Word of mouth had spread, attracting individuals seeking traditional Chinese medicine treatment. Moreover, Uncle Xiao always treated his patients patiently and meticulously, utilising traditional Chinese medicine practices like acupuncture and massage to heal numerous individuals. His exceptional medical skills and noble medical ethics won him the trust and respect of his patients.

Uncle Xiao’s story prompts us to consider an important question: As Chinese individuals, how should we view Africa and its people? Should we exploit them, seek only profit, and seize their resources, or should we, like Uncle Xiao, apply our knowledge, skills, and affection to assist African individuals in solving practical problems? Uncle Xiao’s actions offer a clear answer: We should respect Africans, care for them, help them, and work alongside them for mutual development, shared prosperity, and commonwealth.

Now in his 70s, Uncle Xiao still visits the clinic daily. His composure and work ethic are exemplary and deserve our utmost respect. What is even more commendable is that with the dedication of the Chinese people, he abandoned the better living conditions at home and diligently took root in Ghana to practice medicine. This undoubtedly reflects a person's sense of responsibility in a far-off land. Uncle Xiao has become a role model for us to admire. His experiences have given us the courage to work harder and realise how crucial family, social, and national responsibilities are.

Case 3 Tang Hong, Ghana-China Friendship Association (GHACHIFA), and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chairman of the Tang Palace Hotel

In Ghana, a West African nation, a Chinese entrepreneur has emerged as a leader in numerous industries, distinguished by his exceptional business acumen and keen market insight. This individual is Tang Hong, the President of the Ghana-China Friendship Association (GHACHIFA) and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He also serves as the representative for all overseas Chinese in Ghana.

Tang Hong's presidency has been marked by his unwavering commitment to the success of this research effort. John recalls encountering him at a dinner party when he was young, providing him with valuable support and assistance. Despite the fuzziness of memories from 19 years ago, his words imparted a sense of the preciousness of his research work. The adult overseas Chinese he met as a child were simply friends of his parents, yet it instilled in him a sense of excitement at the idea of having Chinese individuals in Africa. Their arrivals always brought surprises to our lives. They introduced domestic products, skills, and expertise, and under the wings of the Chinese people, they formed the foundation of emotional connections within the overseas Chinese community.

Tang Hong's entrepreneurial empire spans numerous industries, including hotels, real estate, mining, and import-export trade. His enterprises have played a pivotal role in fostering economic cooperation between China and Ghana, serving as a solid bridge for trade relations between the two nations. His journey began in the early 1990s when he arrived in Ghana to work for a state-owned enterprise promoting textiles, hardware, and electrical products. At that time, approximately 2,000 Chinese individuals were residing in Ghana, and the local consumption level was relatively low. Additionally, conditions were not conducive to producing electrical appliances in Ghana; thus, early household appliances were imported from various sources such as India, Arabia, Europe, the United States, or other locations. These appliances carried exorbitant prices and prohibitive maintenance costs for the local populace, limiting their accessibility to only the affluent. Tang's electrical products imported from China initially met with success but were later overshadowed by improper operations within domestic enterprises, necessitating his withdrawal of overseas investments in Ghana. This setback marked a transition in the early planned economic system and proved to be a turning point for Tang. He opted to depart from the confines of state-owned enterprises and continued his operations as a private company specialising in electrical appliances. He visited local supermarkets frequented by Indians and Arabs, promoting Chinese appliances to them. His products excelled in terms of price and were once immensely popular.

Tang's success can be attributed to his astute observation of market trends and his consistent pursuit of innovation. He maintains a vigilant eye on market developments and excels at spotting emerging business opportunities. Moreover, Tang Hong is a visionary entrepreneur who recognised that Ghana's growing economy would increase demand for high-quality hotels and real estate. Consequently, he made the strategic decision to venture into these industries.

As a result, he began importing car tyres from China. This tyre business is also thriving, supported by his extensive import-export experience. Located near the Atlantic Ocean, the capital of Ghana has a long-standing fishing industry. It was at this time that Mr Tang identified new business opportunities. Noticing the primitive fishing tools used by fishermen, he imported fishing nets from China. These nets proved highly effective, increasing fishing production among Ghanaian fishermen.

Subsequently, Mr Tang diversified his operations, producing auto parts and complete vehicles. He primarily serves as the agent for several large enterprises, such as Jianghuai FAW and Shaanxi Automobile. He later expanded into construction machinery and became the exclusive agent of Sany Heavy Industry in Ghana. Following this, he established his hotel business, focusing on tyre and auto parts production while gradually phasing out hardware and home appliances manufacturing.

When queried about his success, Tang Hong attributed it to his in-depth understanding of the market and his commitment to continuous innovation. He remains vigilant in monitoring market trends and spotting emerging business opportunities. As a visionary entrepreneur, he recognised Ghana’s developing economy’s increasing demand for high-quality hotels and real estate. This insight prompted him to enter these industries, ultimately leading to the establishment of his hotel business.

In 2015, he opened the Tang Palace Hotel in Accra, a four-star luxury hotel offering deluxe accommodations, Chinese and Western restaurants, cafes, gyms, and other facilities. This hotel has become a gathering place for overseas Chinese in Ghana, hosting numerous large-scale events and parties. The Tang Palace Hotel has elevated the standard of hotel service in Ghana and enhanced the reputational standing of Chinese enterprises in Ghana.

Figure 16: Tang Hong, photographed in the Tang Palace Hotel presidential suite.

In addition to his forays into the hotel and real estate industries, Chairman Tang Hong has ventured into mining and e-commerce platforms. He owns a gold mine and aims to collaborate with Chinese partners to establish an e-commerce platform to further expand his footprint in Ghana.

The businessman's accomplishments are confined to his enterprises and extend to his contributions to the GHACHIFA and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. As the chairman of the Ghanaian Overseas Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, he is committed to fostering relationships between overseas Chinese and the local community and enhancing economic and cultural exchanges between the two nations. He believes that Chinese expatriates should play a more active role in Africa's development and hopes to contribute towards this goal through his efforts.

With a deep-rooted Chinese heritage, Chairman Tang Hong offers unique perspectives on promoting exchanges between China and Ghana. He emphasises that developing Chinese enterprises in Africa encompasses economic cooperation and cultural exchange. He maintains that Chinese enterprises should actively fulfil their social responsibilities in Africa and bring tangible benefits to the local community. For instance, his businesses have generated employment opportunities in Ghana and contributed to regional infrastructure development.

Concurrently, Chairman Tang Hong underscores the significance of overseas Chinese in Africa's development. He remarks that overseas Chinese serve as a vital bridge between China and Africa, and their success is advantageous in bolstering Sino-African relations. He expresses the aspiration for more overseas Chinese to participate in Africa's development and collaboratively promote the advancement of friendly relations between China and Africa.

When discussing his outlook for the future, Chairman Tang Hong remarks that he intends to continue expanding his business scope and is committed to enhancing the reputation of Chinese companies in Ghana. He hopes that through his endeavours, more individuals will recognise the advantages and characteristics of Chinese enterprises, thus making more significant contributions towards Ghana's development.

In summary, Chairman Tang Hong is a visionary entrepreneur and community leader whose success is reflected in his business achievements and his contributions to the overseas Chinese community in Ghana and the African continent. His narrative is a testament to courage, innovation, and dedication, embodying the success of Chinese companies in Africa.

Case 4 Pan Guozhen, an entrepreneur of a glass factory

Figure 17: Factory building in Tema. Left 1 Mr Pan, Left 2, Dr John Qiong Wang, Right 2 A research assistant, Right one driver. The factory used to produce glass-related products.

In the hustle and bustle of Ghana's streets, a remarkable business tale has unfolded the journey of Chinese entrepreneur Mr. Pan Guozhen, who settled in this African country many years ago. The 1980s found Pan Guozhen crossing vast oceans to Ghana, determined to carve out a fresh path in this foreign land.

Upon his arrival, he faced significant infrastructure and power challenges. However, he keenly identified a market gap and set out to produce glass products. His foresight was bang on kerosene glass lampshades, which became a sensation, and his factory met the exacting needs of Ghanaian society. Pan

Guozhen made the kerosene glass lampshade an indispensable fixture in Ghanaian homes through meticulous cost management and ensuring product quality.

In an interview, Pan Guozhen reflected: "It's not easy for foreigners to invest and set up factories in Ghana." True to his words, Ghana's government systems were fledgling, and the business environment was fraught with challenges. But these obstacles fired Pan Guozhen's fighting spirit, spurring him on the path of entrepreneurship. His unwavering efforts and exceptional acumen saw him overcome each challenge, ultimately ascending to the pinnacle of Ghana's business sphere.

As the years progressed, Pan Guozhen entered his later years. His daughter, who was raised in Hong Kong, is married and has a business. She has returned to her motherland. This period saw Pan Guozhen exploring new horizons in business. This time, he set his sights on soymilk production. In hot Ghana, soymilk is a summertime hit. However, storage issues have hindered its scale production. Undaunted, Pan Guozhen undertook this complex challenge.

He repurposed part of his original glass factory to produce soymilk. He carefully selects high-quality ingredients and meticulously manages production processes, ensuring each cup meets the highest standards. Limited output notwithstanding, his soymilk enjoys immense popularity in the market, meeting the discerning tastes of Ghanaian consumers.

Today, Mr. Pan has reached retirement. His daughter has moved back to Hong Kong to start her family and career, and he is planning to retire there within the next two years. Reflecting on his journey, Mr. Pan is overwhelmed with emotion. He evolved from a regular Hong Kong resident into a celebrated entrepreneur in Africa, a path filled with numerous hardships and challenges.

However, Mr. Pan always firmly believes that as long as you have a dream in your heart and move forward bravely, you can create a world of your own no matter where you are. His story is the history of the Chinese struggle in a foreign country, and he is an inspiring entrepreneurial legend.

In Mr. Pan's mind, retirement is not the end but a new beginning. He plans to pass on his experiences and stories to the next generation and inspire more people to pursue their dreams. At the same time, he also hopes to continue to pay attention to Ghana's development and contribute to the prosperity of this land.

In the vibrant land of Ghana, Mr. Pan wrote an eternal business chapter with wisdom and courage. His story will always inspire newcomers to pursue their dreams bravely and create their brilliant futures.

Case 5 Taiwanese businessman Zhou Senlin

Since the early 1980s, Zhou Senlin, an eminent entrepreneur from the Chinese Taiwan region, has left an indelible mark on the Ghanaian business community. His enterprising spirit encapsulates the Taiwanese tenets of adventure, pioneering, and unrelenting hard work.

In 1981, Mr. Zhou set foot in Ghana when Taiwanese business people were relatively unknown. However, with his keen insight into business and determination to overcome difficulties, he decided to pursue business activities there. Initially, he entered the steel bar manufacturing industry, which required significant capital and technological investments. Yet, he established a foothold in the market through his unwavering commitment and tireless efforts.

Unsatisfied with his success in the steel bar industry, Mr. Zhou recognised the rapid market changes and understood that he could remain invincible in the fierce business competition only through constant innovation and adaptability. Consequently, he began to consider transformation and seek new business opportunities. After careful consideration, he transitioned to producing plastic products, an industry with vast market potential.

Once again, Mr. Zhou demonstrated his entrepreneurial spirit and business acumen within the new industry. He actively introduced advanced production technology and equipment, emphasising product quality and environmental sustainability standards, enormously appealing to the market. Additionally, adhering to the principle of ethical management, he fostered excellent relationships with local businesses and government entities, laying a solid foundation for long-term enterprise growth.

Zhou's fighting spirit extends beyond personal career development. He is aware of enterprises' role in driving local economic growth, so he actively participates in social welfare initiatives and contributes to Ghana's economic advancement and societal progress. His enterprise provides numerous job opportunities and offers valuable support for the growth of local businesses by sharing technological and managerial expertise.

Today, Mr. Zhou's son has assumed responsibility for the family business. The young entrepreneur has ample business knowledge and practical experience, having been carefully mentored by his father. He has aggressively expanded operations into real estate investment and other sectors, infusing fresh vitality into the enterprise's development.

In reflecting on Mr. Zhou's entrepreneurial journey in Ghana, one cannot help but be impressed by his indomitable spirit and business acumen. He emerged from unfamiliar territory, weathered the vagaries of the market and industry shifts, and ultimately established a thriving privately funded enterprise. His success story is a remarkable personal odyssey and a model for Taiwanese entrepreneurs seeking to innovate and prosper overseas.

Figure 18: Photo taken with Mr Zhou and his son in his yard.

Case 6 Lawyer Yang Weiqiang

In the Ghanaian legal profession, the name of lawyer Yang Weiqiang has become renowned. Hailing from Qingdao, Shandong Province, his professional journey and influence have been firmly established in Ghana. Over the past 17 years, Mr. Yang has become deeply integrated into Ghana's legal community, establishing himself as a prominent Chinese barrister in Ghana.

Shortly after graduating in 2003, he embarked on his journey to Ghana. As a fresh arrival, he was curious and eager for this unfamiliar land. He soon realised that a deep understanding and mastery of Ghanaian law was paramount for his work there. Consequently, he embarked on a self-study journey of Ghanaian law, developing a profound interest in its intricacies. Thanks to the introduction by current President Akuffo Addo, he had the opportunity to delve deeper into Ghanaian law. He began translating Chinese and English materials for the Ghanaian High Court upon the recommendation of Addo's law firm.

Throughout this journey, lawyer Yang met with many esteemed members of the Ghanaian legal community. These encounters not only enhanced his knowledge of the Ghanaian legal framework but also enriched his practical experience. Consequently, this deepened understanding and exposure reinforced Yang's determination to qualify as a lawyer in Ghana, where he could adeptly represent Chinese and overseas Chinese clients.

Yang Weiqiang's efforts and perseverance have been widely recognised. Since 2016, he has served as legal advisor to the GHACHIFA and the Ghana-Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry. These appointments are a testament to the high regard held by the Chinese community and reflect his status and influence within the Ghanaian legal profession.

As a highly respected lawyer, Yang Weiqiang is patriotic towards his motherland and passionate about legal research. He possesses excellent legal acumen and is honest, diligent, and friendly towards others. Simultaneously, he respects and is eager to learn about Ghana's native culture and language, striving to integrate into the local society. His qualities have won him widespread acclaim from Chinese and local communities.

In lawyer Yang's opinion, the law is crucial to a country's foreign development strategy. He understands with the expansion of Chinese enterprises in Africa and the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, understanding and navigating local laws in Africa has become paramount. Consequently, he aspires to achieve more significant milestones in Ghanaian law. He hopes that more African Chinese and overseas Chinese will study local laws and become local lawyers to better support the Belt and Road Initiative's activities. This focus suggests an emphasis on aligning with China's economic and political interests through the initiative, potentially prioritizing these over the local legal and development concerns in Ghana. This perspective highlights the complexity of international projects and the significant role legal professionals play in balancing different national interests.

The story of lawyer Yang Weiqiang is one of tenacity, talent, and dedication. Through his practical actions, he has proved that one can become a leader in any field, regardless of location, with a dream, enthusiasm, and perseverance. His story inspires all: irrespective of our challenges, if we dream and move forward courageously, we will one day shine in our respective fields.

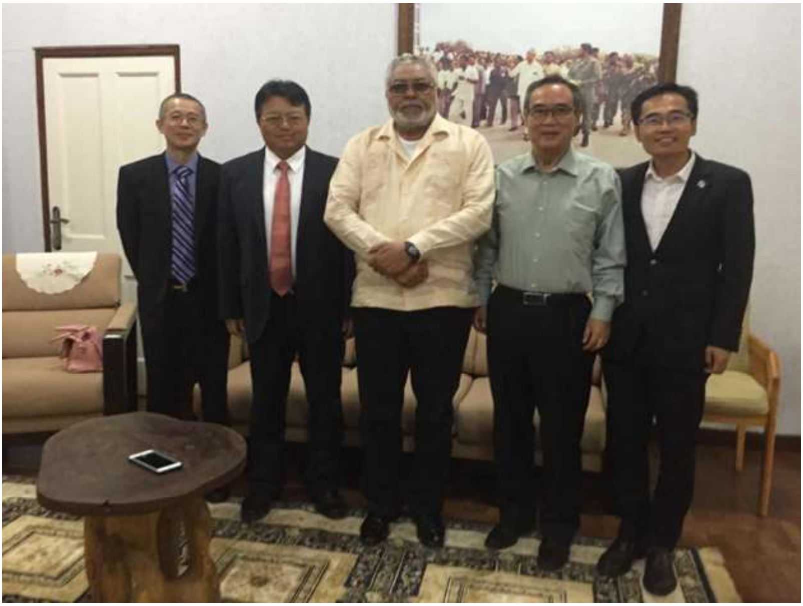

Figure 19: Former President of Ghana (middle), lawyer Yang Weiqiang (Right 1), President Tang Hong(Left 2), Dr. Xiao Bo(Right 2), and others

Theoretical implications: The impact of Sino-Ghana relations on Ghana's post-independence political, economic, and sociocultural transformations

The discussion delves into how these relationships have influenced Ghana's development trajectory and the theoretical frameworks that can aid in understanding the complex dynamics at play. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of cultural and historical perspectives in comprehending the evolving nature of Sino-Ghana relations and their impact on Ghana's political, economic, and sociocultural transformation since independence.

In the realm of political, economic, and sociocultural transformations, Ghana's post-independence journey has been profoundly influenced by its relationship with China. This relationship dates to Ghana's independence in 1957 and has had far-reaching implications for the nation's development trajectory.

Ghana's political system, inherited from the colonial era, has challenged its national development and unity path. Attempts at reform have been piecemeal, constrained by the lack of in-depth transformation in the people's class structure, the yawning gap between urban and rural areas, imbalances within the economic system, and career disparities. These challenges are manifest not only in national governance but also in infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare, education, and other sectors.

Establishing diplomatic relations between Ghana and China shortly after independence marked a significant milestone in the country's history. The influx of Chinese nationals injected new vitality into Ghana's economy, introducing various technologies and products that propelled the country's modernisation process. However, as China's influence in Africa has grown, the applicability of the "Chinese model" to African contexts has been scrutinised. Some observers maintain that China's success is predicated on its unique cultural and historical backdrop. African nations should exercise caution in borrowing lessons from it without fully considering their circumstances.

Stephen Chan (2009, 2010) posits that China, India, and even the entire world have made their presence felt in Africa, and it is only natural for the West to grow accustomed to the involvement of China or other nations in Africa and establish themselves as competitors for investment and trade with the

West. Prizgar Gonzales (2014) maintains that China's influence represents a leading and potential force in African development in the 21st century. Africans are witnessing China's emergence as a great power at every step. The Chinese work ethic, which Gonzales highlights, is a significant challenge to African workers, who must adapt their work ethic accordingly. She further asserts that the Chinese have a strong work ethic, committing their time to education, work, and productivity. If Africans can rejuvenate their work ethic, a brighter future lies ahead. Additionally, Gonzales highlights the importance of Chinese Confucianism as the basis for all development and emphasises the centrality of the family in instilling moral values.

Qing (2013) maintains that China's consistent emphasis on political unity with Africa is the foundation for sovereignty-centered relations between China and Africa. China asserts that it understands Africa's views, feelings, conditions, and problems by emphasising a shared anti-colonial tradition. This "natural bond" with "African brothers" forms the crux of China's narrative on Africa. China and Africa share similar historical experiences of struggle for national liberation, leading to a profound friendship.

Choosing a development path and partners is a significant decision for Ghana and other African countries. The rise of China presents both opportunities and challenges for African nations. Many African countries have begun reevaluating their relations with China in search of cooperation that promotes their development while preserving national independence.

At the cultural level, Chinese Confucianism has influenced African workers, emphasising diligence, discipline, and family education. The dissemination of such values has transformed Africa's social and cultural atmosphere to some extent, prompting individuals to emphasise individual and collective efforts. This cultural exchange, however, is not one-sided, as African culture and traditions have also influenced China, adding diversity and depth to Sino-African relations. African culture has also influenced China in various ways, particularly in the areas of food, language, and lifestyle. For example, the influence of African culture on China is not without its challenges, as evidenced by the differences in language, pedagogical thinking, and lifestyle between Chinese and Angolan students (Long & Xiong, 2014). These cultural differences also manifest in business relations, with the need for greater mutual understanding to minimise misunderstandings (Anedo, 2012).

Looking back at history, the friendship between China and Africa has a longstanding legacy. China and Africa share a similar history of anti-colonial struggle and national liberation experience, and this shared historical memory serves as a profound emotional foundation for bilateral relations. China's policy towards Africa is not merely one of assistance but rather one based on mutual respect and joint development.

In summary, Ghana's post-independence political, economic, and sociocultural transformations constitute complex processes replete with opportunities, challenges, exploration, and reflection. As Ghana faces its future development path, it must delve deeper into its national identity and development strategy to forge a path tailored to its unique circumstances.

Conclusion

Ghana, also known as the "Gold Coast," is renowned not only for its abundant gold resources but also for the unceasing growth of its population. For ages, the residents of this land have fostered a deep historical connection with China.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, Chinese settlers have begun to settle in Ghana, fostering a profound friendship with the local populace. These Chinese have made remarkable contributions to Ghana's development through their diligence and wisdom. Not only did they introduce Chinese technology, but they also disseminated Chinese culture, thereby strengthening the bond between China and Ghana.

The arrival of the Chinese brought economic prosperity to Ghana and introduced a new way of life and thinking to the local populace. They coexist harmoniously with the locals, learning from each other and growing together. This transcultural communication and integration have enhanced the friendship between the two peoples and contributed to global peace and development.

As China's reform and opening deepen in the 21st century, it has forged closer ties with the rest of the world. Increasingly, Chinese enterprises have expanded abroad in search of broader markets and richer resources. As an important African country, Ghana has attracted more Chinese enterprises due to its market potential and resource endowments. However, one must comprehend the local culture, society, and populace to prosper here. We can only achieve mutual benefits and win-win outcomes by integrating into the local society.

In summary, the relationship between Ghana and China has a long history, and the friendship between our two peoples is profound. In the future, we look forward to witnessing more Chinese elements take root in Ghana and writing a more illustrious chapter on Sino-Ghana relations.

Future research should explore the evolving dynamics of the Ghana-China relationship, focusing on the long-term repercussions of Chinese economic activities and cultural integration within Ghanaian society. This entails analysing the socio-economic impacts on local communities, evaluating the sustainability of Chinese investments, and investigating how these interactions affect local cultural identities and social norms. Future studies could also undertake comparative analyses with other African nations with significant Chinese engagements to identify patterns and unique outcomes of Sino-African partnerships. Understanding the successes and challenges within these relationships can offer valuable insights for scholars and policymakers.

Regarding policy-making, it is essential to develop frameworks that enhance mutual understanding and cooperation between Ghana and China. Policies should ensure that Chinese investments promote sustainable and mutually beneficial development. This involves implementing regulations that protect local industries and labour rights while promoting technology transfer and capacity building.

Furthermore, fostering cultural exchange programs and educational collaborations can bridge cultural gaps and cultivate mutual respect. Policies should also address any socio-political tensions arising from increased foreign presence, ensuring that the local population feels included and valued in these international partnerships.

By concentrating on these areas, future research and policy-making can contribute to a more balanced and equitable relationship between Ghana and China, ensuring mutual benefits from their ongoing collaboration and fostering a more harmonious and prosperous future.

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A pragmatic analysis of the expression of appreciation – thanks in Nigerian English

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Abstract

Many studies on the linguistic realizations and social functions of responses to thanks in different varieties of English have reported interesting findings on the speech act. However, it appears that thanking, the first pair part of the thanking formula, is under-researched. To fill this gap, this study investigated the linguistic realizations of thanks in Nigerian English in order to determine and compare their features and functions with previous findings in British English. 300 expressions of thanks that were recorded from speakers of Nigerian English from verbal exchange, WhatsApp and radio airings were analyzed. The analysis revealed massive similarities in linguistic patterns but divergent pragmatic features owing to cultural differences. These findings support the variational pragmatic theory which opines that intra-variation does not guarantee same pragmatic features.

Keywords: Comparison, English, pragmatics, thanks, variation

Introduction

Studies on the thanking formulae (thanking and responding to thanks) in British English (BrE) (Jacobson, 2002), British English, American English (AmE) and Irish English (IrE) (Schneider, 2005), Canadian English (CanE) (Farenkia 2012), Cameroon English (CamE) (Ouafeu, 2009), English in Namibia (Schroder and Schneider 2018), Japanese (Ohashi, 2008), Akan (Agyekun, 2010) among others have reported interesting findings about the thanking formula. Their findings are germane to cross-variation and cross-cultural studies and second/foreign language teaching and learning. Insightful linguistic, socio-cultural and pragmatic information that suggest cultural and linguistic specificity abound in these works. However, it appears that most of the studies have concentrated on responses to thanks leaving the expression of thanks itself under-researched. Consequently, similar linguistic and cultural information that are provided for responses are yet to be reported about the first pair part, thanking, barring very few studies such as Eisenstein and Bodman (1993), Jacobson (2002), Ohashi (2008) and Agyekum (2010) that studied expressing appreciation - thanks. These studies provide insightful information relating to the contexts of usage and the semantics of thanking with skeletal pragmatic and cross-variation information within variational pragmatics.

Recognizing the gap in variational pragmatics studies and the place of such studies in cross-cultural/variational and second language learning studies between native and second language varieties of English, this paper examined thanking in Nigerian English (henceforth NigE) in order to determine whether its lexical, syntactic and pragmatic characteristics align with what has been reported about thanking in British English (henceforth BrE). The importance of comparative studies within cross-cultural orientation and their contribution towards the validity of variational pragmatics framework and cross-variation literature on “Old Englishes” and “New Englishes” cannot be overemphasized. They provide crucial insights into the ethnolinguistic information of the speech communities, participants' speech functions as well as useful linguistic information for language teaching and learning.

Theoretical framework

This study is rooted in Barron and Schneider's (2009) schema, where intercultural pragmatics treats studies in second language varieties of English as postcolonial pragmatics. However, because we compare findings in NigE with what has been reported in BrE, the study is arguably considered as a study in variational pragmatics which treats all national varieties of English as forms of one Global English. According to Barron and Schneider (2009) "variational pragmatics investigates intra-lingual differences i.e., pragmatic variation between and across L1 varieties of the same language" (p.246). In addition, the framework takes variation studies beyond phonological, lexical and syntactic differences and postulates that varieties of the same language also vary along pragmatic parameters, especially in the speech acts of complimenting, apologizing, congratulating, thanking and responding. The theoretical underpinnings of variational pragmatics are captured in Schröder and Schneider (2018, p. 337) thus: "variational pragmatics, as the study of pragmatic differences between regional and social varieties of a language, is defined as the intersection of pragmatics and variational linguistics" (see Schneider and Barron (2008) for a detailed discussion of variational pragmatics). It is noted that speakers of NigE are considered as L1 speakers of NigE within sociolinguistic orientation just as speakers of BrE and AmE are considered as L1 speakers of their Englishes. In the next section, there is a review some existing studies on thanking with particular attention on definitions, structure, context and functions.

