ETHNOPRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE
POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN GHANA:
INVECTIVE AND INSULTS ON GHANAWEB

Rachel Thompson

Bachelor of Arts (English and Linguistics)
University of Cape Coast, Ghana, 2011

Master of Philosophy (Linguistics)
University of Ghana, Ghana, 2014

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science

Griffith University

July 2019
ABSTRACT

The study explores the practice, meaning and significance of invective and insults in political discourse among Ghanaians. It examines the use of such language forms against people of higher social status in online discourse in Ghana, a country where it is traditionally unacceptable to openly criticize the elderly and authority figures, let alone insult them. Data was sourced from GhanaWeb [www.ghanaweb.com], the most patronized online news website in Ghana that ensures anonymous citizen participation in issues of national interest.

The data involved invective and insult-filled online reader comments on news reports about the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner involved in the 2016 general election in Ghana. Metapragmatic comments (reader reactions) which portray Ghanaian sociocultural perspectives on the use of abusive language against these individuals were also gathered. These two sets of comments were used to build the Corpus of GhanaWeb Comments on Ghana’s 2016 Election (CGCGE16). In addition to CGCGE16, the data for the study included comments from social media platforms, native speakers’ intuitions and the views of Ghanaian anthropological linguists and cultural specialists obtained from interviews, and evidence from scholarly works.

The qualitative meaning analysis method is used along with the quantitative discourse analysis method. The study adopts an ethnopragmatic approach, combining corpus-based searches with semantic explications and cultural scripts, following the principles of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) approach (Wierzbicka, 1992, 1996; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014).

The findings indicate that most of the comments in CGCGE16 are personal attacks that violate the Ghanaian communicative norms towards the elderly and people in authority and, furthermore, do not conform to the expected displays of verbal respect. Instead of expressing their views on on-going socio-political issues, the commenters often draw on past socio-political occurrences, their public and sociocultural knowledge to engage in negative emotional characterizations and evaluations of the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner, thereby, showing disapproval of them. By means of name-calling expressions, derogatory adjectives, and derogatory interjections, these commenters attack the intellectual abilities, moral behaviour, social competence, and physical characteristics of their targets.

This negative communicative behaviour is attributed to the fact that on GhanaWeb, like on many online communities, interactants are not obliged to uphold communicative norms. The anonymity of GhanaWeb shields commenters from the repercussions such speech behaviours would otherwise necessitate. It is also attributed to the right to freedom of speech, the repeal of
the criminal libel law, and the fact that traditionally, there are some specific settings that allow the use of insults against authority. The study demonstrates that although the practice of using insults against political leaders in online commentary appears to be “normal” in the online context, it is a transgression when one considers the Ghanaian sociocultural norms of communication. Consistent with this, although the interaction on GhanaWeb is asynchronous, some commenters play the role of regulatory figures and traditional gatekeepers of appropriate communicative behaviour by posting disapproving metapragmatic comments.

The study identifies many ways in which interactions on GhanaWeb are culturally shaped. These include first, commenters do not only rely on English slang terms and swearwords, they also employ some local language insulting expressions (e.g. kwasea ‘fool’, yaka gbɔmɔ ‘worthless person’) due to the ‘weight’ such expressions carry for Ghanaians. Secondly, the metapragmatic comments do not employ certain key terms such as “offensiveness” that can be found in the literature on online studies related to the speakers of Inner Circle Englishes. Instead, they highlight the clear position of the Ghanaian culture on respect for elders and people in authority. These metapragmatic comments also stress the fact that the exchange of invective and insults in politics can result in violence which may have adverse effects on the development of the nation.

Overall, the study is inclined towards the view that instead of generalizing the results of studies on abusive language use in online interactions, there is a need to draw out what distinguishes Ghanaian online interactants from, let’s say, Western countries, Asian countries, African countries, or from interactants elsewhere. The key claim is that understanding the sociocultural backdrop for the speech practices of online interactants is crucial to understanding their language use, as interactants draw on existing communicative repertoires which influence their language choices. Also, the study draws attention to news websites in Ghana as a platform where the use of unmitigated invective and insults against people of higher social status is increasingly becoming the norm, despite the fact it violates Ghanaian communicative values. Thus, this study serves as a springboard for future research into abusive language use in online interactions among Ghanaians.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Queensland, June 28, 2019

Rachel Thompson
DEDICATION

To

Mama Wendy Bennett                          Mr Fred Oware
Asantewaa Ampofo                            Dzidefo Alomenu
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Bless the Lord oh my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits (Psalm 103: 1-2)

This study has been under the supervision of Professors Cliff Goddard and Andy Kirkpatrick and funded by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. Professor Cliff Goddard not only provided me with exceptionally thorough feedback on the thesis and rich insight into the NSM approach and ethno-pragmatics but has also been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me. His thought-provoking questions caused me to see things in different but more critical ways. Professor Andy Kirkpatrick has always given me prompt feedback, constructive suggestions and drawn my attention to some relevant issues and literature. I am extremely grateful to both of them for their excellent guidance and directions throughout the study.

Special thanks, also, to Dr Zhengdao Ye of Australian National University for her role as my independent assessor during the study and her insightful and critical comments. Likewise, I wish to express my appreciation to my former supervisor, Professor Kofi Agyekum for his input in the study. Despite his busy schedule, he made time for me when I went to Ghana and the session I had with him was, as usual, very illuminating. My profound gratitude goes to Professor Felix Ameka and the late Professor Tope Omoniyi (Sky), posthumously, for encouraging and inspiring me in diverse ways in my PhD journey.

I wish to acknowledge the CEO of GhanaWeb, Mr Robert Bellaart, his personal assistant, Sharida Ramsaroep, and the webmaster, Mr Joszja de Weerdt for their interest in my research and prompt responses to my emails. I am indebted to all my informants who contributed greatly to the success of the study by sharing with me their knowledge and experiences. I should especially mention Ms Akosua Agyapongmaa, Ms Patricia Amo, Ms Georgina Ampofo, Mr Peter King Appiah, Mr Robert Appiah, Mr Akwasi Boadi, and Mr Milliont Dufour at the Kumasi Cultural Centre. I want to wholeheartedly thank the Head of Performing Arts Department at the Centre, Mr Mustapha Issah Zerbah for introducing me to all these wonderful people and also for coordinating the interviews with them. I also wish to appreciate Pastor Derrick Ocansey, Pastor Aziz Sulley, Mr Wisdom Agbadi, Ms Henrietta
Freeman, Mr Vincent Tawiah, Ms Wendy Kwakye Amoako, Mr Edzordzi Agbozo, Mr Gladstone Deklu, and Mr Selikem Gotah for assisting me and providing me with information in the course of writing this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the faculty and staff of the School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, most especially Dr Robert Mason, Dr Ian Walkinshaw, and Mrs Nadine Savage. They have always been willing to help whenever I called on them. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr Frank Alifui-Segbaya of the School of Dentistry at Griffith University, Dr Emmanuel Amo Ofori and Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia of the University of Cape Coast, and Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo, Professor Augustine Asaah, Professor Richard Boateng, Dr Evershed Amuzu, Dr Jemima Anderson, Dr Mercy Bobuafor, Dr Seth Ofori, Dr Clement Apaah, and Mr Richard Kuwornu, all of the University of Ghana for their constant encouragement throughout the study.

Words cannot express my appreciation to my dear husband, Jerry for his overwhelming support, understanding, prayers, and love. To him, I say, ɛbɔtɔnyɛ, akpe nawi. My heartfelt gratitude to my father, Rev. David Thompson, my mother, Mrs Jewel Thompson, my sisters, Sheila and Tricia, my grandmother, Madam Bridget Tamakloe and other members of my family for their love, prayers, encouragement and support.

I owe many thanks to Pastor James Andrew Chinedu, Dr Elvis Asante Kyere, and Mrs Maria Cawse for their prayers and thoughtfulness. I would also like to thank my hub mates and colleagues, especially Jinghui, Jan, and Reza, my “Ghanaian brothers and sisters” in Australia, especially Emmanuel, Gideon, Stella, Frank, Delphina, Samuel, Philip, Ransford, Moses, Prince, Charles, and Richard, and all others who have been helpful to me in one way or the other throughout the study. God bless you all!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... i
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY ................................................................................... iii
DEDICATION ...................................................................................................................... iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................................................................... vii
FIGURES AND TABLES .................................................................................................. xi
ABBREVIATIONS, SYMBOLS AND GLOSSING CONVENTIONS ................................ xiii
RESEARCH WORKS FROM THE THESIS ................................................................. xv

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the thesis ................................................................................................. 1
1.2 Rationale for the present study .................................................................................. 3
1.3 Objectives and research questions ............................................................................ 5

## CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND FACTS ABOUT GHANA

2.1 Linguistic landscape, language use and attitudes ................................................... 6

2.2 Traditional Ghanaian social structure and communicative norms and values ........ 11
   2.2.1 Social structure in Ghana .................................................................................. 11
   2.2.2 Ghanaian speech culture ................................................................................... 13
   2.2.3 Attitudes to age and authority ......................................................................... 17

2.3 Invective and insult use among Ghanaians ............................................................ 20

2.4 Ghana’s political history, the media and citizen participation .............................. 24
   2.4.1 Political history (1957 - 2016) ....................................................................... 24
   2.4.2 Political dynamics and the impact on the media in Ghana ............................... 31
   2.4.3 Media and citizen participation in Ghana ....................................................... 32

2.5 Interactive media as a platform for invective and insults in political discussions ... 36
   2.5.1 Invective in the traditional media .................................................................... 36
   2.5.2 Internet and online discourse ......................................................................... 38
CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data and methods of analysis ................................................................. 45
   3.1.1 GhanaWeb ....................................................................................... 45
   3.1.2 Data and evidence ......................................................................... 52
   3.1.3 Coding system for GhanaWeb data .................................................. 53
   3.1.4 Methods of analysis ..................................................................... 59

3.2 Ethnopragmatic approach and Ewe NSM .............................................. 62
   3.2.1 Ethnopragmatic approach .............................................................. 62
   3.2.2 Methodological tools of the ethnopragmatic approach .................... 65
   3.2.3 Natural semantic metalanguage (NSM) of Ewe .............................. 69

3.3 Concluding remarks ........................................................................... 79

CHAPTER 4 ABUSIVE LANGUAGE USE AGAINST NATIONAL LEADERS AS A NORM VIOLATION: A CULTURAL BACKDROP

4.1 Ghanaian perspectives on the use of invective and insults in political discussions ...... 80
   4.1.1 The perceived “crisis” in Ghanaian political discourse ....................... 81
   4.1.2 Public reactions to the perceived “crisis” in Ghanaian political discourse...... 84

4.2 Semantic explications for local social categories ..................................... 88
   4.2.1 Age-related categories .................................................................. 90
   4.2.2 Social status-related categories ...................................................... 94

4.3 Ghanaian cultural scripts for interacting with someone considered “above”
   oneself/others ...................................................................................... 98

4.4 Ghanaian cultural script against criticizing someone considered “above” oneself/others 
   .............................................................................................................. 105

4.5 Concluding remarks .......................................................................... 107
CHAPTER 5 INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS AND ABUSIVE LANGUAGE ON GHANAWEB

5.1 Discourse patterns on GhanaWeb ................................................................. 109
5.2 Commenters’ “identity” on GhanaWeb......................................................... 111
5.3 Analysis of variables: relations, targets and tone ........................................ 116
   5.3.1 Relations........................................................................................................ 116
   5.3.2 Targets........................................................................................................... 118
   5.3.3 Tone ............................................................................................................. 120
5.4 Insult types and characteristic features of reader comments in CGCGE16 ........ 123
   5.4.1 Insult types in CGCGE16............................................................................ 123
   5.4.2 Bases of invective ....................................................................................... 127
   5.4.3 Forms of attack............................................................................................ 133
   5.4.4 Negative content choices............................................................................ 140
5.5 Rhetorical and graphological techniques....................................................... 150
   5.5.1 Rhetorical techniques ................................................................................. 150
   5.5.2 Graphological techniques ......................................................................... 156
5.6 Concluding remarks....................................................................................... 159

CHAPTER 6 SEMANTICS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC INSULTING EXPRESSIONS
IN CGCGE16: AN NSM ANALYSIS

6.1 NSM analysis of kwasea, aboa and gyimii.................................................... 162
   6.1.1 Kwasea ‘oaf/fool’........................................................................................ 164
   6.1.2 Aboa ‘animal/beast’.................................................................................... 169
   6.1.3 Gyimii ‘retard/stupid person’........................................................................ 174
6.2 NSM analysis of tweaa and apuu................................................................... 178
   6.2.1 Tweaa.......................................................................................................... 179
   6.2.2 Apuu............................................................................................................ 186
6.3 Concluding remarks....................................................................................... 191
CHAPTER 7 METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTS ON GHANAWEB

7.1 Motivation for metapragmatic responses on GhanaWeb ........................................ 193

7.2 Types of metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 .............................................. 198
   7.2.1 On-topic metapragmatic acts ................................................................. 198
   7.2.2 Off-topic metapragmatic acts ................................................................. 199

7.3 Communication flow of metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 ......................... 200

7.4 Reacting to invective and insult-filled comments on GhanaWeb .......................... 205

7.5 Concluding remarks ......................................................................................... 210

CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Major findings ..................................................................................................... 212

8.2 Limitations .......................................................................................................... 215

8.3 Implications ......................................................................................................... 217
   8.3.1 Theoretical implications .............................................................................. 217
   8.3.2 Practical implications ................................................................................... 219

8.4 Recommendations for further research ............................................................. 220

8.5 Closing remarks ................................................................................................ 221

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 223

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Letter of request .................................................................................... 254

Appendix 2 Letter of approval .................................................................................. 256

Appendix 3 Notice of ethical clearance ..................................................................... 257
FIGURES AND TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Map of West Africa 6
Figure 2.2 Geographic distribution of the languages in Ghana 11
Figure 3.1 Comment threads on GhanaWeb 49
Figure 3.2 Hierarchical structure of a comment thread on GhanaWeb 50
Figure 3.3 A common discourse pattern on GhanaWeb 56
Figure 5.1 “Identity” types in CGCGE16 113
Figure 5.2 Relation of comments to news reports 118
Figure 5.3 Targets of comments in CGCGE16 120
Figure 5.4 Tone of comments in CGCGE16 122
Figure 5.5 A representation of the use of political insults in the past 126
Figure 5.6 Frequency of negative content choices in CGCGE16 141
Figure 7.1 Communication flow of metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 200
LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 Civilian and military governments of Ghana since 1957 25

Table 2.2 Indecent campaign language on radio for the period
   April 18 – 30, 2016 37

Table 3.1 Code categories and subcategories 54

Table 3.2 Comment status 55

Table 3.3 Classifications with examples 57

Table 3.4 Subcategories for ‘commenter ID’ 57

Table 3.5 Subcategories for ‘relations’ 58

Table 3.6 Subcategories for ‘targets’ 58

Table 3.7 Subcategories for ‘tone’ 58

Table 3.8 Semantic primes (Ewe and English exponents) grouped into
   related categories 72

Table 5.1 Threads and single comments in CGCGE16 109

Table 5.2 Threads by number of comments 110

Table 5.3 Lexical forms classified as insults in CGCGE16 124
ABBREVIATIONS, SYMBOLS AND GLOSSING CONVENTIONS

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CGCGE16  Corpus of GhanaWeb Comments on Ghana’s 2016 Election
NSM     Natural Semantic Metalanguage
CMC     Computer-mediated communication
NPP     New Patriotic Party
NDC     National Democratic Congress
NDP     New Democratic Party
PNC     People's National Convention
CPP     Convention People’s Party
PPP     Progressive People’s Party
MFWA    Media Foundation for West Africa
JDM     John Dramani Mahama
EC      Electoral Commission
ID      Identity
[E]     Semantic Explication
[S]     Cultural Script
(C)     Example from CGCGE16
(O)     Example from another source
[sic]   Error is in the original comment
*       Sentence that follows is syntactically ill-formed or semantically anomalous
# GLOSSING CONVENTIONS

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>first person</td>
<td>LOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>second person</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>third person</td>
<td>NEG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADD</td>
<td>addressive particle</td>
<td>OBJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>agentive particle</td>
<td>PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEF</td>
<td>definite</td>
<td>POSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>determiner</td>
<td>POST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>future</td>
<td>PREP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAB</td>
<td>habitual</td>
<td>PRO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEF</td>
<td>indefinite</td>
<td>PROG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGR</td>
<td>ingressive</td>
<td>SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRR</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
<td>TP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RESEARCH WORKS FROM THE THESIS

Parts of this thesis have been presented at academic workshops and conferences and have been published and submitted for publication in academic journals.


CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter first presents an overview of the thesis and briefly states what is explored in each of the following chapters. Section 1.2 outlines the rationale for the study. Section 1.3 presents the objectives and research questions that guided the study.

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This thesis examines online abusive comments against the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner involved in Ghana’s 2016 general election, and explains why invective\(^1\) and insults against leaders and authority figures is a transgression of the norms of appropriate speech behaviour among Ghanaians. Reader comments following news reports published about these key figures were downloaded from GhanaWeb [www.ghanaweb.com] as the primary data for the study.

Ghanian sociocultural expectations and communicative norms regarding asymmetrical interactions (obtained from interviews and scholarly works) are studied with the aid of semantic explications and cultural scripts, the twin tools of the ethnopragmatic approach. The qualitative meaning analysis method is used along with the quantitative discourse analysis method to (a) describe some sociocultural perspectives on the use of verbal abuse against people of higher social status in Ghana, (b) explore the use of abusive language on GhanaWeb, and (c) show the dynamics of commentary on GhanaWeb.

The thesis is made up of eight chapters. Chapter 2 provides some background facts about Ghana in relation to the linguistic landscape, political history, and citizen participation. It profiles the key personalities in the 2016 presidential election, and reviews some existing literature on the use of invective and insults on interactive media platforms.

Chapter 3 gives details of the data collection procedures and the methods of analysis. It describes the methodological tools of the ethnopragmatic approach, semantic explications and cultural scripts. The application of these tools to describe the meaning of culture- and

\(^1\) In this thesis, the term ‘invective’ is used as a mass noun (see https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). However, the author acknowledges that in some varieties of English, the term is considered as a count noun and thus the plural form is ‘invectives’.
language-specific terms and enhance the understanding of sociocultural norms add to the textual analysis of the comments in the corpus. Ewe NSM developed by Ameka (1994) is adapted in line with latest trends in NSM scholarship.

Chapter 4 provides essential context for the analysis of invective and insults against authority figures as inappropriate and unacceptable in the Ghanaian context. Semantic explications and cultural scripts are proposed to capture some traditional ideologies and values, and some sociocultural expectations and norms in relation to interactional asymmetry among Ghanaians.

Chapter 5 identifies common words and expressions in the data with the aid of AntConc 3.4.0w and Microsoft Excel softwares and analyzes the patterns and dynamics of the reader commentary on GhanaWeb. It considers, among other things, communication flow on the news site and how participants construct their socio-political identities. It shows the various forms of verbal attacks against political leaders (e.g. on Ethnicity; on Intellectual/mental ability; on Physical characteristics) and examines the textual elements (e.g. Swear/taboo words; Derogatory adjectives; Animal terms) and graphological techniques (e.g. Rhetorical question; Repetition; Word lengthening) identified in the comments.

Chapter 6 establishes that the meanings of common local insulting expressions differ from their meanings in English, especially the most frequent insult, fool. Akan name-calling terms, kwasea, gyimii, and aboa as well as derogatory interjections, tweaa and apuu are also explicated to show their actual meanings in the Ghanaian context.

Chapter 7 turns to metapragmatic comments in the comment threads, that is, comments that condemn the use of offensive and abusive language on GhanaWeb. These metapragmatic comments help to indicate how some commenters perform the role of regulatory figures and traditional gatekeepers of appropriate communicative behaviour on the website.

Chapter 8 states the major findings of the study and summarizes their theoretical and practical implications. It outlines the limitations of the study, along with recommendations for future research.
1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

GhanaWeb, the data source for the present study, is a news website that allows people to post comments and share opinions in reaction to various news reports published. It is free from official constraints and characterized by anonymous and pseudonymous comments. There is no registration or identity verification of commenters. There is a lack of moderation policies, prescreening, and censorship. Comments are filled with various forms of invective and insults, many of which cannot be fully understood without knowledge and competence in the cultural, political, and situational contexts of Ghana. Nevertheless, the available literature on internet interaction among Ghanaians is mainly about the impact of the social media on youth (e.g. Borzekowski, Fobil, & Asante, 2006; Tettey, 2006; Fair, Tully, Ekdale, & Asante, 2009; Markwei & Appiah, 2016). Little research has been done on the use of invective and insults in internet interactions among Ghanaians. Thus, the present study will fill this gap in the literature.

In spite of the large body of literature on online disinhibition, norm violations, and the use of derogatory language on online interactive platforms, the reaction of participants to the negative communicative behaviour displayed by other participants on the same platform has not been extensively studied. Neurauter-Kessels (2011) highlighted a need for research on the reactions of commenters to norm violations of other commenters. She avers that such research can help establish the complex dynamics of these communicative settings. The present study not only examines abusive comments but also the metapragmatic comments on GhanaWeb to demonstrate how some participants attempt to ensure civil and smooth communication in online political discourse².

A survey through the literature shows that studies on online interactions are mainly devoted to reasons why participants use negative language, and sometimes, to the effects or possible effects of this communicative behaviour (see Joinson, 1998, 2001; Kayany, 1998; Vrooman, 2002; Suler, 2004; Santana, 2013). Most of the factors highlighted in these studies are based on the inherent structure of the internet and general features of internet forums.

---
² Following van Dijk (1997), political discourse, needless to say, does not only refer to official political speeches but it includes talk or text from all groups, institutions or citizens participating in a political event.
There is, therefore, a pressing need to investigate the culture-specific manifestations of offensive communicative behaviours in various domains (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010).

The common assumption in the literature is that the use of abusive language forms online is inherently bad and this is quite understandable. Nevertheless, a person’s internalized values based on their culture and tradition influence their verbal behaviour or attitude and subsequently, their judgments in every speech event (Turnage, 2007; Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010). Thus, when investigating online interactions, one cannot disregard structured sociocultural patterns of communication.

To date, relatively few studies have highlighted cultural specificities of offensive language during online interactions (e.g. Thais - Hongladarom, 1998; Israelis - Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013). In order to extend the scholarship in this context, the present study draws on the ethnopragmatic approach (Goddard, 2000, 2006; Ameka & Breedveld, 2004; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014). This approach draws attention to the fact that there is a relationship between the indigenous values and belief systems of society and their indigenous speech practices (Wierzbicka, 1997; Wong, 2006; Goddard & Ye, 2015).

Given that no two communities have the same culture, the norms that guide the interpretation of communicative practices and serve as the measuring rod for appropriateness and acceptability in Community A may not be able to adequately deal with similar practices in Community B. This implies that if online verbal practices are measured against more specific cultural norms, then one can understand and interpret it more clearly. Invective and insults, in general, are not peculiar to any speech community (Neu, 2008). However, each community has distinctive rules of language use and common strategies for interpreting and signifying such language forms (Kampf, 2015).

Bearing this in mind, a pure linguistic description of the invective and insults gathered may be indispensable, but it will be a partial description, hence the use of an ethnopragmatic approach in this study. With the aid of the methodological tools of ethnopragmatics (i.e. semantic explications and cultural scripts), the study enhances the understanding of selected invective and insults. It also lays bare some indigenous perspectives on communicative norms among Ghanaians to cultural outsiders.
1.3 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall goal of this study can be stated as follows:

To identify and enhance understanding of selected invective and insults in online discourse against leading political figures in Ghana, a country where it is socio-culturally unacceptable to openly criticize the elderly and people of higher status.

More specifically, the study attempts to find answers to the four research questions (RQs) below. It identifies and discusses some Ghanaian cultural scripts for appropriate ways of interacting with others, especially in asymmetrical interactions.

1. What are the Ghanaian cultural scripts for appropriate ways of interacting with socially elevated categories?

It then examines online political discourse and abusive language on news sites in Ghana, focusing on the questions below:

2. a. What are interactional patterns displayed on GhanaWeb?
   b. What are the characteristic insulting words and expressions used by commenters during online political discourse on GhanaWeb?

With regard to the understanding of invective and insults in particular, it seeks to answer the question that follows:

3. What are the meanings of common local language abusive terms and their social value in terms of offence in the Ghanaian context?

Finally, the study examines some comments that depict people’s assessment of this unacceptable communicative behaviour in light of their sociocultural values and norms, answering the following question:

4. What are the metapragmatic reactions from other commenters to the practice of using invective and insults towards others on news sites in Ghana?
CHAPTER TWO
BACKGROUND FACTS ABOUT GHANA

This chapter provides background context for the study. Section 2.1 presents information on Ghana in terms of the linguistic landscape, language use and attitudes. Section 2.2 recounts Ghana’s political history and its impact on media practices and citizen participation. Section 2.3 outlines some norms of communication and Section 2.4 discusses the use of invective and insults in everyday discourse among Ghanaians. Section 2.5 gives a picture of the interactive media as a platform for invective and insults in Ghanaian political discussions.

2.1 LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE, LANGUAGE USE AND ATTITUDES

Ghana is a West African country with an estimated population of 28 million (United Nation’s World Population Review Report, 2017). It is a former British colony, previously known as Gold Coast. The capital city of Ghana is Accra. As Figure 2.1 shows, Ghana borders Togo to the east, Côte d’Ivoire (Ivory Coast) to the west, and Burkina Faso to the north. The Gulf of Guinea lies to the south. English is the defacto national and official language of Ghana.

Figure 2.1. Map of West Africa (Source: www.mapsof.net)
There are strong economic (trade) and social relations (e.g. marriage) among some Ghanaians and citizens of these neighbouring countries, especially those who live along the borders (Ansah, 2014). Since French is the official language of all of Ghana’s immediate neighbours, it is studied as a subject in basic and high schools. Due to this, a number of citizens speak French with different levels of proficiency. A nearby country in West Africa which does not share a border with Ghana but has social and economic relations with the country is Nigeria. This is because Ghana and Nigeria had similar colonial and independence experiences (Otohile & Obakhedo, 2011). Both countries were colonized by the British and as a result, use English for many official purposes. Nigeria is also Ghana’s second biggest trading partner, after China (http://countries.bridgat.com/Ghana_Trade_Partners.html).

Ghana has two cultural areas, the southern and the northern, which have developed historically. They are distinct geographically, linguistically, and in sociocultural practices. Approximately 70 percent of the population are in the Southern half (Langer, 2013). The nation is highly multilingual. According to ethnologue³, there are about 73 mutually unintelligible indigenous languages and 8 non-indigenous languages (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2019). Languages such as Akan, Ewe, Ga, Gua, Ligbi, and Nzema are indigenous to Southern Ghana, while languages such as Dagbani, Gonja, Kasem, Bisa, Dagaare and Gurene are indigenous to Northern Ghana (Dakubu, 1996). These languages belong to various branches within the Niger-Congo language family. Akan, Ewe, Ga, Nzema, Gua, and Gonja are Kwa languages. Dagbani, Dagaare, Gurene and Kasem are Gur languages. Bisa and Ligbi are Mande languages.

As indicated in the report of the last official national census, Ghana has five major ethnic language groups: Akans (47.5%), Mole Dagbons (16.6%), Ewes (13.9%), Ga-Adangmes (7.4%) and Guans (5.7%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Ansah (2014) observes that although the indigenous Ghanaian languages are associated with the various ethnic groups in the country, there are not as many ethnic groups as languages. She explains that “what is usually described as a language group typically consists of a cluster of socioculturally and linguistically related ethnic groups who do not see themselves as internally homogeneous” (Ansah, 2014, p. 2). English, Akan, Hausa, and Ghanaian Pidgin

³Ethnologue assumes that all numbers are estimates since languages are fluid (Ansah, 2014).
English (GhPE) are the languages of wider communication in Ghana (Eberhard et al., 2019). These languages are considered as major lingua francas in the country. While English and GhPE are used across the country, Akan is mainly used in the south (including in the capital, Accra) and Hausa in the north (Obeng, 1997a; Ansah, 2014).

As mentioned, English is the defacto official/national language and a cross-ethnic lingua franca in Ghana (Dakubu, 1996; Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). It is used in the media, politics and diplomacy, government business, education, and for international trade, technology and general modernization (Saah, 1986; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). After the first three years of primary education, the medium of instruction in school at all levels is exclusively English. One of about nine selected indigenous Ghanaian languages, which include Ewe, Ga, Nzema, Kasem, and Dagaare, is taught as a subject; the choice is based on the dominance of a particular language at where the school is located (Owu-Ewie, 2006; Ansah, 2014; Anyidoho, 2018). For instance, schools in the Volta Region teach Ewe as a subject, as that is the dominant language of the area. According to the last official national census report (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012), the literacy rate of the total population of Ghana is 61 percent (Amfo, Houphouet, Dordoye, & Thompson, 2018, p. 3).

Among Ghanaians, English is seen in a more positive light as compared to the indigenous languages and enjoys greater prestige (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008; Ansah, 2014; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). Lack of English proficiency can lead to people having “communicative insecurity”. At every given opportunity, most literates would rather write to others, including to relatives, friends and loved ones (even for informal or unofficial purposes), in English (Saah, 1986, pp. 370-371). It is evident in the current study that this has been extended to social media and other forms of computer-mediated communication, as the majority of the online interactants generally communicate their opinions in English.

One’s level of proficiency in English is often equated to one’s level of intelligence, as many people view English as being synonymous to general education (Saah, 1986; Mfum-Mensah, 2005; Dako & Quarcoo, 2017). The educational system allocates more resources (books, qualified teachers, etc.) to English than to the Ghanaian languages. English tests at the basic or secondary school level need to be passed for one to be able to further one’s education. Also, competence in English is likely to get one a higher paid job than competence in a Ghanaian language. Many parents, thus, do everything possible to ensure their children
are competent in English, such as enrolling them in an English-only-medium private school. In some homes, especially where the parents are elites, the medium of communication is English (Ansah, 2014; Anyidoho, 2018). Consequently, some Ghanaians are more proficient in the English language than in any indigenous language (Amfo et al., 2018).

GhPE is spoken by about 5 million people and can be categorized into educated GhPE and uneducated GhPE (Eberhard et al., 2019). Educated GhPE is used among the elites (typically among males), as an in-group language to express solidarity, as well as a lingua franca in multilingual contexts, mainly for casual conversation (Saah, 1986; Huber, 1999). Uneducated GhPE is used by both males and females. Generally, it is associated with illiteracy (Huber, 1999). It is the only medium of communication for people of different linguistic backgrounds who cannot speak English. Uneducated GhPE is mainly used in the market among traders or between the traders and their customers. Menial labour workers who cannot speak English and do not share a common local language with their superiors or employers usually communicate with them in this language (Saah, 1986).

Akan is the most widely used local language in different socio-economic, religious, entertainment and cultural contexts in Ghana (Obeng, 2005). Apart from being the first or second language of about 9 million people, it is also an additional language for many citizens (Amfo et al., 2018; Eberhard et al., 2019). Dako and Quarcoo (2017: 21) opine that 70% of Ghanaians can speak Akan. Akan is the major language of communication in the capital city, Accra, although Ga is the indigenous language of the region. This linguistic phenomenon can be attributed to Accra’s cosmopolitan nature (Ansah, 2014; Thompson & Anderson, 2019). Thompson (2018) observes that Akan is the most frequently used local language in both traditional and social media platforms across the country. As the present study shows, Akan is also used more than any other Ghanaian language in reader comments on online news sites in Ghana. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that most of the Ghanaian language lexical items which are classified as invective in this study are Akan terms or Akan terms that have been borrowed into other languages.

Hausa, unlike Akan, is a non-indigenous Ghanaian language. It is a Nigerian language that is regarded as a West-African trade language. As mentioned earlier, it is widely used as a second or additional language among people who hail from northern Ghana. It is also one of the languages used by the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (the only broadcasting station
in Ghana with a nation-wide coverage) in national radio and television broadcasting (Obeng, 1997a; Ansah, 2014).

It has been established that Ghana is a multilingual country where English, GhPE, Akan, and Hausa serve as lingua francas. However, it is noteworthy that language choice in unofficial/non-formal contexts is determined mainly by the linguistic background of the interactants (Ansah, 2014). For instance, the language of interaction during a political discussion on GhanaWeb, from which the present study draws data, is English, but occasionally, some submissions (either entirely or in part) are made in GhPE, Akan, Hausa, Ga, or Ewe. Figure 2.2 is a linguistic map that shows the regional/geographic distribution of some of the languages in Ghana.

Owing to the multilingual situation in Ghana, many citizens (elites and non-elites) can speak at least two languages (Adika, 2012; Akpojivi & Fosu, 2016). The elites are able to speak English and one or more languages which may include an indigenous language (e.g. Ga), Hausa or French. The non-elites may be able to speak their native language or one or more other local languages. Some of these bilingual and multilingual speakers are also able to read and write in all or some of the different languages they speak. For example, the present author is multilingual with varying degrees of proficiency in English, Ewe, Akan, Ga, and French. She acquired English and French in school, has Ewe as her mother tongue and acquired both Akan and Ga in Accra, where she was born and raised.

Many citizens like the present author sometimes display their bilingual or multilingual identity during online interactions. As will be demonstrated in this study, they code-switch when communicating online for various reasons. Code-switching online is not peculiar to Ghanaians. Research shows that during English-based online interactions, members of bilingual or multilingual communities employ words and expressions that do not have precise English equivalents from the other language(s) in order to communicate in a more economical and effective manner (Danet & Herring, 2003; Huang, 2004; Halim & Maros, 2013). This phenomenon is explored further in Chapter 5.
2.2 TRADITIONAL GHANAIAN SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND COMMUNICATIVE NORMS AND VALUES

This section first describes the traditional organizational structure of the Ghanaian society. It then describes some norms for verbal interactions and finally, some norms for asymmetrical interactions among Ghanaians.

2.2.1 Social Structure in Ghana

Traditionally, the organizational structure of the Ghanaian society is based on kinship and ancestry (Ayittey, 2006). The authority system in many communities (towns or villages) can
be made up of chiefs, queens, family heads, elders, youth leaders, traditional priest and priestesses (Kendie, Ghartey, & Guri, 2008). The family\(^4\) forms the basic political units of any community. Even though things have changed slightly in modern times, the Ghanaian concept of family (fome in Ewe and abusua in Akan), typically, does not involve only parents and children. It includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces, and even in-laws. That is, it is more of the “extended family” concept than the “nuclear family” concept. The family has a hierarchical structure, which is led by the family head known in Ewe as fometatɔ/fomemetsitsi or in Akan abusuapanyin (Awoonor, 1990). At the helm of affairs in the entire community is the chief, that is, tɔgbui in Ewe or Nana in Akan (Ayittey, 2006).

Family heads are the authority figures in every family. What qualifies a person for this position are “seniority, age, wisdom, a sense of civic responsibility and logical persuasiveness” (Wiredu, 1995, p. 55). Family heads are the custodians of family properties and representatives of their families on the traditional governing council. In this regard, they must consult with the other elders (ametsitsiwo [Ewe]; mpanyinfoɔ [Akan]) in the family before they make decisions on important matters in relation to economic, political, and religious activities (Kludze, 1987; Yankah, 1995). As coordinators of the family and the father figures to all members of the family, they regulate and manage affairs in order to ensure the wellbeing of all. They are expected to guide individuals in the family with their wisdom so that these individuals can make the right choices in their social endeavours. The family heads convene and preside over all family gatherings, especially those relating to marriage, naming ceremonies, funerals, divorce, dispute settlements, and many other culturally related activities (Yankah, 1995).

Chiefs are the rulers and heads of authority in the community and they obtain the right to rule from inheritance. Although not of significance in present times, families in Ghana are either royals or non-royals. Chiefs must come from the royal families. Before the colonial period, the chiefs exercised their authorities as legislative, administrative, military, economic, religious, and cultural custodians (Abotchie, 2006). They ensured the peace of the members of their communities and put mechanisms in place to defend them against any form

\(^4\) The term ‘lineage’ may be more accurate.
of external aggression (Boulton, 2004). Busia (1951: 196) cited in Aning, Brown, Boege, and Hunt (2018: 133-151) describes a chief as:

A leader revered as the lineal successor of the founder of the state, its sub-divisions, divisions and the village. His subjects felt beholden to him for their well being. He was the custodian of the lands of the political community of which he was the head. He exercised judicial functions in relation to offences classified as hateful to the ancestral spirits and other spiritual beings, to which he offered prayers for the prosperity of the community.

The colonial leaders included the chiefs in their governance structure as they made the chiefs the central figures for local administration through the indirect rule model (Nukunya, 2003; Tieleman & Uitermark, 2018). During the rule of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president, the authority of the chiefs was reduced and from then till now, they serve only as cultural custodians (Asamoah, 2012). An elaborate description of a chief is provided in Chapter 3.

2.2.2 Ghanaian Speech Culture

In social interactions among Ghanaians, speakers are supposed to be very mindful of the spoken word, and this is highlighted, for instance, in the Akan maxim, *asem te se ekutwa; wopepa a, enkɔ* ‘speech is like a scar: it never disappears even when wiped’. Hence, a person’s ideas or messages must be conveyed tactfully in order to maintain harmonious relationships. Silence is considered a better response when one is uncomfortable with a question posed or does not think others will appreciate the actual response (Thompson & Agyekum, 2015). To many people in Ghana, a person’s intelligence can be measured by their ability to use language effectively to impress an audience. For instance, in many official gatherings, the English language is used; however, a speaker who can skilfully add some witty local expressions often attracts applause.

Traditional Ghanaian speech culture strongly disapproves of open verbal confrontation. A person engaging in such behaviour is regarded as *onim kasa* among the Akans and *menya nufọfo o* among the Ewes. These expressions literally translate as ‘he/she does not know how to talk/speak’ (i.e. they are communicatively incompetent). Some local maxims that underscore the non-acceptance of this behaviour include *nu lokpo mevlia atsu o* (Ewe) ‘a big mouth does not win the contest for a husband’ (mouthiness does not grant one their desires); *asem ye den sen ara, yen fa sikan ntw* (Akan) ‘no matter how difficult an issue is, it is not
cut with the knife’ (difficult issues are not resolved with harsh words); and noore la sọɔ (Dagaare) ‘the mouth is a witch’ (mind your speech) (Agbemabiese, n.d; Appiah, Appiah, & Agyeman-Duah, 2001; Kogri & Tangwam, 2018). These maxims point to the need for speakers to be tactful and discreet when an issue is potentially confrontational. When confrontational language cannot be avoided, the situation can be managed through certain non-verbal and verbal communication strategies.

The non-verbal strategies include the use of certain costumes and props such as cloths/wax prints (as wax prints 1 - 3 below show, many cloths in Ghana have names captured in sentences that carry specific messages), hairstyles, proxemics, gazes, dance moves, drum beats (see Dzameshie, 1998; Obeng, 1999, 2001; Agyekum, 2006; Yankah, 2017; Amissah & Letcher-Teye, 2018). For example, someone can wear Wax Print 3, the cloth known as se wobe ka mehu asem a, fa adwa tena ase ‘if you want to talk about me, take a seat and sit down’ to a social gathering. The reason behind this choice of outfit can be that there are some individuals in the gathering that the person perceives as gossips or rumour-mongers.

The verbal strategies include the use of conventional forms such as proverbs, folktales, idioms, metaphors, euphemisms, songs, circumlocution, innuendoes, hyperbole, evasion, pseudo-soliloquy, and pronoun mismatches (i.e. using a specific personal pronoun to index a referent other than the one it is conventionally associated with). Unconventional forms include giving names to dogs and cats, nicknames, pseudonyms, and even (middle) names of

These strategies are generally employed to criticize and draw the attention of others to antisocial behaviours. The unconventional forms are typically used to express some emotions to a group of people concerned as they bemoan negative social behaviours of other people around them such as laziness, gossiping, ingratitude, betrayal, and selfishness without attracting any form of trouble. For instance, a person can name a dog in Akan as Bonniaye ‘ungrateful’ or Suronipa ‘be-afraid-of-humans’; or in Ewe as Dokuitɔdzila ‘selfish-person’ or Kpɔtwogbo ‘mind-your-own-business’, and call attention to the name of the animal in the presence of the intended target. Subsequently, the person may verbally abuse the animal. The human target can understand that they are the referent of the abuse but cannot respond directly.

Also, nicknames, pseudonyms, and baby names could be proverbial names or names couched in the form of innuendoes to portray strained relationships between people (Agbedor, 1991; Dakubu, 2000; Obeng, 2001; Agyekum, 2006; Adjah, 2011). Names\(^5\) like Suhuyeni ‘one-heart’ and Zantale ‘take-someone’s-fault’ in Dagbani, Amewoho ‘a-person-is-more-worthy-than-money’ and Gotahunehune ‘sparkling-on-the-outside’ in Ewe, and Ammɛyɛhuu ‘did-not-come-to-perform-anything’ and Mmaɛnyɛwodɛ ‘do-not-rejoice-over-it’ in Akan fall in this category.

The intended meaning of these language forms is generally unambiguous in context because in most cases, the speaker and the target share a common sociocultural background. Nevertheless, the target cannot take any grievous action as the speaker can always deny that they were speaking to or about that specific person. The use of these strategies depicts conflictive situations in the society, but it also serves a social control function by preventing social disorder and ensuring protection against any direct attack on a speaker (Yankah, 1991; Obeng, 1994, 1999).