Background

Definitions

Thanking has been defined and/or described in many ways, thereby providing complementary views that provide a multi-faceted meaning of the speech act. For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines thanking as an expression of appreciation of someone else's investment in our well-being, an act of courtesy, or simply reciprocation. Rousan (2018) observed that thanking is a verbal appreciation for receiving a favour and help. Within the field of pragmatics, some authors have defined and/or described thanking as a pragmatic act that performs social actions. These actions include meeting the positive face need of the other person, ensuring good feelings in others and fostering or oiling the wheel of social relationships among interactants. One other definition of thanking that tends to stress its formulaic structure is that of Perkins (1999) cited in Wray and Perkins (2000, p. 1) which defines it "as manifested strings of linguistic items where the relation of each item to the rest is relatively fixed, and where the substitutability of one item by another of the same category is relatively constrained". These definitions suggest the functions, characteristics and structure of thanking. Two perceptions of thanking have been proposed in the literature - indebtedness and moral obligation. One postulation stipulates that thanking implies accepting indebtedness to the thankee. Studies by Agyekum (2010) and Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) appear to have stressed indebtedness, rooting their works within the politeness framework. Similarly, Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006), Ohashi (2008), and Farenkia (2012) fall into the same orientation. For example, in our data, some dyads express their gratitude by acknowledging their indebtedness (e.g., *I owe you a world of gratitude, thanks/I can never pay you enough for this*). Here, thankers acknowledge and exaggerate their indebtedness. These kinds of expression are rife in our data especially where the magnitude of the help, gift or favour is estimated to be of great value to the thanker. This is illustrated in Example 1.

Example 1: Two friends: one had received help from the other

A: Good morning. We cannot thank you enough. I am around when can we meet?

B: Oh thank God.

Supporting the indebtedness of thankers, Agykenum (2010) quoted an Akan proverb which says that if someone took care of you when you were teething you should as well take care of him when s/he is losing his/her teeth.

Although thanking has been interpreted to suggest indebtedness, it might be necessary to clarify that this is actually the effect of thanking on the thanker. Thus it has been argued that the effects of thanking on dyads, especially on the thankee, are closely related to its functions. Many works such as Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006), Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) have examined the effects of thanking on dyads and noted that by accepting indebtedness to the thankee, thanking also renders the thanker a dependant, if not subordinate to the thankee. In other words, by accepting your indebtedness as a thanker you accept your dependence or subordinate status to the thankee. Thus sometimes parents, under the guise of training their wards, ask their children after the latter might have been given gifts*: Can't you show appreciation*? Or they may ask: *What should you do?* Thus thanking has a humbling effect on the thanker just as it also signals an acceptance of indebtedness which the thanker pays for in part.

According to Ksenofontov and Becker's (2019), study which is rooted in the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), expressing thanks signals acceptance of a gift or a favor which limits the beneficiary's freedom of action because it implies that they have taken on a debt and will have to pay. Therefore, giving thanks can cause indebtedness. Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006) noted that this can, in turn, be dissolved through the beneficiary paying off their debt with another benefit.

Thanking as a verbal gift has also been conceived as a moral obligation. Thus, thanking, especially between non-equals (parents and children, superiors and subordinates) is often demanded., Consequently, thanking has been conceived as a moral obligation in daily interactions so that failure to express (verbal) gratitude after one might have received a favour or gift is interpreted as being rude or an ingrate. Based on this social convention, thanking is said to accomplish a moral obligation. According to Ksenofontov and Beckect (2019), failure to express thanks is socially undesirable. While displays of thankfulness when receiving benefits are encouraged, displays of dissatisfaction and ingratitude, no matter how unattractive the benefit is, signify rudeness and moral defect as observed by Carr (2015) and Eibach et al. (2015). It is interesting however, that this moral obligation perception might explain why people are more likely to express thanks before an audience (Baumeister and Ilko, 1995). Based on the above argument, thanking, as a gift, might be conceived as verbal payback for the gift or favour received and a moral obligation to benefactors.

Structure

Thanking has been reported in the literature to be formulaic in structure and as phatic communication that is patterned as adjacency pairs. This structural characteristic has warranted its inclusion among the speech functions that are described as linguistic routines in some studies (e.g., Aijmer, 2010). Linguistic routines have been aptly described by Bonvillain (1993) "… as expressions that combine verbal material and social messages in patterns expressive of cultural values and sensitive to interactional context" (p.103). Agyekum (2010) amplified Bonvillain's (1993) description thus:

> Linguistic routines are determined by the formality of the setting, the nature of the relationship between the

> participants, social variables, and their communicative goals. Linguistic routines are therefore context bound and socio-culturally oriented. The linguistic routines are communally owned and predictable, and interlocutors are expected to follow certain accepted societal and cultural formulas and conventions. However, the way they are employed and structured may differ from language to language, but their functions may be identical since they all aim at social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. (p.78)

Wray and Perkins's (2000) working definition in their study reiterates the structure as a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning element, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar.

Describing the formulaic characteristic of phatic communication, Sinclair (1991, cited in Wray and Perkins 2000, p. 2) noted that formulaicity encompasses the enormous set of simple lexical collocations, whose patterns are both remarkable and puzzling from a formal grammatical point of view. The formulaic nature of thanking and responding that has been so widely supported in many studies is akin to other formulaic expressions with the strong claim that "all evidence points to an underlying rigidity of phraseology, despite a rich superficial variation (Sinclair 1991, p. 121 cited in Wray and Perkins 2000, p. 2)). This is corroborated by the observation in Perkins (1999) that formulaicity contrasts with productivity, the ability to use the structural system of language (syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology) in a combinatory way to create novel utterances and in an analytical way to understanding them.

Although many studies (e.g., Jespersen, 1968), Aijmer, 1996), Jacobson, 2002) have attested to the conversational routine nature of thanking, one of the strongest observations is that of Ouafeu (2009) which says that " phrases or expressions of the type '*thank you'*, '*thank you very much indeed'* or '*many thanks'* all belong to the class of fixed phrases whose main characteristic feature is their unalterable or fossilized nature" (p. 544).

Although the linguistic characteristics of our data attest to the routine nature of thanking, it is possible that speakers do bring innovations thereby suggesting that expressions of gratitude are not as unalterable as one might be tempted to believe going by the volume of works that supports their formulaicity. In fact, Leech *et al* (2001) acknowledged that there are a wide range of expressions available for dyads. Though thanking may have predictable forms in many cases, there are linguistic variations available to users that may not fit into the fixed formulaic forms. However, it must be noted that most thanking data in the previous studies and in our study display formulaic structures. Variants are therefore not as copious as formulaic forms of thanking.

Kinds of thanking

Thanking types are often identified based on whether they are between individuals (interpersonal) or among groups (corporate) although some expressions might be difficult to classify. For example, consider how a father's appreciation of colleagues' gesture at the workplace using the WhatsApp platform in Example 2 might be difficult to classify as individual or group thanking:

Example 2:

> A: (Father of the newborn): I want to use this forum to appreciate all members of staff for their love toward me and my family. May the good Lord continue to bless you. Amen.
>
> B1: (colleague). You are welcome
> B2: (colleague). You are welcome Bro. May the child be a great blessing to your family and to humanity in general. May you have peace.

Ironic thanking has also been identified in the literature although it is in doubt whether it should be included as expression of gratitude because of thankers' insincerity and their communicative function. We also found contexts where thankers thank those who wronged them as in Example 3. In such situations, the thanker may want the thankee to know that the former took notice of the wrong done. This kind of thanking is often determined by the reasons and contexts of thanking.

Example 3. A friend (B) had leaked the secret that plunged A into trouble.

A: Thank you o. I saw your hand.
B: What did I do?
A: Thank you

Objects and contexts

Agyekum (2010, p. 77) gives a list of speech events where thanking occurs in the Akan culture of Ghana. The list includes thanking in joyful occasions such as childbirth and wedding ceremonies. In the literature, it has been shown that objects (reasons) of expressions of gratitude could be material gifts, hospitality such as showing interest in one's health, making a request, an offer, a promise, a suggestion, an invitation, a proposal, or giving useful information, among others. In fact, if you had coughed for whatever reason, a caring person around you is likely to tell you to '*take care'* and in response the person is thanked for showing concern.

Thus thanking is not so restricted to favours or gifts received as it includes appreciation for welcome performance, doing one's work which is neither a help nor a favour. For example, an employer may thank his/her employee for a work well done as a way of encouraging good work and fostering cordial relationship or showing politeness. Expression of gratitude might be given after enquiring after the welfare of the other person. Thanking may be offered after congratulating others, complimenting others, being shown favour, offered good counsel, commiserated with someone, given a direction, even when you have done your expected service and/or extended an invitation; offered a free ride and many other reasons. Examples of all these objects of thanking among our participants are rife in our data. In fact, among speakers of NigE it is common for thankers to turn down an unwelcome offer with *thanks* as in Example 4,

Example 4. Context: A friend met his friend having a meal, the former asks:

A: Do you need a hand to help you finish your meal?
B: Thank you (to decline the offer).

Here the thanker uses *thank you* to turn down the offer. Sometimes, thanking might be a form of gambit or pre-act as the person giving the offer may not mean what is said. Rather s/he might like to use thanking to open a discussion with the other person. Example 5 illustrates this.

Example 5: After a church service

Pastor: Thank you for attending the service today. How did you find it?
Visitor: I enjoyed it. Pastor: Will you like to repeat visit or ….?

In terms of context, we found some expressions of gratitude in formal situation -institutional/corporate thanking. For example, after giving a lecture to an audience, the audience might thank the speaker by giving the vote of thanks through the moderator or another person. We found where hosts thanked their guests who had attended their parties, (birthday, naming, burial, housewarming). Sometimes, wealthy families use the print/electronic media to express gratitude to guests who supported them (financially) and/or attended their parties. In Example 6, a section of a programme book used at a burial ceremony reads:

Example 6. Appreciation:

> The entire family of Late Pa. Thomas A …profoundly express our gratitude to God and everyone that has demonstrated immeasurable love support towards the success of celebrating the glorious exit of our Father, Grandfather and Great Grandfather. Our prayers are with you. Our good God will grant us all safe trips back to our destinations.

Social actions/functions of thanking

In his study of thanking among the Akans of Ghana, Agyekum (2010, p. 83) noted that each of the expressions of thanking has deeper pragmatic and socio-philosophical meanings. The prototypical expression *meda wo ase* in Akan (I thank you) is made up of; *Me da wo ase* (I lie you under/below). Literally, it means "I, the recipient, lie below you, the benefactor". The Akans think that when somebody gives you something or does something (good) for you, that person is elevated higher in social status and the beneficiary is lowered and humbled. Agyekum's (2010) observation suggests a kind of power play that might be at work in thanking. This notion is truly reflected in situations where interactants are non-equals. Commenting on power play in thanking, Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) observed that "… benefactor can thus control or manipulate the beneficiary and the latter may not complain because the latter is below the former status-wise either perpetually or momentarily" (p. 1). Thus, the speech act of thanking presupposes conventional reciprocal contract (expression of gratitude for the good received and acknowledging the appreciation). In addition, Agykenum (2008) asserts, the notion of thanking presupposes power play of hierarchies and power relations between the *donor* and the *recipient.*

In terms of function, thanking has been described within politeness principles as positive politeness or negative politeness strategies. As a speech act, most of the studies thus far agree that thanking serves as lubricant for social relationships and is used as tools for demonstrating politeness or at least, it serves as a positive politeness strategy in daily interactions. It is along this vein that Leech (1983) sees the act of thanking as a face-enhancing, a convivial or a positively affective speech act (p. 104). Similarly, Jautz (2008, p.142) asserts that expressions of gratitude are used when a speaker wants the addressee to know that s/he is grateful for what the addressee has said or done. By expressing appreciations, the speaker enhances the positive face need of the addressee (who desires that his/her action be approved by others).

In addition to serving as a social lubricant for relationships, psychological research has largely documented the intra/inter-personal benefits of giving thanks as it makes us feel better and brings us closer together (Watkins, 2014 cited in Ksenofontov and Becker 2019). Expressions of thanks can yield beneficial psychological outcomes both in the giver and recipient of thanks (see Watkins, 2014 for a review). Giving thanks can increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms as reported in Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005). It strengthens social bonds as reported by Algoe, Fredrickson and Gable (2013) and motivates recipients of thanks to show prosocial behavior (Grant and Gino, 2010).

However, thanking does not only serve face enhancing functions but can also function as a face threatening act and more precisely, an act of accepting a debt or an act of humbling the speaker's own face which suggests two different and opposing pragmatic acts. In other words, it satisfies the positive face need of the addressee who is thanked but puts the speaker in debt, a kind of a face threatening act. Thus while the thanker satisfies the positive face need of the addressee, the thanker becomes indebted to the thankee – (self is put down), the response of the verbal gift may either enhance the debt, or reduce the debt in one form or the other that is acceptable to the culture of the speech community.

Effects

Apart from these positive and negative functions of thanking, studies have also shown other negative effects on both the giver and the recipient. For example, thanking between non-equals has been shown to perpetrate social distance that keeps low-group members from expressing discontent with oppressive domination by those in the high-group. For example, Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) studied the psychological effects of expressing 'thank you' and reported that giving thanks has multiple psychological benefits. For example, they noted that within intergroup contexts, thankful responses from low-power to high-power group members could solidify the power hierarchy. The other-oriented nature of grateful expressions could mask power differences and discourage low-power group members from advocating for their in-group interests. Their study demonstrates the other side of expressing gratitude which to them provides evidence for a problematic side of gratitude within intergroup relations. By recruiting some persons in the community to express unwarranted gratitude, the people are kept back from expressing their dissatisfaction or displeasure.

Speech/illocutionary/perlocutionary acts

Perhaps the functions of thanking and its effects on thankees and thankers might have informed the classification of thanking not only as perlocutionary act and performance act but also as expressive speech acts. Agyekum (2010, p. 78) classified thanking as "… an expressive speech act that states what the speaker feels". Expressives have been defined in many ways. One definition says that expressives are representatives and interpretations of the psychological inner state of the speaker either to himself or to the addressee. They denote the speaker's experience by the use of statements of pleasure, pain, likes and dislikes, joy, sorrow, love or hatred (see Yule 1996, p. 53, Mey 1993, p. 165 cited in Agyekum 2010, p. 76).

Although expressives have been described as representative of the inner feeling of the thanker, considering the social and cultural pressures and expectations on speakers, it is doubtful whether all expressions of gratitude can be said to be expressives. There are givers of thanks that are compelled or mandated to express gratitude because of the institutional/social/moral demands. At other times, the urge to express gratitude might be stronger especially where the receiver of the gift/favour is aware that failure to express gratitude might occasion being reprimanded for being rude and/or future gift/favour might be withdrawn. This position is corroborated by Ackah (1988, p. 55) who noted that failure to render thanks would mean, in the estimation of the giver, that the one who received the gift is an ungrateful wretch, and may result in the giver deciding never to make another present to that person. Thus, sometimes, expressions of gratitude might not reflect the inner state/feelings of its speakers. In fact, the name-callings for failing to express gratitude in some communities are so demeaning that receivers of gifts and favour are compelled to express 'thank you' to avoid such names. For example, according to Agykunem (2010) the word for ungratefulness in Akan is *bonniaye*; which is made up of *aboa a nni ayE* (lit.) means 'the animal that has no gratefulness' (p. 81). Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, an ingrate is classified as a robber (e.g., *Alaimore eniyan dabi olosa to koni leru lo* (An ingrate is like a robber that robbed one of his/her goods)).

Perhaps one of the ways to determine whether the expression of appreciation is a reflection of the inner feeling of the speaker or not might be at the point of data collection where the data collector might need to probe the speaker further whether the appreciation expressed is from a pleased mind or is motivated by the social, institutional and cultural demands/pressures. Also, the failure of a receiver of gift or favour to express gratitude to the giver might be interpreted as impoliteness and/or being deficient in the communicative competence in the language. According to Agyekum (2010) within the Akan culture if people are supposed to be polite and failed to do so they bring about disgrace not only to themselves but also to their parents who might be indicted for failing to bring up their wards in the expected ways of the given culture. Consequently, some other factors aside from a pleased inner feeling are responsible for the giving of thanks among thankers.

In sum, (Mey 1993) claims that:

> an expressive speech act must presuppose an embedded true proposition to indicate that the speaker is expressing an inner feeling towards something which s/he deems to be true in the world and which s/he is sincerely giving his/her state of mind (p.160 cited in Agyekun 2010, p.76).

This claim is controversial. The impact of the expressive should move from the individual to the societal level (Rosaldo 1982, p. 204 cited in Agyekum 2010, p. 78) and might extend to other expressives. Consequently, caution is needed in classifying all thanking expressions as expressives. In fact, Viser (2009) observed that people do not have to experience gratitude when saying ‘thank you’. This becomes apparent when observing the difficulty young children have in expressing thanks, despite persistent prompting from their parents as observed by Grief and Gleason (1980) cited in Ksenofotov and Becker (2019).

Perhaps, the act of thanking might rather fall into what has been described as perlocutionary acts rather than expressive speech acts. This might be the case if due consideration is accorded the definitions of speech acts and perlocutionary acts. Speech act is used to refer to a theory that analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of the Speaker (S) and the Addressee (A) in interpersonal communication while perlocutionary acts according to Duranti (1997, p. 220) consists of actions that might be beyond the conventional interpretation of an utterance and/or outside the control of the speaker. In other words, the act of thanking might be beyond the conventional interpretation as a reflection of true state of the inner feeling of the speaker. This is not to assert that all expressions of appreciation are not representative of the pleased inner feeling of their speakers. However, the fact that there are other sociocultural and institutional pressures on speakers to give thanks must be considered in the act of thanking so that if thanking must be classified as expressives, perhaps Mey's (1993, p. 166) description that "expressives are subject to limitations and changes according to different conceptualisations of social guilt behaviour." might be more appropriate.

From the foregoing, it is safe to acknowledge and align with the position of some studies which opine that thanking be considered as a speech act and grouped among other speech functions that serve as politeness strategies such as compliment, praises, and congratulations, among others. To summarise this section, thanking seems to be indisputably positive, universal, and multifunctional and as a pragmatic and sociocultural act (that) it requires the communicative competence of the language users whether as a native speaker or near-native user of the language. However, though many studies have examined thanking in various languages including BrE, it appears there is neither an in-depth study of thanking in NigE nor a comparative study of intra-varieties of the same language, e.g., BrE and NigE. The preoccupation of this undertaking is to fill these gaps.

Methodology

Data

The data used were drawn from a corpus of thanking and responding exchanges that we collected from speakers of NigE in Nigeria between 2018 and 2020. The researcher with a team of research assistants (undergraduate and postgraduate students from five universities in Nigeria) collected thanking and responding exchanges between dyads. Data from cell phones (sms), WhatsApp, and participants on air (radio), daily conversations in shops, homes, schools, religious meetings, on the bus and other domains of language use in many parts of the country were collected. Fieldnotes were used to record spoken data (205) and written data (95). Data collected included those between intimates (74), casuals (192), strangers (34); equals (99) and non-equals (201). 300 exchanges from the corpus of 500 were used for this study. The other 200 exchanges were ignored because they were repetitive and/or contain expressions in local languages. Attempts to translate expressions in local languages to Nigerian English might be faulted because they are not the actual renderings from research participants. In addition, natural occurring data are commonplace in variational studies. Other expressions were excluded because they failed the test of thanks as an expression of satisfaction/pleasure for a gift/favour received. For example, in Example 6, the speaker ironically thanks a gossip for maligning him.

Example 6:

Context: The thanker has been told of what the thankee said to badmouth him.
Thanker: I saw your hand. Thank you o
Thankee: What did I do o?

It is noted that the corpus consists of the entire thanking formula – thanking and responses. For this study, we have isolated the first pair part – thanking – while the responses to the thanks, the second pair part are being examined for another study on responses to thanks in Nigerian English. For example, Data 8 in the appendix has the complete thanking formulae although only the first pair part is used for this study.

Example 7 *Context: The principal of a school attended one of the teacher's party in Ibadan.*

A: *Thank* you, Sir, for attending our party.
B: Oh! It's my pleasure.

In the analysis, we describe the linguistic forms of the expressions of gratitude collected from speakers of Nigerian English. In addition, we identified the number of headings, supportive structures, lexical and syntactic forms before comparing the linguistic characteristics with the patterns that have been reported in BrE. The importance of these forms is that they could form the basis for describing communicative strategies in a given speech community especially among second language users of English who have domesticated English (merging local language features with the second language).

Analysis

Headings

Expression of gratitude could have one heading (e.g., *I thank you*) or two or more headings (e.g., *I thank you very much. I am really grateful* [two headings] or *Thank you for being my companion. I appreciate you*). We found some expressions of gratitude that have one heading, whereas others had two or more headings. In Example 8, the thanker uses multiple headings to express gratitude that might be termed exaggerated gratitude. Example 9 contains one heading though the expression is long.

> Example 8: No words can express, no act of gratitude can relay; no gift can represent what your engagement and support have meant to me.
>
> Exchange 9: Please accept this note as an indicator of my heartfelt appreciation for everything you are to me.

Lexical characteristics

At the lexical level, there is the preponderant use of *thank*, *thanks*, *appreciate* (e.g., *I thank you or thank you/Thanks a lot/ many thanks/thanks a bunch*. Where the word *thanks* is used as a noun, it is often quantified with *a lot, a million, very much, a bunch*. But where it serves as a verb (e.g., *I thank you*), we have *very, greatly*...modifying the verb *thank*. *Appreciate* as a verb co-occurs with … *a lot/much (e.g. I appreciate this a lot)*. As a noun, *appreciation* appears in some expressions of thanks (e.g. *I hereby express my appreciation for*….). Thus, the nouns *thanks*, *appreciation*, *gratitude* might be expected in the expressions of gratitude while the verb *thank* and *appreciate* are also used.

The other verbs and adjectives that appear to characterize the lexical forms of thanking are *indebted*, (e.g., *I am indebted to you* …); *owe* (e.g., *I owe you ...)*. The adjectives *grateful,* as in *I am very grateful* is often used. The other adjectives that are sparingly used are *kind* and *nice* (e.g., *You are too good/ That was kind/nice of you/That was thoughtful of you*) that are compliments but function as expressions of gratitude. Table 1 provides the frequency.

Table 1: Frequency of lexical words

Lexical characteristics		
Verbs	**Frequencies**	**%**
Thank	178	59.3
Appreciate	20	6.6
Nouns		
Thanks	65	21.6
Appreciation	05	1.6
Gratitude	06	2.0
Adjectives		
Grateful	12	4.0
Kind and nice	14	4.6
Total	300	99.7

Table 1 shows that the use of verbs ranks highest (65.9%) followed by nouns (25.2%) and then adjectives (8.6%). These results suggest that verbs are most preferred in the participants' thanking expressions. For verbs, *thank* as a verb (59.3%) is preferred to the use of the verb *appreciate* 6.6%). Similarly, in the use of nouns, *thanks* seems to be most preferred (21.6%) since only less than 4% is for both *appreciation* (1.6%) and *gratitude* (2.0%).

A further analysis revealed the use of quantifiers (intensifiers) in the expressions. For example, we found expressions such as *I thank you very much/I cannot thank you enough/Thanks a lot/very much/a bunch/I owe you a lot of thanks/ appreciation*. Amongst them were quantifiers – *much* (*e.g., I thank you* very much; *thanks so much*/*Thanks a lot*/*Thanks a bunch*/*Thanks a million*)**.** Thus, there is a preponderant use of intensifiers that accompany *thanks.* We did find some interesting expressions of thanks such as *I cannot thank you enough/I thank you ever so much*. Two exchanges in our data used expressions such as *Thanks anyway/ I thank you anyway*.

Adverbs such as *truly, really* (e.g., *I truly appreciate/I really appreciate*) were reported in our data. There was also the use of *many* (e.g., *Many thanks*). We also found the use of *truly, really* which might have been used to signify sincerity or mark emotion.

It is very interesting to find that many of the thanking expressions of our participants were characterized by the use of vocatives such as Sir, Madam, Dad, mum, daughter, Son, *Oga* (Boss), Prof, Dr. to mark social distance in relationships (e.g., *Many thanks, my brother/Thanks so much* Dr/*I thank you very much Ma for the gift*).

Syntactic structure

The following syntactic structures appear to characterize thanking among our participants. Sentence types include simple sentences (e.g., *Thank you very much. I appreciate*); complex sentences as in *I thank you for the help you rendered or Thanks very much for the helping, Madam*; and other simple sentences as in *I thank you*. The use of two simple sentences in an expression to convey appreciation is common. In what follows, we describe the structural patterns in their expressions.

For example, we found (i) TL + verb + obj as in *Madam, thank you*; (ii) NP +verb (appreciate)+obj +) adverbial reason) as *in I appreciate your efforts* ... Table 2 captures the frequencies of the syntactic structures:

Table 2: Frequency of syntactic structures

Structure	Frequency	%
A. **Double sentence or two sentences** Thanks so much. I appreciate you. *Thank* you a lot. That was very thoughtful of you. (10)	28	9
B. **NP+Vb+Object (Adjunct)** 58 (I) thank you so much (170 Ah Baba, … thank you so much I can't thank you enough (4) I owe you big time		174
C. **Noun + quantifier** Thanks a million/so much/anyway/a lot	60	20
D. **Demon+Vb+Adj+Pp** That is kind/nice of you That was thoughtful of you	10	3
E**. NP+Vb+(Comple)** 10 I am grateful (12) I appreciate (16)		28
Total	300	100

Table 2 shows that the most preferred syntactic structure is the B structure (58%) followed by C structure (20%) and then E (10%) and A (9%) structures. The least preferred is the D structure (3%) as in *That is kind/nice/thoughtful of you.*

Apart from these formulaic expressions, there are other forms such as metaphorical expressions and compliments (e.g., *You are a blessing/You are so great*) that are used to express gratitude. Others are long expressions in written form (e.g., *No words can express; no act of gratitude can relay; no gift can represent what your encouragement and support have meant to me/Please accept this note as an indicator of my heartfelt appreciation for everything you are/If I tried to tell you how much I appreciate you; I'd be talking for the rest of my life. I hope that, in some small way, you realize how much you've meant to me, and how truly I desire to give back to you*). Other special expressions (e.g., *This means a lot to me!*) were found. Apart from very few instances of double thanking, (e.g., *Thank you very much…I am very grateful*), thanking with compliments (e.g., *I thank you for this lovely gift*), gratitude that conveys emotions (e.g., *I truly appreciate/Kindly accept my heartfelt appreciation/I am deeply grateful/I honestly appreciate*) and those accompanied with blessing, it appears thanking among speakers of NigE is often bare.

Summary and discussion

In summary, our analysis of expressions of gratitude in NigE is characterized by formulaic expression apart from few special expressions (e.g., *I cannot thank you enough/What should I say*?). Most of the expressions largely contain one thanking strategy (heading) apart from very few expressions that contain other strategies such as blessing the thankee and the others that convey emotions. *Thanks* are generally accompanied by intensifiers *very much* and *a lot*. In other words, their expressions of gratitude are largely bare – simple rather than complex.

The contexts for thanking are many - social meetings, offices, and schools and the formal and informal settings. The social relationships between dyads also vary: there are exchanges between intimates, casuals, strangers and acquaintances.

Reasons for expressing gratitude include – asking after the well-being of others, given gifts, favour shown, help rendered, offered free ride, counseling given, honouring invitations, attending to students or customers, among the others.

The use of address forms such as *Sir, Madam, Dad, mum, son, daughter*, is rife in their expressions. These vocatives are used to mark hierarchy and relationship (social distance) between dyads. . For example, the use of *Dad, mum, pet names,* such as *Dear, Honey, Sweety* was reported. This is similar to what Jacobson (2002) reported about Early Modern BrE and Ajiimer (1996) in AmE. However, Jacobson (2002) reported that this feature has disappeared in contemporary English society. The use of hierarchical titles in contemporary NigE differs from what Jacobson (2002) reported about contemporary English society.

However, thanking in NigE and BrE has common cores in their use of same lexical words and syntactic structures. NigE might have inherited these features from the early BrE. However, the use of different speech acts to accompany thanking, such as the use of address forms and blessing the thankee in NigE, points to the divergence in the two varieties of English (BrE and NigE) as these forms are not reported in the early and contemporary BrE thanking formulae.

The similarities in the lexical and syntactic characteristics suggest that NigE has not departed much from the BrE, its ancestor, although NigE as a norm-evolving outer circle English has its distinctive features. However, the differences in the use of pragmatic features (e.g., marking social distance and the use bare expressions of thanks in NigE) mark departures from BrE. These differences in pragmatic features might be interpreted to show that although speakers of NigE learnt/inherited English from speakers of BrE at the inception, influences from Nigeria's local languages and the process of domesticating BrE has occasioned departure from what they have learnt in BrE. Thus these results lend support to the claim those second/foreign language learners, who learn communicative English in the classroom and from textbooks often depart from what they have learnt to form their local pragmatic communicative expressions. This conclusion is further strengthened by the finding that thanking in NigE is often bare whereas BrE thanking is rarely bare. For example, bare thanking (e.g., *Thanks a lot*) is the most preferred formula in NigE whereas, thanking in BrE is often complex as it is often complemented with other strategies such as appreciating the addressee, the gift or favour received, complimenting (e.g., *Thanks, that's nice of you*). In other words, BrE has complex thanking expressions because they are often accompanied with another clause that comments on how much the favour/gift is valued (e.g., *Thanks a lot. The dress fits so well).* This complex thanking has also been reported in AmE (Ajiimer, 1996) where its speakers show consistent use of expressions of gratitude which are often accompanied by other expressions such as complimenting, reassuring, expression of surprise and delight, expressing a lack of necessity or obligation. On the other hand, NigE speakers' thanking expressions are largely simple although few of their thanking expressions are accompanied with blessing (e.g. *Thank you so much. God bless you*).

This divergence is one area of cultural difference between BrE and NigE. Speakers of NigE are not likely to pass explicit comment on how much they value the gift/favour/help apart from the use of intensifiers such as *I so much appreciate this gift.* In other words, this is one area that cross-cultural communication information is very important and speakers from both speech communities might need to understand why one group prefers bare thanking while the other favours complex thanking.

One other area that marks divergence is the use of deference. Although Jacobson (2002) has reported that Early Middle English was characterized by the use of deference which is said to be connected with a stricter social hierarchy of the period while the Modern English appears to have relaxed the use of deference, the use of deference is still rife in the NigE thanking formulae. Marking relationship and social distance and social hierarchy appears to be important to NigE speech community. For example, subordinates would often add *Sir* or *Ma(dam*) to thank their superiors in age, social status, and education, among others. Thus although thanking has been described as positive politeness strategy helping to cement social relationships and enhance solidarity and good feelings between dyads, the use of deference to mark social hierarchy in thanking appears to be counterproductive in their social functions. It is difficult to interpret this divergence to mean that NigE still retains the Victorian English it learnt from the native speakers since the Nigerian society sociologically is a hierarchical community where age, economic, educational and political status divide the people into social strata and linguistic means are used to mark these features.

Conclusion

Thanking is ubiquitous in NigE speakers' daily interactions. This feature suggests how much they value cordial social relationships and meeting the face needs of their interactional partners. Though their thanking is formulaic in structure, they also use innovation to express gratitude accompanied by gestures and address forms. Lexical and syntactic features of thanking in NigE are similar to what has been reported about contemporary BrE, except in the use of other pragmatic strategies that accompany thanking in BrE which are rarely found in NigE because of cultural difference. NigE and BrE appear to be maintaining linguistic common-cores in English, which tie the varieties together as members of World Englishes. This finding suggests the significance of teaching/learning of common-cores language features of English amongst learners and users of English. The writing of learning materials for learners/users of English as a second language should not concentrate on what sets the varieties of English apart but rather, they should stress the common-cores which ensure/foster mutual intelligibility among learners/users of English worldwide. However, the pragmatic features in their thanking formulas suggest divergences that index different cultural environments. This study therefore corroborates the postulations of the variational pragmatic theory and also supports the claim that second/foreign language learners and users do depart in some way from the communicative practice they learn in the target language and evolve their communicative practices in line with their local environment. Consequently, this position supports the room for innovations in the learning and use of English in the 'outer circle'. Finally, the study points to the fact that speakers of English worldwide must recognize their convergence and also be willing to welcome divergence in their speech functions for inter-cultural communication and language accommodation.

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Appendix

Appendix: Responses to thanks

1. A conversation between a Boss and his lover.
   Akin: Please, take good care of yourself for me.
   Inioluwa: Okay love, thanks. I will.

2. In a conversation between two friends.
   Richard: To truly appreciate life, we seek companionship.
   Fred: *Thank* you for being my companion. I *appreciate* you.

3. A doctor and his patient's relative.
   Doctor: We've tried all our best to revive your sister, but all to no avail. So, you have to take her out of this place.
   Patient Relative: Uh! Doctor. Okay**,** thanks any way.
   Doctor: Thanks too. It's our work.

4. Between two close friends who have lost contact.
   Friend A: That's all right.
   Friend B: It's my pleasure.

5. For an assistance rendered in an office.
   Oga: Don't mention it.
   Staff: Not at all!
   Oga: It's nothing, thanks.

6. A daughter had helped her dad.
   Daughter: *Thank* you for taking the pains to ……..
   Father: I don't know what to say!!!!!!!
   Daughter: Oh, you shouldn't have!

7. In a reply to a message.
   Gabriel Clark: Hi Cuks, thanks so much for the positive feedback. It's always good to know people are out there, enjoying our work and finding it useful.
   Chuks: You've done it again. Brilliant! Thanks ever so much.
   Gabriel Clark: No. Thank YOU!

8. *The principal of a school attended a party organized by one of the teacher's in Ibadan.*
   A. (F) : *Thank* you Sir for attending our party.
   B. Oh! It's my pleasure.

9. *A man has just helped to fix a punctured tyre.*
   A. (M): Thanks so much, I appreciate you.
   B. (M) : I'm happy to help
   Context: Informal – by the side of the road.

10. *Mrs. Josiah visited the Alabis.*
    A. (F): Thanks very much for the visit.
    B. Ah! It's nothing.
    Context: Informal.

11. *Helped to relay a piece of information.*
    A. (F): Thanks a bunch.
    B. (M): No worries.
    Context: Informal.

12. *Honored an invitation to a party.*
    A. (F) : *Thank* you for the other day.
    B. (M): You're welcome.
    Context: Informal.

13. *A son has just finished his meal.*
    A. (M): Daddy, *thank* you.
    B. You’re welcome.
    Context: Informal – Father and Son.

14. *Helped to get a book from his library.*
    A. (M): Thank you very much.
    (F): Don’t mention.

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Akan concepts and proverbs on *abusua*, 'family'

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Abstract

The paper explores the Akan concept of family based on their cultural ideologies and proverbs. The paper adopts the framework of language ideology that looks at how a people rationalise their language and culture based on their worldview, religious beliefs and anthropological notions. The data for this paper is collected from library studies on books on Akan proverbs and other literary books. Part of the data is collected from Akan folksongs, folktales, interviews and discussions with some renowned Akan scholars. The proverbs collected are subjected to semantic, stylistic and pragmatics analysis. The paper will find out whether the proverbs that relate to family are still applicable in modern times where globalisation, westernisation, modernisation and foreign religion are taking over the Akan family system and some of the aspects of Akan culture and beliefs. This paper is a follow up of other papers I have done on the Akan concept of face, poverty, marriage and death.

Keywords: Akan family system, clan, extended family, proverbs, language ideology, folksongs

Introduction

Scholars in anthropology, sociology, social welfare, psychology and religion such as McCarthy and Edward (2011), have worked extensively on the family. However, little has been done on the interface between family and language especially among the Akans. It is upon this backdrop that this study is focusing on how Akans use language, especially proverbs, to comment on family as an important aspect of people’s life. The paper will look at the Akan family system, concepts and its structure. I will discuss both the nuclear and the extended family systems and tag the extended family system with the Akan *abusuaban*, ‘clan’ system.

The paper further looks at the use of proverbs, which are embodiments of Akan traditional wisdom and how they are used to express the experiences and notions of the Akan clan and family systems. It further discusses the indispensability and the major role of proverbs in commenting on the Akan *abusua*, ‘family’. The proverbs for analysis are semantically categorised into six. They are as follows: (1) the essence of the mother and daughters in a family, (2) marriage as an entry into a family, (3) sufferings from a bad family (4) booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt, (5) unity and diversity in the family and (6) steadfastness and identity. The paper opens the gate for further studies on the interface between language and the family, especially with the current dynamism in the family.

The Akan Family System

One of the cardinal aspects of this article is the Akan family system and we will look at *abusua* first from the clan systems and dovetail into the two major systems of inheritance, matrilineal and patrilineal. The Akan clan system is made up of eight matrilineal clans, namely *Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenneɛ, Asona, Bretuo, Ɛkoɔna* and *Ɔyokoɔ*. Members of each of these clans trace their ancestral lineage to one great grandparent irrespective of their geographical location. In view of the strong bondage, members of the clan (family) cannot marry themselves, nor have any sexual relations; that will be incestuous. These types of family relations can be considered as the extreme notions of extended family. There is a limited extended family that will refer to members who trace their lineage to a common grandmother within a specific location; village or town who are closely knit and know themselves. In discussing the Akan kinship system, Brempong (1991) states that:

> Every Akan is born into an *abusua,* the blood family system or the clan. Each child inherits a spirit (totem) from his father but has his mother's blood. Therefore, each child is related, through blood, to his mother's brother, to his mother's sister and her [mother's sister's emphasis mine] siblings; but not to the children of his mother's brother. The word *Abusua when* ***etymologized has two morphemes, abu, literally meaning broken and sua meaning to learn. Abusua in a sense therefore means part of the society which is broken or a segment of the society which can be uniquely identified. The lexeme sua*** **'to learn'** denotes the learning process within such an institution. This means that individuals within the *Abusua* learn to identify themselves with the group (p. 94).[1]

In the Akan matrilineal extended systems, descent and clan lines are traced through the mother's side. A woman and her sister, their children, and their daughters' children thus belong to the same descent group through consanguineous relations (see also Schwimmer, 2001). Again, Siegel (1996) indicates that one is supposed to inherit material resources from the mother's brother, the matrilineal authority figure, rather than one's father (p. 10). In the matrilineal system, there is no matriachy, where women rule, the formal authority in the group is usually held by mothers' brother(s). In this respect, one of the male elders is the *abusuapanin*, 'family head' or the family's chief administrator. Apart from this matrilineal kind of extended family system, there is a similar patriarchal extended family relation where members of one's father's family are considered as family members irrespective of their geographical relations and migration. The Akans thus have two extended family relations, namely patrilineal and matrilineal.[2]

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[1] Rattray (1941) gave the etymology of the word abusua as stated below. There lived in former times a King of Adanse who had a linguist named Abu. This Abu incurred the King's anger and was heavily fined. Now, at that time children used to inherit from their father. Abu asked his children to assist him to pay the fine imposed by the King but they refused and all went off to their mother's relatives. But Abu's sister's children rendered him assistance to pay off his debt, and Abu therefore, when he died left all his belongings to them. Other people then copied him and willed their property to their sister's children (Abu - sua, lit. copying Abu), (p. 41). (Brempong Owusu (1991) affirms that this is one of the explanations given by the Akans on matrilineal; inheritance (p. 107).

The paper further recognises that family ties and kinship ties are not necessarily the same. Kinship ties usually rest on the recognised blood relations determined by the established social and kinship structure of a society/people. Family ties can be with other relations not necessarily determined as blood relations by the social and kinship structure of a society/people. In modern Ghana, people have what they call family friends, who could be their school mates, church members or workplace friends. These relations could be patrilateral or matrilateral depending on who is at the centre of the relations, namely the father or the mother.

We can strike a distinction between a complimentary filiation extended family system that is based on marriage (affinal) and the kinship extended family system that involves blood relations and, therefore, constitutes the consanguineous relations in the Akan. In the complimentary marriage system, the Akans have a proverb that states:

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[2] The terms matrilineal and patrilineal systems refer to the ways in which descent and inheritance are traced. In a matrilineal system, descent, a person's family identity, inheritance, and leadership positions are determined and traced through their mother's lineage. However, in a patrilineal system, these are determined by the father's lineage. From a strictly anthropological point of view, we also have matrilateral and patrilateral systems that refer to the social connections and obligations within a family. In a matrilateral system, relatives of significant social importance, are formed through the mother's side of the family. In a patrilateral system, the emphasis is rather on the father's side. These distinctions may shape familial relationships, inheritance patterns, and social organization within different cultures and societies. While linear kin are counted "downward" by descent through the kinship system (father-son-grandson), lateral kin are kinfolk "to the side"; it could refer to siblings and affinals.

> *Sɛ worepɛ abusua bi mu awura na sɛ wonnya kwan a, na woware firi mu.*
> 'If you want to enter into a family and you are not getting the access then you marry from that family.'

This proverb indicates that marriage gives one an automatic entry into another family, outside his clan and matrilineal family. Family relationship can thus be affinal or consanguinal. Yang (2010) states that "In Chinese, there are two kinds of relatives. One is blood relatives which indicate relatives with blood relations. The other is 'adfinis', which refers to relatives formed by marriage. Terms addressing relatives on the father's side are therefore, different from those used to address relatives on the mother's side" (p. 739). This system is similar to the Akan system and confirms the view that culturally, there are certain similarities between Asian, Polynesian, Carribean and African cultures.

There is the modern nuclear family that involves the father, mother and the children. According to Nukunuya (2003), such a conjugal or nuclear family is called monogamous family and a couple without children does not constitute a family (p. 49). Another type of family is the polygamous nuclear family involving the man, his wives and children. Nukunya (2003) explains that the extended family system can be classified into two types. One of them is a residential group comprising a series of close relatives built around either patrilineal or matrilineal lines. The second refers to social arrangements in which an individual has extensive reciprocal duties and obligations outside his immediate (nuclear) family. In Akan, the latter system is based on the clan systems as noted above.

In most African cultures, including Ghana and specifically among the Akan, members of the same family will normally want to stay closer to each other and even have their worksites closer to family members. This is manifested in the villages where family members are usually found in one part of the village. When cocoa farming started, many Akans who travelled to other places to buy land for cocoa productions usually went in family groups. The same phenomenon occurs when family members want to buy plots in the cities for residential building. Family and ethnic members are found within the same suburbs of Accra, Kumasi or Takoradi.[3] Nukunya, therefore. avers that:

> In the Anlo-Ewe society where virilocal residence is emphasised, men build their houses close to those of their fathers and other agnates and the maxim that a man is not fully a master of his own house while his father lives, ensures that the authority pattern associated with extended family residential system is maintained (Nukunya, 2003, p. 50).

The extended family system therefore entrusts power in the adults and parents irrespective of the qualification and social status of the sons or daughters.

The extended family system comes with various forms of responsibilities from both the elders and the young. These include social, economic, political, religious, cultural, educational, child nurturing and sanitation responsibilities. Whether members of an extended family live in the same household, village and town or live in distant geographical locations, they try as much as possible to keep track of their kin and show love, care and absolute commitment and responsibility to them anywhere they meet. This is highly manifested during the death of a family member when people travel across regions to partake in the funeral. Undoubtedly, no matter the distance, people of the same extended family trace their descent system through one great grandparent (see Siegel, 1996). Siegel (1996) states the following about the family:

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[3] In Kumasi, the capital of the Asante region of Ghana, there are suburbs like Anloga (Ewes), Accra Town (Gas), Fante New Town (Fantes) and Mosi Zongo (Mossis). These areas are inhabited by the ethnic groups.

> In theory, every individual is born into a conceptually immortal descent group that includes the living, the dead (ancestors), and the yet unborn…. A lineage or clan transcends the lifetimes of its individual members and controls property rights to such things as land and herds, leadership positions, and spiritual powers. As each lineage or clan is a giant extended family, its members must marry outside their own descent group (p. 7).

We will thus find in the discussion that, it is these responsibilities and the functions of the family that generate the proverbs.

The Akan people[4]

The word 'Akan' refers to the people as well as their language. Akans are considered from (a) ethnographic and (b) linguistic perspectives. The ethnographic Akans encompass the native Akans plus the Ahantas, Aowins, Nzemas, and Sefwis, who share cultural similarities with the native Akans but have their respective languages, and speak Akan as L2. The linguistic Akans are those who speak the Akan language as their L1 and are the largest ethnic group in Ghana (Obeng, 1987). In the 2021 national population census, 47.5% of the Ghanaian population was Akan, and about 44% of non-Akans use Akan as a lingua franca (see Agyekum, 2023).

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[4] There is a proto-Akan language common to all the 13 linguistic Akan ethnic groups. Linguistic evidence suggests that the Akan-speaking people likely originated somewhere from Old-Ghana to the present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast. Over time, as the Akan people migrated southwards and westwards and settled in different areas, their language evolved into the various Akan dialects spoken today, especially Twi, Fante, and Akuapem. Dolphyne (2006) states that "The name Akan is also used to refer to the people who live in most of the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. They speak languages /dialects which include Baule, Anyi (Aowin), Sehwi (Sanvil) Nzema, Ahanta, Fante, Akuapem, Asante, Brong, Wassaw, etc The ethnographic non-Akan L1 groups speak their respective languages which have traits of the proto-Akan language under the Tano language family. These languages/dialects are all closely related, and have a number of vocabulary in common" (p. xi-xii). In Ghana, the non-Akan L1 shares common geographical boundaries with the Akan and are potentially bilingual; they speak Akan as L2 in addition to their respective L1. This is the premises for Akan L1 versus non-Akan L1 forms.

The Akan are found predominantly in central and southern Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in 9 out of the 16 regions in Ghana, namely Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western and Western North Regions. The Akan speaking communities in the Oti region are surrounded by the Gbe language communities of Ewe, Guan and Gur. The Akan language has 13 dialects, namely Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Fante, Denkyira, Kwawu, Twifo and Wassaw. Some Bono speakers are found in Cote d'Ivoire. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level in Ghana. (Agyekum, 2023, 2016, p. 165).

Literature review and Language Ideology

Ideologies are shared and predictable beliefs and ideas of a people that are noted to be real and implicit in their everyday life situations within a period of time (see Agyekum, 2016, 2011, 2010). In ideological studies, meaning is socially constructed and to understand people's behaviour in social interaction, it is better to know their socio-cultural, environmental, political and historical background. The lack of this accounts for the misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Hall (2005) stipulates that "ideologies are mental frameworks —the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 26). A society's ideological concept on any aspect of their life make them see the concept as socially-owned, inner-perspective shared phenomenon, unchangeable, inevitable, indispensable, real and natural, and that is why they will always justify and rationalise its existence. Makus (1990) states that:

> Ideological representation cannot be explained by the inclinations of individuals, nor can the motive of trickery be necessarily assigned to it. Ideological

> formulations remain largely unconscious to both their speaker and their receivers. Consequently, although rhetors may choose what they will say, ideological theory maintains that these choices are determined within the common sense of the culture (p. 500).

The above indicates that culture, society and the environment have absolute power on the individual as far as ideology is concerned. In the society, ideologies operate as part of the systems of linguistic practices (Makus 1990, p. 503). Let us now look at language ideology.

Silverstein (1998) posits that "Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (p. 123). This is in line with Rumsey (1990), who posits that "linguistic ideologies are shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (p. 346). To this effect, the beliefs and systems in a people's culture and language that they rationalize, are shared and predictable during their application and execution. Language use and its interpretation are based on the linguistic and cultural ideology of the group. Speakers of a language must be aware of the structure and nature of their language, so as to justify its usage and how it affects their social and rational behaviour.

Verschueren (1999) opines that "language ideologies are habitual ways of thinking and speaking about language and language use which are rarely challenged within a given community" (p.198). The awareness of one's language ideology and how the language is appropriately used in language and cultural contexts affect thinking, speaking and communicative competence.

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.

255). Language ideologies are therefore embodied in the people's culture and their language and behaviour in different situations. Language ideology effectively coordinates between languages, culture, politics, psychological behaviour and sociocultural world (Agyekum, 2016, 2010). Kroskrity (2006) avers that "language ideologies are beliefs, or feelings about language as used in their social worlds" (p. 498). In all the notions of language ideology above, we can infer that language ideology provides a sociocultural understanding and interpretation of the political, cultural, economic, law and religious processes that are justifiable by the language community. Again, language ideology affects people's way of life and their local beliefs about language and culture.

Language ideology further links language to social identity, social class and ranks, status and indeixicality, gender, aesthetics, morality, epistemology, and operations of socio-economic institutions (see Agyekum, (2016; 2010), Kroskrity, (2001, p. 413) and Silverstein, (1998 p. 126). In discussing language ideologies from the standpoint of law, Haviland (2003) opines that "linguistic ideology are 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) Language ideology also discusses language policies in multilingual societies as to which language to be used in education, politics and judicial systems and why.

Irvine and Gal (2000) posit 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). In this view, Participants in the linguistic environment and their performances play a crucial role in language ideology. Language ideology marks people's status, identities, their communicative practices in terms of varieties of languages they choose based on their positions in the society (see Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough (1989, p. 2).

It is upon the multiple functions of language ideology that I am adopting it as the framework to analyse proverbs on Akan family to indicate that Akans are able to justify the existence of such proverbs on family as an important socio-cultural institution.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this paper was basically library studies and interviews under the qualitative methods. The interviewees were four renowned M. Phil Akan scholars of the University of Ghana, University of Education Winneba and University of Cape Coast.

A greater proportion of the data was collected from library studies using the Balme, African Studies, Linguistics and Sociology libraries all at the University of Ghana, Legon. I further picked some data from books on Akan proverbs, especially Adu Gyamfi (1999), Akrofi (1958), Appiah et al. (2000), Bannerman (1974), Ofei-Ayisi (1966), and Rattray (1941). I also collected some of the proverbs on family from Akan written literature books including fiction (Adi 1973: *Brako)*, drama (Amoako 1976: *Etire nni Safoa*) and poetry (Adi 1979: *Mewɔ Bi Ka*). Furthermore, I tapped some of the proverbs from Akan oral literature materials such as recorded folksongs, proverbs, folktales and dirges (Agyekum 2017, p. 29).

I crosschecked the aphorisms, symbolisms and imagery in the proverbs with a fellow renowned Akan retired lecturer at the University of Ghana (the late, Mr. Apenteng Sackey) who gave his comments. I also contacted Mr. Bosie Amponsah, and the late Opanin Alwasi Donkor, two retired broadcasters and Akan scholars in Kumasi and Accra respectively. I further consulted Agya Koo Nimo, an Akan folklorist and ethnomusicologist. These are renowned and fluent speakers in Akan who read and write the language very well. In the section on analysis, the proverbs are subjected to stylistic analysis with special attention to the semantic and pragmatic notions, imagery, metaphor, irony, repetition, parallelism and symbolisms. I adopted this same methodology in Agyekum (2017 and 2016, p165) on the concept of *ohia,* 'poverty' *in* Konadu's song.

Akan proverbs

In my previous works on proverbs, I explained the notions and concept of proverbs among the Akans. Since this paper is a continuation of the research on proverbs that relate to specific cultural concepts, I will adopt the same style of explaining the notions and concepts of the proverbs on family (Agyekum 2017, 2016 and 2012).

Definition and functions of proverbs

Proverbs are terse sayings that embody general truths or principles and ways of life. The general truths are based on the people's past experiences, philosophy, socio-cultural concepts and the environment (Agyekum, 2012, p.11). We will see how the Akans consider the usefulness of proverbs and witty sayings in describing the family in this paper. In Akan, the average Akan speaker has some conscious folk knowledge system about the value of proverbs as a class of linguistic expressions that depict or express the Akan philosophy and experiences about family. Most of the proverbs discussed in section 5 depict the Akan folk knowledge about proverbs.

Scholars of linguistic and oral literature like Agyekum (2005), Finnegan (2012), Okpewho (1992) and Yankah (1989) have researched extensively into proverbs. Proverbs are embodiments of traditional wisdom based on the experiences and socio-cultural life of our elders (see Agyekum (2005:9). In fact, in Akan indigenous communication, the use of proverbs is the acknowledged mark of one's communicative competence and oratory in the Akan language. Speakers' ability to use appropriate proverbs in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts depicts how competent and well versed they are in the language This is manifested especially in local arbitration (Agyekum, 2012, Yankah, 1989). For instance, in Agyekum (2016) and (2005), the oral artist Alex Konadu uses a series of proverbs to depict his competence in the Akan language. The crafty ways by which the proverbs are aesthetically interwoven to promote the song's communicative functions, also identify the artist's creativity.

Agyekum (2005) further posits that "In the Akan context, there are adages such as *ɛbɛ ne kasa mu abohemmaa,* 'the proverb is the most precious stone of speech', *ɛtwa asɛm tia,* 'it curtails matters', *ɛnka asɛm ho a, ɛnwie dɛ yɛ,*'without it, a speech does not acquire its sweetness" (p. 10). The indigenous Akan perceives the proverb as an indispensable and aesthetic device that is vital in speech, and as the salt of a language, without which the real taste of the "language dish" is not felt. This is similar to Achebe (1962) who indicates that in the Igbo culture, during conversations, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (p. 6). Similarly, Olantuji (1984) records that "The Fon of Benin as well as the Yoruba of Nigeria describe proverbs as the horses of speech" (p. 170). In all these examples, proverbs drive and propel the smooth running of conversations and speeches, and these mark the indispensability of proverbs in Akan discourse.

Proverbs are used as verbal strategies to calm or contain conflict situations especially in face-to-face communication in Akan (Agyekum 2010, Yankah 1991; 1989). An Akan speaker who is well versed in the culture and knows the background of his/her interactants uses the proper thematic proverbs as we find in this paper.

In discussing the use of African proverbs and the construction of masculinity and femininity, Hussein (2005) looked at how scholars of African literary arts worked hard and placed proverbs at a very higher level of communication (p. 61). Some of the scholars mentioned are Finnegan (2012), Oluwole (1997) and Ssetuba (2002). Let us briefly look at their assertions on proverbs. Ssetuba (2002) opines that in Africa "The proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life" p, 1). Hussein (2005) adds his voice to the indispensability of proverbs and how they are highly linked with philosophy and thought. He refers to (Oluwole, 1997) who records that some Africans posit that "proverbs are the analytic tools of thought, when thought is lost; it is proverbs that are used to search for it" (p, 100). Let us consider what Finnegan (2012) records about African proverbs by stating that "In many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs" (p. 380). Let us finally look at what Mommoh (2000) says about African proverbs from a philosophical point of view; he avers that:

> For anything to be known it has to be put into proverbs and for anything to be deknown it has to be removed from proverbs. Proverbs represent the last authority on the communal or public aspect of a people's beliefs or philosophy on any concept or issue. In short and in summary, for the traditional African, to be is to be in proverbs and not to be is not to be in proverbs (p. 362).

The proverbs on Akan family reflect the Akan philosophy, experiences and interactions in the family and their sociocultural importance. It is therefore crucial for Akan speakers to understand, appreciate and be able to use Akan proverbs appropriately in contexts.

Discussions

Semantic categorization of proverbs that relate to the family

The proverbs for analysis are semantically categorised into proverbs that express or communicate the Akan philosophy and experiences such as, situations or states about the Akan family. The proverbs were on: (1) the essence of the mother and daughters in a family, (2) marriage as an entry into a family, (3) sufferings from a bad family, (4) booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt, (5) unity and diversity in the family and (6) steadfastness, unity and identity in family. Some of the proverbs listed in this section are taken from Appiah and Appiah (2000: 243-246) and they will be indicated accordingly.

The essence of the mother and daughters in the family

Some proverbs capture the role of mothers and female children in the Akan family systems. Some of these are found in folksongs. Examples include:

1. *Wo ni/na wu a, na w'abusua asa.*
   'The death of your mother marks the end of your family.'