It is noteworthy that there are some communicative contexts among Ghanaians, such as cross-examinations in the court, which require the use of plain language. Yankah (1991)

---

\(^5\) In recent times, baby names like the examples provided are not commonly given or used by their bearers for various reasons. One reason may be that they usually involve invective and the bearer may find it embarrassing. Another reason is related to the belief that a name like ‘did not come to perform anything’ can have a negative impact on the life or character of the bearer (Dakubu, 2000).
notes that there is a “practical need for candor and openness in certain interactions” (p. 53). Some maxims that recognize this fact include the following in Akan: *paepae mu ka ma ahomka* ‘candid words beget relief’; *asem deɛ eda ne kwan mu a, na woaka, yenyi nto nkyen na yenkyea no nso* ‘if an issue is lying on its path, you say it, we neither remove it or put it sideways nor bend it’; and *asem nokware, yen to sebe* ‘you don’t have to apologize to say the truth’; *twene anim da ho a, yenyan nkyen* ‘when the drum is barefaced you don’t rattle the sides’. Considering the preference for embellished or “roundabout” speech in some contexts, and candid or blunt speech in other contexts, verbal artistry is valued and appreciated among Ghanaians (Yankah, 2004). That is, a good speaker must know what to say and how to say it in different speech contexts. In this vein, people are usually well enculturated with communicative norms and values in the early stages of their lives and are motivated to conform consistently (Yankah, 1991; Awedoba, 1996; Salifu, 2010).

Babies are first initiated into “the essence of truth and discreet speech, the need for care, truth, firmness and social sensitivity in the exercise of the spoken word” during naming ceremonies (Yankah, 1991, p. 48). The adults then share the responsibility of their upbringing in a way that they can address and communicate with others in accordance with accepted conventions to avert the potential negative consequences of non-conforming behaviours (Opuni-Frimpong, 2012). As a supplement to what the family teaches them, children with access to formal education have to study the subject, ‘Ghanaian languages and culture’ from primary school through to junior high school. The teaching of this subject, as stated in the syllabus, is among other reasons, to make the children (1) knowledgeable about the cultural norms and values, and (2) competent in their use of language; that is, the subject is a way of integrating children into the Ghanaian culture (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 2007).

Masaka and Chemhuru (2011) suggest that norms instil commendable character traits that make people behave and communicate in a desirable fashion. Society, therefore, has much regard for those considered to have gone through proper nurturing and to have acquired the relevant knowledge, norms and values, and disapproves of people who are considered not to have gone through proper nurturing (see Opuni-Frimpong, 2012, pp. 104-105). In the home or community, children are normally taught the expected ways of relating either directly through verbal admonitions or indirectly through folktales. Discussing the significance of
folktales among Ghanaians, Miescher (2005) asserts that they are not solely for oral entertainment, as most of them are didactic: “most tales close with a moral statement that sets out a norm or explains the status quo” (p. 41). Sometimes, children are made to publicly play the role of the characters in certain folktales. In such role plays, it is believed that they internalize the moral values and norms as well as learn the fundamental ways of initiating conversations appropriately. The expectation is that when they become adults, they will treat anyone they come across in a proper manner or with respect.

Among Ghanaians, an individual’s poor public speech can reflect badly on their parents, family or community. The question often asked is “whose son [daughter] is he [she] to be so unrefined in speech?” (Yankah, 1998, p. 40, insertion mine). Not only do those who speak decorously at all times avoid causing their relatives embarrassment, but they also help to maintain the dignity, honour, and good reputation of their relations (Agyekum, 2004b). Thus, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, teachers, and other adults in the community, seize different opportunities daily to transmit sociocultural norms and values to children (Mosha, 2000; Agyekum, 2010; Salifu, 2014). One of such opportunities is when a child misbehaves. Depending on how grave the misconduct is, the child is reprimanded through verbal means, such as yelling, threatening, and teasing or the child is caned, most often in front of others to serve as a deterrent to them (see Quinn, 2005). Alternative behaviours which are deemed appropriate are then pointed out to that child and others present. Another opportunity is when a family receives visitors including older people, especially persons of the parental generation and above. The children are taught how to greet the older people, refer to them with the appropriate address terms and relate to them in an appropriate manner (Awedoba, 1996).

2.2.3 Attitudes to Age and Authority

According to Mosha (2000), one of the basic principles of African indigenous thought is “respect for age and authority (that is, for people older than oneself and those in authority)” (p. 100). Several studies have shown that Ghana is one of such African societies where respect is attached to age and social status (e.g. Dakubu, 1981; Obeng, 1997b; Agyekum, 2003; Fening, 2015). In Flamenbaum’s (2016) words, there exists among Ghanaians, “this deeply rooted preference for unquestioning deference to parents, chiefs, elders, and other authority figures” (p. 134). That is, it is highly expected that age, position, wealth, and
experience are well regarded and so anybody who is considered superior in terms of any of these social variables must be treated with “respect” or “deference” (Salifu, 2010, 2014; Fening, 2015; Flamenbaum 2016; Thompson & Anderson, 2019).

Hierarchy and the relative status of a speaker and their addressee can be regarded as social universals in that they should exert an influence on the organization of speech in any social interaction, no matter in which cultural context they are found (Kirkpatrick, 2007). This means that during a speech event, there should be a link between the relative statuses of the interactants and the interactional flow. Asymmetrical social interactions are rarely engaged in on equal terms, as subordinates are expected to yield to higher-status individuals (in many cases, their superiors), and acknowledge the privileges associated with their status. For instance, the higher-status individual or superior should be able to speak for longer periods of time, and often, while the superior is speaking, there is an expectation that the subordinate will not interrupt (Guerrero, DeVito & Hecht, 1999, p. 326). An interaction with a chief must be channeled through an intermediary known as the ɔkyeame (Akan) or tsiame (Ewe/Ga) so that the speaker can keep some distance from him. This is because the chief is sacred and any form of direct communication between him and others must be avoided (Yankah, 1995; Ameka, 2004).

Moreover, a speaker’s language choices during the interaction are highly influenced by the status of their addressee or referent (Hudson, 1996; Barbieri, 2008). During subordinate-superior speech events, it is required that the subordinates engage in what Obeng (1997b) refers to in Akan as “kasa pa (good speech), ɔpɔ kasa (polite or civilized speech) or obuo kasa (respectful speech)” (p. 52). This form of language used towards people of high social status can be described, just as Ide (1989) puts it (i) “a speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favorably by the addressee”, and (ii) “a speaker’s choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities” (p. 225). In other words, a subordinate must avoid being offensive and must be able to properly manipulate their linguistic actions and expressions to suit the communicative event, according to the accepted values and norms.

For example, expressions like mesre meka ‘pardon me to say’ in Akan, mede kuku ‘please’ in Ewe, and mekpa fai ‘please’ in Ga are ways of highlighting status asymmetry and
of softening the force of a following utterance (Obeng, 2003; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016; Thompson & Anderson, 2019). Others such as sebe mpre aduasa (Akan), taflatse (Ewe), and tafratse (Ga) are apologetic signals that inform other interlocutors that a following statement is to some extent awkward and potentially unpleasant to the hearer. In the words of Sekyi-Baidoo (2016), these apologetic signals “prepare[s] the addressee for the unpleasantness of the expression, thereby reducing the shock of the negativity of the expression” (p. 125). It is necessary to address a person of a higher social status with a deferential term such as opanyin (‘elder’ in Akan), nii (‘grandfather’ in Ga), ‘sir’, ‘madam’, ‘boss’, ‘professor’, ‘doctor’ or any other term that acknowledges their status. That is, the correct form of address for the person should be determined by their relative social status. In so doing, the speaker not only transmits some social information about the identity of the person to others present but indicates their respect to the referent.

It can be considered improper or disrespectful when a child answers a question from an elder with a nod, shrugging of the shoulder or other nonverbal response. A child cannot tell an older person that they are telling a lie. As the Dagbani maxim has it: bia b’ yeri ninkurugu ni o 弇ari ziri ‘a child does not tell an elder that he is telling a lie’ (Salifu, 2010). When it is obvious that the older person is being untruthful, the child can say ‘I don’t think you mean it’, or ‘it is not clear to me’, or pose questions like ‘are you joking?’, ‘is it true?’, or ‘is that the case?’. Also, a child is not expected to refuse a request from older people, make them feel that their instruction is being questioned, disagree or argue with them, criticize them, or openly attempt to prove them wrong. In instances where the child cannot help it, the child must be tactful and discreet by using excuses, hedges, and downtoners.

In view of the preceding discussion, it is easy to understand that it is traditionally unacceptable in Ghana to directly criticize people in authority, such as traditional rulers and political leaders regardless of their actions or inactions. It is considered even more inappropriate and unacceptable if the criticism is made in a public space. The use of insults against such people is highly disapproved and even considered a verbal taboo (see Agyekum, 2010b). Ofori (2015: 24) notes that “[t]o not insult an elderly person or people in power, especially in public, is a basic principle of conduct that is inculcated into every Ghanaian child”. It is against this backdrop that cultural outsiders may better appreciate why posting
(unaltered) comments like C2.1 and C2.2 (about a president on GhanaWeb, an open platform) is an issue of concern and a communicative behaviour that is worthy of scholarly attention.

C2.1. MAHAME [sic] IS FUCKING CORRUPT YOU AND YOUR CORRUPT OFFICIALS [sic] USED THE 1ST TERM TO FILL YOUR POCKETS AND YOUR BANK ACCOUNTS AFTER GETTING RID OF ATTA MILLS AND CHAINING THE BARKING DOG… (KOFi JNR 06-09-16)

C2.2. stupid fool kwasea man always joking on platform now u r holding bishop okala position concert president get out aimless and senseless incompetent president ghanaians don’t blame u we should blame atuguba aboafunu (shaka 10-09-16)

The next section discusses in detail the use of invective and insults among Ghanaians.

2.3 INVECTIVE AND INSULT USE AMONG GHANAIANS

“Invective is a term derived from oratio invectiva, the practice of verbally insulting, attacking and ridiculing an opponent either orally or in writing” (Novokhatko, 2009, p. 12 cited in Applauso, 2010, p. 16). It is a public ad hominem attack. The present study considers invective as any language form that expresses a negative feeling towards a person(s) and which has the potential to cause offence or some psychological and emotional harm to the person and/or their associates. Generally, invective may be employed for various effects which include to denigrate, demean, humiliate, discredit, ridicule or intimidate others, and to project the speaker’s self-image or cover their inadequacies (Applauso, 2010; Dankiewicz, Rodasik, & Skórzak, 2014; Forson, Fordjour, Tettey, & Oteng-Preko, 2017). The content of the invective may be false and sound unbelievable to many people, but it still has the potential to trigger shock, pain, anger, bitterness and other negative emotions and feelings (Agyekum, 2004a). Often, the perpetrator questions the target’s social competence or attacks their physical characteristics (Forson et al., 2017).

On many occasions, specific words or expressions are chosen and used strategically to hurt others and cause them pain (Agyekum, 2010b). Research has shown, and it is also evident in the current study, that invective can be expressed overtly in the form of name calling, swear words, negative stereotypes, sarcastic remarks, obscene language, hate speech, slander, mockery, and innuendo (Yiannis, 1998; Obeng, 2000; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009). It can
also be expressed covertly using subtle words (e.g. proverbs), gestures or facial expressions. The choice of the latter over the former gives room for the speaker to claim immunity from social sanctions because the message is not visible in the content but can only be realised in the context of the communicative event (Obeng, 2003; Dankiewicz et al., 2014). No matter the form the invective takes, it often results in humiliating and offending the target as it expresses an attitude of contempt and involves a denial of respect toward the target (Neu, 2008).

Even though invective typically involves two communicative participants, namely, a perpetrator and a target, when it comes to measuring its impact, the audience and other social factors play a significant role (Yiannis, 1998; Culpeper, 2011). The other social factors are “a product of the various elements which are factored into the ethnography of that particular speech event, principal of which are the participant-relationship, the end, and the norms of interpretation and interaction” (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009, pp. 1-2). In the same vein, Agyekum (2004a) indicates that the emotions that come to play when invective is used are determined by background conditions such as the mood of the person (target), the time, the event, the place, the atmosphere, or the stakes involved. That is to say, the chances that invective used on an open online platform such as GhanaWeb can have a greater effect on the target is high. In order to achieve the much-needed impact among Ghanaians, according to Forson et al. (2017: 150), “most often, perpetrators intentionally attack their victims at strategic settings, […] such as durbar grounds, lorry stations, and market places”.

Invective is “a versatile and practical tool” (Applauso, 2010, p. 5). It can be employed when speakers want to unleash their anger, express their pain about a particular situation or even relieve themselves of stress. In Ghana and West Africa generally, using invective is one of the conventional means of protesting against a person (a target) who engages in untoward acts that challenge the values of society or go contrary to the tenets of society (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009; Kampf, 2015). These acts include lateness at a public gathering, use of foul language, inappropriate dressing and general misbehaviour.

Moreover, the ardent desire to share one’s frustrations and disappointments can lead to directing at someone or something, an angry, critical or abusive tirade (Kodah, 2012). Given that human societies can be characterized by different kind of pressures that lead to psychological distress, stress and frustrations, it is perhaps understandable that people search
for ways to relieve themselves. Blaming, criticizing, belittling, discrediting, or casting insinuations on others becomes a psychological outlet for the speaker to let go of their frustration built from disappointments (Thompson, 2014).

Among Ghanaians, the use of invective is considered morally unjustifiable; it is one of the most unpardonable communicative behaviours (Agyekum, 2004a; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009; Ofori, 2015; Thompson & Agyekum, 2015). Generally, if the perpetrator is regarded as socially higher than the target, they are not punished but can be asked to apologize; however, if the perpetrator is regarded as socially lower, they incur dire consequences. Forson et al. (2017) capture this phenomenon with the Akan maxim, wo ne panyin beko oo, na wo weder emu ‘you can fight a superior, but the pain you will feel afterwards will be unbearable’ (p. 157). That is, one can choose to engage their superior in a linguistic combat, but they must be conscious of the consequences.

Admittedly, there are certain highly restricted sociocultural contexts that allow the ‘free’ use of abusive language in public. These contexts include the play of traditional games such as ‘lude’, ‘oware’, and ‘dame’, and interethnic abusive games among members of ethnic groups with mutually hostile historical relationships. Some of these ethnic groups are the Frafras of the Upper East Region and the Dargartis of Upper West Region, and the Nzemas and Asantes of the Western Region and Ashanti Region, respectively. During these games, sociocultural norms and values are suspended, and participants can use abusive language in an equal fashion. Due to this, authority figures, including the traditional rulers of these areas, are not allowed to participate in such games (Agyekum, 2004a).

Among the Anlo Ewes of the Volta Region too, the tradition of halo (songs of insult), was practised until 1960 when it was officially abolished because of the conflicts it caused between the people (Avorgbedor, 1994). During the performance of halo, two factions took turns to publicly and directly confront each other by exchanging verbal abuses through songs. The songs served the purpose to strongly attack social vices such as stealing, greed, adultery, wickedness, and prostitution, and nobody in the community was exempted from the derision expressed in halo (Ojaide, 2016).

Another example of such contexts in Ghana is a special ceremony held during the celebration of the annual festivals of some ethnic groups where invective and insults are “required” to criticize and moralize people of higher social status including traditional rulers,
government officials, political leaders, elders, and parents. These festivals include the *Hogbetsotso* festival of the Anlo people, the *Kundum* festival of the Ahanta and Nzema people and the *Apoɔ* festival of the people of Techiman, Nkoranza, and Wenchi. Among the Anlo people, for instance, Geurts (2003) observes that the ceremony involves “speaking (*nufofo*) aloud and listening (*nusese*) to various complaints along with the sounds of ritualized “crying out”” (p. 147). This means that those being insulted can clearly hear the people. Generally, the ceremony serves as an occasion for people to release any pent-up emotion they might have harboured during the year in a carefree manner. People can hurl abuse at others, including those in authority, through oral performances (e.g. songs) without the fear of being reprimanded or held responsible for what they said. According to Yankah (1998: 20-21), “social norms are frozen during the period of the festival, after which all social norms and courtesies are restored”.

Core to the traditional Ghanaian concept of hurling insults at others through such oral performances are the principles of correction and deterrence. The opportunity is given to the less powerful and ordinary members of the community to openly criticize their leaders or rulers and to review their performances. By this means, “the attention of the rulers is drawn to some of the faults of their administration so that they start taking corrective measures” (Agyekum, 2010b, p. 140). Also, people are allowed to vent out their grievances, frustrations, or anger towards others and also put in check members of the community who are considered as social deviants without any form of restriction. In Yankah’s (1998) words, “the publicization of social flaws through abuse is expected to lead to the reformation of wayward behaviour for the general good” (p. 23). Note that although the practice helps to empower the powerless in society, it is done in controlled circumstances and is only available for a short period of time (Ofori, 2015). Also, it usually ends with a socioreligious reconciliation ceremony that is aimed at restoring peace and harmony among the people (Geurts, 2003).

Bearing all this in mind, one can argue that the negative communicative behaviour displayed online, as exemplified in C2.1 and C2.2, is not entirely alien to the Ghanaian culture. It is therefore fair if one asserts that it is somewhere in the minds of the ordinary citizens or the less powerful that there are specific settings (i.e. places and times) where they can freely challenge authority with invective and get away with it. Arguably, with the advent of online communication, a more liberal forum has been created for citizens to keep people
in authority in check. Unlike the traditional communicative practice, the online communicative practice, especially on the anonymous media outlets, is without moderation and restriction. Besides, there is no form of reconciliation event on the online platform.

2.4 GHANA’S POLITICAL HISTORY, THE MEDIA AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

This section provides an overview of some past political events in Ghana and introduces the national leaders of concern to the study (i.e. the presidential candidates and electoral commissioner in the 2016 general election). This is followed by an account of the impact of politics on the media, and the proliferation of media companies and activities that have enhanced citizen participation in the country.

2.4.1 Political History (1957 - 2016)

The political history of Ghana is crucial for an understanding of citizen participation in socio-political issues. A detailed history of politics in Ghana is beyond the scope of the present study, but studies such as Ocquaye (1980, 2004), Nugent (1995), and Fobih (2008) represent extensive documentation that articulates very well political occurrences in the past. This section provides some highlights of Ghana’s political journey from independence in 1957 to the 2016 general election. It further presents some background information and scandals about the key leaders involved in the 2016 election: the seven (7) presidential candidates who contested (John Dramani Mahama, Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, Ivor Kobina Greenstreet, Papa Kwesi Nduom, Edward Mahama, and Jacob Osei Yeboah) and the electoral commissioner (Charlotte Kessen-Smith Osei). Giving details of the scandals about these individuals is necessary because these scandals form the basis of many of the insults hurled at them (the individuals) in online reader comments on GhanaWeb. The various governments of Ghana since 1957 are listed in Table 2.1.
Table 2.1 Civilian and military governments of Ghana since 1957

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Government</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Leader(s)</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Convention People’s Party</td>
<td>Dr Kwame Nkrumah</td>
<td>1957–1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>Progress Party</td>
<td>Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia</td>
<td>1969–1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Armed Forces Revolutionary Council</td>
<td>Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings</td>
<td>1979 (June–September)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>People National Party</td>
<td>Dr Hilla Limann</td>
<td>1979–1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>National Democratic Congress</td>
<td>Prof John Evans Fiifi Attah Mills</td>
<td>2009–2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>National Democratic Congress</td>
<td>John Dramani Mahama</td>
<td>2012–2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>New Patriotic Party</td>
<td>Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo</td>
<td>2017–Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ghana gained independence in 1957 under the leadership of Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah’s government was however overthrown by a coup d’état in 1966. The political system of Ghana remained unstable after this coup d’état until around 1992 and this greatly affected media practices and development. Between 1957 and 1992, Ghana had three civilian governments and five different military governments. The military governments in each case abolished the constitution and substituted it with their laws. In 1990, citizens started demanding a more democratic form of government. In response, the head of state at the time,
Jerry John Rawlings, retired from the military and became the leader of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). After that, he legalized the establishment of political parties to effect the transition from military rule to multi-party democracy. In 1992, Presidential and Parliamentary elections were organized, Rawlings contested on the ticket of the NDC and won.

A new democratic era emerged from 1993 with a stabilized constitution. In a multi-party system with over 15 registered political parties currently, Ghana has experienced stable civilian government switching between two political parties, namely the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The NDC administration was first led by Jerry John Rawlings from 1993 to 2000. The NPP led by John Agyekum Kufuor then took over from 2001 to 2008. The NDC was restored to power under the leadership of John Evans Fiifi Atta Mills from 2009 to 2012 and John Dramani Mahama from 2012 to 2016. Following the 2016 general election, the NPP came into power again in 2017 under the leadership of Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo.

Below is background information on the presidential candidates who contested in the 2016 election (which Nana won), and the electoral commissioner.

Ghana’s 2016 general election: Profile of key leaders

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (Nana) Opposition Leader; Presidential Candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP)

Photo: www.graphic.com.gh

Nana, the oldest of all the presidential candidates, was 72 years old in 2016. His father, Edward Akufo-Addo, was the third Chief Justice of Ghana and later, a ceremonial President of the nation from 1969 to 1970. Between 2001 and 2007, Nana was appointed as Cabinet Minister, as Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, and later, Foreign Minister. He resigned as Minister in 2007 and contested the position of the presidential candidate of the NPP. He was endorsed as the presidential candidate for

---

6 Five months to the completion of his first term of presidency, John Evans Fiifi Atta Mills died at the 37 Military Hospital in Accra, on 24th July 2012. In accordance with the constitution of Ghana, his vice president, John Dramani Mahama was sworn in as president on the same day, at about 8:00 pm GMT. On 7th December 2012, an election was held and John Dramani Mahama won. He was again sworn in as president on 7th January 2013.
NPP but lost in the general election to Professor Atta Mills. Nana contested again in 2012 against the NDC candidate John Dramani Mahama and lost. It was alleged that Nana smokes *wee* ‘marijuana’. He has also been accused of being an unqualified lawyer who has not been called to the Ghana Bar Association. Nana was the successful candidate in 2016. He is the current president of Ghana.