This proverb was used by one renowned highlife composer, Master Bob Akwaboa. The proverb implies that in Akan, the family is seen as a big unit with segments that relate very well, but there is none that can treat you fairly like your mother. Based on the matrilineal concept of inheritance, as soon as your mother dies, you are doomed. Your father could still be alive but he is not a member of your Akan family. It becomes worse if you have a polygamous father; your step mother may rather maltreat you.

2. *Yɛde mma mmaa na ɛkyekyere abusua*
   'A family is well established using daughters.' The core pillar of the family is thus the mother, that is why in every family, they expect the women to give birth, and childbirth should crucially include daughters. They are the ones who will give birth to sustain the matrilineal family. The sons will grow up and give birth and populate their wives' families since in Akan marriages, the children belong to the wives. It was based on this

notion that in the olden days, barrenness was considered a taboo and was a target for insult. This explains why women lamented when they gave birth to only males. It was alleged that it was a strong sign to mark the end of the family in future. Again, Akans ask *woahunu akokɔnini a ne mma di n'akyiri da*? 'Have you ever seen a cockerel that is followed by chickens?' This is a rhetorical proverb used by the Akan to establish a natural phenomenon. It means that it is the hen that hatches chickens and, as such, chickens know their mothers better and therefore follow them (the hen), instead of following the cockerel. The same phenomenon accounted for the notion of *badudwan*, 'tenth born ram'. When a woman gave birth to a tenth-born child, it was obligatory on the part of her brother to offer a ram to her husband in appreciation of populating their family for them. These days because of family planning and the economic situations, this ritual is no more or scarcely practised.

Marriage as an entry into a family

There are certain proverbs that look at the interface between family and marriage.

3. *Worepɛ abusua bi mu akɔ a, na woware mu*.
   'It is only when you want to join a family that you marry from it.' (Agyekum, 2012)

This confirms the fact that marriage stretches beyond the two partners, and the moment you marry from another family, you become an automatic member of that extended family. This notion is echoed by Nukunya (2003) that "When a couple is joined in marriage, their respective lineages and families automatically become affinal relatives while the children of the union are kin to all those above. It is the institution through which kinship ties are both established and extended" (p. 41). The affiliation continues even after the death of one of the couples or both;

the children remain as the agents of continuity of the bondage between the two families.[5]

In the olden days, family members and relations had such a big say in marriage that they could even break marriages. Again, the families had the power to sustain the marriage even when a couple wanted to break up. This is reflected in proverb 4.

4. *Abusua awareɛ sɛe abusua, ɔyɛ wo bɔne a, wontumi nka.*
'Family marriage destroys the family, when s/he offends you, you cannot complain.'

Abusuawareɛ, 'family marriage' can be cross-cousin marriage, and the two families would not like to see any form of divorce. The marriage can be on rocks, but the two families will ask the couple to carry on, with the hope that it could be mended. Meanwhile, cross-cousin marriage had the advantage of cementing the bondage between the two families.

Proverbs on the sufferings from a bad family

There are a series of proverbs that comment on the suffering one encounters in a bad and non-progressive family. The proverbs under this category were captured from Akan folksongs. A highlife composer, CST Amankwaa, composed a song with the title *M'abusua yi,* 'this family of mine' and gave a vivid account of his bad family where nothing goes on well with the members. The proverb on family from the song is:

5. *Wotɔ abusua nsansono mu a, woyɛ biribiara a ɛnyɛ yie.*
'If you fall into an "itching plant" family, nothing goes on well with you.'

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[5] We noted earlier on that kinship ties usually rest on the recognised blood relations and established social and kinship structure. Families' ties can be with other relations not necessarily by blood relations or social and kinship structure of a society (ibid section 1.1).

The family is conceptualised as a farm full of itching plants with some bristles that touch a person’s skin and bring irritation that causes people to scratch themselves (negative connotations). The Akan expression, *abusua nsansono,* ‘an itching family’ indicates some family conflicts. It depicts that when you are from such a family, there are always standing blocks and impediments that will obstruct you to move and concentrate on fruitful ventures. The time available is spent on the “metaphorical scratching of your body” that will block you to move forward into action in the farm. The late S. K. Oppong also had a song with the proverbial title *Abusua Bɔne*.[6]

6. *Abusua bɔne mu yɛ tena,*	‘It is difficult living in a bad family.’
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie,	‘Whether this life will be better.’
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛnyɛ yie a	‘Whether life will not be better.’
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie a	Whether this life will be better.’
Ene wo ara.	‘It will depend on you the individual.’

There is Nnwonkorɔ song that goes like this:

7. *Ɛkɔm de me o, maame*	‘I am hungry my mother.’
Ɛkɔm de me o, Awo	‘I am hungry my mother.’
Abusua bɔne ama ɛkɔm de me,	‘A bad family has caused my hunger.’

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[6] The title *Abusua Bɔne* is a truncated form of the proverb *Abusua b ne mu yE tena,* ‘it is difficult living in a bad family. J. A. Adofo has a song with the same title *Abusua b ne mu yE tena na* where he recounts what happens in an Asona clan where things are not going on very well, there are constant deaths.

Na ɛkɔm de me	'And I am hungry.'
Abusua bɔne ama ɛkɔm de me	'A bad family has caused my hunger.'
Na ebi redidi na ebi rebua da.	'Some are eating while others are suffering.'

Items 6 and 7 lament about having a bad family. In 6, you have to struggle in life since there is nobody to help you, and all will depend on you the individual. In 7, the oral artist remarks that there is injustice and unfairness in a bad family; while some enjoy life and are well fed, others suffer and starve.

Proverbs on booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt

There are certain proverbs that indicate that Akan family members would wish that they could benefit from the rich relative instead of assisting him/her. The proverbs talk about the family members' unwillingness to pay debts. Others want to share the booty and properties in the family, and leave some people out, and the family head wants to be "filled up" and always enjoy life. The following proverbs allude to such sentiments.

8a. *Abusua pɛ adeɛ kyiri ka.*
'The family wants booty but hates debt.'

One of the prevalent situations in Akan (and generally, Ghanaian families) is that when you are rich and prosperous, members will flock around you. However, when you are indebted, they will all run away from you because they loathe indebtedness. A similar proverb is;

8b. *Abusua pɛ dɛ kyiri ka.*
'The family likes enjoyment but loathes indebtedness.'

8c. *Abusua kyiri ka.*
'The matriclan abhors debts.'

When a matriclan is engulfed in debts, members display a high sense of apathy but when there is booty all of them want to get their shares. Other similar proverbs are:

9. *Ɛka pae abusua mu*.
'Debt splits the family.'

10. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, na abusua ne wo ka.*
'If you are rich, the family will love you'

11. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, abusua anhu wo a, wɔmmɔ pɔw*
'If you are rich, the family does not take any firm decision until you have been consulted.'

12. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, abusua anhu wo a, wɔnkasa.*
'If you are rich, the family does not speak until you have been consulted.'

13. *(Sɛ) wonni sika a, abusua kɔ agyina a, yɛnhwehwɛ wo*.
'If you do not have money, the family ignores you when they go into counsel.'

Proverbs 10-13 are syntactically marked by conditional clauses with the split conjunction *(Sɛ)...a.* The first part is optional while the second part *...a,* is obligatory. The conditional clauses indicate that X will occur if there is the presence of Y (Agyekum, 2016).

Agyekum (2017) records a song *Sika Frɛ Bogya* by Slim Young composed in 2014, where the artiste compared richness with poverty. He further stated that the power attached to money makes the rich powerful enough to control the entire family, while the poor in the family is not consulted at all as found in the above proverbs (p. 43).

The proverbs above are captured in one of the songs by J. A. Adofo, a Ghanaian highlife artiste. Both artistes link richness to family's preference, and the power of money. They confirm the notion that the family will want to enjoy the riches and booty from you as a wealthy member of the family, but will run away when you are indebted— they will actually despise you. The general principle is that the family will congregate around you when you have money but when you are indebted, they will disparage and disown you. Other proverbs employ irony as can be observed in proverb 14, which indicates that the love people have for a person assuages when s/he dies.

14. *Abusua dɔ funu.*
'A matriclan loves/cherishes the corpse.'
(Adu Gyamfi 1999 p.12)

Among the Akans, the family will do all they can to organise a befitting funeral for their dead relatives even if it demands borrowing from outside. When a person dies, that is the period all members of the family from far and near visit home. In that case, the death of a family member is a home calling. The question normally asked is why people fail to cater for the living, especially the poor, the sick and the needy, but readily treat corpses nicely and organise lavish funerals. The answer is found in the Akans' belief in life after death and the ancestral world as a carbon copy of the living world. A befitting burial and funeral will smoothly usher the deceased into the ancestral world. Other proverbs refer to greed among family members.

15. *Abusua monkyɛ nni na menkɔwe aboɔ.*
'The family should share the booty and I should chew stone.'

In all families, there are cheats and greedy people. The family likes to share the booty without thinking about the needy. They prefer to take all and leave the vulnerable nothing. The vulnerable person can thus quote proverb 15 above to indicate that they can take all and let him metaphorically chew stones (starve). On the contrary, whilst the needy are starving, the family head is always enjoying as in proverb 16 below.

16. *Abusuapanin mpere kɔm.*
‘The family head does not groan from hunger.’

The family head may get enough to satisfy himself. Among the Akans, the *abusuapanin*, ‘family head’ is the custodian of the family property including the land, gold and other aspects of wealth. He will therefore have enough to eat and hence will never cry of hunger. Traditionally, he could command any family member to send food items to his house but times have changed. Other proverbs that focus on the greediness of families and the fact that they want to enjoy and run away from debts, include:

17. *Abusua kyɛ di wie a, na ato agorɔ.*
‘If the matriclan finishes sharing all the booty they can play with you.’

Proverb 17 implies that when the family has squandered the estate and the property, they become friendly again. During the sharing, they cleverly strategise to eliminate other members who are remote from the owner of the property. It is when there is nothing left that they try to re-establish the unity in the family. A parallel proverb is:

18. *Abusua kyɛ ka, na wɔnkyɛ adedie.*
‘The matriclan shares a funeral debt but they do not share an inheritance.’

Appiah and Appiah (2000) explain that all the members of the family share the funeral debt to defray all the costs and expenditures; but it is the individual members who inherit (p. 244). The inheritance is by family gates so if you are not a core member of the gate you will never inherit. During the time for inheritance, they would use historical narratives to kick out all those who are not members of the inner circles of the family. However, in contemporary times the inheritor of the property takes greater chunk of the funeral debt.

Unity and diversity in the family

The Akan family is always an extended family with a lot of members, yet people truly consider siblings as the closest. In view of that, if you are an outsider, you may think that there is a strong and inextricable bond between the family members, but the reality is that there are in-groups. This is reflected in the following proverb.

19. *Deɛ ɔwoo mmaa mmienu na ɔde abusua paeɛ baeɛ.*
‘She who gave birth to two daughters is the one who
brought the split in family.’

It is assumed that if the two daughters give birth, their children would be closer as siblings more than as cousins. Other proverbs on unity and diversity are:

20. *Abusua yɛ dɔm, na wo na ba ne wo nua.*
‘A family is a group, but your mother’s child is your sibling.
(see Ofei-Ayisi 1966, 73, Appiah and Appiah 2000, Proverb
1262).

In times of hardships, you have to fall on your siblings but not on cousins or the entire remote family members. This confirms the Akan notion of *mogya mu yɛ duru,* (lit.) blood is thicker (than water). Ofei-Ayisi (1966) commented on this using proverb 21 below.

21. *Abusua de emu nnipa dɔɔso nanso sɛ ahokyere to wo a, wo na ba ankasa na ɔbɛboa wo.*
‘As for a family it is made up of a lot of people, but in times
of hardships, it is your mother’s child that will help you.’

This implies that despite the close-knit system of family found in Akan, we still rely on siblings for assistance. The real "in-groups" in the family is captured by the following:

22. *Abusua te sɛ kwaeɛ, wogyina akyire a, ɛbɔ mu koro. Wopini ho a, na wohunu sɛ dua koro biara wɔ ne siberɛ.*
'The matriclan is like a forest, if you are standing afar, it forms a canopy and a single unit, but if you draw closer you will see that each tree has its position (Appiah and Appiah, 2000, Proverb 1259).

23. *Abusua te sɛ nhwiren ɛgugu akuoakuo.*
'The family is like flowers; it blossoms in clusters (see Brempong 1991, 95).

A similar proverb is:

24. *Abusua hwedeɛ gu nkuruwa na me nko ara me deɛ na ogya da mu.*
'The grass of the matriclan grows in groups, mine alone is burning. (Appiah and Appiah Proverb 1252).

The above parallel proverbs highlight the Akan family system and how the inner members conceptualise it differently from outsiders. One proverb that emphasises the recognition of family members and the close relationship in the family is the concept of *ayiaseka,* 'funeral debt'. On the death of a family member, all family members pay part of the debt from the funeral to show their responsibilities as real family members. People outside the family rather donate cash (*bɔ nsawa*) or other materials to support the family.

25. *(Sɛ) abusua dɔ wo a, na wɔkyɛ ka a, wɔma wo tua bi.*
'If the matriclan loves you and they have a debt, they let you pay part of it.'

The above proverb therefore indicates that the family will contact you to pay *ayiaseka,* when they think that you are a core responsible member of the family. In view of these, non-native members of the family, including tenants, migrants and affinal relatives prefer to pay *ayiaseka* rather than to donate to depict that they are strong affiliates.

Steadfastness, unity and identity in family

There are certain proverbs that portray that despite the individualism and set groups in the family, the family is still considered as a unified and fortified group. This is indicated by the following proverbs:

26. *Abusua dua wɔntwa.*
 'The family tree is not cut'.

The implication is that one cannot disparage his/her origin. No matter how bad and mischievous your family is, it will forever remain your family. This is supported by similar parallel proverbs as follows:

27. *(Sɛ) w'abusua nyɛ a, wo deɛ ara ne no.*
 'If your family is not good that is all that you have.'

28. *(Sɛ) w'abusua nyɛ a, wonto ntwene.*
 'If your family is not good, you do not throw it away.'

29. *Abusua nyɛ asafo na yɛabɔ agyae.*
 'A family is not an *asafo*, 'musical group' that you join and leave at any time.'[7]

These proverbs imply that the moment you are born into a family, you remain in it till death and even after death when you become an ancestor. You cannot despise the family but rather, you would have to work hard to improve on the status of the family instead of running away because the family is bad. Appiah and Appiah (2000) state categorically that "Your family is your family, good or bad" (p. 246).

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[7] Asafo is a war musical group that you can join and decide to opt out anytime because of lack of interest, deceit, or imposition.

30. *Abusua twene yɛde afafa na ayere, nanso yɛde dadeɛ nkonta bɔ a, ɛnsuane.*
'The matriclan drum is covered with spider's web; and yet when it is beaten with iron sticks, it does not break.'
(See Appiah and Appiah 2000, Proverb 1261).

Proverb 30 is ironical in nature. Naturally, Akan drums are covered with very strong animal hides and no matter how hard we play them with wooden fork sticks they will not get torn. Contrarily, in proverb 30, the family drums are covered with spiders' webs that are very thin and soft and ironically beaten with iron sticks. However, no matter how hard they are beaten, they are not torn off. This metaphor depicts how strong family ties and networks can be even when they seem to be weak from the outsiders' viewpoint.

The proverbs above emphasise the strong knit between family members. There could be quarrels, animosity and litigation among members yet there should be a mode of restitution, and the family ties will never break for members to split. There is a similar proverb that comments on the elasticity of the family and how it is inextricably interwoven despite the difficult situations on the ground (Appiah and Appiah 2000 Proverb 1263).

31. *Abusua ayɛ nkɔnsɔnnkɔnsɔn: nkwa mu a, ɛtoa mu; owuo mu a, ɛtoa mu.*
"The matriclan is like a chain: in life they are joined, in death they are joined.'

The Akan matrilineal extended family is comparable to a chain where the elements are all connected to each other. It is very complex, and the people are connected irrespective of their geographical location and whether dead or alive; this is even extended to those unborn.

32. *Abusua nkyɛre afa kɔ.*
   'It takes no time for the family to rally to one side.'
   (See Adu Gyamfi 1999:12).

One can see family members having some in-fighting but when a third party wants to harm them, they will regroup and unite. The family will usually stand united against an outsider. This notion is captured by a popular Akan proverb that states:

33. *(Sɛ) tia ne tia nka a, ɛnkyerɛ sɛ baabifo mmɛfa nkɔdi.*
   'No matter how antagonising people from the two outskirts of a town are, it does not warrant an outsider to come for their booty.'[8]

34. *(Sɛ) wo busuani ne abebeɛ a, anka worenka sɛ ɔmfa ne to ntena akonnwa so.*
   'If your relative were to be a small water snail, you would not ask it to sit on a stool.' (Appiah and Appiah, proverb 1267).

The *abebeɛ*, 'small water snail' has not got buttocks but rather a long tail, thus it cannot sit down, but if you want to punish or ridicule it, you will force it to sit on a seat. No kinsman will do that to punish a fellow family member. This suggests the sympathy family members have for each other, but an outsider will punish the *abebeɛ* irrespective of the hardships it will go through; in other words, outsiders may not show sympathy for others.

35. *(Sɛ) wo busuani (biribi) ne abobɔnnua a, anka wobɛtɔ akuma ama no, ɛfiri sɛ nea ɔreyɛ no yɛ owuo adwuma.*
   (See Agyekum, 2005, p.7 proverb 16).[9]

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[8] In this proverb, the two outskirts of the town represent two opposing members of the extended family who despite their differences, may unite to defend their family and their family properties.

[9] The word *biribi*, 'something' is extended to mean somebody and further conceptualised as a family member as found in the two parallel proverbs (35 and 36).

‘If you were a relative of *abobɔnnua* ‘the woodpecker’, you would surely buy it an axe for it, because its task is risky and leads to death.’

36. *Wo biribi (busuani) ne ɔdamfoɔ a, anka worensere no koraa.*
‘If you were the madman’s relative you would not mock at him’.

Agyekum (2005) avers that the above proverbs are allusions to those who molest the needy and do not sympathise with them (p. 13). The poor person’s sufferings are reasons for jubilation to unsympathetic people. There is a similar proverb that states:

37. *Obiara mpɛ ba kwasea awoɔ nanso ɔpɛ n’agodie,*
‘Nobody likes to give birth to a moron but will enjoy playing with him/her.’

The other interpretations of the proverbs are that when you are related to somebody as a family, you will not deliberately embarrass him/her. The children of a mad person still regard him/her as their parent.

Conclusion

The paper has discussed the Akan concept of the family through proverbs. We analysed how proverbs display the linguistic ideology of the Akans and their worldview about the family. The proverbs were categorised into semantic domains that depict the nature and the sociocultural concepts of the Akan family. The proverbs expressed: *the essence of the mother and daughters in a family, family and marriage, family and internal marriage, the booty, enjoyment and loathing of indebtedness, unity and diversity of the family, and steadfastness, unity and identity in the family.*

We also examined the Akan extended family system. We have seen that the Akans have the matrilineal system hence most of the proverbs are based on the clan system, and family members are the children of a mother and her sisters and brothers. They exclude all members from one's father's family. The core pillar is thus the mother; that is why in every family they expect the woman to give birth, and childbirth should include having daughters for the sustainability of the family.

The current paper has emphasised the Akan clan system and how it is tied to the extended family system. It further touched on family and marriage and what wives normally expect from marriage and why they will usually focus on having a girl child instead of only boys. We further emphasised that another area where the family system and relationship become very strong and family members become cordial and helpful is during death, bereavement and funerals.

The current study reveals the complexities of the Akan matrilineal family system via their proverbs. With the introduction of the nuclear family system due to urbanisation, economic hardships, globalisation, westernisation, contemporary jobs, foreign religion and western education, the extended family system is breaking down. The dynamism in culture affects language usage including the use of proverbs. The implication is that some of the proverbs discussed in this paper are losing their importance, and the current generation may not use them.

It is possible that based on cultural and linguistic dynamism, some new proverbs may emerge to relate to the nuclear family, however, the current research did not encounter such new proverbs. Indeed, some members of the current generation may not support some of the proverbs discussed in this paper since the proverbs do not reflect the current realities of life. Future research could examine the composition of the Ghanaian family and its associated lexicon, idioms and proverbs in contemporary times.

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Extending the rape narrative: A corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the construction of rape in selected Nigerian dailies

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Abstract

This study examines the discursive construction of rape in news reports from the standpoint of critical linguistics. To do this, a corpus of news articles on rape cases was generated from five Nigerian newspapers (*The Punch, Vanguard, Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune and Sun)* published between 2018-2022. For concordance analysis, AntConc4 was deployed to tease out lexemes and collocates that index the construal of rape and actors. With insights from Wodak's (2001) model of critical discourse analysis, the study identifies (e) vilifying rape and its perpetrators through labelling, the empathy-evoking construal of rape victims' experience, and sexual offenders as blame-shifters as ideological constructs accentuated by discursive strategies. Existing studies have argued that the Nigerian press has largely promoted an androcentric order in the reporting of rape cases, to the detriment of rape victims. However, this study extends this view and suggests that Nigerian newspapers attempt to combat the heinous act of rape by vilifying, demonising, denigrating, and negatively portraying rape and perpetrators through linguistic constructs. These constructs are meant to project sexual offenders and their heinous acts to the public in highly repugnant and distasteful ways that would convince the public to desist from such acts.

Keywords: corpus-assisted approach, critical discourse analysis, media representation, Nigerian dailies, rape

Introduction

Sexual assault is a global phenomenon that cuts across societies. Some identified types of rape and sexual assault are stranger rape, seduction rape, date rape, acquaintance rape, marital or spousal rape, multiple assailants/gang rape, drug-facilitated rape, and child sexual abuse and assault, among others (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Rape culture is being promoted in many societies through what is regarded as rape myths. Rape myths are essentially ideological beliefs that serve as instruments for blaming the sexually abused and exempting the perpetrator. Benedict (1992) identifies some rape myths that shape media portrayal of women: women use the accusation of rape as a tactic for revenge; the assaulter is a pervert; only 'loose' women are victims; the assailant is motivated by lust; the assailant is usually black or lower class; rape is sex; women provoke rape; women deserve rape. With a female victim, rape can take on a variety of forms, including those that serve to show hatred, exert vengeance for a victim's rejection of a man's approaches, and/or satisfy male sexual craving. In Nigerian newspaper articles, rape reports frequently include these aspects (Osisanwo & Ojo, 2022).

The phenomenon of rape continues to be one of the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence and human rights violations in Nigeria (Ogunlana et al., 2021). According to some studies, rape continues to be a social problem in Nigeria as a result of inadequately validated evidence on rape cases and poor statistics on rape incidents by concerned government agencies and parastatals; underreporting by sexual assault victims due to fear of stigmatisation and victim blaming; a lack of trust in the criminal justice system; and police extortion and manipulation, among other factors (Adebajo, 2019; Amnesty International, 2021). In the Nigerian situation, one of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown measures adopted by many countries around the world to curtail its spread was a spike in rape incidents across the nation. The upsurge in rape cases in Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown was caused by poverty, lack of sex education, discriminatory gender norms and inadequate institutional and legal frameworks (Uwaegbute & Unachukwu, 2022). This period also witnessed a surge in femicide (Ogunlana et al., 2021). While studies exist on rape culture and gender-based violence from the standpoints of linguistics, sociology, psychology, and several other social science and humanistic disciplines, this study focuses on a corpus-assisted approach to engaging the discursive construction of rape in selected Nigerian dailies. The objectives driving this study are to (i) examine the various discursive structures in the construction of rape; (ii) extricate the representational strategies and lexical resources that index the constructions of rape in selected Nigerian dailies; and (iii) discuss gender-based assumptions that underlie the discursive construction of rape in selected Nigerian dailies.

Media representation of gender-based violence

The media, as a tool for constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing public perception on a variety of social issues, plays a significant role in shaping public perspectives and optics on rape and other sexual assaults (Kitzinger, 2013). Numerous studies have revealed that, in relation to the way victims of gender-based (or sexual) violence is portrayed, the wider media tends to sensationalise its reporting of violence against women, with discourses frequently being heavily gendered and persistently sexualised (O'Hara, 2012). 'Frames', which could be negative or positive, are strategic constructs deployed to present an issue or a personality in specific ways the text producer desires, thereby influencing public perception. To support a specific problem definition, interpret and analyse social issues, and make an evaluation or moral judgement in a communicative text, a high level of prominence and salience is given to some aspects of perceived reality in consonance with the ideology the media seeks to project (O'Hara, 2012). Framing, as such, is a potent discursive tool for projecting representations and ideologies. Consequently, media framing and representation in media reportage of gender-based violence can largely influence not only dominant public thinking but also the responses of policymakers, public authorities, and institutions (Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff, 2008).

In congruence with the power the media wields in framing and representing gender-based violence, Breen et al. (2017) argue that certain media outlets frequently add extraneous information to new stories on rape for no other reason than to make them more "sensationalistic," even though it was unnecessary to do so to convey the gravity of the crime. This act has been called the media's 're-victimisation' of rape victims (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014). Media re-victimisation refers to the use of linguistic choices and frames to convey the idea that a rape victim was responsible for the rape by either dressing indecently, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or other blame-shifting strategies (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014). Benedict (1992) earlier projected this stance on the notion of media re-victimisation of sexual violence victims. Although studies have established that both male and female genders can be victims of rape (Kunnuji & Esiet, 2013), the media seems to have, over time, given prime attention to the reportage of female victims. More so, many societies have been plagued with the rampancy of male violence against women or female gender. In this line of thought, Dare (2016) submits that a typical Nigerian journalist is incredibly sensitive to female concerns and takes advantage of any chance to say something important regarding women.

Gender/sexual violence discourse and problem statement

Gender-based violence has, over the years, been a subject of interest to scholars in communication and journalism, feminism and gender studies, social psychologists, media experts, and public policy analysts globally. Literature abounds in studies on the representation of sexual violence, domestic violence, non-domestic violence, and several other gender issues in media reporting (Gold & Auslander, 1999; Adcock, 2010; Animasahun, 2015; Ahmed, 2018). Scholars have also continually explored the function of ideology in the media's framing and representation of gender issues (McNeil, Harris & Fondren, 2012; Tijani-Adenle, 2016; Egen et al., 2020). An avalanche of studies exists on rape from different perspectives, for instance, legal and justice systems (Steyn & Steyn, 2008), psychology and mental health (Campbell & Raja, 1999), media (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014), and linguistics (Bohner, 2001; Ahmed, 2018; Babatope & Muhyideen, 2019). Belmonte and Negri (2021) explore social representations of gender-based violence in the Italian press to determine the role played by the media in perpetuating a social structure that fosters inequality and power relations. The following thematic focuses are identified by the authors as socially constructive practices: the normalisation of violence; denying women's subjectivity; the "de-responsibilisation" of the violence perpetrator; the episodic narrative of violence; and an unbalanced representation of victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, the authors observe that in the narrative of gender-based violence, attention is preponderantly given to the crimes committed against women with an emphasis on *women* and the investigative processes and legal proceedings. Such framing and representation are presented in a way that conceals male responsibility and denies that abuse, violence, and femicide are typically committed by men.

Within the Nigerian context, Nwabueze and Oduah (2014) underscore media framing and representation, as well as the frequency of news reports on rape cases in the selected Nigerian newspapers. The 'innocence frame', which depicts victims of rape as innocent of the crime, was found to be the dominant frame of rape stories in newspapers. In contrast, the 're-victimisation frame', which depicts victims as responsible for the incident, was found to be the least common. Taking a cursory look at the coverage and reportage of rape cases in two Nigerian dailies, Tade and Udechukwu (2018) identify the attribution frame, morality frame, human interest frame, and episodic frame as framing strategies for crafting news reports on rape. The episodic frame only centres on the personality, temperament, or motivational condition of the individuals involved. Morality frames place greater emphasis on the ethical or religious context of an issue or event. The reason for using the human-interest frame was to elicit an emotional response from the viewers and establish a personal connection with the victim. The attribution of responsibility frame portrays issues by assigning the cause or solution of a problem to someone, the government, or an external entity rather than the individual. The study further found that some factors contributed to the low rates at which rape cases were reported to authorities and covered in the media, some of which are fear of the assailant, religious orientations, family ties, stigmatisation, and the inability to access media correspondents and security personnel. In another study, Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020) uncover the deployment of the pity frame, heartlessness frame, and predominantly 'defenselessness frame' by selected Nigerian newspapers in the coverage of incidents of sexual assault and other forms of violence against women in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Nigeria. Through the lenses of quantitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis, Ogunlana et al. (2021) investigate the digital media reportage of the trend of femicide and rape incidents that occurred in Nigeria both during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. They found, unsurprisingly, that most of the rape victims (97% of them) were females, while the majority of the perpetrators were males. They also discovered that the media - Nigerian online newspapers, Facebook and Twitter as case studies - did not attribute blame to victims in the portrayal of rape and femicide. The discussion of the victim was done more passively, and this may have contributed to the welcome unpopularity of victim blaming in some reports.

This study closely relates to Osisanwo and Ojo's (2022) investigation of the discursive construction of female rape victims (FRV) in selected Nigerian newspapers. While it focuses on a group of participants in the reportage of rape cases, the female gender precisely, this study probes the lexical and discursive construction of the act and the victims and perpetrators of rape in selected Nigerian newspapers. Therefore, this study is born out of the insufficient extant linguistics-oriented studies on rape, as constructed in Nigerian newspaper reports. Adopting a corpus-assisted approach, the study underscores the lexical construction and discursive representation of social actors in rape cases in the Nigerian press.

Material and Methods

The study adopts a corpus-assisted critical discourse analytical approach, a synergetic methodology of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis (Baker et al., 2008). Critical discourse analysis examines social practices that manifest in politics, gender, institutions, and the media as they reflect power and ideology within the social strata in which they operate. Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach (DHA) systematically integrates all available background information to analyse and interpret the text's numerous layers, either written or spoken. In addition to extra-linguistic, social and sociological elements, the history of an organisation or institution, and situational frames, the focus of DHA is on the intertextual and interdiscursive links between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses (Reisigl & Wodak, 2008). The representational categorisations of social actors, actions, phenomena, and events are achieved through discursive strategies. This study adopts Wodak's DHA due to the relevance of its discursive strategies in explaining rape as a social issue of historical practice. For instance, the discursive strategy of 'perspectivisation' relates to ideological standpoint and positioning, and empowers text producers (the five newspapers in the context of this study) to signal and project their stances in relation to the discursive framing of rape as a recurring social vice and menace both historically and in the present. Corpus Linguistics (CL) adopts a system of computerised technology to carry out quantitative analysis on massive volumes of language data with the aid of numerous statistical methods and measurements, including frequency, keyness, and concordance. Frequency and keyness show patterns and topics hidden in the data. Not only does CL methodology allow the reduction of researcher bias, but it also enables the explication of contextualised findings. In essence, CL through frequency patterns, aids in uncovering various macro-contexts in data. It also strengthens CDA results, which are more likely to be reliable and valid if they are supported by a large dataset (Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). The adopted synergetic methodology engages the use of computerised methods to identify frequent and statistically significant linguistic patterns in conjunction with qualitative reading (Baker & Levon, 2015). According to some prominent scholars in corpus-based or corpus-assisted discourse studies (Baker, 2006; Baker *et al.*, 2008; Flowerdew, 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008; Partington *et al.,* 2013), CL can respond to socially relevant research issues about power, inequality, identity, and change when using this methodology. The quantitative analytical approach represents the micro-level analysis of data, while the lexical and grammatical patterns are taken as indexes of discursive constructs and constitute macro- or meta-level analysis.

Table 1: Newspapers, news items and tokens

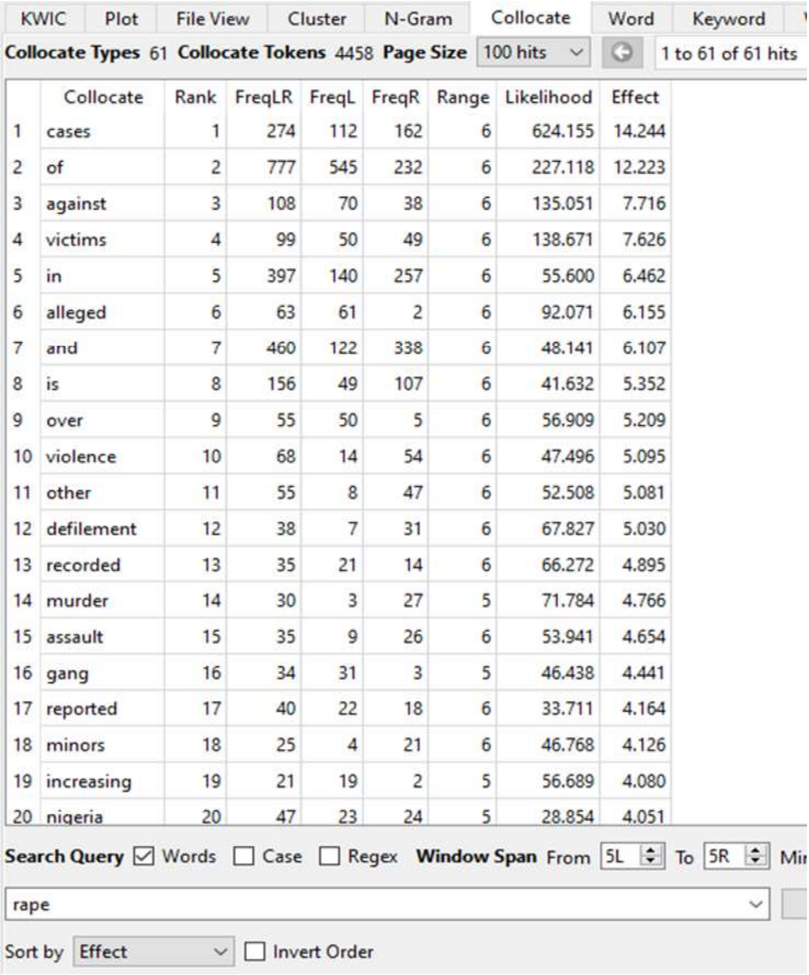
Newspaper	**No of Texts (news items)**	**Words (Tokens)**
The Punch	55	17,482
Sun	49	24,333
Vanguard	353	95,017
Daily Trust	16	12,013
Nigerian Tribune	30	12,647
Total	503	161,492

The study draws data from five Nigerian dailies: *Punch, Vanguard, Nigerian Tribune Daily Trust* and *The Sun*. These newspapers significantly represent coverage across the western, eastern and northern parts of Nigeria. We selected them based on wide circulation and readership, and availability of archived reports on rape cases. These archived news articles on rape cases are, unlike other mainstream and less mainstream newspapers, easily accessible on the online platforms of the selected newspapers. News items spanning 2018 to 2022, drawn on to build the corpus, constitute 503 news items, culminating in 161,492 words as shown in Table 1 above. This period, especially the COVID-19 lockdown era, was characterised by an increase in the occurrence and media reporting of rape (Ogunlana et al., 2021). News articles on rape cases were searched on online platforms of selected newspapers through Google and manually gathered. Each news article culled from each of the selected newspapers was stored as a document file and fed into *AntConc4* for concordance and collocational analysis.

Given the corpus orientation adopted, the concordance programme *AntConc4*, developed by Laurence Anthony, was deployed and fed with the created corpus to generate concordance lines for search queries such as ‘rape’, ‘gang-raped’ and ‘devil’, and to reveal the collocational patterns within the generated concordances. For qualitative analysis, some news contents that explicate the identified discourses surrounding the construction of rape in the data were taken as excerpts. These excerpts were given context-based explanations through the orientations of critical discourse analysis. While the corpus created for this study is a specialised corpus designed to provide insights into discourses of rape in Nigerian news media, it should be noted that this is not a diachronic corpus study. While the corpus provides a sample of the rape discourses presented to and engaged with by large audiences in Nigeria, it is not representative of all news reports on rape cases for these dates.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive representative excerpts, which are quantitatively corroborated by concordances of keywords in context and collocates extracted from *AntConc*, are presented below to unveil the construction of rape perpetrators, victims, and the act of rape in the five selected Nigerian dailies. The study identifies three key discourses: (e)vilifying rape and its perpetrators through labelling; empathy-evoking construal of rape victims' experience; and sexual offenders as blame-shifters, and explicate them through discursive strategies.



Collocate Types 61 **Collocate Tokens** 4458 **Page Size** 100 hits 1 to 61 of 61 hits

	Collocate	Rank	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Range	Likelihood	Effect
1	cases	1	274	112	162	6	624.155	14.244
2	of	2	777	545	232	6	227.118	12.223
3	against	3	108	70	38	6	135.051	7.716
4	victims	4	99	50	49	6	138.671	7.626
5	in	5	397	140	257	6	55.600	6.462
6	alleged	6	63	61	2	6	92.071	6.155
7	and	7	460	122	338	6	48.141	6.107
8	is	8	156	49	107	6	41.632	5.352
9	over	9	55	50	5	6	56.909	5.209
10	violence	10	68	14	54	6	47.496	5.095
11	other	11	55	8	47	6	52.508	5.081
12	defilement	12	38	7	31	6	67.827	5.030
13	recorded	13	35	21	14	6	66.272	4.895
14	murder	14	30	3	27	5	71.784	4.766
15	assault	15	35	9	26	6	53.941	4.654
16	gang	16	34	31	3	5	46.438	4.441
17	reported	17	40	22	18	6	33.711	4.164
18	minors	18	25	4	21	6	46.768	4.126
19	increasing	19	21	19	2	5	56.689	4.080
20	nigeria	20	47	23	24	5	28.854	4.051

Search Query ☑ Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex **Window Span** From 5L To 5R

rape

Sort by Effect ☐ Invert Order

Figure 1: Collocates of *rape* and their statistical value

Figure 1 above shows the collocates of the key linguistic item, *rape*. For statistical significance, we utilise the Effect-Size Metric (ESM), which incorporates the T-score measure to evaluate the collocate strength of the keyword rape, as well as the patterned co-occurrence between the node of interest (rape) and collocates. We rely on *AntConc's* built-in t-score measure.

The essence of this collocational measure is to establish the association between a query term and collocate. Harper's (2008) argument motivates the choice of t-score as a reliable measurement for collocates, indicating the confidence with which one can assert the existence of an association. In essence, a higher t-score value would statistically imply a higher level of confidence that a co-occurring association exists between the query node and collocates, and vice versa. Therefore, the higher the t-score value, the stronger the collocate (Harper, 2008).

The contextual significance of the top 20 ranking collocates out of 61 hits generated through the 'sort by' function in *AntConc* is explained because our focus is on collocates with higher t-score values. Therefore, the top 20 collocates hold significant value and, statistically speaking, exhibit a strong association with the keyword *rape*, as they are present throughout the entire data set. According to Huston (2002), collocates significantly contribute to the overall meaning of a text because they convey the implicit meaning of messages.

The understudied Nigerian newspapers, as depicted in Figure 1. above, use lexical constructs to capture the debilitating effects of rape and the traumatic consequences that victims face. This is significantly captured statistically through the collocates *violence* (5.095 as effect-size value), *defilement* (5.030 as effect-size value), *murder* (4.766 as effect-size value), and *assault* (4.654 as effect-size value) as these collocates show a strong association with *rape*. Additionally, the patterned co-occurrence value of the collocate *gang* (4.441) is symbolic and shows that gang rape, which is considered to be more physically and psychologically devastating, is one of the prevalent kinds of rape that bedevils Nigeria as a society. Another collocate, *minors* with an effect-size value of 4.126, evinces a strong association with rape incidents in Nigeria. This statistical evidence shows an increase in minors as rape victims. This is, therefore, a wake-up call to policymakers in Nigeria to protect the lives of minors and shield them from ravenous sexual offenders so as not to build a community of irate and psychologically battered people.

Furthermore, the collocate word *increasing* features among the top ranking collocates based on its significant value of effect-size of 4.080. This strongly suggests that the newspapers understudied decry the worrisome rise in the index of rape incidents in Nigeria. Although some studies (Tade & Udechukwu, 2018; Ogunlana et al., 2021) argue that rape is underreported in some parts of Nigeria, the strong affinity of rape with the collocate words *reported* (with an effect-size value of 4.164) and *recorded* (with an effect-size value of 4.895) suggests that the news media made some efforts in unveiling the noisome spread of rape, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown period, although more strategic and result-oriented efforts were expected from the media.

(e)vilifying rape and its perpetrators through labelling

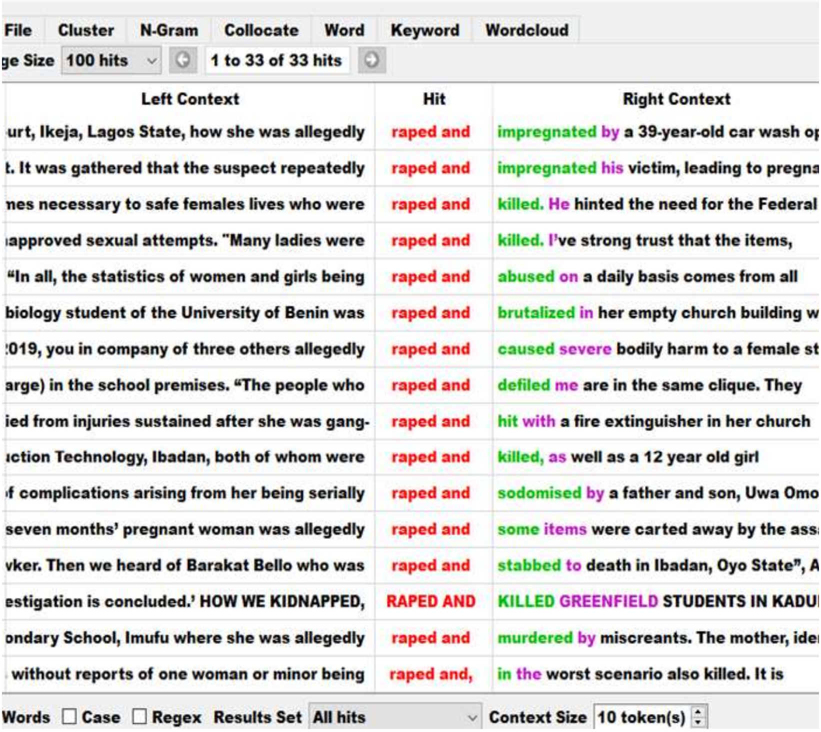
The media often latches onto the power of language for the cognitive construction of ideas, actions, and people (Kitzinger, 2013). Media framing and constructs have been observed to strongly influence the public's perception of rape and other forms of sexual violence (Belmonte & Negri, 2021). In Excerpts 1–3 below, the framing of rape, rape victims, and perpetrators is actualised through labelling. These labels express negative valence and pejorative representation and are indexes of vilification of rape perpetrators and denigratory portrayal of rape.

> **Excerpt 1: Tackling Nigeria's rape crisis**
>
> Rape is a *violent crime* that *dehumanises* the victims and *devalues* their sense of self-worth. *There must be no place in our society for sexual predators.* We must chain and lock this *monster* in a dungeon. Our womenfolk and vulnerable people of all ages must be adequately protected. (*Vanguard*, June 18, 2020)

In Excerpt 1, the lexical choice “violent crime” is an instance of predication deployed in discursively qualifying rape as an evil act. Also, “violent crime” is a form of evaluative attribution that expresses negativity in the text producer’s stance on rape. The verbal elements “dehumanises” and “devalues” are denotative terms that capture the demoralising effect of rape on victims and the havoc it wreaks on their self-esteem and psychological health.

> **Excerpt 2: Corpse of six-year-old rape victim found in Kaduna burial ground**
>
> On June 28, while locals were in their houses due to the lockdown orchestrated by COVID-19, early risers had woken up to the gory scene of the corpse of the little girl in a Mosque whose *killer(s)* is yet to be apprehended up till November 8, when another girl, Aisha Ya’u, was found dead in the same circumstance but this time at a burial ground. (*Sun*, November 9, 2020).

Excerpt 2 provides a conceptual mapping of sexual offenders as criminals and “killers” who are known for acts of violence. The description of sexual offenders with the nominal “monster” and “killer” further expresses an ideological stance on rape. “Monster” is an animal prosody and a depersonalising metaphor that projects rapists as beings who do not deserve to live among humans. This notion is substantiated in Excerpt 2, where the rapist carried out the act of killing and demonstrated cruelty by abandoning the victim’s corpse at a burial ground. Given the epistemic knowledge of monsters as beings that are not meant to exist in human society, the text producer exploits the perspectivisaation strategy in expressing the ideological positioning of distancing, which dissociates peace-loving humans from sexual offenders. To magnify this, the deictic element “our” indicates association with the plights of “women folks" in society. The expression "There must be no place in our society for sexual predators" is a form of membership categorisation that explains the otherisation of "sexual predators". In addition, the representation of victims as "vulnerable people of all ages" indexes the nomination strategy as a metonymic construct that considers "vulnerable people" such as children and the elderly. This construction is strategic, especially because cases of paedophilia and carnal knowledge among the elderly are reported in the media as plaguing society. By extension, "vulnerable people" could also mean people with disabilities or the physically challenged, whose tendency to struggle against and resist sexual predators and assailants is relatively low. In light of the above, it can be argued that the print media do not hold back in negatively projecting and vilifying rape and rapists.



ge Size 100 hits

1 to 33 of 33 hits

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
urt, Ikeja, Lagos State, how she was allegedly	raped and	impregnated by a 39-year-old car wash op
t. It was gathered that the suspect repeatedly	raped and	impregnated his victim, leading to pregna
nes necessary to safe females lives who were	raped and	killed. He hinted the need for the Federal
approved sexual attempts. "Many ladies were	raped and	killed. I've strong trust that the items,
"In all, the statistics of women and girls being	raped and	abused on a daily basis comes from all
biology student of the University of Benin was	raped and	brutalized in her empty church building w
019, you in company of three others allegedly	raped and	caused severe bodily harm to a female st
arge) in the school premises. "The people who	raped and	defiled me are in the same clique. They
ied from injuries sustained after she was gang-	raped and	hit with a fire extinguisher in her church
ction Technology, Ibadan, both of whom were	raped and	killed, as well as a 12 year old girl
f complications arising from her being serially	raped and	sodomised by a father and son, Uwa Omo
seven months' pregnant woman was allegedly	raped and	some items were carted away by the ass
vker. Then we heard of Barakat Bello who was	raped and	stabbed to death in Ibadan, Oyo State", A
estigation is concluded.' HOW WE KIDNAPPED,	RAPED AND	KILLED GREENFIELD STUDENTS IN KADU
ondary School, Imufu where she was allegedly	raped and	murdered by miscreants. The mother, ide
without reports of one woman or minor being	raped and,	in the worst scenario also killed. It is

Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex Results Set All hits Context Size 10 token(s)

Figure 2: Keywords in context for *raped and*

The screenshot above provides a concordance analysis of the construction of rape. The query term *raped and* is chosen to tease out other physically and psychologically demoralising actions performed in addition to rape against victims. As indicated in the right context of *raped and*, the activities of sexual offenders are negatively portrayed as evil, violent, and devilish through active verbs such as "hit", "killed", "brutalised", "abused", "stabbed", "murdered" and "sodomised" these action words are collocates of "rape," implicating rape as a disastrous and traumatic practice for women. According to Wodak (2001), these collocates instantiate the predication strategy that explains the discursive qualification of negatively construed actions. These collocates form discursive patterns that explain the media's negative perception and projection of rape and rapists.

Table 2: Frequencies of nominal choices for framing sexual offenders

Nominal choices framing sex offenders	**Frequency**
Man	613
Men	337
Rapists	123
Rapist	88
Monster	15
Abuser	13
Pervert	9
Killer	55
Miscreant	8
Assailant	15
Paedophiles	21
Murderer	15
Beast	13

Brutal	10
Attacker	14

The nominal choices in Table 2 point to the negative categorization of sexual offenders, which relates to the discursive strategy of 'nomination' (Wodak, 2001). Through the corpus tool deployed, the lexemes above and their frequencies in news reports further establish the media's denigration and lambasting of sexual assault and sexual offenders. These nominal prosodies are negative imbuements of sex offenders. Again, the above animating and inhuman prosodies, such as "monsters" and "beast", and agent role terms such as "abuser", "killer", "attacker", and "murderer", are viewed as metaphoric framing that affirms the positioning or perspective of the media about rape and rapists.

Empathy-evoking construal of victims' experience

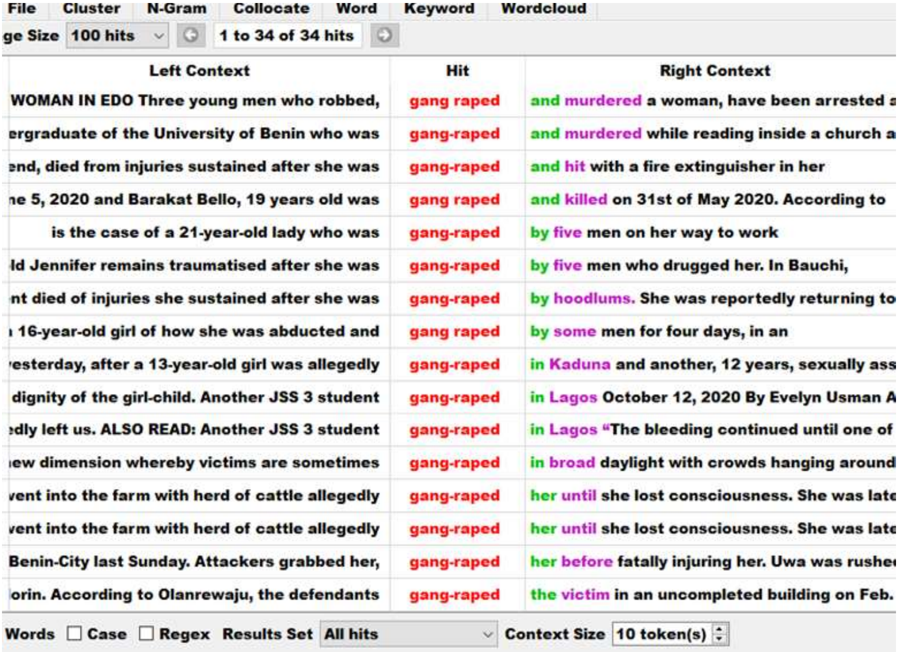
The experiences of rape victims are captured in ways that denote injustice, inhumanity, and empathy. Just as the strong presence of the collocate *increasing* with an effect-size value of 4.080 indicates in Figure 1, the first sentence of Excerpt 3 is suggestive of the notion that sexual violence against women is worrisomely gaining root in Nigeria:

> **Excerpt 3: Defiled on arrival: Season of agony for Nigerian infants *hunted, raped* by perverts**
>
> …At a time when sexual violence against women and the girl child has been a burning issue globally, the story of Khadijah may be shocking, but is, unfortunately, not the first in recent times. In fact, in the last few months, it seems *infants are increasingly becoming unsafe* in Nigeria, as ritualists and paedophiles *defile babies* barely out of their mother's wombs. (*The Punch*, May 13, 2018).

Therefore, the media is quick to sympathise with victims who are alive and can only be hunted by this traumatic experience. In Excerpt 3, the text producer leans on 'argumentation' in disclosing and affirming the stance that "infants are increasingly becoming unsafe" in the country. In voicing the media's position and concern, the lexical choice "increasingly" stands to index the discursive strategy of intensification. There is a conceptual mapping of children and infants as prey who are hunted by randy men: "perverts", "ritualists", and "paedophiles". Additionally, a sense of fear, dread, and insecurity is implied in the excerpt. Notably, the text harps on the degeneration of security in a nation where rapists not only satisfy their sexual cravings but also rape and kill for money rituals.

> **Excerpt 4: Six-year-old allegedly raped to death in Kaduna, body dumped in cemetery**
>
> Earlier, a six-year-old girl's l*ifeless body* was found at a cemetery in Kurmi Mashi on Sunday. It was suspected that the girl was *raped to death* before *her body was dumped at the cemetery*. A couple of months ago, the body of a 6-year-old girl suspected to be *raped* was found in a Mosque in the same community. (*The Punch*, November 10, 2020).

Furthermore, a sense of empathy is evoked with the description of the experiences of the girl child who was "defiled" (Excerpt 3) and another who was "raped to death" and whose "lifeless body was dumped at the cemetery (Excerpt 4). It can be said that the media do not hold back in describing the horrific experiences of some infants who are "defiled on arrival" while others are sent to an early grave. The purpose of this is to appeal to the emotions of the audience and to express their stance on the evil of rape and sexual violence, knowing the trauma and psychological damage such an experience could instil in a growing child. In Fig.1 above, the collocate *victims* has a high effect-size value of 7.626 and this shows its close association and patterned co-occurrence with the key term *rape* in all of the reportage. The word *victims* in itself suggests suppression, oppression and all forms of inhuman acts that accrue to rape which the female gender has suffered. Invariably, this collocate appears constantly to provoke empathy for rape victims in the heart of news consumers. Figure 3 below attempts to provide a concordance description of the emotive lexical choices deployed to construct the experience of victims of sexual molestation empathetically. Gang-raping is another heinous act committed by several attackers against a rape victim. Apart from the query term *rape* earlier used in Figure 2, the keyword *gang-raped* is selected to unveil the reported consequences of rape within the generated concordance lines.



ge Size 100 hits
1 to 34 of 34 hits

Left Context	Hit	Right Context
WOMAN IN EDO Three young men who robbed,	gang raped	and murdered a woman, have been arrested a
ergraduate of the University of Benin who was	gang-raped	and murdered while reading inside a church a
end, died from injuries sustained after she was	gang-raped	and hit with a fire extinguisher in her
ne 5, 2020 and Barakat Bello, 19 years old was	gang raped	and killed on 31st of May 2020. According to
is the case of a 21-year-old lady who was	gang-raped	by five men on her way to work
ld Jennifer remains traumatised after she was	gang-raped	by five men who drugged her. In Bauchi,
nt died of injuries she sustained after she was	gang-raped	by hoodlums. She was reportedly returning to
16-year-old girl of how she was abducted and	gang raped	by some men for four days, in an
esterday, after a 13-year-old girl was allegedly	gang-raped	in Kaduna and another, 12 years, sexually ass
dignity of the girl-child. Another JSS 3 student	gang-raped	in Lagos October 12, 2020 By Evelyn Usman A
dly left us. ALSO READ: Another JSS 3 student	gang-raped	in Lagos "The bleeding continued until one of
ew dimension whereby victims are sometimes	gang-raped	in broad daylight with crowds hanging around
vent into the farm with herd of cattle allegedly	gang-raped	her until she lost consciousness. She was late
vent into the farm with herd of cattle allegedly	gang-raped	her until she lost consciousness. She was late
Benin-City last Sunday. Attackers grabbed her,	gang-raped	her before fatally injuring her. Uwa was rushe
orin. According to Olanrewaju, the defendants	gang-raped	the victim in an uncompleted building on Feb.

Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex Results Set All hits Context Size 10 token(s)

Figure 3: Keywords in context for *gang-raped*

In the concordance screenshot, 'punchline' emotive constructs such as "she lost consciousness", "the bleeding continued", "drugged her", "died of injuries", "died of injuries sustained" (right context) and "remains traumatised" (left context) express the high level of victimisation, trauma, and multiple jeopardies that rape victims are subjected to. These lexical choices are semantically related to death and the traumatic process of dying. The construal of such an experience evokes empathy for the female rape victims and emphasises the evil effects and consequences of rape.

Sexual offenders as blame-shifters

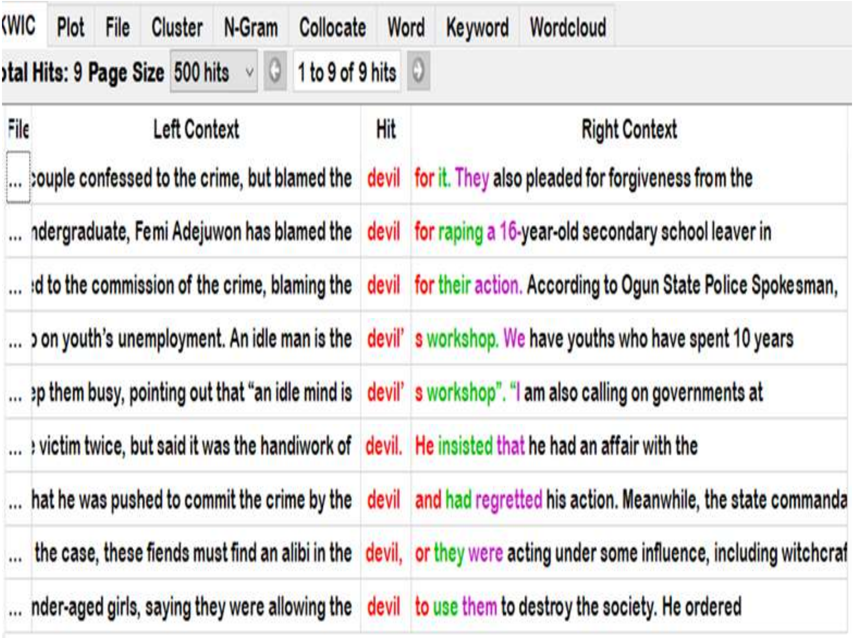
In most cases, specifically in the Nigeria context, when individuals have been apprehended for being involved in illegal activities, there is a common practice of shifting blame to "the devil" to appeal to the sense of emotion of law enforcers and to seek pardon or a considerate verdict. This is a shared social knowledge among Nigerians (Nairaland, 2013). The perpetrators present themselves as having their minds controlled by a stronger spiritual force. In this case, the metaphysical devil is always a victim of the blame game because of the shared knowledge occasioned by the religious orientation of the devil as the initiator of all evil works. This study considers blame-shifting as a strategy used by perpetrators to trigger exoneration from punishment to be meted out to sexual offenders. Rape perpetrators refuse to take responsibility for not controlling their sexual urges and therefore ascribe blame to a greater spiritual force of manipulation, as shown in the excerpts below:

> **Excerpt 5: 'I was pushed by the devil', says undergraduate arrested for rape in Ondo**
>
> An undergraduate, Femi Adejuwon has *blamed the devil* for raping a 16-year-old secondary school leaver in Akure, the Ondo state capital. He pleaded for mercy, regretting his crime and promised to turn over a new leaf. (*Vanguard,* April 4, 2020)

Excerpt 6: Rape: Castrate them all

> One cannot help wondering what *demon* has taken over the menfolk to resort to this basest of means to satisfy sexual urges. Of course, as is usually the case, these *fiends* must find an alibi in the *devil,* or they were acting under some influence, including *witchcraft spells.* (*Sun*, May 3, 2021)

In Excerpt 5, the rape perpetrator "blamed the devil for raping a 16-year-old secondary school leaver". The offender presents himself as an innocent but manipulated being and makes a commitment to "turn a new leaf". Similarly, in Excerpt 6, the text producer leans on a 'perspectivization technique' in expressing the exact excuse of sexual offenders who seem to have been emboldened by the devil to perpetrate rape. The attribution of blame to the devil is informed by the absence of an iota of sanity, morality, and humanity that rapists are expected to have, which should serve as a prompt to desist from the act of rape. The lexemes and semantic prosodies "demon", "fiends", "devil", and "witchcraft spells" suggest the impact of spiritual manipulation on rapists. Invariably, such a belief provides leeway for ascribing blame and responsibility to the devil. While such expressions are not accepted as valid, especially within legal jurisdiction, male sexual offenders are often fond of making such excuses for their acts of cruelty (Miller, 2024).



File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
...	ouple confessed to the crime, but blamed the	devil	for it. They also pleaded for forgiveness from the
...	ndergraduate, Femi Adejuwon has blamed the	devil	for raping a 16-year-old secondary school leaver in
...	d to the commission of the crime, blaming the	devil	for their action. According to Ogun State Police Spokesman,
...	on youth's unemployment. An idle man is the	devil'	s workshop. We have youths who have spent 10 years
...	p them busy, pointing out that "an idle mind is	devil'	s workshop". "I am also calling on governments at
...	victim twice, but said it was the handiwork of	devil.	He insisted that he had an affair with the
...	hat he was pushed to commit the crime by the	devil	and had regretted his action. Meanwhile, the state commanda
...	the case, these fiends must find an alibi in the	devil,	or they were acting under some influence, including witchcraf
...	nder-aged girls, saying they were allowing the	devil	to use them to destroy the society. He ordered

Figure 4: Keywords in context for *devil*

The screenshot above shows the keyword "devil" and the generated words in context. In expressing opinions about rape, the concordance analysis shows the text producers' use of allusion in expressing their stance on the act of rape. The common saying, "an idle hand is the devil's workshop," is meant to caution against getting involved in vices that result from idleness and non-productivity. In this sense, sexual offenders are regarded as idlers, although not all those convicted of rape are jobless or idle. In the context of this belief, rapists quickly resort to blame-shifting to appeal for clemency from the justice system (Ikwechegh, 2018; Miller, 2024).

Conclusion

This study interrogated the discourse of rape within the context of discourse analysis, media studies, and gender issues.

It interrogated rape as a gender issue within media practice through the lens of critical discourse analysis. Assisted by corpus analysis, this study identified the discursive construction of rape in selected Nigerian dailies through three particular discursive structures: (e)vilifying rape and its perpetrators through labelling; empathy-evoking construal of rape victims' experience; and sexual offenders as blame-shifters. Some existing studies (Adcock, 2010; Animasahun, 2015; Breen *et al*., 2017) on gender-based violence, especially those routed through feminist ideals, uphold the position as this study does, that newspapers implicitly contribute to the androcentric social order by deploying linguistic resources for empathetic construal of the ordeals of rape victims, usually females. This study particularly views this position from an extended perspective and contends that the media not only represents female victims and their unfortunate experiences with sexual offenders through empathy-invoked construal but also vilifies, denigrates, and demonises perpetrators or rapists. In essence, newspapers are not mild in branding and labelling perpetrators with negative constructs and monster imagery. In most news reports on rape, the identities of rapists are sufficiently supplied which tends to place them in the blacklist of the public. This re-echoes Tade and Udechukwu's (2018) stance that traditional media in Nigeria play a pivotal role in directing attention to criminal behaviours such as rape. As such, the news media are making efforts to project sexual offenders and their heinous acts to the public in highly repugnant and distasteful ways that would convince the public to desist from such acts.

This study shows that the representation of rape perpetrators in all senses of negativity projects rape and sexual offences in such a way that their acts would be repulsive to the public. This suggests that these five Nigerian newspapers do not hold back in exposing rapists and delineating their actions in negative and repulsive projections. Significantly, this position dovetails with the stance of Blauenfeldt (2014), i.e., that in the British tabloid press, sex offenders are frequently sensationalised and described in derogatory and emotionally charged language. This study, therefore, argues in accordance with the argument of Babatope and Muhyideen (2019) that the discourse representations in some Nigerian newspapers are relatively fair to the victim, while the perpetrators and their actions are exposed, with the perpetrators treated as outcasts by totally devoicing them. Additionally, this study does not write off Bonher's (2001) position on the media's victim-blaming representational practices in rape cases and the propagation of general stereotypic beliefs that exonerate rapists. With a different optic, it contends that attention should be shifted to the efforts of the media (Nigerian newspapers in this case) in denigrating and decrying the evils of rape and other forms of sexual violence by harnessing linguistic and discursive constructs. Although the phenomenon of media re-victimisation exists (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014; Dare, 2016) in newspaper reports on rape, efforts are also made to negatively portray sex offenders and circumstances responsible for perpetuating sexual violence in society. This study also calls for a more extensive exploration of the discourses around rape to engender the campaign against rape and other forms of sexual violence in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this study opines that the news media can strengthen their efforts in combating the menace of rape and its attendant traumatic consequences. Beyond the linguistic and discursive structures weaponised by the news media to represent and frame the occurrence of rape, media practitioners must further channel their efforts into advancing strategic and massive media campaigns against rape and objectification of the female gender. In line with the perspective of Egen et al. (2020), the news media can enhance their coverage by monitoring and reporting on lawsuits against sexual offenders, thereby disseminating these reports to the public. The Nigerian society at large could be motivated to enact improved preventive legislation, implement more effective punitive measures to punish offenders, and provide greater support for victims.

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Exploring the semantic and pragmatic functions of modal auxiliaries: A case study of commencement speeches

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Abstract

The use of modal auxiliaries in research articles and political speeches has been well investigated. The genre of commencement speeches, however, has yet to be investigated as far as the use of modal auxiliaries are concerned. In addressing the gap, the present study compares the usage of modal auxiliary verbs in commencement speeches of Ghanaian speakers with American speakers, and investigates the semantic contribution of the modal auxiliaries in the speeches. Additionally, the study also explores the speech act performed via the usage of the modal auxiliary verb and their pragmatic nuances in commencement speeches. The dataset for the study is a corpus of 51,447 words obtained from twelve (12) commencement speeches of the Ashesi University (in Ghana) and twelve (12) highly ranked American Universities. The study employed AntConc 4.0 to generate the instances of modal auxiliary usage in the data. Leech's (2004) theory of modal auxiliary meaning and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory were employed to identify modal meanings and speech acts performed in the speeches. The study highlights the vital role of modal auxiliaries and speech acts in encoding actions that speech acts inspire within the Ghanaian and American contexts. These include the *can-do* attitude of Ghanaians, on the one hand, and the *need-to-cherish-family* and *keep close ties* attitude of the Americans, on the other hand. The results show that relatively speaking, American commencement speeches employ more modal auxiliaries than Ghanaian commencement speeches.

Keywords: Commencement speeches, modal auxiliaries, speech acts, Ghana, America

Introduction

The form and function of speeches have been extensively studied in the literature from the perspective of different genres such as political (Adjei-Fobi, 2021), rap (Davis, 2011), and gossip and advice (Garvin & Margolis, 2015). Scholars have explored issues such as stylistics (Anderson, 2021), rhetorical features (Dadugblor, 2016), power play (Winter & Gärdenfors, 1994), referential features (Umera-Okeke, 2007), and poly discursivity (Ivanova, 2017). Other scholars have also analyzed speech as an action (Jabber & Jinquan, 2013) and the commitment of speech makers. For English used in Ghana, modal auxiliaries have been explored in personal letters (cf. Owusu Ansah, 1994), research articles (cf. Ngula 2015), and spoken text (cf. Nartey & Ferguson, 2014). Indeed, others have also analyzed speech as the performance of an action while others have tried to scrutinize the commitment of speech makers to whatever assertion they make (cf. Yamazaki, 2001). Some studies also explored the influence of American English and British English on Ghanaian English (Osei-Tutu, 2021) and the effect of American English on Ghanaian English (Owusu-Ansah, 1994). For instance, the findings from the analysis of Osei-Tutu (2021) based on data from the International Corpus of English (Ghana component – written and spoken; British component – written and spoken; and the American component – written) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) revealed that the Ghanaian English patterns mirror the patterns of American English and British English, but more so British English in the use of modals (Osei-Tutu, 2021)

The present study focuses on commencement speech as a genre. A commencement speech is a speech given to graduating students at universities, secondary education institutions, and similar institutions worldwide. In the Ghanaian context, very little is known about the genre of commencement speech, and the role of modal auxiliaries in commencement speeches, hence, the need for the present work, which compares the use of modal auxiliary verbs in the genre of commencement speeches by Ghanaian and American speakers. In particular, the themes that are projected by the use of modal auxiliaries and the related speech act in commencement speeches are yet to receive any scholarly attention. It is instructive to note that while domains of the use of modal auxiliaries *per se* have been explored in genres such as personal letters (cf. Owusu-Ansah, 1994), research articles (cf. Ngula, 2015), and spoken text (cf. Schneider, 2017), the role of modal auxiliaries in commencement speeches is yet to be explored.

This study examines commencement speeches, and how speakers demonstrate commitment through their choice of modal auxiliaries. It aims to understand the utopian and experiential nature of themes, socio-cultural underpinnings, and the charge placed on the graduating class. It compares the usage of modal auxiliary verbs in Ghanaian commencement speeches with American commencement speakers, intending to uncover how Ghanaian and American speakers use modal auxiliaries to encode themes in commencement speeches and, address the gap in understanding modal auxiliary usage in commencement speeches.

Review of related literature

Researchers have made in-roads into modality and the use of modal auxiliaries in different text forms. These studies have been aimed at measuring the modal force of the texts and comparing native and non-native usage of modal auxiliaries. While Ngula (2015) and Vazquez (2010) report deviant usage by non-native speakers even in formal academic publications, the same cannot be said of the commencement speech, especially in the Ghanaian context. As far as the genre commencement speech is concerned, very little is known with regard to the use of modal auxiliaries and the comparative usage. Again, the effects of the modal auxiliaries to produce speech acts have also not been explored in the context of the commencement speech. The present study compares the usage of modal auxiliary verbs in commencement speeches by Ghanaian speakers and American speakers and the incidences of speech acts precipitated by them.

Empirical studies on modal auxiliary usage

Epistemic Modality in Political Discourse

Milkovic's (2017) study titled *Epistemic Modality in Political Discourse* analyzed how President George Bush, Prime Minister Tony Blair, and other members of their administration employed the use of epistemic modality in talking about the situation in Iran, which led to the case of a lack of "firm" evidence to link Iran to the attack of terrorism in New York. The study concludes that the speakers herein mentioned used hedging devices such as 'may', 'might', 'can' and 'could' to evade giving straightforward answers. Another observation was that the use of plural pronouns, conditional and hypothetical clauses as epistemic modality helped the speakers to evade taking personal responsibility (Milkovic, 2017).

Aničić (2014) studied modalised utterances in the Obama-Romney election debate and also explored modalized utterances in the two presidential candidates' speech with the view to analyzing the content of the political statements and messages issued by Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. She identified the modalised utterances and the relative frequencies that were determined. The modals identified were 'will', 'would', 'can', 'could', 'should' and 'must', which appeared marginally. The semi-modals identified were 'going to', 'need to' and 'have to'. The non-factive verbs identified were 'think' and 'believe'. The sensory markers identified were 'see', 'hear' and 'feel'. The findings were that the utterances of critical national interest were found to contain 'be going to' as it denotes the short distance between the speaker's here and now and expressed state of affairs, current orientation and lack of conditionality all of, which contribute to the sense of urgency. It was also found out that there was a preferential use of 'have to'. Aničić notes that the avoidance of 'must' which she considers the "strongest and irresistible force among the modal expressions" and the consistent use of 'have to' in both candidates' speeches as strategic. This paper also gives us another view of modal auxiliaries while highlighting the tendency to have certain types of modal auxiliaries featuring more in an environment based on the subject matter (Aničić, 2014).

Vukovic (2014) also studies strong epistemic modality in parliamentary discourse. The study aims to investigate the linguistic resources used to express a high degree of commitment to the truth of the utterance in political discourse. In other words, he applies the scalarity principle to bring to bear linguistic devices expressing epistemic modality. The data analyzed constitutes transcripts from the first day of the budget debate in the UK House of Commons in March 2010. The total word count was 61,225, and the total number of parliamentarians who participated in the debate was thirty-three. After manually checking for items that expressed modal certainty, the author uses the Text STAT 2.8 to confirm their frequency. The researcher then sorted the modals into the parts of speech they belong to. The most frequent ones were qualitatively analyzed in their context. This enabled the researcher to characterize the frequency and patterning of strong epistemic modality in the UK. The study states that very few modals were used to express strong epistemic modality. The researcher concludes that their appearances are too low to draw any concrete conclusions (Vukovic, 2014). Vukovic observes that strong epistemic modality is much more frequently expressed through modifying verbs and that this might be a consequence of the characteristics of the English Language and not necessarily a feature of parliamentary language. The author states, however, that what is more parliamentary specific is the overall high presence of adverbs in the debate. It adds that there was a remarkable consistency in the results of strong epistemic nouns, adjectives and adverbs that is, there was more epistemic certainty from the opposition side. The paper contends that when examining modality in political genres, modal adverbs and verbs expressing modality other than the typical modal verbs must particularly be taken into account as they seem to be the most frequent means of expressing it.

Vukovic's (2014) is an interesting study as the research ventures into the field of rhetoric. The methodology adopted is in-depth. The work, however, seemed to overgeneralize the findings. Granted, that for the data analysed there were less encounter of modal verbs cannot be enough grounds to justify that more attention should be given to the other ways of expressing modality to the detriment of modal verbs. This is because modal verbs have their functions in expressing modality.

Epistemic Modality in Academic Discourse

Ngula (2015) using a corpus study, examines the use of epistemic modal verbs in research articles (RAs) written by

Ghanaian and international scholars from the fields of Law, Economics and Sociology. The author tests the hypothesis that there was a non-conformity in the rhetorical patterns and strategies deployed by non-native English-speaking (NNES) writers especially those based in contexts referred to as “off-network” and “peripheral” centers of academic scholarship to the mainstream community practices. The analyses contrived to comprehend how the usage of these devices compares with their usage in RAs of prestigious international Anglophone journals written by native English-speaking scholars. The data for the study is put together by building two corpora; one is composed of RAs of Ghanaian scholars published in local journals in Ghana and the other is made up of RAs of native English-speaking scholars published in reputable Anglophone journals. Each corpus was made up of three fields: Sociology, Economics and Law. The total word size was approximately one million with each corpora having close to equal word count. Using Hyland (2005), the researcher determined a list of modal auxiliaries and came up with eleven of them which would serve as the basis of examining the corpora. The modal verbs included *‘could’, ‘couldn’t’, ‘may’, ‘might’, ‘shall’, ‘shouldn’t’, ‘will’, ‘won’t’, ‘would’, ‘wouldn’t’* and ‘*must’*. The modal ‘*can’* was excluded as it rarely functions as an epistemic modal. He then regrouped the modal auxiliaries on three levels of strong, medium and weak based on the works of Hyland (2005), Milton (1997), and McEnery and Kifle (2002).

Ngula (2015) contends that NNES scholars engage in the misapplication of the rhetorical features of academic writing. This implies the overuse, underuse or misuse of the modals. The researcher notes that the epistemic modals have been considerably underused by the Ghanaian scholars studied. The study also reveals that the rhetorical challenges of academic writing not only affect NNES authors in EFL contexts but also those in ESL contexts (Ngula, 2015).

Empirical studies in commencement speeches

Values and messages conveyed in College Commencement Speeches

Partch and Kinnier (2011) adopted content analysis to investigate the values and messages from ninety American university commencement speeches. The speeches span from 1990 to 2007. The speeches included those delivered by speakers from outside the university. To ensure diversity, no speaker was included twice. The speeches used were also obtained from electronic sources or institutions. Partch and Kinnier employed two readers who read the scripts independently and made a list of themes. They also kept track of recurring themes. The two readers then met to discuss and reached a consensus on the themes of the speeches read. They then employed a team of three raters who read all the speeches while rating the presence or absence of the themes in the speeches. Their ratings were analyzed using the SPSS data editor. The predominant messages were ‘help others’, which was the highest i.e., 64%, ‘do the right thing’, which was the next highest i.e., 61%, followed by ‘expand your horizons’, then ‘be true to yourself’, ‘never give up’, ‘appreciate diversity’, ‘cherish special others’ and ‘seek balance’.

An intercultural analysis of personal metadiscourse in English and Chinese commencement speeches

Zhu (2018) explores the use of personal metadiscourse in English and Chinese commencement speeches based on Adel’s reflexive model of metadiscourse and its adaptation. The data for the research was sixty speeches of which thirty were in Chinese and thirty were in English. Zhu (2018) built two corpuses with each containing thirty commencement speeches. The speeches were collected from the website https://www.baidu.com/. All sixty speeches were delivered in Chinese and American Universities including Harvard University, Stanford University and Fudan University. Zhu (2018) used AntConc 3.2.4 to process the data. Zhu (2018) ran a search for the personal metadiscourse including ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘you’ and their oblique and possessive forms in the linguistic concordance software, AntConc 3.2.4.

The paper looked at the similarities and differences in the use of personal metadiscourse in English and Chinese commencement speeches. The paper also looked at the possible reasons for these differences and similarities. The researcher utilizing quantitative and qualitative analysis, revealed that American speeches featured more personal metadiscourse than the Chinese speeches. It was also through textual analysis that characteristics of the genre under study resulted in the finding of similarities in the American and Chinese speeches while the differences in the speeches were identified as stemming from socio-cultural differences.

Zhu’s (2018) work was very instrumental in this study as it provided an avenue for the researchers to adopt one of the tools used in processing and analyzing the data. However, for this study, the researchers used an upgraded version of the same linguistic concordance software i.e., AntConc 4.0.

Research Questions

1. What are the frequencies of modal auxiliaries and speech acts used by Ghanaian and American speakers in their commencement speeches?
2. What are the semantic and pragmatic contributions of the modal auxiliaries to the commencement speeches of the Ghanaian and American speakers?
3. What are the sociolinguistic implications of the use of the modal auxiliaries and speech acts used and performed in commencement speeches of the Ghanaian and American speakers?

Austin (1962) hinges his speech act theory on three facets including the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act has to deal with the act of saying something that makes sense in a language; obeying all phonological and grammatical rules of the language. The illocutionary act, which was later developed by J.R. Searle and considered simultaneous to speech acts is about the use of language in society specifically, the act intended by the speaker. The perlocutionary act is concerned with what follows what is said.

J.R. Searle (1979) develops Austin (1962) and came out with a five-point categorization of speech acts.

- **Representatives**: This commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. In such instances, the speaker makes assertions and draws conclusion.
- **Directives**: These are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something. The speaker who falls in this category will be making requests or questioning.
- **Commissives**: This commits the speaker to some future course of action. The speaker in this category will be making promises, threatening or offering some help.
- **Expressives**: The speaker expresses a psychological state such as thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating, among others.
- **Declaratives**: The speaker in this category effects immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tends to rely on extralinguistic institutions. Instances of excommunication, declaring war, baptism, marrying, firing from employment etc.

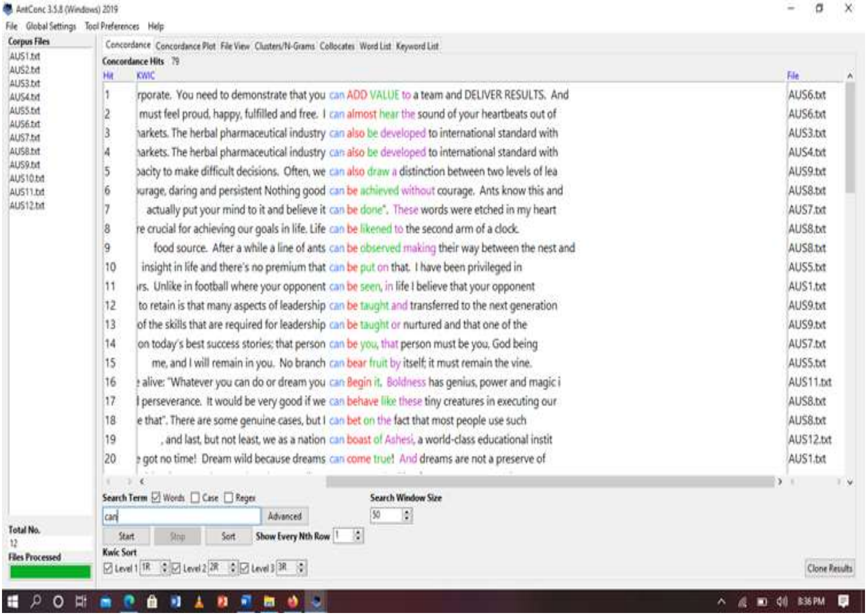
Consequently, scholars in the field of linguistics also agree that the use of modality is the performance of an action (Boicu, 2007; Jabber and Jinquan, 2013; Logogye, 2016). Hence, some scholars have also gone further to look at modality in speeches under the lens of the speech act theory (Safwat, 2015; Rosyida and Fauzi, 2020). This has led to the identification of the speech act of request by the instances of modal use (Jabber and Jinquan, 2013) while others see the instances of modal use as face saving acts or politeness strategies (Boicu, 2007). Others also record the instances of modal use as performatives (Logogye, 2016).

Data and Methodology

Commencement speeches from Ashesi University and selected speeches from the United States of America served as the data for this study, with a total corpus of 51,447 words. The speeches were extracted from two sources. The speeches of the American University were extracted from www.goskills.com – a website that ranks the top twenty commencement speeches of the year under review while those of Ashesi University were extracted from the official website of the university - www.ashesi.edu.gh. The data, after it was collected, was coded using three alphabetical letters each plus the numerical order. Hence, commencement speeches from the Ashesi University were coded AUS while commencement speeches from the selected American Universities were coded ACS. Ashesi University was chosen for two reasons; first, it is the only University in Ghana, which holds actual Commencement Ceremonies, as in where graduation ceremonies are conceptualized and dubbed "Commencement Ceremony" and this can be confirmed from their webpage; and second reason for selecting Ashesi University was the fact that they had a well-documented record of all their commencement speeches.

The figures were then attached to complete the coding process (i.e., AUS1, AUS2, AUS3, ACS1, ACS2, ACS3, etc.). The data then went through a process of trimming. The introductory part and concluding parts of the data were cut off. This was the case because the introductory part of the speeches contained the speaker's expression of his/her joy or privileged state for having been chosen as a commencement speaker while the concluding part included the last words which often was an admonition to go into the world and make a difference. Hence, the researchers believed that the two parts were not contents and so could be excluded. The text was then converted from Word format to text (.txt) format with the aid of AntConc file converter. This was done because the software for analysis accepted only text files. The software for analysis was AntConc 4.0.

The figure below displays how the software works.