JDM is the first Ghanaian born after Ghana’s independence to become president of the nation. He is also the first President of Ghana who has served at all levels of national government. He was Member of Parliament, Deputy Minister, Minister, Vice-President, and President. After JDM was declared the winner of the 2012 presidential election, his victory was challenged by leaders of the NPP at Ghana’s Supreme Court. After 8 months of hearings, the petition was dismissed by a 5-4 majority on August 29, 2013. JDM thus became the first president in Ghana whose position was decided by a court.

JDM was, on several occasions, described as incompetent by leaders of the opposition. His government was also characterized by various scandals bordering on corruption. A notable one was a report of an investigation conducted by a journalist which maintained that JDM received a Ford Expedition vehicle from a Burkinabe contractor. After that, some members of the opposition referred to him as John Ford Mahama.

He was also referred to as “dead goat” or *odwanfunu* ‘dead-sheep’ because he stated in one of his speeches that he had adopted a “dead goat syndrome”. In his words, “I have seen more demonstrations and strikes in my first two years. I don’t think it can get worse. It is said that when you kill a goat, and you frighten it with a knife, it doesn’t fear the knife because it is dead already … I have a dead goat syndrome”.

John Dramani Mahama (JDM)
President of Ghana;
Presidential Candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC)
Photo: www.graphic.com.gh
Konadu is the wife of former President Jerry John Rawlings. She was the First Lady of Ghana for 19 years. Konadu was the only female presidential candidate in the 2016 general election and also, the first woman to contest for President of Ghana. She was nicknamed “Ghana’s Hillary Clinton”.

In 2011, Konadu contested for the presidential candidacy of the NDC for the 2012 election and lost to Professor Mills. She later left the NDC and formed her own party, NDP. According to her, Ghana needs a woman President. She was, therefore, going to “break the glass ceiling”. Interestingly, while Konadu was contesting as the presidential candidate of the NDP, her eldest daughter, Zanetor Agyeman-Rawlings was contesting for the position of a Member of Parliament on the ticket of the NDC.

It was alleged that Konadu fraudulently acquired some state-owned industrial properties while she was the first lady. During President Kufuor’s rule, in 2005, she was charged with theft, fraud, and conspiracy to defraud the state, when her husband was president. Her attorney later said the charges levelled against her had been dropped on the orders of the president, although no official reason was provided by the Kufuor administration.

Mahama is the President and Medical Director of Superior Medical Centre, a Lecturer at the University of Ghana Medical School and a Consultant of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra. He was born on April 15, 1945. He had been in the Ghanaian presidential contest since 1996 but had never won an election. He was 71 years in 2016. Mahama was elected as the PNC presidential candidate in 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008. Before the 2004 election, the PNC merged with two other political parties, Every Ghanaian Living Everywhere (EGLE) and the Great Consolidated Popular Party (GCPP) and they formed an alliance called the Grand Coalition (GC). Mahama was nominated to be the presidential candidate of the GC, but he still could not make it. In 2012, he competed again for the presidential candidacy of the PNC but lost. However, in 2016, he won the position of the presidential candidate of the PNC.
Greenstreet is a lawyer called to the Ghana Bar and the English Bar Association. In 1997, he was involved in a car accident. As a result, he has a mobility impairment and uses a wheelchair. He is the first physically challenged person to contest for presidency in Ghana.

He unsuccessfully contested as a parliamentary candidate on the ticket of the People’s Convention Party in 1996, which merged with the National Convention Party later in that same year and became the Convention People’s Party (CPP).

According to Greenstreet, his motivation to become president is to put in place a “Ghanaian Dream”. This “Ghanaian Dream” will allow the government machinery and the civil bureaucracy to respond and serve the needs of the public. Citizens who are hardworking and wish to be free from poverty will have opportunities to change their lives and secure their future.

Nduom is a well-established businessman. He owns a Multi-National Conglomerate with close to 50 Companies in Ghana, Togo, La Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, UK, and the USA. In 2000, he contested for the position of Member of Parliament (MP) on the ticket of CPP and lost but contested again in 2004 and won. Nduom was appointed by President Kufuor (of NPP) as the chairman of the National Development Planning Commission in 2001, as Minister of Energy in 2003, and as Minister for Public Sector Reform in 2005. In 2001, many CPP members protested against Nduom’s appointment into President Kufour’s government, saying that he accepted the position without the consent of the CPP. However, Nduom maintained that the appointment had the blessing of the CPP hierarchy.

In July 2007, Nduom resigned as minister to contest for the position of the CPP presidential candidate for the 2008 election. He was elected as the presidential candidate, but he lost in the general election. In 2011, Nduom contested again for the position of the CPP presidential candidate for the 2012 election but lost to Samia Nkrumah, a daughter of Dr Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana. Nduom was displeased with the new development, and so he formed his own party, PPP, to contest in the 2012 election, and also in the 2016 election.
Joy was the only independent candidate approved by the EC to contest in the 2016 presidential election. He first contested for the presidency, as an independent candidate, in 2012. According to him, he believes in an all-inclusive system of governance and thus, does not believe in the party system. In his opinion, there can be no meaningful development in a polarized society that has resulted from the wrong implementation of multi-party democracy in a multi-cultural society such as Ghana. This is because the leaders of the political parties when in power, will only pursue the parochial and selfish interests of their parties. He asserts that, as an independent candidate, he represents the unifying force who will address polarization in Ghana.

President John Dramani Mahama (JDM) appointed Charlotte as the Chairperson of Ghana’s EC in 2016. She was the first female to serve in this office in Ghana. It was reported that some Ghanaians, including top officials, disapproved of her as the Chairperson of the EC for various reasons. Some of these people claimed that she is a Nigerian citizen and as such does not qualify to be Ghana’s EC Chairperson. Others claimed that she is a member of the NDC and was appointed to help rig the election in favour of the President, who was seeking a second term. The Member of Parliament of Assin Central, Mr Kennedy Agyapong, accused her of offering sexual favours to JDM in exchange for her position.

Under Charlotte’s leadership in 2016, the EC disqualified 13 out of the 17 candidates who wanted to contest for the 2016 presidential election, for various reasons which include errors and inconsistencies on their nomination forms and failure to pay the required fees in the time required. This sparked some controversy in the nation as many alleged that the candidates had been disqualified for political reasons. The EC denied all such accusations. Some of the candidates took the EC to court over their disqualification. The court ruled in favour of three of them, leading to there being seven presidential candidates in the 2016 general election.
2.4.2 Political Dynamics and the Impact on the Media in Ghana

Some reflection on the political history of Ghana is necessary because background stories on the media in Ghana cannot be fully discussed without first pointing out how successive governments have had striking effects on the media and on citizen participation in issues of national interest. The civilian governments often guaranteed some freedom to the media, while the military governments oppressed the media through various forms of public intimidation, harassment, and abuse of journalists (see Adjei, M., 1994; Obeng, 1997b).

Many of the editorial policies, especially of the national media, were aimed at promoting the ideals and serving the interests of each of these military governments (Gadzekpo, 1997). There were various forms of official and unofficial censorship which involved bans on any publication that opposed the ideals of the government at the time. Journalists who were non-conformists were often apprehended, detained, and brutally tortured. Obeng (1997: 64) maintains that due to the “repressive”, “vindictive”, and “tyrannical nature” of most of these military governments in Ghana, there was a very little direct protest against the political leaders. Many news agencies therefore resorted to publishing sports-related news and avoided politics. People who still wanted to criticize the government for any reason had to do so through “indirect” means such as the use of songs, proverbs, and other forms of figurative expressions (Obeng, 1997b, 2003; Yankah, 2002; Agyekum, 2006).

The liberalization of the media and broadcasting industry was made possible by Chapter 12, Article 162 of the 1992 Constitution, which states:

1) Freedom and independence of the media are hereby guaranteed.

2) Subject to this Constitution and any other law not inconsistent with this Constitution, there shall be no censorship in Ghana.

3) There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information.
(4) Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalized or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications.

(5) All agencies of the mass media shall, at all times, be free to uphold the principles, provisions and objectives of this Constitution, and shall uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people of Ghana.

(6) Any medium for the dissemination of information to the public which publishes a statement about or against any person shall be obliged to publish a rejoinder, if any, from the person in respect of whom the publication was made.

The liberalization of the media and broadcasting industry was further reinforced during President Kufuor’s rule (Asamoah, Yeboah-Assiamah, & Osei-Kojo, 2014). In 2001, the government issued a bill to the Attorney General and Ministry of Justice of Ghana to repeal the Criminal Libel Law in order to encourage free speech and expression among citizens. The government’s memorandum on the bill indicated that every criminal code that prevents or frustrates free speech of citizens in any legal document of the country should be removed (Asamoah et al., 2014). The repeal liberated and guaranteed absolute freedom to the mass media, devoid of interference and censorship (Agyekum, 2004a; Marfo, 2014). This independence and freedom led to the establishment of a lot of private newspaper agencies, television stations, and radio stations, in addition to the state-owned broadcasting industries, across all the regions of the nation (Agyekum, 2004a).

2.4.3 Media and Citizen Participation in Ghana

There is a high level of citizen engagement with media and politics in Ghana. Currently, there are more than 135 newspapers (dailies or weeklies) published, including 2 state-owned dailies (Karlekar & Marchant, 2007). These newspapers are all in English, that is, no major newspaper in any Ghanaian language. It is common to find people gathered every morning to check the news headlines and lead stories displayed on the front pages of newspapers hanging across the frames of kiosks along streets or at lorry stations in their communities. If a person is interested in a particular news headline and can afford the newspaper, they buy it
in order to read the full story and other stories in it. After reading, they lend it to other interested people to read on the bus, at work or even at home.

In many government institutions and private companies in the country, about three or more different newspapers are bought on a daily basis for workers to read during their free periods and for clients to occupy themselves with while they wait to be attended to. This helps people to be abreast of on-going issues in the country. However, people who cannot read or do not understand English are estranged from this English-oriented media sphere and lack direct access to many national issues (Akpojivi & Fosu, 2016). Readers who would want to contribute or share their opinions on these issues can do so by writing a letter to the editor or an opinion article. Due to the space limitation of the newspapers, many of these write-ups, after going through the editorial processes, are rejected for several reasons including grammatical inaccuracies (Omoniyi, 2010; Landert, 2014). Consequently, only a few people have the opportunity to get their opinions across to the reading public.

A 2019 report from the National Communications Authority in Ghana confirms that the country has a pluralist broadcasting industry (https://www.nca.org.gh/industry-data). According to the report, at the end of December 2018, the media industry across the regions had a total of 487 authorized FM broadcasting stations and 136 authorized television stations. These include 398 operational radio stations and 35 operational free-to-air television programme channels with nationwide coverage. Foreign broadcasting companies like the British Broadcasting Corporation, Cable News Network, Voice of America, Al Jazeera English, and Radio France Internationale are also part of the broadcasting industry in Ghana. The state, through the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, runs regional radio stations and one free on-air television network which is accessible in every part of the country.

While the state-owned radio and television stations broadcast in English, as well as the major indigenous Ghanaian languages (e.g. Akan, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Hausa, Nzema), the case is not the same with the private broadcasting industry. The choice of the main language for broadcasting in the various regions remains the sole decision of the management (Anyidoho, 2016; Thompson & Anderson, 2018). For instance, many private stations in the Greater Accra region broadcast in Akan (the lingua franca of the region) alongside English. In other regions such as the Volta Region and the Western Region, Ewe and Nzema may be the preferred languages, respectively.
Many of these media outlets have designed interactive programmes in the form of panel discussions, phone-in segments, texting sessions through which viewers and/or listeners can participate in the discussion of national and topical issues (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2002; Coker, 2012; Thompson & Anderson, 2018). It is very common to find the broadcast of morning shows on television or radio stations across the nation between 6 am and 10 am, every Monday to Friday. A major session of these morning shows, apart from the morning news report, is the newspaper review segment in which headlines and top stories are reported and translated into the major language of broadcast of the station (where English does not play this role). These stories are then analyzed and discussed by studio panel members selected from diverse socio-political backgrounds in the country. After a while, citizens are invited to phone in or send text messages to share their views on issues of interest (see Karlekar & Marchant, 2007; Thompson & Anderson, 2018).

Karlekar and Marchant (2007) describe radio phone-in programmes as “a staple of daily life in Ghana” (p. 145). The callers on many occasions speak any language (e.g. Akan, Ga, Ewe or English) they can freely express themselves in to get their opinion to the listening public. The option of using one’s native language during the phone-in programmes has enhanced citizen participation (Kafewo, 2006). The text messages are mainly in English. Nevertheless, texters sometimes resort to hybrid forms by inserting interjections and other expressions in Ghanaian languages. These messages are read from time to time throughout the show by the hosts. Occasionally, the hosts receive and read an entire message in a Ghanaian language. These hosts reserve the right to read a message or not, and they can also edit or refine a message while reading it to their audience if this message can lead to a potentially confrontational situation (Thompson & Anderson, 2018). This implies that in some instances, messages do not get to the audiences in the original words of the texters.

Considering the limitation of air-time on radio, some people who are interested are unable to join the discussions. Given that media technology is advancing in different dimensions, the media industry sees the need to keep up with the times as a way of extending their services to their audience and encouraging citizen participation. With the current trend of internet use, media companies including Peace FM, Joy FM, Starr FM, Class FM, TV3, TV Africa, Metro TV, UTV, Daily Guide Newspaper, Daily Graphic Newspaper, Ghanaian Times Newspaper, and Ghana News Agency have adopted the internet into their news cycles.
They have registered news sites or social media sites where they upload their news reports to complement their traditional electronic or print modes. Also, their news reports are uploaded on GhanaWeb (the research site for the present study), which serves as a host platform for several news agencies and a platform for anonymous citizen participation. Note that in Ghana, access to the internet, as a medium through which people share information, is unrestricted by the government (Karlekar & Marchant, 2007).

People who for any reason do not get the opportunity to know what is going on in the nation through radio, television or newspapers can at any time get onto these news sites and read online published news. In many cases, the audience is asked to post comments and make contributions to national issues. Thus, the masses do not passively consume information, like the case is in print media, but they are required to participate on the news sites. Also, citizens who are overseas can still read news about their nation and share their opinions with a large and diverse audience. The regulations on news sites do not usually match the strict ethics that guide media companies in print publication (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Brost, 2013). For instance, on GhanaWeb, the reader comments posted are unmoderated and uncensored. What this means for the present study is that reader comments gathered as data are in their original form and will naturally reflect the attitudes of participants in online socio-political discourse.

In short, ordinary Ghanaians, on a daily basis, have the opportunity to contribute to specific issues including, politics, sports, religion, health, business, and entertainment. Most citizens not only have access to information in their own languages; they also have the opportunity to express their views through whatever medium they find comfortable. The promotion of the use of indigenous local languages, the affordability and accessibility of mobile phones to call in or send messages, and access to internet platforms for the discussion of issues of national interest, to a large extent, create the room for people of different backgrounds to participate (Agyekum, 2010a; Mu-azu & Shivram, 2017; Yankah, 2017).
2.5 INTERACTIVE MEDIA AS A PLATFORM FOR INVECTIVE AND INSULTS IN POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS

The media, according to Owen (1997), gives citizens of lower social status the opportunity to be involved in politics and contribute to matters of national interest. Other communication experts have argued that, in many democratic societies, this opportunity provided through interactive media programmes generally facilitates the use of utterances that can invoke disapproval or displeasure (e.g. Yankah, 2004; Bousfield, 2008; Coker, 2012). In Ghana, for instance, Agyekum (2010a) points out that “incendiary discourse” by media interactants against politicians and other state officials is one of the major challenges facing the broadcasting industry. This section is divided into two parts to situate the present study in the existing literature. The first part points out the highlights of a number of studies on the prevalence of invective in political discussions in Ghana’s traditional media (i.e. newspaper, radio, and television). The second part is devoted to key features of online discourse as a platform for conflictive language, mainly in political discussions.

2.5.1 Invective in the Traditional Media

According to Agyekum (2004a), “the explicitness … and the missing norms of political correctness in the media nowadays are surprising” (p. 371). Various explanations have been given and factors commonly mentioned are the rights to freedom of speech, freedom of the media, and freedom of association guaranteed by the Constitution of Ghana (Agyekum, 2004a; Mahama, 2012; Marfo, 2013, 2014). Owing to the fact that Ghana is a democratic country in which the content of public and media information is not directly regulated by the government, the political landscape has become a “theater of most vitriolic insults …” (Marfo, 2014, p. 527).

From 1992 to 2012, all general elections held in Ghana have been free of major violent acts. However, none of these elections has been devoid of verbal animosity, indecorous language and abusive words which often resulted in needless tension among citizens (Asamoah et al., 2014). The situation was not different in the 2016 general election. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) in Ghana undertook a nine-month project titled ‘Promoting Issues-based and Decent Language Campaigning for a Peaceful, Free and Fair
Elections in Ghana in 2016’ to monitor expressions used by political activists on selected radio programmes from April to December 2016. The project produced bi-weekly reports from the day-to-day monitoring of indecent expressions used by political activists and other individuals during the stipulated period. These bi-weekly reports also “name and shame” the relevant politicians or political activists and further name the programmes and the radio stations involved (http://www.mfwa.org).

It was already clear from the first two-week monitoring period (April 18 – 30, 2016) that most of these indecent expressions were used during current affairs and political discussion programmes. Five categories of indecent expressions were noted, namely Insulting and Offensive Comments; Unsubstantiated Allegations; Provocative Remarks; Expressions or Comments Promoting Divisiveness and Remarks Endorsing Violence. Out of a total of 87 recorded indecent expressions, the most common were insulting and offensive comments (see Table 2.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remarks Endorsing Violence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressions or Comments Promoting Divisiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocative Remarks</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsubstantiated Allegations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulting and Offensive Comments</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Asamoah et al. (2014) attribute the negative verbal behaviour to the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law in 2001. They state that repealing this law was meant to “encourage a free and congenial expression of thoughts and opinions … but it appears it has rather encouraged uncouth free speech” (Asamoah et al., 2014, p. 49). Mahama (2012), Asamoah et al. (2014), and Marfo (2014) opine that the use of invective among political actors poses a “serious threat” to Ghana’s social, political and economic development.

Thompson (2014) does not dispute this claim. However, she draws attention to an additional consideration that people using abusive language in politics may be yielding to a communicative practice known among the Akans as *ka na wu na nsemfoo ye ahi*, ‘say it as it is and die, for foolish matters are disgusting’ (i.e. it is better to voice one’s opinion even if it
would lead to your death) (p. 121). She argues that such use of negative language helps the speaker to gain some psychological relief. Ofori (2015) adds that Ghanaians prefer to release their frustrations and anger through abusive language on interactive radio programmes, rather than resort to weapons and ammunition that can plunge the country into disarray and destruction.

The present study focuses on the use of invective and insults used by citizens in online political discourses during the campaign period of the 2016 general election. Much attention has been given to the use of abusive language in traditional media discourse in Ghana (e.g. Agyekum, 2004a, 2010a; Yankah, 2004; Coker, 2012; Asamoah et al., 2014; Marfo, 2014; Thompson & Anderson, 2018). Yet, online media discourse remains largely unexplored. This study draws attention to news sites, as a step to create a balance in the literature.

2.5.2 Internet and Online Discourse

This subsection deals with the internet as an interactive platform where invective and insults thrive. It is organized into three parts to describe some characteristic features of the internet in general, the internet as an interactive media platform, and as a platform for emotionally charged political discussions.

Characteristic features of the internet

The internet has become a channel through which people with distinct sociocultural backgrounds can come together frequently to share opinions and knowledge and stay connected all over the world (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Its pervasiveness is particularly based on the geographical and temporal flexibilities associated with it (Nitin, Bansal, & Khazanchi, 2011). A 2019 report on internet penetration in Africa\(^7\) shows that Ghana is among the first 25 African countries with the largest population of internet users. As of 31st March 2019, the number of internet users in Ghana was 10,110,000. Mobile phones owned and used by a great number of people from various socio-economic backgrounds have greatly expanded access (Yankah, 2017). Many mobile phones are equipped with speedy internet connectivity, such that their owners do not have to walk miles to internet cafes, as they used to some years ago.

\(^7\) [www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm)
ago to have access to the internet. Thus, sociocultural boundaries that hinder instant
communication among individuals of different communities of practice are practically
removed (Sey, 2011).

Yankah (2017), with reference to a survey conducted by Gallup across 17 African
countries, indicates that Africa has overtaken South America and has the fastest growing
mobile phone penetration rate in the world. In 2013, the mobile phone penetration was
estimated to have exceeded 80%. Of Africa’s 1.08 billion population, 821 million are mobile
phone subscribers, and 75% of these subscribers have had at least nine years of formal
education. Yankah (2017) reports that in Ghana specifically, the estimated mobile phone
penetration rate increased from 63% in 2009 to 85% in 2011, to 91% in 2012, and to more
than 100% in February 2013. The total number of subscribers exceeded the total population,
not because every Ghanaian has a mobile phone, but rather there are multiple SIM card users.

On internet platforms, there is an opportunity for people who are socially less powerful
to engage those who are more powerful. Papacharissi (2002) describes the internet as a “great
democratizer”, a virtual public sphere where members of any community, regardless of social
status, race, or gender are free to express their views and participate in discussions. Online
interactions, unlike face-to-face interactions, are much more egalitarian, the notion of
traditional distinction of social statuses is not of much concern, and there is no tie to identity
and hierarchy (Herring, 2003; Hess, 2015; Groshek & Cutino, 2016). It is perhaps not
surprising then that in a nation like Ghana, where it is unacceptable to criticize the elderly
and those in authority, citizens use online platforms to openly vilify political leaders. They
feel licensed to express themselves with some level of verbal aggression that they would
generally avoid in face-to-face interactions. The lack of eye contact, the absence of physical
cues and non-verbal elements, and the use of pseudonyms make participants in online
interactions feel invisible and less exposed (Ng & Detenber, 2005; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak,
2012).

Some scholars have suggested that internet-based or online communications are just
as interactive as face-to-face conversations, in that the interactional conflicts found in the
latter are also present in the former (e.g. Kleinke, 2008; Varnhagen et al., 2009). However,
many scholars, including the present author, are inclined to the opinion that online
interactions are much more aggressive, confrontational, and conflictive than face-to-face
interactions (e.g. Watson, 1997; Hongladarom, 1998). The interactional conflicts and anti-social language use in internet-based discourse have been termed as flaming (Alonzo & Aiken, 2004; Lange, 2007; Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008; Moor et al., 2010), online aggression (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Werner, Bumpus, & Rock, 2009), or online incivility (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011; Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014), among other terms. They generally involve name-calling, swearing, attacking another’s self-concept, negative words or comments, threats, and sexually inappropriate comments. Typographically, they involve the disproportionate use of question marks, exclamation marks and capital letters (Chory-Assad, 2004; Turnage, 2007; Moor et al., 2010; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

Factors such as anonymity and invisibility (Suler, 2004; Gardner, 2012), lack of accountability (Hardaker, 2010), lack of monitoring and gatekeeping (Ofori, 2015) contribute to the ‘veiling influence’ of the internet on traditional expectations and social norms regarding acceptable communicative behaviour. These factors block the interpersonal identification and judgment processes interactants draw on to evaluate others in traditional forms of communication (Joinson, 2001; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). It is almost impossible that participants will face direct and open judgments or sociocultural risks, even in communities such as Ghana where critical attention is paid to appropriate asymmetrical interactions. Consequently, online participants take advantage of the freedom to circumvent sociocultural gatekeepers, disregard traditional and specialized speech styles and freely employ disfavoured forms of language without fear of retribution (Shapiro, 1999; Caplan, 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finklehor, 2007; Hardaker 2010).

The use of mobile devices has also contributed to the increase of antagonistic behaviours online (Billieux, van der Linden, & Rochat, 2008; O’Neill & Dinh, 2015; Murthy, Bowman, Gross, & McGarry, 2015; Groshek & Cutino, 2016). Groshek and Cutino (2016) argue that anyone who gets hold of a smartphone can engage in name-calling, expletives, and accusations at any place or time either on a genuine or anonymized pseudo account. Murthy et al. (2015) attest to this on the basis of a study of twitter spritzer stream data of 235 million tweets collected in 2013. Their study demonstrated that at any given point in a day, mobile tweets are at least 25 percent more negative and hostile than web-based tweets.
Assuming that similar trends apply in Ghana and considering the widespread adoption of mobile phones and the availability of data-enabled cellular networks, it can be said that anti-social communicative behaviours will be significant on news sites with mobile versions. It would, therefore, be reasonable to conclude that www.mobile.ghanaweb.com, the mobile version of GhanaWeb, is one of the factors why negative and abusive reader comments are common on the website.

The internet as an interactive media platform

The increase of interactive news sites, which is a significant part of the digital media today, suggests a change/switch from the traditional medium of ‘letters to the editor’. When news reports are uploaded on these sites, readers are allowed to post comments on them. Generally speaking, there is no barrier in terms of space and no restriction to a particular time in the day (Bergström, 2008). The commentary creates (potentially, at least) an interaction between the commenters, the authors of the news reports, the readers and even the people referred to in the comments thus, forming a kind of multi-participant interaction (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004; Lorenzo-Dus, Garcés-Conejos, & Bou-Franch, 2011). Some news sites guarantee a high level of anonymity to commenters, allow pseudonymity and are unmoderated, while others ensure that commenters register with their personal details and sign comments with their names.

Upadhyay (2010) compares reader responses on the Washington Post, where comments are posted with pseudonyms, with reader responses on the New York Times, where the full names of commenters are revealed. Although both news sites had negative comments, the comments on Washington Post are more harshly worded. On this basis, Upadhyay (2010) argues that if Goffman’s (1971) “rule of self-respect” and “rule of considerateness” influence language behaviour during face-to-face interactions, then they do not work that way with virtually anonymous reader responses online.

Studies like Hlavach and Freivogel (2011) and Santana (2013) concur that posted comments that are made anonymously and signed with pseudonyms are significantly more insensitive and uncivil than the non-anonymous ones. As documented in the present study, the majority of commenters who patronize GhanaWeb do not discuss in a civil manner but rather abuse political leaders and other people of high social status. Online interlocutors are
often well aware that since they cannot be identified, they are divorced from the consequences of their actions (see Suler, 2004; Diakopoulos & Naaman, 2011; Bolander, 2013; Hopkinson, 2014). As Ofori (2015) asserts, when citizens are making comments on media platforms that are moderated, they often employ presupposition, proverbs, and metaphors. On the other hand, when the comments are made on unmoderated platforms (e.g. GhanaWeb), it becomes a “free-for-all insult” (p. 211).

Erjavec and Kovačič (2013) explore offensive speech in comments under online news reports in Slovenia. In Slovenia, journalists especially are often verbally attacked. In Ghana, however, the abusive comments are seldom directed at journalists but at the political leaders and/or members of the political parties to which these leaders are affiliated. In some cases, they are directed at co-commenters.

Political discussions on the internet

Different studies agree that the internet records a high rate of participation as a medium of expressing one’s views, especially when it comes to contributing to political issues on news sites, message boards, or social networking sites, (see Weger & Aakhus, 2003; Trammell Williams, Postelniciu, & Landreville, 2006; Boyd, 2008; Zhang, Cao, & Tran, 2013). The high rate of participation can be attributed to many factors which include the fact that politicians can communicate with less inhibition, and that ordinary citizens can add their contributions with no interference (Park, Ko, Kim, Liu, & Song, 2011; Prior, 2013; Lee, Choi, Kim, & Kim, 2014).

The current study notes that the high rate of participation in online political discourse is because traditional media generally allows only one-to-many interaction, but online platforms generally provide interactional opportunities which are one-to-many and many-to-many across time and geographic boundaries. Although this means that political actors can easily get their messages across to a wide range of people, Zhang et al. (2013) observe that online platforms do not guarantee improved political deliberation. Many studies attest to this and note that antagonistic and uncivil language is more prevalent in online reader comments on news reports that border on politics (Kayany, 1998; O’Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Ng & Detenber, 2005; Borton, 2013; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2013; Coe et al., 2014). Incivility seems to be a more salient norm in political contexts than in other social contexts online.
The question of why online political discourse seems to foster offensive and hostile language has been addressed by some scholars. Sobieraj and Berry (2011) and Park et al. (2011) opine that, often, online political discussions are gateways for anti-social speech behaviours because, naturally, the discussion of politics is done in an emotional manner and participants can express their emotions in unpleasant ways. Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013) establish that when the political discussions are on websites that guarantee high anonymity, as on GhanaWeb, there is relatively more constant use of abusive language. To Chen and Ng (2016), the use of negative and attacking remarks is even worse when the discussants have some distrust or are dissatisfied with the government. As comments reach other participants, they can further cause complex, divisive reactions (Applauso, 2010), that is, escalating of insults.

Johnson and Johnson (2000) insist that civility not only constitutes an important part of social interaction but is necessary to encourage deliberative politics. Incivility, in other words, could dissuade people from participating in politics in general (Ng & Detenber, 2005). Certainly, there have been instances where some Ghanaians have publicly stated that they do not want to (actively) engage in it because of the fear of being verbally abused. For example, in a news report on www.myjoyonline.com, Grace Omaboe (aka Maame Dokono), a veteran actress in Ghana was quoted to have said “the disgrace and insults I received for going into politics openly were too much for me. I have learnt my lessons and will not go into politics again …”⁸. Uncivil language is also able to block the free exchange of critical ideas, which plays a very significant role in the practice of democracy (Herbst, 2010). Bush (2016) proposes that political discussions should be characterized with gracious speech, even amid contestation and disagreement.

Going somewhat against the tide, Zhang et al. (2013) contend that it can be unwise “to sacrifice contentious yet reasonable discussions in exchange for politeness” (p. 84). In their opinion, reasonable arguments and mutual respect are two principles of deliberative democracy which do not always go together. Their study is a content analysis of discussion threads about the 2004 US presidential election, randomly selected from eight online platforms during the last month before the election. One of their key observations was that

---

although an ideal political deliberation requires both reasonable arguments and mutual respect among participants, in reality, these two features do not occur simultaneously. This observation was again reflected in the presidential debates between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump before the November 2016 election. With respect to the current study, the situation was not different between the presidential candidates in Ghana’s December 2016 general election (especially, JDM and Nana) and their respective supporters during the campaign period.

Drawing on the antagonistic model of democracy, Zhang et al. (2013) argue that mutual respect is unnecessary and even counterproductive when considering the role that the internet plays in democracies. As a result, online political discussions do not have to be polite to make meaningful contributions to democracies. The present study acknowledges that civility and appropriate forms of communication are desirable to encourage people to join in deliberative political discussions. However, it tends to support Zhang et al. (2013) that reasonable argument and mutual respect cannot always co-occur in political discussions.

The discussion in this section has established that there is a significant link between political discussions and the use of invective and insults on online media platforms. Ng and Detenber (2005), therefore, recommend political discussions on the internet as a rich area for analysis. Friedman (2011) and Ruiz et al. (2011) and other scholars duly observe that reader commentary in particular is an understudied topic, although it is very crucial to citizen participation in democracy. The present study focuses on reader commentary on GhanaWeb in relation to the 2016 general election in Ghana.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into two main parts. Section 3.1 gives details on the data sources, the data collection process, and the coding procedures used for the discourse-analytic aspect of the study. Section 3.2 describes the ethnopragnatic approach and its methodological tools to show how these tools can help both cultural insiders and outsiders gain a better understanding of culture-specific keywords and concepts. The chapter ends with concluding remarks in Section 3.3.

3.1 DATA AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This section begins with a description of GhanaWeb, the news site from which the online reader comments used as data for the study were mainly sourced, followed by an account of the data collection process and the coding process for the online reader comments. The methods of analysis are then presented to close the section.

3.1.1 GhanaWeb

GhanaWeb [www.ghanaweb.com] is an online portal on which news reports from Ghanaian newspaper agencies such as Daily Graphic, Daily Guide, and Ghanaian Times and FM stations like Peace FM, Class FM, and Starr FM are published. It also publishes news reports from established news sites in Ghana, such as [www.ghananewsagency.org] and [www.myjoyonline.com], among others. One thing that makes GhanaWeb unique among news sites in the country (e.g. [www.peacefmonline.com], [https://3news.com/]) is its archive section9. GhanaWeb is easily accessible as it has a special version for mobile devices and it is compatible with all browsers. It is described on buzzghana.com as “the one-stop

---

9News reports featured on the site, as well as the discussions that follow them, are available as far back as 1995. This is evident on [www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/browse_archive.php].
point’’ for news in Ghana, that is, the hub of all information about Ghana in terms of politics, entertainment, sports, business, and others.\textsuperscript{10}

According to the 2017 Alexa\textsuperscript{11} report, www.ghanaweb.com is the 4\textsuperscript{th} of 500 top websites in Ghana, following www.google.com.gh, www.youtube.com, and www.google.com (www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/GH). This makes it the most popular and most patronized news site in Ghana. It has also been ranked first among the most popular (most visited) websites with Ghanaian origin (www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/GH). Further evidence that GhanaWeb is the most visited site is that it frequently happens that a news report that has more than 50 comments on GhanaWeb can have just a single comment or no comment at all on its original news site. For instance, a news report with the headline, “Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama” has no comment on citifmonline.com, the news site from which it was sourced, but has 143 comments on GhanaWeb.\textsuperscript{12}

It is fair to say that the people who patronize GhanaWeb are mainly people with some interest in Ghana, but one cannot really establish if these users are resident citizens, citizens in the diaspora or even non-citizens with some form of affiliation or personal attachment to Ghana. However, it is certain that some participants are not resident Ghanaians as it is indicated on the site that a part of the audience and daily participants are migrant Ghanaians in the USA, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Australia, and other places.\textsuperscript{13} These people, from within and outside the country, form a kind of virtual community where people are identified mainly via their display names. They post comments both on a news report published and, less frequently, in reaction to preceding commenters (see Figure 3.1).

The date and time for posting a comment are automatically generated. Currently, the platform does not allow the use of any visual representation (i.e. photographs, emoji, or

\textsuperscript{10} buzzghana.com/visited-popular-websites-ghana

\textsuperscript{11} Alexa is a web information company that measures internet activity based on data from their global traffic panel, which is a sample of millions of internet users using one of over 25,000 different browser extensions. They are able to measure how a website is doing relative to all other websites over the past 3 months. The rank is calculated using a proprietary methodology that combines a site’s estimated average of daily unique visitors and its estimated number of page views over the past 3 months. They also measure how a website ranks in a particular country relative to other sites over the past month.


\textsuperscript{13} www.ghanaweb.com/ghanahomepage/aboutus.php
emoticons), thus, the comments are purely textual. Commenters, therefore, make use of capitalization and punctuation marks to compensate for various paralinguistic features.

English is the predominant language on GhanaWeb though comments are often interspersed with lexical units from Akan, Ewe, Ga, Hausa, and GhPE. An entire comment can also be posted in any of these language varieties. C.3.1, C.3.2, and C.3.3 below are examples:

| C3.1 | Comment in English and Ewe | Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu | You are a shame! … Even your daughters and son don't trust you except [sic] that ayigbe dzimakpla that you have held captive in the marriage. ‘You are a shame! … Even your daughters and son don't trust you except that ayigbe uneducated one that you have held captive in the marriage.’ (Kakaminamor 03-10-16 14:07) |
| C3.2 | Comment in English and Akan | Re: I can’t see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu | Kwasia paa a nii kwasia, you will never see bcuz you are also ugly and b [sic] thrown to the bush. A second beast. fuck you bitch ‘A fool indeed, you will never see because you are also ugly and must be thrown into the bush. A second beast. fuck you bitch.’ (Awaga 03-10-16 13:27) |
| C3.3 | Comment in Akan only | Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through - Greenstreet | Na bafan wei koraa se yenye no den? Ghana akongua no nye abafan fo de. ‘What is this cripple asking us to do for him? The presidential seat of Ghana is not for cripples.’ (Mooree 13-11-16 15:59) |

Participants who wish to post a comment are not required to sign up for an account or register their details with GhanaWeb before clicking on the ‘Post’ button. They are expected to fill designated fields labelled ‘Your name’ and ‘Subject’ in addition to ‘Your comment’ (see Figure 3.1). The field ‘Your name’ is generally filled with pseudonyms and common names (that cannot be tied to a particular individual) because many of the commenters choose not

---

14 *ayigbe* is a term used to refer to Ewes by members of other ethnic groups in Ghana. Some Ewes consider this term as having a negative connotation, thus offensive.

15 a person who is not well trained.

It is not very common to see a pseudonym that is recurrent across different comment threads. Some commenters even fill the ‘Name’ space with multiple punctuation marks, while others use it to reiterate the core idea of their message. Examples of the ‘message’ names are ‘change is coming’, ‘mahama-must-go’, and nana be ba (‘Nana will come’: Akan). This means that a commenter can write several comments at different times with different pseudonyms and have them published online as though they were coming from various authors. Occasionally, one can find full names like ‘Joe Adams’, ‘Emmanuel Agbesi’, ‘Nana Akwasi Clement’, ‘Nana Kufour’, or ‘Kojo Mensah Bonsu’. The identity of commenters on GhanaWeb is further explored in Chapter 5.

As shown in Figure 3.1 below, the display of comments on GhanaWeb is characterized by their respective subject labels (e.g. ‘I trust Akufo Addo to honour his promis’; ‘We Can’t Have Faith In A Liar’; ‘YOU ARE PROMISING TOO MUCH’). In a case where a commenter leaves the designated space blank, a subject is automatically created. Examples of such subjects in Figure 3.1 above are ‘Re: I trust Akufo Addo to honour his promis’ and ‘Re: We Can’t Have Faith In A Liar’. These examples are responses to previous comments in the thread. In general, a ‘Re-comment’ may be a reply contesting or affirming what has formerly been said or may have little or no bearing on it. Sometimes, the comments that come without subjects are not responses to earlier comments. Rather, they are comments on the news report. In those instances, ‘Re’ is attached to the news headline to form the subject of the comment.

---

16 Among the various ethnic groups of Ghana, babies have automatic names that point to the day of the week that they were born, even before they are officially named. For example, among the Akans and Ewes, a male child born on Friday is called Kofi, while a female child is called Af(a) (See Agyekum, 2006).
On GhanaWeb, discussions are mainly asynchronous, and commenters are assured of unlimited space and immediate publication. The comments are usually in the form of mini-texts with an average of about 25 to 50 words. In exceptional cases, a comment may consist of just one word or as much as 1000 words and more. The comment thread is displayed in a hierarchical structure. By this structure, other participants are able to know the sequence of the interaction, that is, who is responding to the news report or who is responding to a particular commenter. Figure 3.2 is an illustration of the first thread in Figure 3.1.
As said before, the discussions on GhanaWeb are not monitored and individual comments are not censored in any way. The lack of physical presence and the knowledge that there is no gatekeeping of communicative norms allow a “natural” display of the thoughts of citizens on GhanaWeb. Commenters feel free to express themselves, share their thoughts and challenge others just as they wish to.

Comments displayed are reproduced here just as presented by their authors, so there are instances when it is clear that there was no check for spelling or grammatical mistakes or they have been posted impulsively. This could mean that the authors did not take time to edit before posting or that they only want to vent their feelings on the issue under discussion. In some instances, the comments posted have no bearing at all on the subject matter of the discussion. For instance, Example C3.4 appears to be an extract adapted from a text or another website. Also, it is evident that the commenter, identified as ‘Satan Church’, is explaining the concept of what ‘Traditional Satanism’ is, and this has no relation to the original news report. In Example C3.5 too, the author is advertising a job opportunity in Malaysia, and this has nothing to do with ‘NDP will attract the good people in NDC – Konadu’.
C3.4 Re: Have faith in my campaign promises - Nana Addo

Traditional Satanism is not simply an inversion, but a complete rejection of the images of a particular culture, religion, or philosophy. From there a Satanist uses those images against the ethos itself, that was once his own conditioning. Persons who participate in traditional Satanic masses sometimes experience a king of 'sartori', a sudden enlightenment, to an increase in their own consciousness, and feeling stronger and satisfied because they had broken with the constraining opposites. In other words, at its highest level Satanism uncovers what the ethos of a particular community or society has covered up through images, dogma, words and ideas, returning the individual to the primal chaos out of which 'opposites' were created." ~ Magister Hagur, Temple of Atazoth Office
(Satan Church 04-09-16 12:02)

C3.5 Re: NDP will attract the good people in NDC - Konadu

WORK IN MALAYSIA, EARN SIX THOUSAND this is an opportunity for you to travel and work abroad and earn 6000 GHANA cedis monthly.0573425368 FOR DETAILS WORK COMES WITH FREE ACCOMODATION
(Gyan 13-10-16-13:38)

From this section, it is clear that GhanaWeb, as a media outlet, has not only complemented the traditional media outlets in Ghana, but has caused a boost in mass media participation. The site not only gives people the opportunity to contribute to issues of national interest and national development but offers a dynamic platform for Ghanaians, regardless of their status in society. Unfortunately, this opportunity tends to result in antagonistic language behaviour, just as on many other anonymous and unmonitored online discussion platforms in other countries (see O’Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003; Wright & Street, 2007).

As the 2016 general election drew near in Ghana, one would expect that users of this platform would use the space to urge that essential national needs were attended to by the various political parties. On the contrary, many of these users utilized this space simply for the exchange of insults, apparently to vent their feelings.
3.1.2 Data and Evidence

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on August 30, 2016. Data was gathered from September 1, 2016 to December 6, 2016. Prior to the application for ethical clearance, a letter was sent to the administrators of GhanaWeb, and their consent was obtained (see Appendices for copies of the letters exchanged, and the notice of ethical clearance). The period of data collection (i.e. three months leading up to the election) was a time of intense campaigning and citizen participation. The study focused on comment threads under selected news reports from the ‘General News’ and ‘Politics’ sections of GhanaWeb about the 2016 presidential election. The ‘General News’ and ‘Politics’ sections mainly contain news reports related to politics in Ghana.