AntConc 3.5.8 (Windows) 2019
File
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AUS3.txt
AUS4.txt
AUS5.txt
AUS6.txt
AUS7.txt
AUS8.txt
AUS9.txt
AUS10.txt
AUS11.txt
AUS12.txt
Concordance
Concordance Plot
File View
Clusters/N-Grams
Collocates
Word List
Keyword List
Advanced
Start
Stop
Sort
Clone Results
Files Processed
8:36 PM

Concordance Hits 79

Hit	KWIC	File
1	rporate. You need to demonstrate that you can ADD VALUE to a team and DELIVER RESULTS. And	AUS6.txt
2	must feel proud, happy, fulfilled and free. I can almost hear the sound of your heartbeats out of	AUS6.txt
3	ıarkets. The herbal pharmaceutical industry can also be developed to international standard with	AUS3.txt
4	ıarkets. The herbal pharmaceutical industry can also be developed to international standard with	AUS4.txt
5	pacity to make difficult decisions. Often, we can also draw a distinction between two levels of lea	AUS9.txt
6	ourage, daring and persistent Nothing good can be achieved without courage. Ants know this and	AUS8.txt
7	actually put your mind to it and believe it can be done". These words were etched in my heart	AUS7.txt
8	re crucial for achieving our goals in life. Life can be likened to the second arm of a clock.	AUS8.txt
9	food source. After a while a line of ants can be observed making their way between the nest and	AUS8.txt
10	insight in life and there's no premium that can be put on that. I have been privileged in	AUS5.txt
11	ırs. Unlike in football where your opponent can be seen, in life I believe that your opponent	AUS1.txt
12	to retain is that many aspects of leadership can be taught and transferred to the next generation	AUS9.txt
13	of the skills that are required for leadership can be taught or nurtured and that one of the	AUS9.txt
14	on today's best success stories; that person can be you, that person must be you, God being	AUS7.txt
15	me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain the vine.	AUS5.txt
16	e alive: "Whatever you can do or dream you can Begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic i	AUS11.txt
17	l perseverance. It would be very good if we can behave like these tiny creatures in executing our	AUS8.txt
18	e that". There are some genuine cases, but I can bet on the fact that most people use such	AUS8.txt
19	, and last, but not least, we as a nation can boast of Ashesi, a world-class educational instit	AUS12.txt
20	e got no time! Dream wild because dreams can come true! And dreams are not a preserve of	AUS1.txt

Search Term ☑ Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex

can

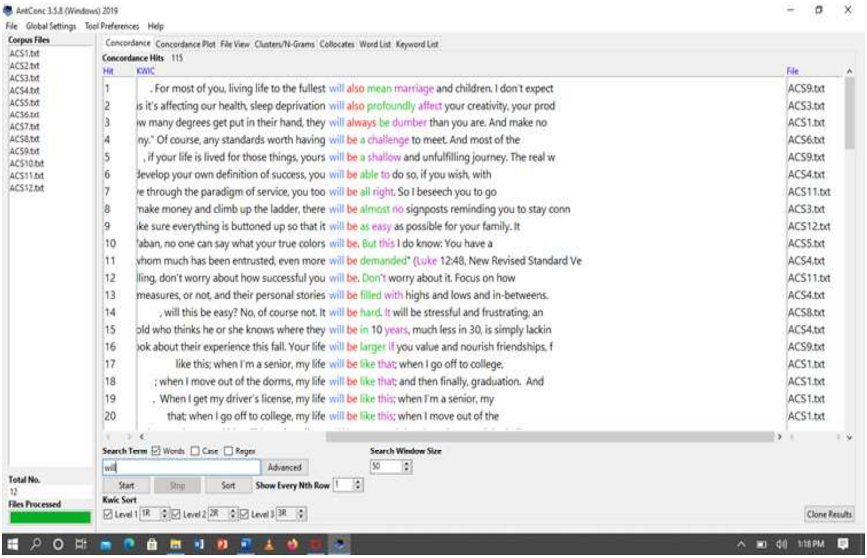
Search Window Size 50

Show Every Nth Row 1

Kwic Sort ☑ Level 1 1R ☑ Level 2 2R ☑ Level 3 3R

Total No. 12

Figure 1: A screenshot of the worksheet of the AntConc 4.0 software for Ashesi University commencement speeches


AntConc 3.5.8 (Windows) 2019
File Global Settings Tool Preferences Help
Corpus Files
ACS1.txt
ACS2.txt
ACS3.txt
ACS4.txt
ACS5.txt
ACS6.txt
ACS7.txt
ACS8.txt
ACS9.txt
ACS10.txt
ACS11.txt
ACS12.txt
Concordance Concordance Plot File View Clusters/N-Grams Collocates Word List Keyword List
Advanced
Start Stop Sort
Clone Results
1:18 PM

Concordance Hits 115

Hit	KWIC	File
1	. For most of you, living life to the fullest will also mean marriage and children. I don't expect	ACS9.txt
2	s it's affecting our health, sleep deprivation will also profoundly affect your creativity, your prod	ACS3.txt
3	w many degrees get put in their hand, they will always be dumber than you are. And make no	ACS1.txt
4	ny." Of course, any standards worth having will be a challenge to meet. And most of the	ACS6.txt
5	, if your life is lived for those things, yours will be a shallow and unfulfilling journey. The real w	ACS9.txt
6	develop your own definition of success, you will be able to do so, if you wish, with	ACS4.txt
7	ve through the paradigm of service, you too will be all right. So I beseech you to go	ACS11.txt
8	make money and climb up the ladder, there will be almost no signposts reminding you to stay conn	ACS3.txt
9	ke sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It	ACS12.txt
10	'aban, no one can say what your true colors will be. But this I do know: You have a	ACS5.txt
11	whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:48, New Revised Standard Ve	ACS4.txt
12	lling, don't worry about how successful you will be. Don't worry about it. Focus on how	ACS11.txt
13	measures, or not, and their personal stories will be filled with highs and lows and in-betweens.	ACS4.txt
14	, will this be easy? No, of course not. It will be hard. It will be stressful and frustrating, an	ACS8.txt
15	old who thinks he or she knows where they will be in 10 years, much less in 30, is simply lackin	ACS4.txt
16	ook about their experience this fall. Your life will be larger if you value and nourish friendships, f	ACS9.txt
17	like this; when I'm a senior, my life will be like that; when I go off to college,	ACS1.txt
18	; when I move out of the dorms, my life will be like that; and then finally, graduation. And	ACS1.txt
19	. When I get my driver's license, my life will be like this; when I'm a senior, my	ACS1.txt
20	that; when I go off to college, my life will be like this; when I move out of the	ACS1.txt

Search Term ☑ Words ☐ Case ☐ Regex

will

Search Window Size 50

Show Every Nth Row 1

Kwic Sort ☑ Level 1 1R ☑ Level 2 2R ☑ Level 3 3R

Total No. 12

Files Processed

Figure 2: A screenshot of the worksheet of the AntConc 4.0 software for American commencement speeches

The hits (the frequency) of the modal auxiliaries are displayed after the task bar. The files loaded are also displayed in the corpus file task pane. The concordance hits section displays the frequency of the modal auxiliary being analyzed. Beneath the Concordance Hits, there are hits which are coloured blue. Below the Concordance hits again displayed the hits arranged in ordinal terms. The pane on the left displays the speeches in which the modal auxiliaries were used. The constructions displayed, however, are not the full sentences. The modal auxiliary under analysis is colored blue while the first closest word is colored red. The second closest word to the modal auxiliary is colored green while the third closest has a light violet color. This kind of display helps the researcher to identify where modal auxiliary meaning is conveyed. Also, when the modal auxiliary being analyzed which is colored blue is clicked on, the software takes the user to the full sentence where the modal auxiliary was originally used.

As the hits showed, the researcher adjusted the words displayed on either side of the modal auxiliary to get the full sentence. This helped to ascertain whether the modal auxiliary used in that instance had modal force as proposed in Leech (2004). If the construction did not have modal force, it was deleted from the hits displayed. The hits were copied and exported to an excel spreadsheet. The frequencies were also recorded. To find the category under which each modal auxiliary fell, the researcher relied on the criteria of Palmer (1990) and Saeed (2003). Their frequencies were also tallied. Again, the meanings of the modal auxiliaries were also distinguished based on Leech (2004).

The researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of speeches, reading them twice to identify themes and patterns. Quantitative results from AntConc 4.0 guided the researcher to identify predominant modal auxiliaries and their role in driving themes. The quantitative analysis revealed the prolific use of modal auxiliaries by American speakers, such as *'must'*, *'will'*, and *'can'*. The study also revealed verbal complementation of modals.

Results and discussion

Modal auxiliaries and speech acts employed

There were a total of seven-hundred and ninety-five modal auxiliaries in the commencement speeches. Out of this figure, the American speakers employed four hundred and thirty-two modal auxiliaries while the Ghanaian speakers employed three hundred and sixty-three. The modal auxiliaries that are featured include *can*, *will*, *must*, *may*, *shall*, *could*, *would*, *might*, *should*, *have to* and *had to*. *Will* was the highest used in both data sets. *Can* was the second highest used modal auxiliary while *shall* was the least used. *Must,* which signifies strong modality was used sparingly in the American speeches but was the third highest in the Ashesi speeches. The pattern of the frequencies for the Ashesi commencement speeches corroborates Leech's classification of the frequency of modals, which indicates that 'will' and 'can' are among the very frequently used modals while 'must' is part of the quite frequently used modals. However, the frequencies for the modal auxiliaries used in the American commencement speeches did not entirely conform to Leech's classification. This translates as the American commencement speeches conveying a relatively lower obligation than the Ashesi commencement speeches. The modals which recorded the lowest frequency i.e., 'shall' is supported by the earlier stated classification of Leech as infrequently used.

Table 1: Frequencies of modal auxiliaries for Ashesi Commencement Speeches AUS

	Can	*Will*	*Must*	*May*	*Shall*	*Could*	*Would*	*Might*	*Should*	*Have to*	*Had to*
AUS 1	7	2	1	2	0	5	11	0	4	0	1
AUS 2	1	10	7	0	0	3	7	0	1	3	0
AUS 3	8	3	8	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
AUS 4	6	3	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
AUS 5	7	17	3	1	0	0	3	0	0	5	0
AUS 6	8	17	2	3	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
AUS 7	3	2	4	0	0	4	1	1	0	0	1
AUS 8	12	11	0	0	0	5	6	0	4	3	0
AUS 9	7	3	8	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
AUS 10	6	7	0	2	0	4	8	1	0	1	2
AUS 11	4	18	12	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	0
AUS 12	7	11	7	2	0	2	6	1	1	1	2

Table 2: Frequencies of Modal Auxiliaries for American Commencement Speeches (ACS)

CODE	Frequencies of Modal Auxiliaries									
	Can	*Will*	*Must*	*May*	*Shall*	*Could*	*Would*	*Might*	*Should*	*Have to*	*Had to*
ACS 1	7	12	0	4	0	4	5	0	0	1	1
ACS 2	7	6	1	1	0	1	8	0	3	3	2
ACS 3	9	7	0	3	0	2	3	4	1	1	1
ACS 4	5	17	0	2	0	0	4	2	2	2	0
ACS 5	2	10	6	2	0	1	2	0	3	3	1
ACS 6	5	14	0	5	0	3	0	2	1	1	0
ACS 7	7	2	0	4	0	2	4	0	0	0	1
ACS 8	8	9	0	3	0	3	4	5	2	2	0
ACS 9	7	10	0	5	0	2	8	2	0	0	1
ACS 10	22	13	2	5	0	1	5	1	9	9	0
ACS 11	17	12	3	3	0	6	4	2	0	0	0
ACS 12	5	3	0	0	0	2	9	2	3	3	0

Table 3: The frequency of modal auxiliaries in Ashesi commencement speeches and the speeches of the American speakers

	Frequency	
Modal Auxiliary	American Speakers	Ashesi Speakers
Can	101	76
Will	115	104
Must	12	60
May	31	16
Shall	3	1
Could	27	24
Would	56	45
Might	20	3
Should	25	14
Have to	35	14
Had to	7	6
Total	432	363
Grand Total	795	

Table 1 shows that the American speakers used more modal auxiliaries than the Ghanaian speakers. This phenomenon is confirmed by Ngula (2015) and Vazquez (2010) as their study revealed that American researchers tend to use more modal auxiliaries than their local contemporaries. However, contrary to these two studies' assertion that non-native researchers overuse or underuse the modal auxiliaries, the present findings does not reveal such in the case of the Ghanaian commencement speakers. The Ghanaian speakers employed the appropriate modal auxiliary usage to convey their message.

It must be noted that in sentences where modal auxiliary usage was apparent, often they were accompanied by other verbs and would rarely stand alone. A verb that seemed to complement almost all the modal auxiliaries was the verb 'be'. Modal auxiliaries such as ‘can’, ‘will’, ‘could’, ‘would’, and ‘may’ were often complemented by the stative verb. For a predictive modal such as ‘will’ and ‘would’, the complementation of ‘be’ helped to drive home the predictive meaning of the modals. The complementation of ‘can’, often provide the meaning of possibility in both the Ghanaian commencement speeches and the American commencement speeches.

Below are AUS extracts to show the verbal complementation of ‘be’

> **Extract 93:** Indeed, having some fear is good for the survival of the human being; of course you *will be* afraid if someone held a loaded gun to your head.
>
> **Extract 94:** It therefore means that you need to be sensitive to the cultural differences that you *will be* confronted with.
>
> **Extract 95:** I am a firm believer in the idea that many of the skills that are required for leadership *can be* taught or nurtured and that one of the prime responsibilities of successful leaders is to pass on their experiences and knowledge to the next generation of leaders.
>
> **Extract 96:** Unlike in football where your opponent *can be* seen, in life I believe that your opponent is life itself.
>
> **Extract 97:** Of course, any standards worth having *will be* a challenge to meet.

Extracts from ACS

> **Extract 98**: If you can get them to open up, they will tell you that today they are happy and satisfied in various measures, or not, and their personal stories *will be* filled with highs and lows and in-betweens.
>
> Extract 99: The only thing we *can be* sure will happen in 2016 is that we’ll elect a new president.
>
> **Extract 100:** Focus on how significant you *can be* in service and the success will take care of itself.

Another verbal complement of ‘can’ was the verb ‘do’. This kind of complementation signalled ability. The very few times ‘can’ was used as a main verb signalled ability. There are other verbs that accompanied the modal auxiliaries. The modal auxiliaries helped communicate in concrete terms what a speaker wanted to communicate as far as the graduate and that main verb were concerned. It is not surprising that Palmer (2001, p.1) puts it succinctly as “modality is concerned with the status of the proposition that describes the event”. Hence, the modal auxiliaries merely described the status of the proposition. That is to say, “is the event possible”, “will it happen”, “is it obligatory”, “does the ability to do exist” etc.

Below are AUS extracts from the text that show the verbal complementation of ‘do’

> **Extract 101:** A good and fulfilling life should also revolve around what you *can do* for your country and continent.
>
> **Extract 102**: If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you *can do* nothing”
>
> **Extract 103:** Through Ashesi you have brought Goethe alive: “Whatever you *can do* or dream, you can begin it.
>
> **Extract 104:** Obvious to him that I was awe-struck and deeply impressed by all this, he kept emphasizing to me that “Kwaku, I am sure you *can do* much more than I have done, if you actually put your mind to it and believe it can be done”

Extracts from ACS

> **Extract 105:** Men often think they *can do* bad things and get away under the supervision of their female bosses.
>
> **Extract 106:** And when I saw Sidney Poitier accept his academy award for “Lilies of the Field,” I remember sitting on my linoleum floor babysitting for my half sister and brother, saying, if a black man *can do* that, I wonder what I *can do*.

> **Extract 107:** Don't ever forget that you're a citizen of this world, and there are things you *can do* to lift the human spirit, things that are easy, things that are free, things that you *can do* every day.

Table 4: Frequency of Speech Act Categories

Speech Acts	American Speakers	Ashesi Speakers
Representative	391	338
Directives	37	18
Commissives	0	3
Expressives	4	4
Total	432	363
Grand Total	795	

From Table 4, the results for representative speech acts as against directives speech acts show a much higher usage of the former. The representative speech acts primarily imply that a proposition, which describes an event is an assertion. Hence, both American and Ashesi commencement speakers made more assertions than they committed graduates to adhere to directives. Again, from Table 4, it is evident that for both speeches from American commencement speakers and Ashesi University commencement speakers, the representative speech acts was employed most. The directives speech acts recorded the second highest usage. However, the directive speech acts expressed are very minimal relative to the representative speech acts expressed. It must be noted that for American commencement speakers, there was no instance of commissives speech acts recorded in their speeches. On the contrary, the Ashesi University commencement speakers employed the commissives and expressives speech acts in their speeches. Nonetheless, their usage was very low as indicated in Table 4. Also, the fact that the representative speech acts were the highest used in both datasets confirms that most parts of the commencement speeches fell under the epistemic category.

It is worthy of note that the meaning of the modal auxiliaries in the instance of usage is directly linked to the category it will fall under i.e., epistemic or deontic. This is because the representative speech act is performed when an assertion is made. Assertions are also made from one's evaluation of a phenomenon. Epistemic modal auxiliary also represents a personal evaluation of a matter. Thus, all representative speech acts reveal a usage of an epistemic modal auxiliary. This evaluation therefore makes it hold true that the category the modal auxiliaries fall under has a direct link to the speech act they express. It is therefore not the case that majority of modal auxiliaries fell under the representative speech acts, which stands for assertions. Pertaining to commissives, they appeared only in the Ashesi speeches and non-existent in the American commencement speeches. Hence, in terms of the use of speech acts, Ashesi commencement speeches show some level of commitment compared to the American commencement speeches.

Semantic and pragmatic contributions of the modal auxiliaries to the speeches

To assess the semantic and pragmatic contribution, the framework for meanings of modal auxiliaries as proposed by Leech (2004) was adopted. To this end, the following meanings were extracted from the instances of modal auxiliary usages in the speech – *possibility*, *ability*, *permission*, *prediction*, *intention*, *insistence*, *willingness*, *obligation*, *requirement*, *rules and regulations*, and *logical necessity*.

Table 5: Modal meanings expressed by instances of modal auxiliary usage

	Frequency		
Modal	Meaning	American Speakers	Ashesi Speakers
Can	Possibility	34	14
	Ability	64	62
	Permission	3	0
Will	Prediction	92	94
	Intention 20		6
	Insistence	3	2
	Willingness	0	2
Must	Obligation	10	46
	Logical Necessity	1	12
	Requirement	1	2
May	Possibility	27	12
	Permission	0	0
	Quasi-subjunctive	4	4
Shall	Rules and regulations	3	0
	Prediction	0	1
Could	Ability	10	19
	Possibility	16	5
	Permission	1	0
Would	Prediction	42	30
	Intention	10	14
	Insistence	4	1
	Willingness	0	0
Might	Possibility	20	3
Should	Obligation	19	8

	Logical Necessity	6	6
Have to	Obligation	25	11
	Requirement	5	1
	Logical Necessity	5	2
Had to	Obligation	4	2
	Requirement	3	4
	Logical Necessity	0	
Total		432	363
	795		

From Table 5, it is evident that the ability usage of 'can' was expressed more than its possibility and permission usages in both American and Ashesi commencement speeches. Also, the possibility usage of 'can' was the second highest expressed in both speeches. An aspect worth discussing, which is evident from the meanings the modal auxiliaries conveyed, is the inherent ability of man to do things or to make things happen. This aspect of the commencement speech is communicated using 'can' and 'could'. The usage of 'can' often communicated an ability of the students to overcome life's challenges and problems. The usage of 'can' also gave graduates a list of the things that can be done by the graduates to make life better for themselves, their communities, and their country. Additionally, thematizing the messages that were communicated in all the commencement speeches, it is understood that the entirety of the speeches aimed to motivate.

Again, it is apparent that the predictive usage of 'will' was the highest expressed with the intention usage being the second highest followed by insistence and willingness in both American and Ashesi commencement speeches. This phenomenon conforms to the assertion of Huddleston and Pullum (2005) that the usage of 'will' as a modal auxiliary primarily falls in the domain of the predictive. It is worthy of note that the American speakers on no account resorted to the willingness usage of ‘will’.

Additionally, Table 5 shows that ‘must’ was the least used by the American speakers but used more frequently by the Ashesi speakers. Despite this fact, both speaker groups utilized the obligation use of ‘must’ rather than its other meanings of requirement and logical necessity. Also, the possibility usage of ‘may’ was more frequent than its quasi-subjunctive usage. There was no occurrence of its permissive usage. In the case of ‘could’, its possibility meaning recorded the highest usage for the American speakers while for the Ghanaian speakers, its ability meaning recorded the highest usage.

As regards the usage of ‘would’, the predictive meaning recorded the highest usage while its intention meaning recorded the second highest usage, with insistence and willingness being the least. The speeches of the American speakers did not utilize the willingness meaning of ‘would’. As far as ‘might’ was concerned, only its possibility meaning was expressed in both speeches. For ‘should’, its obligation meaning that was expressed more than its logical necessity usage. The same was true for the case of ‘have to’.

While assessing the individual speeches, Joyce Aryee’s speech coded AUS 8 recorded the highest usage of the ability meaning of ‘can’ (See Table 1). Indeed, the main theme of her speech centered on the graduates’ ability to do things. She speaks of the inability of people to prevent the graduates from reaching their true potential. She adds that it is impossible to beat time. She also used ‘can’ to show the qualities of the ant which she used as a model that should be emulated. The following are extracts from her speech to show her usage of ‘can’.

> **Extract 1**: No one *can* rob us of ultimate success but ourselves.
>
> **Extract 2:** Life can be likened to the second arm of a clock. It keeps ticking whether we are getting somewhere or not.

> The events of today and even the future will overcome us. We *cannot* beat time. To keep up with the pace of time, we need to be focused.

On the side of the American commencement speeches, Obama's speech recorded the highest use of 'can' to express ability. In Obama's speech coded ACS10, he discusses the role of government in the development of her people (See Table 2). It is worth noting that this speech was given when Obama was still in office as president. The following are extracts from Obama's speech on the usage of 'can'.

> **Extract 7**: But the other strand is the belief that there are some things we *can* only do together, as one nation - and that our government must keep pace with the times.
>
> **Extract 8**: The point is, we *can* and should debate the role of government in our lives, but remember, as you are asked to meet the challenges of our time, that the ability for us to adapt our government to the needs of the age has helped make our democracy work since its inception.

Again, there is a principle that all the speakers from both divides acknowledge by their usage of 'can'. This is the ability of the graduate, which is more inherent than external. The Christian writings (the gospel according to Matthew 15:11 and other synoptic gospels) agree to this ideology as it states explicitly that the only thing that can corrupt a person is internal rather than external. Again, psychologists and philosophers believe in the self. On the Abraham Maslow's theory, the identification of self is primary. The extracts above and other instances of the usage of 'can' to express ability hinges on what the graduate can do rather than what can be done for them.

As regards 'will', Ken Ofori Atta's speech coded AUS11 recorded the highest usage of 'will' expressing a prediction into the future. Capt. Budu and Ms. Hazel Barrad-Amuah's speeches recorded the second highest usage of 'will' expressing a prediction into the future. (See Table 1). In Ken Ofori Atta's speech, he uses 'will' to predict how Ashesi University's modeling of human minds has an impact on the fortunes of entrepreneurs citing Databank as a case in point. He predicts that the entirety of a man's life is to obey God as well as the stewardship role that man has. Among other things, he predicts qualities that will help graduates to succeed in life. Below are extracts from his speech showing how 'will' was used to express prediction into the future.

> **Extract 17:** As we acknowledge the sovereignty of God, our whole duty *will* be to obey Him and therefore become a blessing to our fellow man.
>
> **Extract 18:** Your life *will* be one of stewardship where you become the mere trustee of your time, talent, and treasure to be deplored for the most beneficial results for the community.

In the American commencement speeches, Bernanke's speech coded ACS4 had the highest usage of predictive 'will' (See Table 2). In his speech, he talks about an unpredictable world. He ends his speech by predicting the demands of marriage and parenting that he believes are vital. Below are extracts from his commencement speech.

> **Extract 31:** Life is amazingly unpredictable; any 22-year-old who thinks he or she knows where they *will* be in 10 years, much less in 30, is simply lacking imagination.
>
> **Extract 32:** If you can get them to open up, they *will* tell you that today they are happy and satisfied in various measures, or not, and their personal stories *will* be filled with highs and lows and in-betweens. But, I am willing to bet, those life stories *will* in almost all cases be quite different, in large and small ways, from what they expected when they started out.

Another aspect of the commencement speech that is revealed using 'will' is its predictive or preemptive nature. From Table 5, it is apparent that the commencement speech primarily predicts based on experiences of the speakers about what the graduates will face in the real world after school. This was primarily done through the modal auxiliary 'will' and 'would' for both the Ashesi University commencement speakers and the American commencement speakers. This then puts the commencement speech into the genre of the preemptive. Hence, graduates are given a fair idea of what is ahead of them in life.

Another aspect of its feature of predictability of the future is that it makes the commencement speech appropriate for the occasion. For what is the essence of such a speech if it cannot give a sneak peek into the future for the graduates. Nevertheless, as to whether these graduates encounter whatever scenarios given to them by commencement speakers or whether even listen and learn cannot be fully answered in this study. However, the frequent use of 'will' characterizes the commencement speech as a preemptive one cannot be denied.

Sociolinguistic implication of modal auxiliaries and the speech acts

One of the key findings of this study is that the Ghanaian speakers use 'must' a modal auxiliary, which signals strong modality (Leech 2004) more than the American speakers. The use of modals may be partly attributable to the type of cultural system run in the two countries. For instance, Ashesi **University** has its core values rooted in the liberal arts, however, the commencement ceremony speakers are Ghanaian speakers who have undergone the strict cultural system of training where when an authority speaks i.e., the '*opanyin'* (lit. the elder) all other matters must come to rest. The '*opanyin'* concept portrays Ghanaian elders as repositories of wisdom, people who have seen it all and know it all. This kind of mindset may motivate them to want to impose or compel the younger generation to tow a particular line. The commencement ceremony speakers bring this to bear in their speech when they seem to keep telling graduates what they must do to be successful.

On the contrary, the American culture tends to be very liberal. Children are given the liberty by law and even by conventional parenting to make their own life choices. This is very apparent in the speeches. It must be noted that even the very few times 'must' was used, it referred to what government should do to make life better for the citizenry. At the other few times, it bordered on Oprah Winfrey telling students how they can be more humane while Barbara Bush concentrated on the niceties of life, which should not be taken for granted. Barbara Bush used 'must' more than any of the other American speakers. The messages that 'must' accompanied also showed how the humane connection in the American society was gradually deteriorating and she reminded them to keep upholding these values. Oprah Winfrey also expressed this message with her use of 'must'.

Below are extracts from the commencement speeches that typify the obligatory use of 'must'

> **Extract 56:** There are no guarantees, you *must* earn your keep
>
> **Extract 57:** In Africa we are faced with structural, social and cultural challenges which we *must* continue to work through
>
> **Extract 58:** We *must* build upon what we know best.
>
> **Extract 59:** You *must* bring a new spirit of limitlessness, a can – do spirit which reigned at Independence and most recently when the Black stars shone at the world cup - our boys were mostly in their 20's.
>
> **Extract 60:** It says, "I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but...with the change of circumstances, institutions *must* advance also to keep pace with the times."

> **Extract 61**: But whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: fathers and mothers, if you have children, they ***must*** come first. You ***must*** read to your children, and you ***must*** hug your children, and you ***must*** love your children.
>
> **Extract 62:** Your crown has been paid for and so as you walk forth from this place, these hallowed grounds today, the most important lesson I can offer you from my own life is that in order to remain successful, to continue to wear the crown, as you walk the path of privilege, you ***must*** not forget the less privileged you left behind.

From the extracts 56-60, which come from the Ashesi setting tends to put a compelling charge on the graduates telling them what they must do to keep their heads afloat in the waters of life. While extract 61-62, which comes from the American perspective focuses not necessarily on how you can make it in life but how life can be made richer.

Another phenomenon that is apparent in this study is the knowledge of how things are and how things ought to be done. It is clear from Table 3 that a greater number of modal auxiliary usage fell under the epistemic category of modality. Palmer (2001) identifies deductive reasoning as one of the features of epistemic category. Palmer (2001) adds that this type of reasoning is based on evidence known to the speaker but cannot be readily called forth in tangible terms. This phenomenon is what the researchers would classify as the depth of experience of the speakers. Often than not, speakers at a commencement ceremony lack the luxury of time and cannot lump the entirety of their life lessons into an anecdote. They can only proffer pieces of advice that mirror some of their lives' experience. They can only hope that graduates buy their level of integrity and apply the advice given.