A presidential election is one of the most important political events in a democratic country like Ghana. One can see, from the online reader comments, the diversity of opinions and the extent to which people with different political orientations (e.g. pro-NDC, pro-NPP, pro-PPP) engage one another during discussions and arguments on GhanaWeb. During the fifteen weeks of data collection, news reports that were specifically based on speeches of each of the 2016 presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner and had more than 50 comments at the time were selected for inclusion. In all, fifty news reports were downloaded with their comment threads with the aim of identifying keywords and related expressions. Some examples of the headlines for the selected news reports are:

a. I used my first term to lay a solid foundation – Mahama
b. What is broken can be fixed; vote for me – Akufo-Addo
c. I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu
d. I will be Ghana’s next president – Nduom
e. NDC has made us slaves in our own country – Greenstreet
f. I’ll introduce ‘Thinking’ as subject at basic level – Edward Mahama
g. December polls: I’m God’s favourite – JOY
h. Election 2016: I can’t be influenced - EC Boss

Overall, a total of 1,882 reader comments were downloaded as text files from multiple comment fields to form the Corpus of GhanaWeb Comments on Ghana’s 2016 Election
(CGCGE16). After the coding process (described in the next subsection), it was observed that 1,088 of richly contextualized comments in CGCGE16, comprising a total of approximately 46,500 words, are of interest to this study. They are generally those that involve invective or abusive language on one hand (insult-filled comments), and on the other hand, those that seek to reprove users of such language forms in light of the communicative norms of Ghana (metapragmatic comments).

The GhanaWeb data was supplemented by 100 comments (50 insult-filled comments and 50 metapragmatic comments) from other news sites and social media platforms, as well as my cultural knowledge as a Ghanaian and observation of speech practices.

In addition, native speakers’ intuitions about the meaning and uses of common language- and culture-specific insults were sought through unstructured interviews. Ten native Akan speakers were selected from the Kumasi Cultural Center in the Ashanti Region of Ghana by means of snowball sampling. These informants, between the ages of 40 years and 55 years, have lived in Kumasi since they were born. Kumasi, in Agyekum’s (2003, p. 372) words, is “the citadel of Akan culture”. Thus, the informants are well versed in the traditional and cultural systems of the Akans. The choice of native Akan speakers is because the most frequently occurring local insults found in the downloaded comments are in Akan. The interviews were conducted within a period of three months and they lasted from between 08 to 35 minutes. Key points obtained from the interviews were summarized.

The combination of the different forms of data (i.e., reader comments from GhanaWeb, other news sites, and social media platforms, interview responses, etc) and evidence from scholarly works not only established the credibility of the analysis, but it also provided a reliable analysis and ensured its validity (Angouri, 2010).

### 3.1.3 Coding System for GhanaWeb Data

In order to develop an informed analysis of the comments in CGCGE16, it was necessary to have a system of coding. In her study, *Storytelling and audience reactions in social media*, De Fina (2016) developed a coding system for the comments she gathered, including these categories: (a) Thread to which the comment belonged; (b) Participant name; (c) Interactional
dynamics; (d) Frame focus of the comment; (e) Medium; and (f) Tone (De Fina, 2016, p. 482).

Taking a cue from De Fina’s (2016) categories, the study sought to develop a coding system to shed light on the following questions: 1) what is the position of a given comment in a comment thread?; 2) how do commenters identify themselves?; 3) how related is a given comment to the original news report?; 4) who is the referent of a given comment?; and 5) what is the tone of this comment?. The categories devised were: 1) comment status, 2) commenter ID, 3) relation, 4) target, and 5) tone. Following a critical study of the comments, each of the categories was divided into subcategories as shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Code categories and subcategories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment status</td>
<td>Thread initial comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up comment to initial comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up comment to preceding comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow-up comment to other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standalone comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenter ID</td>
<td>Full name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full name + Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name + Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name + Initials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nickname</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relation</td>
<td>Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loosely related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Leader(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-participant(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Web provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>Antagonistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endorsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antagonistic-Endorsing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metapragmatic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subcategories for the category ‘comment status’ are defined in Table 3.2 below.
Table 3.2 *Comment status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Thread initial comment</td>
<td>A comment that starts a new thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Follow-up comment on thread initial comment</td>
<td>A comment that is a direct response (i.e. reply, reaction, etc.) to the first comment in a thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Follow-up comment on preceding comment</td>
<td>A comment that is a direct response to a comment that comes before immediately before it in the thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Follow-up comment on other</td>
<td>A comment that is a response to another comment which is the initial comment or a preceding comment in the thread.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Standalone comment</td>
<td>A comment that has no response. It is usually a direct response to the news report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was noted that comments classified as (i), (ii) and (iii) in Table 3.2 usually occur in fixed positions and are the common elements that form the threads on the interactive platform. They are thus easily identifiable. Figure 3.3 shows some threads and a common discourse pattern on GhanaWeb.
Consider some comments in Table 3.3 that are examples for each classification in Table 3.2.
Table 3.3 *Classifications with examples*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classifications</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thread initial comment</td>
<td>• GET THE ELEPHANT INTO THE JUBILEE HOUSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nana Konadu is a joker! JM Toaso!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• You will NEVER be President of Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up comment on thread initial comment</td>
<td>• Ghana most useless woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nobody likes you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• please not even 10000 votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up comment on preceding comment</td>
<td>• AMA BOATENG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Please not even 10000 votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CORNEY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up comment on other</td>
<td>• Re: NO JUBILEE HOUSE IN GHANA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standalone comment</td>
<td>• NOW MENOPAUSE FINALLY ENTERED UR BRAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• You meant to say your daughter, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Jezebel”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subcategories for commenter ‘ID’, ‘relation’, ‘target’, and ‘tone’ mentioned in Table 3.1 are explained in Tables 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7, respectively:

Table 3.4 *Subcategories for ‘commenter ID’*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full name</th>
<th>First name and last name OR first name, middle name and last name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full name + Location</td>
<td>First name and last name OR first name, middle name and last name plus location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name only</td>
<td>Single names: Western, Arabic or Ghanaian (either main or shortened/diminutive forms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name + Location</td>
<td>A single name plus a location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initials</td>
<td>The initial letters of names</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name + Initials</td>
<td>Single names plus initials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nickname | Unofficial names bestowed on the bearers by themselves or by others  
|---|---  
Message | An additional message to the main message  
Others | Identity types that do not fall in any of the previous categories  

| Table 3.5 Subcategories for ‘relations’ |  
|---|---  
Related | Comments that focus on the topic of the news report either directly or as a response to a previous comment.  
Loosely related | Comments that do not focus on the topic of the news report but are related to the leader(s) involved the report, their party, affiliates, or opposition members.  
Not related | Comments that have no bearing on the news report.  

| Table 3.6 Subcategories for ‘targets’ |  
|---|---  
Leader(s) | Either the electoral commissioner or any of the presidential candidates of concern to the study.  
Co-participant(s) | A fellow commenter(s) in the comment thread.  
Others | Another person or other people not involved in the news report but somehow related to a ‘leader’.  
Web provider | The staff of GhanaWeb.  

| Table 3.7 Subcategories for ‘tone’ |  
|---|---  
Antagonistic | Comments that are confrontational and show open hostility towards someone or something. These comments generally involve invective and offensive language.  
Endorsing | Comments that commend someone.  
Antagonistic-Endorsing | Comments that are confrontational towards one person and at the same time, commend another.  
Neutral | Comments that are neither negative nor positive.  
Metapragmatic | Comments that are against the communicative behaviour of a commenter(s) in the thread.  

The subcategories that are of major concern to RQs 2, 3, and 4 listed in Section 1.3 are (related and loosely related); (comment on leader(s) and comment on co-participant(s)); and (antagonistic, antagonistic-endorsing, and metapragmatic). Comments selected for the
analysis in subsequent chapters are mainly those that are made up of the following combinations:

- Related + Comment on leader(s) + Antagonistic
- Related + Comment on leader(s) + Antagonistic-Endorsing
- Loosely related + Comment on leader(s) + Antagonistic
- Loosely related + Comment on leader(s) + Antagonistic-Endorsing
- Related + Comment on co-participant(s) + Antagonistic
- Related + Comment on co-participant(s) + metapragmatic
- Related + Comment on leader(s) + metapragmatic

### 3.1.4 Methods of Analysis

This study combined the quantitative method of corpus-based searches with the qualitative methods of enquiry. The quantitative approach, according to Sandelowski, Voils, and Knafl (2009), “allow[s] analysts to discern and to show regularities or peculiarities in qualitative data they might not otherwise see or be able to simply communicate, or to determine that a pattern or idiosyncrasy they thought was there is not” (p. 53). The numerical analyses of the data were done with Microsoft Excel Software.

With the qualitative research, one is able “to understand the process and character of social life and to arrive at meaning types, characteristics, and organisational aspects of documents as social products in their own right, as well as what they claim to represent” (Altheide, 1996, p. 42). In simple terms, qualitative research approaches seek to find out ‘how’ and ‘why’ people behave in certain ways. It helps to explore and understand people’s beliefs, attitudes, and interactive behaviours (see Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Herring, 2004). These approaches are particularly relevant to this study because it aims to thoroughly explain and contextualize the invective and insults used on news sites and to give a detailed account of the reaction and perception of other commenters toward this communicative behaviour.

The discourse pattern of the comments in CGCGE16 was analyzed quantitatively to show (1) the number of threads and the number of standalone comments, and (2) the number of thread-initial comments and the number of follow-up comments. The result of the
quantitative analysis, presented in Chapter 4, helped to show whether or not the political
discourse on GhanaWeb represents a sustained multi-participant interaction. It also helped to
show whether or not the focus of the commenters was on the content of the news reports.

The qualitative analysis of CGCGE16 was done using AntConc 3.4.0w (Windows)
Software, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordance and text analysis developed by
Laurence Anthony in 2014. Specifically, the word list tool of the software was used to get
the exact number of words in the corpus, present them in an ordered list (A-Z), and show the
rank and frequency of each of them. At this stage, the focus was mainly on words that are
considered as insults in the Ghanaian context, and whose referents were any of the
presidential candidates or the electoral commissioner. The frequencies and outputs were
exported to Microsoft Excel Software for graphical representation. The concordance tool of
the AntConc software was then applied. This tool showed search results in the ‘KWIC’
(KeyWord in Context) format, allowing one to examine how insulting expressions were
actually used in the corpus.

The NSM method of semantic explication was used for a lexical semantic analysis of
language- and culture-specific terms identified in the study. Responses from the native Akan
informants helped to inform the meaning of these terms and subsequently their explications.
The explications were checked with Professors Cliff Goddard and Kofi Agyekum for NSM
well-formedness and cultural accuracy, respectively. Before presenting the explications,
mainly in Chapters 4 and 6, some background information on them is given together with
some examples. These examples were drawn from CGCGE16, and other sources such as
scholarly works, maxims (i.e. proverbs which serve as a repository of culturally significant
values and norms) from Ghanaian languages, and social media platforms.

In terms of presentation in the thesis, examples from CGCGE16 are prefixed with (C)
and those from the other sources are prefixed with (O). Also, the semantic explications are
prefixed with (E) and the cultural scripts are prefixed with (S).

The insult-filled comments and metapragmatic comments were analyzed on the basis
of their content and also interpreted in the sociocultural context of communication in Ghana,
as described in Chapters 2 and 4. The insult-filled comments were analyzed for (a) the
source(s) of the invective, (b) the form of abuse or attack, (c) the textual elements engaged,
and (d) the graphological features used. The metapragmatic comments were examined to
tease out how and why the original posts are deemed as culturally unacceptable, regardless of the personal political biases of commenters on GhanaWeb. A sample of the analysis of both the insult-filled comments and metapragmatic comments presented in Chapters 5 and 7 respectively, were verified with three retired teachers and two religious leaders residing in Accra.

These people have each lived in Ghana for more than 50 years. They are well versed in the socio-political occurrences in the country, and in the traditional and cultural norms of communication. More especially, they are regular readers of socio-political news reports on GhanaWeb and other news sites, though are not necessarily commenters. Admittedly, the views of these individuals, and even the informants from Kumasi may vary from that of other Ghanaians, especially some younger people. Nevertheless, their contributions are more applicable to this study because in Ghana, individuals of advanced age are regarded not only as more experienced, but as culture custodians with broader communicative competence (see Agyekum, 2004b; van der Geest, 1998).

Comments from CGCGE16 used as examples in this study are mainly presented with the headline of the news report, the name of the commenter, the date and the time that the comment was published on GhanaWeb. For some of these examples, a summary of the news report to which a commenter(s) responded is provided. Comments presented without the news headline are responses to a preceding comment, rather than the news report. Each comment is presented in its original form, with the proviso that, where necessary, the correct forms of words, phrases or sentences are put in square brackets and inserted into the frame to enhance understanding. In instances where understanding is not hampered, [sic] is placed right after the incorrect expression.

As mentioned earlier, even though GhanaWeb is highly characterized by pseudonymity, a few of the comments are signed with ‘full name’ (e.g. Ama Boateng) or ‘full name + Location’ (e.g. Yaw Asare, Toronto). In a situation where it became necessary to use comments with any of such identity types, the name has been replaced with a pseudonym to minimize any risk of potential harm to anyone who happens to be the bearer and to ensure the protection of their public image (Tilley & Woodthorpe, 2011). To do this, the first two letters of the first name and the last name were combined (e.g. Ama Boateng = Ambo).
3.2 ETHNOPRAGMATIC APPROACH AND EWE NSM

This section first introduces the ethnopragmatic approach. This is followed by a discussion of the methods of semantic explications and cultural scripts. Lastly, a brief description of the NSM of Ewe is presented.

3.2.1 Ethnopragmatic Approach

Discourse preferences widely differ from culture to culture – what is considered ‘ordinary’ in one culture may be considered ‘shocking’, or ‘offensive’ in another (Hymes, 1964; Wierzbicka, 2003; Carbaugh, 2017). For example, while the Japanese abhor and meticulously avoid direct language forms in potentially provocative speech events, the Polish encourage it (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 1997). In many interactional situations, Ghanaians, like the Japanese, do not appreciate plain or blunt speech.

Among Australians and some other western communities, using titles and honorifics in addressing one’s superior is of relatively little significance. However, among West African communities, including Ghana, failure to acknowledge a person’s title or to honour an important detail in the person's identity is offensive. In some cases, even the use of the wrong form of address term or honorific, such as ‘Doctor’ instead of ‘Professor’, can be interpreted as demeaning (see Yiannis, 1998). In a more specific context like politics, political leaders in many parts of the western world are expected to have a tough skin and accept or endure sharp criticisms from citizens. In contrast, the use of such critical statements against political leaders in developing democracies like those in Africa is considered humiliating and offensive. Thus, it flouts traditional norms and is deemed to be unacceptable.

Several scholars including Nwoye (1992), de Kadt (1998), Egner (2006), Ameka (2009), Nkwain (2011), and Schubert and Volkman (2016) maintain that it is difficult to analyze certain communicative events and their related norms, such as the ones stated in the preceding paragraphs, using pragmatic models based on western orientation. Online communication, which is the focus of this study, is no less culturally shaped than any other form of communication. Cultural factors and cultural context are essential to an adequate understanding of what goes on during online interaction. Thus, the current study is situated in the ethnopragmatics paradigm developed by researchers in the Natural Semantic
Metalanguage (NSM) approach to language studies such as Anna Wierzbicka, Bert Peeters, Cliff Goddard, Felix Ameka, Jock Wong, and Zhengdao Ye.

The ethnopragmatic approach, according to Goddard and Ye (2015), is “an approach to language use that sees culture as playing a central explanatory role, and at the same time opens the way for links to be drawn between language and cultural phenomena” (p. 66). It also requires a culture-specific and a culture-internal account of speech practices (Wierzbicka, 1998; Goddard, 2006; Goddard & Ye, 2015). This approach is different from cross-cultural pragmatics as it is directly linked with cross-linguistic semantics and it leans towards the view that speech practices must be understood in terms that make sense to the people concerned (Goddard, 2006, 2015). The relationship between ethnopragmatics and cross-linguistics semantics makes the former relevant to comparative studies, as well as the study of a single language. Goddard (2002) states that “any quest for an insider perspective on pragmatics necessarily involves cross-linguistic lexical semantics because the whole idea is to understand indigenous speech practices in terms of indigenous categories (speech-acts, values, social classifications, etc.)” (p. 114). It is therefore important to employ methods that allow researchers to formulate detailed meaning descriptions of culture- and language-specific categories without any ethnocentric bias entering into the terms of description (see Wierzbicka, 1996, 1998; Ameka, 2006; Wong, 2006).

To capture lexical meanings and describe the speech behaviour of a group of people, the ethnopragmatic approach uses basic, universal meanings known as “semantic primes”. The choice of the expression “semantic primes” suggests that they form a controlled vocabulary of conceptually simple and intuitively intelligible meanings (Wierzbicka, 1996). That is to say, they cannot be further explicated without incurring circular and obscure definitions. These primes are a set of 65 selected words that appear to have exact equivalents in all or most languages or can be expressed by linguistic expressions which “surface” in all human languages. Examples of the primes are ‘think’, ‘feel’, ‘say’, ‘someone’, ‘if’, ‘good’, and ‘bad’. The translatability of these primes has been widely demonstrated in more than 30 languages as can be found on the NSM homepage18.

---

In addition to semantic primes, the ethnopragmatic approach relies on “semantic molecules”. Semantic molecules, according to Goddard (2010), are “non primitive meanings that function alongside semantic primes as building blocks in the composition of yet more complex lexical meanings” (p. 123). They can themselves be explicated separately using the semantic primes (see Goddard 2007, 2016; Wierzbicka, 2009; Priestley, 2012; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Levisen & Aragón, 2017 for the explications of some molecules).

Presently, about 180 semantic molecules for English have been listed, and up to about 50 of them are posited to be universal or near-universal. The (near) universal ones include basic social categories like ‘men’, ‘women’ and ‘children’; basic kin concepts like ‘mother’ and ‘father’; body-parts like ‘ears’, ‘eyes’, and ‘hands’; and “environmental” molecules (as Goddard (2010: 123) calls them) like ‘sky’, ‘water’, and ‘fire’. Some language specific molecules (i.e. molecules that lack exact equivalents in other languages) are “colour words” like ‘blue’, ‘green’, and ‘yellow’, and numbers starting from ‘three’ (see Goddard (2012: 720-726) for more). In semantic explications and cultural scripts, semantic molecules are often indicated with the notation [m]. The semantic molecules used in this study include ‘born’, ‘family’, and ‘animal’.

These semantic primes and semantic molecules can be used to construct “semantic explications” and “cultural scripts”, the two major methodological tools of the ethnopragmatic approach. With these tools, keywords, concepts, values, and norms associated with specific cultures can be explicated with little or no distortion (see Wierzbicka, 1996, 1998; Goddard, 2000, 2004; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004; Travis, 2004). For instance, this study employs them to propose a detailed account of the meaning of certain Ghanaian concepts and sociocultural norms related to the study, in a way that they are appropriately understood just as they are used by cultural insiders.

Although generally, the proposed semantic explications and cultural scripts are presented in English, a number of them are rendered in Ewe to demonstrate their cross-translatability. This is done to show that any explication or script can be represented intelligibly in Ewe, and any other Ghanaian language, whenever it is necessary. Exponents of selected Ewe semantic primes are presented and discussed in Section 3.2.3. Some linguistic evidence is provided from other Ghanaian languages to show that some of the cultural communicative norms described are not exclusive to Ewe speakers, but they are
observed by members of other Ghanaian speech communities, as well as members of some neighbouring West African speech communities. The methods of semantic explications and cultural scripts are examined further in the subsection that follows.

3.2.2 Methodological Tools of the Ethnopragnatic Approach

Semantic explications

Semantic explications are explanatory paraphrases used to unpack the meanings of “local social categories” or complex culture-specific and culture-related keywords and concepts (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2014; Goddard & Ye, 2015). By this method, meaning is rigorously formulated using paraphrases that can be constructed from semantic primes and combined in a fashion consistent with well-specified grammatical rules (Wierzbicka, 1996). The NSM researchers believe that one way to find the irreducible semantic cores of various languages is to engage in explicating meanings of many different kinds from many different languages while aiming at reducing the terms of the explications to the smallest possible set. The method of semantic explications ensures a universal way of describing the meaning of language-specific terms such as the insults studied in this work.

Consider below the semantic explication of “wow!” as presented in Goddard (2014a, p. 57):

Wow!
I think like this: “this is very good”
I didn’t know before that it can be like this
I feel something very good because of this
I feel like someone can feel when this someone sees something very big

Goddard (2014a) explains that “although they look and feel very different from conventional definitions, explications have a high level of intuitive accessibility and are capable of capturing nuances that elude dictionary definitions and conventional translation” (p. 56). An explication such as the one shown above appears to be very simple, but it must be noted that formulating such an explication is a complicated, laborious and time-consuming task. It usually goes through several revisions in order to conform to the combinatory syntax of the metalanguage and to be suitable for the full range of use of the explication (see Goddard, 1998). A good semantic explication makes sense and generates appropriate implications when substituted into contexts of use to the members of the speech community
concerned. At the same time, the understanding of the concepts explicated can be enhanced for people who are not familiar with the culture of that community (see Goddard & Ye, 2015).

Among Ghanaians, for instance, there are “exotic” social categories that are very unfamiliar to Europeans and have no direct equivalent expressions in European languages. One such (though not of direct concern to this study), is the category, ɔkyeame in Akan or tsiame in Ewe and Ga that is often translated as ‘an orator’, ‘a linguist’ or ‘a chief’s/king’s spokesperson’ (see Yankah, 1995). The translation “equivalents” do not even come close to capturing the full Ghanaian meaning. Equally, but much less obviously, there are categories, such as ametsitsi ‘elderly person’ or ɔgbui ‘chief’ that may seem to lend themselves to simple translations. This can be misleading because even though they seem to be so transparent, such simple glosses may fail to disclose the indigenous understanding or may even disguise it. It is in cases of this kind that semantic explications become very necessary as they can capture the semantic invariants of the terms as they are used across a wide range of naturally occurring contexts.

It is shown later (in Chapter 6) that the meaning of some common insults used among Ghanaians during online interactions does not exactly correspond with the meaning of their translations in the Inner Circle Englishes. One such is the most common Ghanaian language insult in CGCGE16, kwasea, which is often translated as a “fool”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, a person who is described as a “fool” is one who lacks a sense of judgment (or someone who is just a professional jester). However, Gyekye (1996) notes that, in the Ghanaian context, someone who is referred to as a kwasea does not lack anything mentally. The answer to the question, what is a kwasea? is explored by means of the semantic explication method in Chapter 6. In addition, the explication method is used to describe social categories of people regarded as people “above” others among Ghanaians in Chapter 4.

Describing Ghanaian social categories and specific insults using the semantic explication method discloses what the terms actually mean to the indigenous people of Ghana and, at the same time, makes them meaningful to people who have very little or no knowledge of the Ghanaian culture. Also, as these terms are usually associated with culturally specific values and speech practices, the explication method helps to ensure that they are explained in a way that avoids the danger of them being misinterpreted and misunderstood from the perspective of a foreign culture (Goddard, 2002, 2006, 2015).
Cultural scripts

Cultural scripts are “representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and which are reflected in language” (Wierzbicka, 2002, p. 401). Although they are not usually recorded anywhere in writing, they are “conventionalized patterns stored in the long-term memory of language users” (Schneider, 2012, p. 18). They are mainly about social cognition (understandings, expectations, norms, and beliefs) which are upheld in a specific society. They demonstrate shared understandings and expectations of specific speech communities. Cultural scripts can be captured in simple and precise terms while avoiding the pressure of cultural bias (Ameka, 2004, 2006). They guide speech participants in the course of production, interpretation, and understanding of interactions, as they form a kind of interpretive background against which the speakers position their own acts and those of others (Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004; Ye, 2004; Wong, 2006; Wierzbicka, 2010).

Arguably, these scripts are similar to Hymes’ (1964) concept of “norms of interaction” and “norms of interpretation”. They do not control the pattern of an interaction. Instead, they can influence the form that specific speech events take because they represent commonly held assumptions about how “people think” about social interaction. It is worth mentioning that not everyone in a speech community will agree with or conform to such shared understandings. However, the claim is that they form an interpretive backdrop to regular speech situations (Wierzbicka, 1998, 2002; Goddard & Wierzbicka, 2004; Goddard, 2006).

Scripts can be proposed to describe cultural communicative norms which are observed not only within a particular speech community, but which are shared across many different linguistic communities with a broad cultural area. Ameka and Breedveld (2004) call the latter areal cultural scripts; “scripts that pertain to a speech area, i.e., an area in which contiguous cultural linguistic groups share similar communicative practices” (p. 169). They propose such to describe communicative norms such as the taboos on the use of the left hand in social interaction and on the use of personal names in adult address, and the widespread preference for the use of intermediaries for serious communication in West Africa (Ameka & Breedveld, 2004). The present study is limited to speech communities in Ghana, such as the Akans, Ewes, Gas, Dagaares, and Dagbanis. In Chapter 4, a number of “areal” cultural scripts for interactions with anyone who is regarded as someone “above” oneself or others are posited.
Cultural scripts are, generally, in two forms: high-level scripts and lower-level scripts. The high-level scripts are “a set of assumptions of what is good and what is bad to do – and what one can or cannot do – especially in speaking” (Wierzbicka, 2002, p. 401). Normally they are generalized evaluations or perceptions, related to norms of expression and interpretation. They can be framed as components such as ‘it is good/bad if …’ for evaluations, and ‘I can/can’t say (do, think) …’ for perceptions. For instance, one of the communicative expectations in the Ghanaian society that underpins this study is the norm of “speaking well”. This norm is illustrated in the high-level script below, *Ghanaian Cultural Script for “Speaking Well”*. To illustrate the cross-translatability of the semantic primes, the script is presented in English [S 3.1a] and in Ewe [S 3.1b].

[S 3.1a] Ghanaian cultural script for “speaking well”

(a) It is good if people think like this at all times:
(b) I don’t want people to think something bad about me because of this, when I say something to someone it is good if I think about it before
(c) I don’t want this someone to feel something bad because I say something because of this, it is good if I say it in a certain way
(d) if I don’t say it in this way, people can say something bad about me at the same time, they can say something bad about my family [m]
(e) it is not good if it is like this

[S 3.1b] Ghanaian cultural script for “speaking well” (Nufofo nyuie) in Ewe

(a) enye nu nyuie ne amewo bua ta me alea ṛesiari:
(b) nye me dzi be amewo woabu susu vo de ŋunye o le esia ta ne megblo nya aqे na ame aqе la enyo ne mebu ta me le ḋutí hafi
(c) nye me dzi be ame aqе nase veve elabena megblo nya aqе o le esia ta, enyo ne me gblo le mо aqе dzi
(d) ne nye megblo le mo sia dzi o la amewo atenu agblo nya vo aqе de ṛutinye ṛeyiy make la, wo atenu agblo nya vo aqе de nye fometowo ṛuti
(e) ne ele alea la, menyo o

19 This script shows that among Ghanaians, speakers are often conscious of how others feel about their utterances and consequently, the thoughts these people will form about them. As a result, they have to choose carefully what they say and how they say it. Failure to consider this before making an utterance could give one the label of a “social deviant” or a communicatively incompetent person.
The lower level scripts specifically state what should happen in a particular speech event. These types of scripts are regarded as ‘how-to’ scripts. They are often introduced by ‘when’ or ‘if’ and they show perceptions of acceptable social conduct (Goddard, 2015). The following example of a lower level script [S 3.2], involves a person’s communicative behaviour in the presence of an elderly person (ametsitsi in the Ewe language).

[S 3.2] Ghanaian cultural script for interacting with ametsitsi

(a) When I am with ametsitsi, if I want to say something,
   it is good if I say it in a certain way
(b) I want this someone to know:
   I feel something good towards you
   I don’t want you to think something bad about me
   because of this, I cannot say bad words

The culture scripts above, and others that are discussed in the next chapter, establish a checklist that can help expound Ghanaian values in some speech events. This checklist is compared with the communicative style displayed on news sites in Ghana in subsequent chapters.

3.2.3 Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) of Ewe

In order to formulate semantic explications and cultural scripts, one needs to have in hand an inventory of the equivalents of the semantic primes in a particular language to ensure that the explications and scripts can be expressed in that language. A number of studies including Wierzbicka (2010), Ye (2013, 2017), and Levisen & Waters (2017) have drawn on this framework and have applied it to languages such as English, French, Finnish, Russian, Malay, Spanish, Polish, Danish, Italian, Koromu, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Yankunytjatjara, and East Cree. Among the many indigenous languages in Africa, the framework has been applied to Fulfulde, Amharic, Likpe, Giryama, Wolof, and Igala (Ameka & Breedveld, 2004; Amberber, 2008; Ameka, 2015; Krijtenburg & de Volder, 2015; Bondéelle, 2015; Brise, 2017) and has been extensively applied to Ewe (see e.g. Ameka, 1990, 1991, 1994, 2002, 2009, 2017).

Ewe is the only Ghanaian language, as far as I know, that has yet gained much scholarly attention in NSM studies. Also, being my mother tongue, in the present study, Ewe is used
to demonstrate the translatability of primes and for illustrative purposes, although the study does not focus on any specific indigenous Ghanaian language. Ameka (1994) identified Ewe lexical equivalents of the English primes established at the time. In 2017, Ameka and the present author worked on the additions that have since been made to the inventory of semantic primes. The updated version of the Ewe exponents of semantic primes, as presented in Table 3.8, can also be found on the NSM Homepage. Beyond Ameka (1994), many other studies of his, including Ameka (2002, 2006, 2009, 2015, and 2017), have proven that semantic explications and cultural scripts are expressible in Ewe.

In order not to reinvent the wheel (considering that no language is of particular interest to this study), but at the same time to allow readers of this thesis to have a taste of the Ewe exponents of the semantic primes, this chapter considers a selected number of primes. These primes are mainly those that have been used in the semantic explications and cultural scripts proposed later in the study. Before this, the Ewe language is introduced with some of its relevant linguistic features.

**Ewe language and some of its linguistic features**

Ewe (Eʋegbe) is a member of the Kwa family of the Niger-Congo languages spoken by approximately 5 million people in southeast Ghana, across to the south of Togo and just across the Togo-Benin border (Ameka, 2008; Adjei, F. A., 2012; Eberhard et al., 2019). It is part of the Gbe group of languages which includes Gen, spoken in Togo and Benin and Fon, spoken in Benin and southwest Nigeria (Capo, 1991; Duthie, 1996). In Ghana, about 3,820,000 people speak Ewe either as a first or second language (Eberhard et al., 2019). The majority of first language speakers live in the southern part of the Volta region. Those who speak it as a second language are located mainly in the northern part of the Volta region (speakers of the Ghana-Togo-Mountain languages such as Logba, Nyangbo, Tafi, Sekpele, and Tuwuli), easternmost part of Greater Accra region, and in the Asikuma town area of the Eastern region (Adjei, F. A., 2012).

Ewe has some distinct dialects which are mutually intelligible. The dialects include Aŋlɔ, Ecedome, Tɔŋu, and Avenɔ (Capo, 1991). The standard written form is a hybrid of the regional variants of the various sub-dialects. It also has a standard colloquial variety, which is widely spoken among Ghanaians and often used in social, traditional, religious, and
economic settings (Ameka, 1994). It is also used in the media, especially on radio and television. Ewe is taught mainly at the primary and secondary levels of education in Ghana.

There are 26 consonants and 7 vowels (each having an oral and a nasalized counterpart) in Ewe. Ewe is a register tone language with high and non-high tonemes, and without a downstep. Typically, an Ewe syllable consists of either a vowel or a consonant plus a vowel. The language has no consonant clusters, but it has doubly articulated consonants such as /gb/ and /kp/ (Ameka, 1994). In terms of morphology, Ewe is an isolating language with agglutinative features. Some word formation processes are affixation, reduplication, tripllication, and compounding (Ameka, 2006). The nominal, adjectival, and adverbial classes are open and can be augmented through any of the abovementioned productive word formation processes. Verbs are a closed class with about only 600 lexical forms, that is, “‘there are no productive morphological processes for the formation of new verbs” (Ameka, 1994, p. 57). They can be reduplicated to form adjectives or gerunds. The grammaticalization processes of verbs via multiverb constructions may result in some minor word classes, such as prepositions and preverbs.

Other minor word classes include quantifiers, postpositions, utterance particles, determiners (including demonstratives), and connectives (Ameka, 1996). As in many other Ghanaian languages, in Ewe, pronouns do not mark difference in gender. The logophoric pronoun y(é) can be used in reportive contexts to mark the individual(s) (except for the first person) whose speech, thoughts, feelings and so on are reflected or reported in the linguistic context. One can use this pronoun only in a clause introduced by bé (ná) ‘say (that)’, the dependent-class introducer (Essegbey, 1994). Ewe is also characterized by ideophones; “a set of words with interesting phonological and syntactic properties some of which encode intensity, manner of movement, etc.” (Adjei, F. A., 2012, p. 107).

Grammatically, Ewe is an aspect prominent language and not a tenseless language (Duthie, 1996; Ameka, 2006; Essegbey, 2008). The suffix (n)a is attached to the verb to mark habitual aspect. There is also potential morpheme a-, which can have future time interpretation in context (see Essegbey (2008) for the discussion of the potential morpheme). The basic word order is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO). An action (verb) is preceded by the doer (the subject) and is followed by the one to whom it is done (the object). Ewe does not use passive constructions. Extensive descriptions on the linguistics of Ewe can be found in
studies such as Ameka (1991) and Duthie (1996). Considering the dialect variation in Ewe, it should be noted that for some of the primes discussed in the next subsection, the nominated exponents may be appropriate only for some dialects.

**Ewe exponents of selected NSM semantic primes**

Table 3.8 presents the Ewe lexical exponents of the 65 semantic primes and their English equivalents as posited by Ameka and Thompson (2017). This is followed by a discussion of some selected exponents of the semantic primes using sentence fragments or simple sentences. These sentences are sourced from scholarly works on Ewe or literary texts in Ewe. Some of these Ewe sentences were quoted together with the glosses presented in the original work, as shown in Example (ii), while others were glossed by the present author, as can be seen in Example (iii).

**Table 3.8 Semantic primes (Ewe and English exponents) grouped into related categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substantives</th>
<th>NYE-ME-, WÔ-(N)È, AME[ÁDÉ], NÁDÉ-NÂNÉ, AMEWÓ, LAME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational Substantives</td>
<td>TÔGBI, AKPÀ[DE]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KINDS, PARTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determiners</td>
<td>SIA, NENEMAKE, BUBU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>THIS, THE SAME, OTHER~ELSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantifiers</td>
<td>DEKA, EVE, EDE, KATA<del>PETEE, GEDE</del>GBOGBO, SUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH<del>MANY, LITTLE</del>FEW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluators</td>
<td>NYO, BADA~VÔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GOOD, BAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptors</td>
<td>GA, VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIG, SMALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Predicates</td>
<td>NYÁ, BU[TAME], DÌ, GBE, SÈ, KPÔ, SÈ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON’T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>GBLÔ-BÉ, NYA, NYATEFE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAY, WORDS, TRUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions, Events, Movement</td>
<td>WÔ, DZÔ, UA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DO, HAPPEN, MOVE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes: (i) Primes exist as the meanings of lexical units (not at the level of lexemes); (ii) Exponents of primes can be polysemous, i.e. they can have other meanings in addition to the semantically primitive meaning; (iii) Exponents of primes may be words, bound morphemes, or phrasemes; (iv) They can be formally complex; (v) They can have “allolexes” (indicated with ~); (vi) Some Ewe primes may have other allolexes in addition to those indicated in the Table; (vii) Each prime has well-specified syntactic (combinatorial) properties (Ameka & Thompson, 2017, cf. Ameka, 1994).

[I] Substantives
NYE~ME- (‘I’~ ‘ME’), WÒ~(N)È (‘YOU’)
Lexical exponents of the first person pronoun ‘I’ and the second person pronoun ‘YOU’ in Ewe are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>YOU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free form</td>
<td>nye</td>
<td>wò</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>me-</td>
<td>(n)è</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>-m</td>
<td>wò</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The free forms occur in different contexts which include:
(i) nominal coordination

**nye kple wò**

I and you

‘You and I’

(ii) possessive constructions

a. **Nye ga bu**

1SG:poss money lost

‘My money is lost.’ (Ameka, 1991, p. 164)

b. **Wò taku dzɔ**

2SG:poss scarf fall

‘Your scarf has fallen off’ (Ameka, 1991, p. 165).

When expressing possession in Ewe, all pronouns, except the above illustrated, are linked to the possessed items by the possessive connective *fe*.

While the first person free form is used at the beginning of a negative sentence, the second person free form can be omitted in this position.

(iii) a. **Nye me gblɔ dzre nya ne o** (Glakpe, 2014, p. 13)

1SG NEG say quarrel word 3SG:obj NEG

‘I did not say anything conflictive to him/her.’

b. **(Wò) me gblɔ dzre nya ne o**

(2SG) NEG say quarrel word 3SG:obj NEG

‘you did not say anything conflictive to him/her.’

Usually, the subject forms are cliticised onto the first unit of the verb phrase as presented below.

(iv) **O Mawu, ne me-yɔ wo la, to na-m** (Krah, 2016, p. 2)

O God, when 1SG-call 2SG TP respond to-1SG:obj

‘O God, answer me when I call.’

(v) **Ne e-gbɔ kaba la da nu na ṃevi-a-wo**

If 2SG-arrive quickly TP cook thing for child-DEF-PL

‘If you arrive early, cook for the children.’

The object forms can function as objects of verbs and prepositions. In (iv), for instance, it is seen that *wo* is the object of the verb *yɔ ‘call’, and *–m* is the object of the preposition *na ‘to’.
AME[ÁDÉ] (‘SOMEONE’), NÁDÉ~NÁNÉ (SOMETHING)

The indefinite marker áɖé is attached to ame ‘person’ and the generic nominal nu ‘thing’ to form ameáɖé ‘someone’ and náɖé/náné ‘something’, respectively. Consider (vi) and (vii):

(vi) Ame-áɖé le Anane dzi-m
    person-INDEF be Anane search-PROG
    ‘Someone is looking for Anane.’

(vii) Né e-kpó n-áɖé, gblɔ-e ná-m
    if 2SG-see thing-INDEF, say-3SG to-1SG:obj
    ‘If you see something, tell me.’

[II] Determiners

SIA (‘THIS’), BUBU (‘OTHER-ELSE’)

The Ewe exponent of THIS is sia. It functions as a modifier of nouns, as is shown in (viii). It can be nominalised by the prefixation of the third person singular pronoun é, as in (ix). The nominalised form can occur as the head of a noun phrase or used anaphorically in discourse (Ameka, 1991).

(viii) Nyɔnu sia vôɖjì
      woman this wicked
      ‘This woman is wicked.’

(ix) É-sia fia be ɔ̀li la dzo
     3SG-this show that ghost DEF leave
     ‘This shows that the ghost has left.’

The exponent of OTHER in Ewe is bùbù, as illustrated in the examples that follow. If the noun being modified by bùbù is in the plural form, the plural marker wó is attached to bùbù and not the noun (see x). This is also the case with other determiners in Ewe, such as sia ‘this’, which has been discussed above. That is, wó is a clitic, hence phrasal in scope.

(x) Du ñkɔ-wó kple nya bùbù-wó le agbale sia-wó me
town name-PL and word other-PL be.LOC books DET-PL POST
‘There are names of towns and other things in these books.’

(xi) Nu bùbù aɖé dzɔ dɛ e-ɖzi (Krah, 2016, p. 16)
thing other INDEF happen PREP 3SG-POST
‘Something else happened to him.’
[III] Mental Predicates

NYÁ (‘KNOW’), BU [TAME] (‘THINK’), SE (‘FEEL’)  
The exponent of know is nyá. When it has a nominal phrase as its object, it is used for ‘to know someone/something’, as in (xii (a) and (b)). It also expresses ‘knowing how to do something’ when it has a nominalized complement, as in (xiii).

(xii)  

a. Mie-nyá mia nœ-wo xoxo (Krah, 2016, p. 11)  
1PL-know 1PL each-other already  
‘We already know each other.’

b. … Mia fofo nyá nu-si-wo hiāa mi …  
2PL:poss father knows thing-this-PL need 2PL:obj …  
‘…Your father knows what you need …’

(xiii)  
Togbɔ be Kokui fe vi-a me-tsi o la,  
although that Kokui POSS child-DEF NEG-old NEG TP  
e-nyá nu qaqa  
3SG-knows thing cook  
‘Although Kokui’s child is still young, she knows how to cook.’

The word nyá ‘know’ can also take a sentential complement which is introduced by bé ‘that’ as exemplified below.

(xiv)  
Wo-nyá be Mawu li kple ye-wo (Glakpe, 2014, p. 34)  
3PL know COMP God be with 3PL:obj-PL  
‘They know that God is with them.’

Bu, as used with the inherent object complement ta-me (head-in, that is, ‘in the head’), means think (see xv). The topic of the thought can be expressed as the object of yu(ti), a postposition. This postpositional phrase may become the object of the prepositions tso ‘from’ and le ‘at’ as shown in (xvi) (see Ameka 1994: 62-63) for more on bu). In a “quotative” expression, the habitual aspect marker (n)a is introduced between bu and the inherent object complement ta-me. This is illustrated in (xvii).

(xv)  
Klo bu ta-me tso nu-si-wo katã wo va kpɔ le atiglinyi gbɔ.  
tortoise think head-in from thing-this-PL all 3SG come see at elephant side  
‘Tortoise thought about everything he saw at elephant’s place.’
(xvi) Me-bu ta-me tso nya sia ŋu tuu
1SG-think head-in from matter this POST long.time
‘I thought about this matter for a long time’ (Ameka, 1994, p. 63).