Below are extracts that show epistemic modal auxiliary usage

Extracts from AUS

Extract 80: You are going to be faced with daily encounters that *would* test the very foundations of the grooming Ashesi has given you.

Extract 81: Nothing good *can* be achieved without courage. Ants know this and so *should* we.

Extract 82: The world out there is like a jungle. It *could* be fun if you have all your cards right but for most of us, it remains a tough place and I *cannot* guarantee you any less.

Extract 83: As fresh school leavers, you *must* be bold, creative, and entrepreneurial in your thinking. Go and create your own job.

Extract 84: But God *could* dream a bigger dream than you *can* dream for yourself.

Extracts from ACS

Extract 85: I chose literacy because I honestly believe that if more people *could* read, write, and comprehend, we *would* be that much closer to solving so many of the problems that plague our nation and our society. And early on I made another choice, which I hope you*'ll* make as well. Whether you are talking about education, career, or service, you're talking about life and life really *must* have joy.

Extract 86: Somebody helped me to get here, just as I know you were helped to get here, Howard, because I know a lot of you came here with only the clothes on your back and a dream for what *could* be. And so as you have been saved, as you have been liberated, you *must* liberate others.

Another dimension of the issue of knowledge and social standards is credibility. As stated earlier, the epistemic category dominated the speeches as far as modal auxiliary usage was concerned. It is important to note that for knowledge to be passed on and even social standards asserted and taken by addressees, the condition of trust in the speaker should be fulfilled. This is only done if the speaker has that credibility. This credibility is also borne out of the status of the personality. That is his level of education, experiences in life, the level of success chalked among other things. It is, therefore, not a wonder that personalities chosen as commencement speakers are high achievers. This contributes to the probability of graduates listening and applying whatever the commencement speakers have to say.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of modal auxiliaries and the speech acts they encode in the genre of commencement speeches, from the viewpoints of Ghanaian versus American speakers. Cast in Leech's (2004) Modal Auxiliary meaning and Searle's (1969) Speech Act theories, the study among other things found that commencement speeches generally assume preemptive modes and tend to be motivational in subject matter. The study again found that except in the use of the modal auxiliary *must,* American speakers are relatively prolific in their use of the modal auxiliaries than their Ghanaian counterparts. This may be attributed to the dynamics in cultural settings, in that the Ghanaian society could be construed as typically governed by prescriptive set of rules, which obliges children to adhere to rules without complaint. In our view, this accounts for the fact that the Ghanaian speakers resorted to the use 'must' more than their American counterparts.

In future studies, this study may be extended to cover at least two yet to be investigated aspects of the form and function of commencement speeches. Firstly, the relevance and impact of commencement speeches on graduates. Shifting attention from speaker's meaning to listener's meaning will aid in assessing the impact of the modal auxiliary and the speech act performed on the hearer. Secondly, the usage of modal auxiliaries and the speech acts performed in other contexts such as advertisements, court ruling and sporting analysis should be examined. In terms of pedagogy, this study sought to set the tone for what exactly constitutes abuse (i.e., under use, overuse and wrong use) of modal auxiliary. The study highlights the vital role of modal auxiliaries and speech acts in encoding actions that speech acts inspire within the Ghanaian and American contexts.

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On the development of psychology profession in Northern Ghana

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Abstract

The history of psychology in Ghana has received research attention. However, documentation of regional or provincial history of psychology in Ghana has not received enough scholarly attention. In a resource-constrained setting, the least developed areas are often neglected, especially in terms of service provision and historical research. It is important that the progress of psychology in Northern Ghana, one of the least developed regions in Ghana, is examined to inform public policy decisions. In this paper, we discuss the history of psychology and its practice in Northern Ghana. We present the challenges faced by the profession in the region and some recommendations for improvement.

Keywords: history of psychology, psychology practice, Northern Ghana, mental health

Introduction

The history of psychology in Ghana, in general, has received scholarly attention (Asante & Oppong, 2012; Oppong et al., 2014; Oppong, 2017). In addition, histories of certain subfields of psychology in Ghana have also been documented. For instance, the histories of clinical psychology (Danquah, 2014), health psychology (de-Graft Aikins, 2018), community psychology (Akotia & Barimah, 2007), school psychology (Danquah, 1987), guidance and counselling (Essuman, 1999), psychological testing and assessment (Oppong et al., 2022), educational psychology (Nyarko, 2014), and industrial/ organizational (I/O) psychology (Oppong, 2022, 2013) have all been documented. In addition, Oppong (2017) has called attention to the need to diversify the history of psychology to move away from the focus on contributions of males to include contributions of female to psychology. In response to this call, Quashie and Akotia (2023) have edited an autobiographical volume that outlines the contributions of female psychologists to the development of psychology in Ghana. However, there has not been a focus on regional histories of psychology in Ghana. By regional history, we mean history of the profession of psychology covering a geographical location so divided for the purposes of administration of (local) government within a nation-state. In this sense, we may also refer to such histories as regional histories. Perhaps, we need to admit that there shall never be a preferred term to describe such histories.

The practice of psychology in Ghana has achieved significant success over the years (Dziwornu & Oppong,

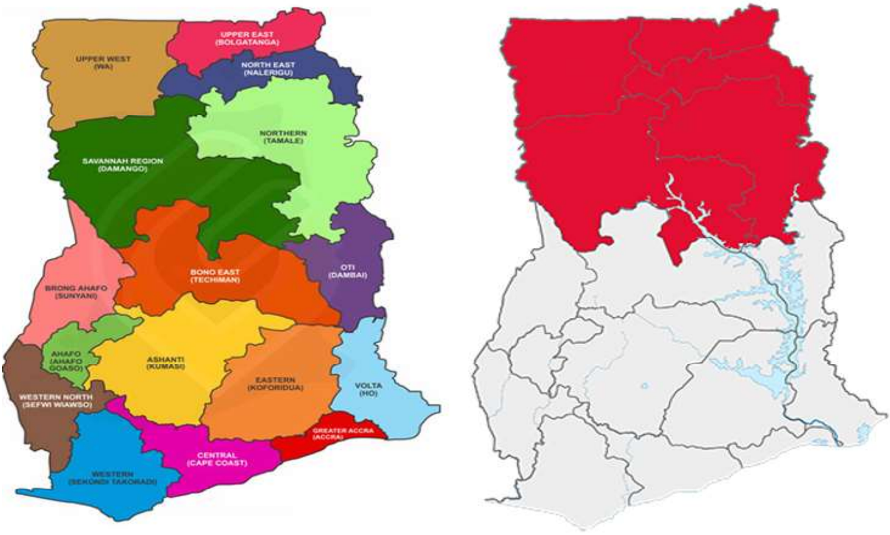
2023) and has contributed to the development of the economy, education, and health since its introduction (Oppong, 2022, 2017, 2013). Arguably, psychological services have been expanded to cover a greater part of the country. However, some geographical regions of the country have not benefited enough from the growth of the field. Notable among them is Northern Ghana which has seen less of psychology practice in particular and mental health in general (Eaton & Ohene, 2016). Generally, there has been limited mental health service in Northern Ghana over the years (Adu-Gyamfi, 2017; Atakora et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2019). The region also continues to record accounts of undesirable treatment of residents of the so-called witch camps who are usually persons with neurodegenerative conditions related to aging such as dementia and mental illnesses such as schizophrenia (Azongo et al., 2020; Darkwah et al., 2021). This is what Azongo et al. (2020) described as a lesser-known violence against people in this part of the country. In this vein, the residents of Northern Ghana have limited access to many services including psychological care until recent times.

It is important that with limited resources, and a relatively low development, the strides made over the years in northern Ghana need to be highlighted especially regarding mental health and psychology practice. As a result of the need for regional histories and the limited development of psychology in that region, we seek to present a historical account of the development of the discipline and profession of psychology in Northern Ghana. In this paper, we also highlight the challenges and make recommendations for future actions. In this paper, we use the term 'Northern Ghana' to refer to the geographical area that covers the five (5) administrative regions (Northern, North-East, Savannah, Upper East, and Upper West regions) (see the Map 1). The Northern part of Ghana was one of the four territories of the then Gold Coast (currently known as Ghana) (de-Graft Aikins, 2018). To reiterate, we state that the aim of this paper is to 1) present a historical account of the development of the psychology profession in northern Ghana, 2) highlight the challenges for the profession in the northern region, and 3) make recommendations.

Growth of Psychology at the National Level in Ghana

Psychology has a long past but a relatively short history in Ghana (Asante & Oppong, 2012; Oppong, 2017; Mate-Kole, 2013). Being taught in different forms in schools for centuries, the practice of psychology blossomed only in contemporary times in Ghana particularly following the establishment of the Ghana Psychology Council in 2013 (Dziwornu et al., 2017; Oppong, 2017). A number of institutions of higher education teach and/or train interested students in psychology (Oppong et al., 2014). A major success for the practice of the discipline occurred when the Mental Health Act, 2012 (Act 846) was enacted and the Ghana Psychology Council under Part Five of the Health Professions' Bodies Regulation Act, 2013 (Act 857) was established (Dziwornu et al., 2016).

Currently, psychologists practise in diverse sub-fields such as clinical, clinical health, social, Industrial/Organizational (I/O), educational, counselling, health, and sports psychology (Dziwornu & Oppong, 2023). The pioneering sub-fields were clinical and counselling psychology and were followed by social/community, educational, and I/O psychology (Akotia & Barimah, 2007; Essuman, 1999, Nyarko, 2014; Oppong et al., 2022). There is still a lack of training for most of the sub-fields in Ghana except for clinical, social/community, I/O, counselling, developmental, measurement and evaluation, and educational psychology (Dziwornu & Oppong, 2023).


UPPER WEST (WA)
UPPER EAST (BOLGATANGA)
NORTH EAST (NALERIGU)
NORTHERN (TAMALE)
SAVANNAH REGION (DAMANGO)
BRONG AHAFO (SUNYANI)
BONO EAST (TECHIMAN)
OTI (DAMBAI)
AHAFO (AHAFO GOASO)
ASHANTI (KUMASI)
EASTERN (KOFORIDUA)
VOLTA (HO)
WESTERN NORTH (SEFWI WIAWSO)
GREATER ACCRA (ACCRA)
CENTRAL (CAPE COAST)
WESTERN (SEKONDI TAKORADI)

(a) **(b)**

Figure 1: Geographical Area representing Northern Ghana
Note: The shaded portion in (b) represents Northern Ghana.

Psychology practice in Ghana has been also extended to private institutions and facilities. Private hospitals now hire and provide the service to their clients (Dziwornu et al., 2017). For-profit organisations and non-profit ones also hire psychologists whereas private universities currently train psychologists in some sub-fields (Dziwornu & Oppong, 2023; Oppong, 2022, 2013). Private and public basic and secondary educational institutions provide counselling and educational psychological services to students (Essuman, 1999). Apart from mainstream government health facilities that have hired psychologists, other government agencies such as the prison service, the police service, and the armed forces also hire psychologists. Thus, generally, the awareness about the practice of psychology has improved significantly in Ghana (Dziwornu & Oppong, 2023).

History of Psychology in Northern Ghana

Psychology in Northern Ghana was initiated through the establishment of teacher and nurses' training colleges around the 1940s and 1970s respectively. However, Islamic scholarship arrived in Northern Ghana with the study of philosophy and physiology in early 1700s (Oppong, 2017). For instance, the Mande scholarly community from Timbuktu arrived in Dagbon (in Northern Ghana) around 1700 C.E. (Dumbe, 2013) and the university town of Moliyili (outside Yendi) was founded in the 1700s (Lauer, 2013). These Islamic scholars brought the study of philosophy and physiology from the University of Sankore at Timbuktu (established in 989 C.E.) (Oppong, 2017). Therefore, Northern Ghana had encounters with the precursors of modern psychology – philosophy and physiology.

General mental health services such as psychiatry and community psychiatric nursing were expanded to Northern Ghana under the Ministry of Health, particularly through the community mental health programme following the passage of the mental Health Act in 2012 (Zambang, 2021). Immediately after, the Ghana Psychology Council was established under the Part five of the Health Professionals Regulatory Bodies Act, 2013 (Act 857), creating room for the Ministry of Health to recruit psychologists into the health sector. This was conceived to enhance mental health agenda in general and particularly promote the community mental health programme by placing psychologists at the district levels for easy access in communities. Prior to this, psychologists were not available in the health system since provision was not made for their recruitment, creating a human resource gap for mental health delivery across the country including the north. There were a few private mental health facilities such as the Shekhinah Clinic for the poor and destitute, established in 1991 by the late Dr. David Abdulai (Zambang, 2021). This clinic still offers free medical care including mental health care to the poor and destitute or the ones they call the 'forgotten ones'. BasicNeeds Ghana, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works to improve the lives of individuals living with mental illness and epilepsy, has also promoted the practice of psychology in Northern Ghana for years. This NGO (BasicNeeds Ghana) aims at providing community-based mental health interventions, livelihood support, and advocacy (Yaro, 2015).

Over the years, I/O psychologists travelled to provide services to organisations in the region. In the early 2000s, the University for Development Studies (UDS) appointed an I/O psychologist as a faculty member. A little after that, specifically after the passage of the Mental Health Act in 2012 and the creation of the Ghana Psychology Council (GPC) in 2013, two (2) clinical psychologists were hired for the regional hospitals in the Upper East and Upper West Regions in 2012. Unfortunately, the one posted to the Upper West Regional Hospital in Wa resigned after a few months to return to school in the same year. The other psychologist at the Upper East Regional Hospital in Bolgatanga also resigned after three (3) years for further studies. A year after their recruitment, the Tamale Teaching Hospital hired its first clinical psychologist in 2013. This psychologist in turn became the only clinical psychology practitioner in the entire Northern Ghana, serving for six (6) continuous years. Noteworthy is the fact that this psychologist operated for five (5) and half years without a specific consultation room dedicated for psychological practice. In his sixth year, three (3) fresh master-level graduates in clinical psychology were hired to join him, two (2) of whom were posted to the Tamale Teaching Hospital and the other to the Upper East Regional Hospital. In addition, two (2) clinical psychologists were hired for the Upper West (Regional and Municipal Hospitals) in Wa, and one (1) clinical psychologist at the Northern Regional Hospital in Tamale (popularly called the Tamale Central Hospital) in 2021. In 2020, the University for Development Studies (UDS) hired two members of staff with a background in psychology to teach at its School of Medicine. The UDS incorporated psychology modules in the curriculum for the training of medical practitioners.

These developments drastically transformed hiring and placement of psychologists at health facilities in the region. There have been social media campaigns and talks, seminars, and trainings. NGOs also utilise the services of psychologists to implement their projects and interventions in the region. Other government agencies such as the Ghana Police Service, Ghana Immigration Service, and Ghana Prison Service have also called for greater engagements and collaborations with psychologists in the region.

One of the most significant events is the establishment of a private psychology practice in the region; this private practice is incorporated as Total Life Enhancement Centre Ghana (TOLECGH). Arguably, TOLECGH is the first private psychology clinic in Northern Ghana, established in June 2018, with accreditation from the Ghana Psychology Council (GPC) in 2020. This is a psychology organisation that aims at promoting and advocating for better psychological health and services for the people in Northern Ghana.

Similarly, Ghana Psychological Association (GPA) began to extend its activities to the region. Annual programmes such as Psychology Week were and are still celebrated by the GPA representatives in the region through awareness creation on the role of psychology, and thr presentation of psychological problems, media engagement, distribution of flyers, and screening exercises. In 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022, the GPA's Psychology Week was celebrated in Northern Ghana along the national celebrations in Accra (the capital of Ghana) in collaboration with TOLECGH, the Tamale Teaching Hospital, and the Tamale Nurse' and Midwifery Training College. For instance, the 2022 celebration was observed in collaboration with TOLECGH and the New Life College. Current psychology-related activities in Northern Ghana include advocacy programmes such as awareness creation in schools, banks, hospitals, and religious organisation, psychological interventions for individuals and organisations, engagement with community leaders, and capacity-building workshops for health professionals. With support from the Centre for Social and Development Reform (CSDR), TOLECGH provides psychological services to prison inmates and ex-convicts in Tamale as part of CSDR's project titled *Harnessing Opportunities for Prison and Ex-convicts* (HOPE+) project. The clinical psychology practitioners in Northern Ghana, in collaboration with the private psychology organisation, are implementing activities in the areas of peacebuilding using the mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) model supported by Coginta Ghana and funded by the European Union.

In 2021, the GPA received a seed grant from the American Psychological Association (APA) to implement an intervention that seeks to improve the psychological wellbeing of residents of the so-called witch camps in Northen Ghana (Darkwah et al., 2021). The proposed intervention seeks to utilise a "blend of creative, indigenous cultural strategies with conventional psychosocial approaches to provide intervention primarily for the women who live in the witch camps and then for the communities where the practice occurs." (Darkwah et al., 2021, para. 5). This approach has been dubbed "Psychosocial Plus approach" and it combines *Expressive Art Therapy* and provision of other psychosocial support with basic needs provisions that responds to the sustenance needs (Darkwah et al., 2021).

Disaster interventions have also been led by the GPA in the region. These include provision of psychological intervention to affected banking sector workers following the banking sector crisis in 2019; crisis intervention for a drowning disaster on the Oti River involving students of the St. Charles Lawga R/C School at Saboba; crisis intervention for sodomised boys in Salaga in the Savannah Region in 2021; COVID-19 psychosocial support in 2020/21; the de-escalation of a clash between community members and the Ghana Police Service following an electricity disconnection exercise in 2021; and the provision of psychological support for Police Officers of

Zuarungu Command following the shooting and killing of two Police Officers by armed robbers in the Upper East Region in 2021.

A Growing Profession in Northern Ghana

Psychology has made significant gains in Northern Ghana. Some of these gains are discussed in this section. To begin, psychologists have been hired by three (3) of the regional hospitals in the region. The region initially had problem with retention of psychologists. However, there is currently low staff turnover among psychologists in Northern Ghana. The challenge of having only one person for the entire region has also been addressed. This means that the challenge of persons requiring clinical psychological services who had to travel to the south of the country or Tamale (at least at the time when there was only one psychologist based at the Tamale Teaching Hospital) has equally been resolved.

The presence of psychology in the region reflects in the collaborations with governmental and non-governmental organisations. Psychologists are recommended to and by individuals and groups or organisations regularly in the region. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Ghana, psychologists provided psychosocial support to the public in Northern Ghana (Dziwornu & Oppong, 2023). Besides, psychologists are called upon during other disasters for psychosocial support and to conduct training programmes for Ghana Prisons Service and sensitisation programmes for the Ghana Police Service. The request to conduct capacity-building activities for health workers, teachers, media personnel, bankers, and educational institutions and the media is worth mentioning here as well. Recognition of the role and contribution of psychologists during the COVID-19 pandemic have dramatically enhanced the practice. For instance, the Office of the President of the Republic of Ghana, through the Tamale Teaching Hospital, presented a certificate of honour to the resident psychologist at the hospital for his contribution during the COVID-19 pandemic. The psychologist was among other health professionals who were recognised.

The establishment of a private psychology practice in the region also represents a significant progress. This affords the region the opportunity to choose between mainstream government services or a private service. This opportunity used to be available only in the southern part of the country. As such, some services that come in handy through private practitioners were lacking in Northern Ghana for a long time. In this respect, this development has significantly contributed to expanding access to mental health services in Northern Ghana. There is also an increased awareness and recognition of the role of psychology in delivering total health to individuals in the region. Though slow, people are beginning to recognise psychology as a health profession, and this reflects in the increasing caseloads at the various facilities with psychologists. Institutional and professional referrals as well as self-referrals have increased over a space of a decade in the region. This shift in perception of the utility of psychology has helped reduce stigma surrounding mental health and encouraged individuals to seek professional help. This can be attributed to the extensive awareness creation through the media and GPA celebrations. Initially, the sigma of mental health negatively affected psychological health-seeking in the region. However, the commitment shown by the few psychologists in the region has led to an increase in the number of clients seen at the government facilities and in private practice. These clients are often recommended either by their employers, their attending physicians, or a (current or previous) beneficiary of psychological service to see psychologists.

Challenges of a Growing Profession

There remains a long way to go to fully develop the practice of psychology in Northern Ghana. There has been an unequal access to psychological services and unequal economic development in Ghana (Abdulai et al., 2018; Songsore, 2011). Southern Ghana tends to have increased access to social amenities including health facilities and has higher socioeconomic development compared to Northern Ghana. However, there are shared challenges across the country. The challenge of poverty and social exclusion associated with low socioeconomic development impacts access to health even where the services are available (Xu et al., 2019). This challenge has led to a situation where less resources are allocated to psychology practice in facilities/institutions in the region.

Another major challenge is the increasing but limited acceptance and utilisation of psychological services by the residents in Northern Ghana; in other words, there is still stigma associated with seeking mental health services in the region. One can still find people who make statements such as “I am not mad” when referred to see a clinical psychologist. This affirms the prevalence of decreasing but relatively high levels of stigma associated with mental health in Ghana, in general and Northern Ghana, in particular. Many individuals and communities still view mental illness as a sign of weakness, wickedness, spiritual affliction, or a taboo subject. This discourages people from seeking professional help and hinders the acceptance and utilization of psychological services. Furthermore, the low level of mental health literacy is impacting negatively the gains made in the perceived utility of psychological services. Thus, concerted effort is still needed to be directed at supporting individuals to appreciate mental health services more and to accept psychological interventions.

Limited human resource is a challenge in Northern Ghana. Generally, there is a national mental health human resource challenge (Atakora et al., 2020)leading to poor knowledge and awareness of mental health among the population. Objective: The overall aim of this study was to provide a systematic description of mental health services in Ghana. Methods: A snowball technique was used to select a total of 42 mental health professionals from six hospitals for interviews. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Results: Major findings of this study include inadequate human and material resources; poor knowledge of mental health among the population; weak coordination between general practitioners and mental health professionals; inadequate mental health services in schools and prisons. Additionally, 54.8% of respondents reported limited mental health educational materials, and most schools (54.8%. However, compared with the numbers recorded in other parts of the country, Northern Ghana is woefully under-resourced. Currently, there are five (5) administrative regions in Northern Ghana. As stated earlier, there was a time when only one (1) psychologist served the entire region. Presently, Savannah and North East Regions (the two newly created regions) are without a psychologist. In any case, one (1) psychologist in an entire region is not adequate, creating room for stress, inefficiency, and limited growth for the profession. This also limits access to psychological services, especially in remote and rural areas. Unfortunately, no institution trains psychologists in Northern Ghana, limiting access to psychology education. There is limited availability of continuous professional development programmes in Northern Ghana (except for online/virtual programmes) given that there are fewer professionals in the region.

In addition, limited funding is making the practice of psychology in particular and mental health in general challenging in the region. Efforts towards supporting psychology practice by government, NGOs, and international organisation will go a long way towards making the service readily available and accessible. Related to funding is the issue of lack of motivation. As most of the townships and cities in the region are relatively deprived, it becomes difficult to get professionals to accept posting to such places and may require some motivational packages or incentives to get them to accept appointments and retain them in the region.

Directions for the Future

Some suggestions to improve the service in Northern Ghana are presented in this section. First, there is the need for strong partnership and collaboration between psychology bodies (GPC and GPA), the Mental Health Authority (MHA), and other organisations particularly those with vested interest in Northern Ghana (particularly the Northern Development Authority) to promote psychological services to the benefit of the region. By this, the GPA and the GPC are also encouraged to visit the region regularly and conduct exercises to announce their existence/ presence. This can include monitoring projects and hosting of conferences and other events. The World Mental Health Day, the GPA Psychology Week, and other notable celebrations such as the World Suicide Prevention Day, and World Bipolar Day should be observed in the region where free services will be rendered to people and organisations.

With respect to motivation, more needs to be done to incentivise the professionals in the region. Psychologists' salary should be renegotiated with government, with special case made for those who accept posting to Northern Ghana to attract and retain them in the region. We need to acknowledge some efforts by GPA to lead such negotiations. For instance, representatives of GPA National Executive Committee met with GPC on issues of employment and salaries of psychologists in Ghana (GPA, 2023). This meeting was not held specifically to address the concerns we raised in this paper *per se*, but it represents a significant progress towards addressing the concerns of lack of motivation among psychologists in Ghana. These discussions should be expanded to include the special needs for posting to Northern Ghana. For example, psychologists posted to Northern Ghana could be given free accommodation, a 13th month allowance (similar to what is done for the medical doctors in the country), extra-duty allowances, shorter period to qualify for study leave, and prompt approval of applications for study leave.

Furthermore, there is the need for continued but increased collaboration with NGOs in the region to make psychological services readily available for their projects' beneficiaries. This should be done with the view that psychological impact of trauma-related events, which these NGOs are addressing, linger on for a very long time. Perhaps, an important issue is that government agencies, NGOs, and other civil society organisations (CSOs) in the region should engage licensed professionals to minimise and prevent reputational damage to the profession – a situation that negates the gains made in terms of improved perceived utility of psychology by the few practitioners in the region. The GPC may also need to actively monitor the activities of practitioners in the region to ensure that organisations hire or engage the services of only licensed psychologists in the region.

Also, more undergraduates with psychology background should be posted to Northern Ghana for their national service. Of course, this should come with some basic motivational provisions such as accommodation to whip up their interest and encourage them to accept the posting. This can be facilitated through the Psych Corp programme which prepares such graduates for national service particularly in health facilities and communities. These personnel will be attached to psychologists in the respective facilities where they can learn and assist the few professionals in the field in the region. This will also expose such young ones to the region and reduce their reluctance to work there in the future. Their presence will enhance psychology activities such as GPA's psychology week celebrations, mental health month celebrations and outreaches in the region. Thus, the GPA, GPC and Psych Corp should collaborate and utilize channels at the national service secretariat in order to achieve this goal.

Finally, continued extensive public education, campaigns, and sensitisation programmes must be rolled out by national mental health organisations such as GPA and MHA to address issues of stigma and other negative perceptions people may hold about the profession in the region. When this yields the desired results and people begin to avail themselves for the service, a special service charge regime could possibly be implemented for them to enable the service providers to meet the costs associated with providing psychological services in the region. This will also mean that more psychologists will have to be deployed to the region for the sensitisation exercises and the much-needed psychological services.

Conclusion

Clearly, the practice of psychology in Ghana is beginning to blossom. However, some regions of the country may have been left behind. It may be the case that, years after the country achieved considerable progress in psychology practice, we then will notice a disparity in access, and struggle to close the gaps in access to health services. There are several challenges that Northern Ghana is faced with in respect of expanding access to psychological services. These challenges have been noted to include poverty and social exclusion, limited human resources, lacking funding support, and decreasing but relatively higher levels of stigma. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving government support, increased funding, community engagement, advocacy efforts, and collaborations with other well-meaning organizations. It is crucial to promote the importance of psychological health, reduce stigma, to improve mental health literacy, and to expand access to quality psychological services in Northern Ghana. Northern Ghana is known to be often left behind in instances such as economic growth, infrastructure development, and health. Psychology practice must not suffer the same fate in the region. There are some concerted efforts to overcome some of these challenges. However, zeal, commitment and support are required to realise the goal of improved mental health infrastructure (facilities, supplies, and qualified human resources including psychologists) in the region. Therefore, it is imperative that the Government of Ghana, GPA and its members, and other well-meaning organisations collaborate to increase access to psychological services. Towards this end, GPA will need to step up its efforts and reach out to Northern Ghana more often.

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