(xvii) Ame gedee bu-a ta-me ale-a …
person many think-HAB head-in like-DET …
‘Many people think like this …’

The Ewe exponent of feel is se. It is homonymous with the Ewe exponent of the prime hear and other words, such as ‘perceive’, ‘taste’, and ‘smell’. Se can only be unambiguously rendered as ‘feel’ in a number of contexts which include:

(A) when its object is an emotion/sensation nominal.

(xviii) Me se vevé tso ŋu
1SG feel pain about side
‘I was hurt about it.’

(B) when the locus of perception is identified as inside one’s body. In this case, the prepositional phrase le lame (at body-in, i.e. ‘in the body’) can be joined to se to have seselelame ‘feeling’. Consider (xix) and (xx).

(xix) Me-se seselelame nyui ađe le ŋuti wo
1SG-feel feeling good INDEF at skin 2SG:poss
‘I feel something good towards you.’

(xx) Me-se náné le nye la-me
1SG-feel something at 1SG:poss body-in
‘I feel something in my body.’

Example (xx) can be translated as ‘I heard something’ when the prepositional phrase is omitted. Ameka (1994) aptly notes that it is impossible to translate sentences such as ‘I feel good/bad’ and ‘I feel like this’ without the use of a nominal like ‘something’ in the translation.
[IV] Speech

**GBLɔ-BÉ (‘SAY’)**

The verbs *gblɔ* and *bé* are the equivalents of the prime *say*. They are generally not substitutable in different contexts. Except in very few cases, *gblɔ* is mutually substitutable with its dialect variant *dó* (see Ameka, 1994). For example:

(xxii) Yesu *gblɔ/dó* na e-fe nu-srɔ-la-wo be “tetekpɔ
Jesus say to 3SG:poss thing-learn-AG-PL that “temptation
a-va mia dzi”
FUT-come 2PL top”
‘Jesus said to his disciples, “temptations will certainly come…”’ (Luke 17:1).

*Gblɔ* is also used to denote internal speech, as in (xxii) or a soliloquy, as in (xxiii).

(xxii) Ama *gblɔ/dó* le ta-me …
Ama say PREP head-in …
‘Ama said in her head (mind) …’

(xxiii) Petro *gblɔ/dó* na e-dokui be …
Peter say to 3SG-self that …
‘Peter said to himself that …’

*Bé* is mainly used to introduce direct quotes as shown in the following:

(xxiv) Papa *bé*: kpɔ dokui-wo dzi nyui
Papa say see self-2SG top well
‘Papa said: take care of yourself.’

(xxv) Me *bé*: nkɔ-nye e-nye Sika Nutor
1SG say name-SG:poss 3SG-be Sika Nutor
‘I said: my name is Sika Nutor.’

[V] Logical Concepts

**ME…O (‘NOT’), NE (‘IF’)**

The Ewe exponent of *not* is the bipartite negation particles *mé* …*o*. In a clause, *mé* precedes the verb phrase and is cliticised onto the first element of the phrase. The second particle, *o* follows the verb phrase, as in (xxvi) and (xxvii), or occurs at the end of the clause but before any utterance-final particle, as in (xxviii).
The conditional clause introducer *né* is the equivalent of the prime *if* as illustrated in (xxix).

(39) **Né** nye me-kpɔ Ṿu o ma-zɔ  
    if 1SG NEG-see car NEG 1SG:IRR-walk  
    ‘If I don’t get a car, I will walk.’

*Né* can also be translated as ‘when’ as in (xxx).

(40) **Né** me-do afeme la me nu da gé  
    when 1SG-reach home TP 1SG thing cook INGR  
    ‘When I get home, I will cook.’

Examples [*I* to *V*], as presented in this subsection, have shown the lexical exponents of the selected Ewe semantic primes in this study. A fuller version of the Ewe metalanguage will be published in due course.

### 3.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has examined the data and the research methods employed for the thesis. The data collection process and various methods of analysis which include some quantitative methods of corpus-based searches and some qualitative methods of enquiry were shown. Further, the chapter provided an overview of the semantic explication and cultural script methods of the ethnopragmatic approach. It showed that with these tools, Ghanaian sociocultural norms, values, concepts, and keywords can be described in maximum detail with very little or no distortion. Lastly, the NSM of Ewe was discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

ABUSIVE LANGUAGE USE AGAINST NATIONAL LEADERS AS A NORM VIOLATION: A CULTURAL BACKDROP

This chapter aims at providing an understanding of how the use of invective and insults against national leaders features against the backdrop of traditional Ghanaian speech culture, which places high value on respect for social hierarchy, among other things. It first draws attention to publicly expressed viewpoints of opinion leaders from diverse backgrounds in the nation about the use of invective, insults, and abusive language as a trend in political discussions in Ghana. It then sets out to explain the cultural backdrop by describing some normative expectations about respect or deference towards age and authority using the techniques of semantic explication and cultural script. The chapter highlights how concepts of social hierarchy (roughly, the thought that some people are “above” others or oneself) ought to influence verbal interaction among Ghanaians. These normative expectations are shared across various speech communities in the country; however, for reasons of being specific, the chapter focuses on Ewe social categories and draws on examples from other Ghanaian languages whenever possible. The English version of NSM is used for the semantic explications and scripts; however, to show that they are equally expressible in Ewe, one explication and one script are provided in both languages.

4.1 GHANAIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF INVECTIVE AND INSULTS IN POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS

According to Fish (1994), “speech, in short, is never a value in and of itself but is always produced within the precincts of some assumed conception of the good” (p. 104). In this sense, van Mill (2017) explains that in every society, there are some limits to how speech can be exercised when one considers the values and norms of the people. In present-day Ghana, there is a perceived “crisis” about language use during political discussions (i.e. deterioration in civility and breakdown in issue-based discussion and argument). Traditional rulers, religious leaders, political leaders, academics, and media experts have all expressed their concerns and have appealed for decorum during political discussions. A salient part of this
public discourse are explicit statements to the effect that public disrespect of the “elderly” and people in authority is against Ghanaian values. Additionally, a practical danger is highlighted, namely, that the “crisis” in public discourse can threaten Ghana’s peace and national development.

Extracts\(^\text{20}\) [O4.1 - O4.22] below are from public speeches made by leading Ghanaians from 2010 to 2016. Using these extracts, the focus of this section is to describe the “crisis” in Ghanaian political discourse, as well as the concerns raised about the “crisis”.

4.1.1 The Perceived “Crisis” in Ghanaian Political Discourse
It has been widely noted that political discourse among Ghanaians is presently characterized with a deterioration in civility (as shown in O4.1 to O4.5) and a breakdown in issue-based discussion and argument (as shown in O4.6 to O4.10).

“Deterioration in civility”

Consider the following extracts about incivility in Ghanaian political discourse.

O4.1  “With ideological extremity and political polarization developing into a monster and to a greater extent entrenched in Ghanaian society, *civility in public discourse keep on declining*. Which at the present is at an imperil status we should be terrified of its disappearance. I sincerely believe that if a *Civilty Survey be conducted in Ghana the result of the poll may reveal disheartening figures …*” (Nana Akwah, Columnist, Modern Ghana, 21/3/12) [https://www.modernghana.com](https://www.modernghana.com)

O4.2  “Political polarization between the two major political parties has increased dramatically in the last 20 years, and with this polarization, *civility has waned*. Name-calling and angry exchanges occur regularly on cable television channels and radio talk show programs every now and then …” (Nana Marfo, Editor-Ghana London Accra News, 22/8/13) [https://www.ghanaweb.com](https://www.ghanaweb.com)

O4.3  “*Being rude in public discourse is about lack of civility, not free speech …* Ghana’s politics is afflicted by indiscipline and low level thinking, to an extent that any common minded person has the platform to insult respectable men and leaders of our country. In *public discourse incivility is manifested in a range of* …

\(^{20}\) The extracts are presented either as direct quotes from the speakers (e.g. O4.1) or captions of news reports (e.g. O4.6).
forms, including hate speech and reckless remarks and populist discourses, all of which consist of an offensive language used against leaders.” (Lewis Kwame Addo, Columnist, GhanaWeb, 22/11/16) https://www.ghanaweb.com

O4.4 “In fact, the two political behemoths have turned politics into a bloodsport … Overall, the prevailing political atmosphere is one of intense incivility, bitterness and vindictiveness …” (Moses Kofi Yahaya, Columnist, Zaa Radio online, 4/2/18) http://zaaradio.com

O4.5 “To return to our current politics, there is too much hatred and lack of civility. … We need some love. My NDC brothers, the NPP guys you know are not your enemies; they are your opponents. My NPP brothers; the NDC guys you know are not your enemies; they are your opponents” (Dr Arthur Kennedy, Founding Member, New Patriotic Party, 22/4/16) https://www.pulse.com.gh/news/politics

In the extracts reported above, some of the speakers say that civility is on the decline (e.g. O4.1), while the others believe that it is already lost (e.g. O4.4). The view being expressed is that the lack of civility is as a result of the political polarization between the two major political parties (e.g. O4.2 and O4.5). Dr Kennedy in O4.5 suggests that the lack of civility is because members of the two major political parties see each other as enemies. This view is shared by Marfo (2013) who states that “in the Ghanaian political context, a political opponent is largely considered as a sub-human who needs no recognition and sympathy” (p. 552). Thus, during political discourse, the scene created is as described by Dahlgren (2005), “speech is not always so rational, tolerance toward those who hold opposing views is at times wanting, and the forms of interaction are not always so civil” (p. 156).

Often, participants in political discourse not only fail to appreciate the fact that their opponents are fully entitled to their political opinions, but they fail to distinguish between the people and the ideologies that they support and promote. Disagreements are therefore expressed without any form of mutual respect. The act of incivility tends to adversely affect political trust and efficacy (Mutz & Reeves, 2005; Borah, 2013) as it is considered to be less fair, less important, and less informative (Brooks & Geer, 2007).
Mahama (2012: 108) asserts that vilification not only portrays the lack of “sophistication” and “delicacy” in language use, it also deprives voters of the opportunity to scrutinize policy options and vision of power seekers. The following are comments about the perceived breakdown in issue-based discussion and argument in political discourse in Ghana.

O4.6 According to the President, he is bewildered by the tremendous waste of precious time by politicians who engage in abusive exchanges in the media instead of focusing on issues of national interest which affect the ordinary person. (As reported by citifmonline, 28/10/10) https://www.ghanaweb.com

O4.7 “The overall effect of the common practice of political invective is that we are establishing a political tradition where insults have taken the place of polite language and logical persuasion ....” (Prof Kofi Agyekum, Professor, University of Ghana, 26/2/12) https://www.modernghana.com

O4.8 “In politics, we all have the interest of the country at heart, there is no need to insult anybody in politics because insult is not argument.” (Justice V. C. R. A. C. Crabbe, A retired Ghana Supreme Court judge, 6/9/16) https://www.atinkaonline.com

O4.9 “Indeed rather than doing the noble thing of engaging in the debate and competition of ideas, the resort generally had been to the ignoble.” (Emmanuel Attafuah-Danso Converner, The Africa Young Conservatives Dialogue, Ghana, 6/7/16) https://www.modernghana.com

O4.10 Ghana’s second gentleman said the political parties should concentrate on selling their messages to the electorates to win them over, rather than insulting each other. He said in such a delicate time, tolerance and not confrontation is what is needed, therefore the parties must eschew the politics of insults. (As reported by Nii Smiley Byte, 2/9/16) https://www.ghanacelebrities.com

Presumably, in discussions about national challenges, the welfare of citizens and the future of the nation, the discussants would naturally have opposing views, but the belief is that they all share a common ground, which is having “the interest of the country at heart” (O4.8). Resorting to verbal attacks is a sign that one has nothing constructive or worthwhile to contribute to issues of national interest and as stated in O4.6, is a “tremendous waste of precious time”. Personality attack, name-calling, and highlighting irrelevant personal
imperfections detract from debate. The result is certainly not “logical persuasion” (O4.7), “argument” (O4.8), or “debate” (O4.9), as there is “no competition of ideas” (O4.9), and “no substantial message” sent across to the electorates (O4.10).

4.1.2 Public Reactions to the Perceived “Crisis” in Ghanaian Political Discourse

Given that there is a widely-perceived deterioration in public discourse, what do Ghanaians make of this? Extracts [O4.11 – O4.16] illustrate typical cultural ideological objections to invective in politics, while Extracts [O4.17 – O4.22] illustrate the utilitarian concerns (practical dangers) raised against it.

“Socioculturally, a non-Ghanaian way of speaking”

O4.11 Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene … said Ghanaians, especially the youth, need to exhibit the moral training they have received and help discourage attempts to superimpose imported cultures on the rich Ghanaian culture. … He stressed that the democratic dispensation in the country did not mean the trading of insults and invectives and that an elected personality must be accorded all the respect that he or she deserves. (As reported by Justice Ghana, 4/7/11) [http://www.justiceghana.com]

O4.12 The Ashanti Regional Director of the National for Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), Mr. Alhassan Yakubu, has roundly condemned the situation where leaders are openly denigrated, derided and insulted. That, he said, was completely unacceptable, alien to the Ghanaian culture and must be rejected. Mr. Yakubu therefore called on everybody not to disrespect people in authority, even if they disagreed with things they did. (As reported by Peace FM, 10/2/16) [https://www.peacefmonline.com]

O4.13 “… insulting opponents especially adults, is an affront to Ghanaian values.” (Mrs Rachel Apoh Opoku, Former Deputy Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 18/1/15) [http://ghanamps.com]

O4.14 “We are conscious of the fact that our politics have experienced some kind of insults from time past but we are very worried the level it is getting into. … What has taken place in our view undermines our moral culture and the respect we expect the citizens to accord our political leaders and MPs and must not be encouraged in any way. Unfortunately if you go to the Internet and Google ‘Politics of Insults’ the only country that shows up is Ghana and all articles are about Ghana’s politics. This is sad
...” (Bishop Prince Benny Wood- President/Spokesperson, Concerned Clergy Association of Ghana, 19/2/16) https://www.classfmonline.com

O4.15 “... In fact was the culture of silence broken to be replaced with the culture of insults and impunity? Then we are in danger of losing a very valuable aspect of our cultural heritage.” (Prof Kofi Agyekum, Professor, University of Ghana, 26/2/12) https://www.modernghana.com/news

O4.16 “… Ghanaian values demanded that respect was given to all manner of people, especially the elderly and those in authority irrespective of which side of the political divide they belonged to. ... It is therefore unfortunate that we are gradually losing these values in the name of politics and there are thousands of young people who listen to what these politicians say or do and are likely to be infected with this kind of politicking in Ghana.” (Daasebre Professor Oti Boateng, Omanhene of the New Juaben Traditional Area, 17/8/12) http://www.ghananewsagency.org

The speakers in O4.11 to O4.16 all assert that using insults against the elderly and authority figures demonstrates a disregard for traditional values. The speech of the Asantehene (i.e. traditional ruler of the Asante Kingdom) in O4.11 implies that the practice is not originally Ghanaian. In a similar vein, it is described in O4.12 as “alien to the Ghanaian culture”, and in O4.13, as “an affront to Ghanaian values”. The President of the Concerned Clergy Association of Ghana, in O4.14, states that the level at which insults are used in politics undermines the “moral culture” of the nation. In O4.15 and O4.16, it is indicated that, if the “alien” culture is not checked, a significant cultural value would be lost in due time.

These statements and many others like them are consistent with studies such as Yankah (1998), Agyekum (2004a, 2010b), Coker (2012), Thompson and Agyekum (2015), and Ofori (2017), to the effect that using invective and insults in politics can be considered as a deviation from the norms and moral values of the Ghanaian society. This communicative behaviour especially against socially powerful people, in the words of Ofori (2015), is considered “disrespectful and unacceptable” in Ghana because of “the conservative nature” and “the cultural priorities” of the society (p. 31).

A separate objection often raised in public commentary is that verbal abuse in political discourse can break down social harmony. This theme is illustrated below.
“Can impact negatively on the peace of the nation and/or national development”

O4.17 Mr Prince Iddriisu Mahmoud [Spokesperson, National Deputy Youth Organizers of the National Democratic Congress] … stated that Ghanaian could not take for granted the peace they are enjoying and as such all should work hard to consolidate on the gains made over the years … (As reported by Ghana News Agency, 12/9/11) http://vibeghana.com

O4.18 Mr Abdulai Baba Alhassan, Executive Director of the Foundation for Reconciliation and Democracy (FORDEM) has appealed to political parties and their supporters to desist from politics of insults … He said insults, lies and foul language used by some politicians could send the country into a regrettable position saying, “we should not forget that some nations on the African continent were enjoying peace like Ghana … due to electoral violence, Rwanda, Kenya and others have suffered. (As reported by Ghana News Agency, 9/3/12) http://www.ghananewsagency.org

O4.19 “The use of indecent or intemperate language … can cause panic and create a great deal of concern to many peace-loving Ghanaians. The unfortunate events of 1994 in Rwanda should serve as a lesson to us …” (Togbe Afede XIV, President of the National House of Chiefs, 13/10/18) https://www.graphic.com.gh

O4.20 “We need to passionately demonstrate our religious responsibility to use our pulpits and other platforms at are disposals to nip in the bud this rising societal evil that is threatening the peace, stability and development of the country”. (Moderator of the General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, Rt Rev. Dr Seth Agidi, as reported by Daily Graphic, 21/7/16) https://www.graphic.com.gh

O4.21 “… resorting to “abusive and statements” is inimical to the peace and development of the country.” (Women in Law and Development in Africa, Ghana, 28/9/16) https://www.starrfmonline.com

O4.22 “This moral and cultural deviation in our body politic is not only counter-productive and an anathema to national development, but also makes our democratic experiment fragile and vulnerable to negative consequences.” (Emmanuel Attafuah-Danso, Convener, The Africa Young Conservatives Dialogue, Ghana, 6/7/16) https://www.modernghana.com

The extracts above show the widespread Ghanaian perception that the exchange of invective and insults in politics can rob citizens of the peace they are enjoying and subsequently be
detrimental to national development. Ghana is regarded as a beacon of democracy in Africa (Saa-Dade, 2015). Citizens take pride in the peaceful and democratic transition of power from one political party to the other following general elections since 1992. If one considers that the African continent is replete with nations that have experienced violence and conflicts which degenerated into wars during or after elections, they can understand better statements such as the bolded expressions in Examples O4.17, O4.18, and O4.19.

A range of scholars concur. Danso and Edu-Afful (2012), Tietaah (2012), Marfo (2013), Asamoah et al. (2014), and Bentil and Aidoo (2018) agree that provoking strong sentiments can ignite disputes, which could challenge the peace being enjoyed in Ghana. Tietaah (2012) refers to Ghana as “an oasis of electoral peace and democratic stability in West Africa” (p. 210). Danso and Edu-Afful (2012) warn that there have been tell-tale grassroots violence or isolated incidents of electoral violence in the nation (in 2000, 2008) which are partially attributable to intemperate political rhetoric, albeit they cannot be compared with the election-related violence elsewhere in Africa, such as in Côte d'Ivoire (in 2000, 2010), Kenya (in 2007), Nigeria (in 2003, 2007, 2011), and Zimbabwe (in 2008). Although not election-related, it has been noted that abusive language in the media contributed to the chaos and destabilization that led to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (see Allan, 2007; Meadow, 2009; Marfo, 2013). References are made to these instances in O4.18 and O4.19 above.

Excerpts [O4.20 – O4.22] suggest invective and insults in Ghanaian politics can also hinder national development. As Stone (2011) points out, the fear of being openly insulted can have a chilling effect on political deliberations because many people with great ideas would not want to participate if they are open to being unduly denigrated. Along similar lines, Asamoah et al. (2014) explain that intemperate and abusive language can be disadvantageous to national development in the sense that usually, the conflict it generates has social, political and economic implications. If the nation is reduced to two or more factions, each taking entrenched positions without first considering its merit, there would be unnecessarily prolonged decision-making processes, unwarranted delays in or even non-execution/-implementation of decisions.
Remarks

Subsection 4.1.1 has shown that there is recognition of increasing incivility and a breakdown in issue-based debates in political discourse among Ghanaians. It was reported in the *2016 Preliminary Statement of the National Democratic Institute's International Observer Mission to Ghana’s December 7 Presidential and Legislative Elections* that prior to the election, there were several appeals to political actors by religious, traditional and civil society leaders to be mindful of their speech (www.africanelections.org). The excerpts presented in this section, apart from representing such appeals, also portray Ghanaian perspectives on the use of invective and insults in political discourse. Two main points were identified. First, it is a behaviour that is inconsistent with the cultural norms and values of communication in Ghana. Second, it is not in the country’s best interest as it can fan tension, militate against peace and security and hold back national development.

The remainder of this chapter concerns itself with throwing more light on the first of these points, that is, the use of invective and insults against political leaders is against the sociocultural norms and values of Ghanaians that demand respect for the elderly and authority figures. In order to do this, a cultural backdrop is needed. With the aid of the methods of semantic explication and cultural script, the following sections explore in detail this cultural backdrop. Section 4.2 examines the meanings of local social categories considered as people “above” others. Section 4.3 explores Ghanaian cultural scripts for interacting with people in elevated positions and Section 4.4 discusses the Ghanaian cultural script against criticizing such people.

4.2 SEMANTIC EXPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL SOCIAL CATEGORIES

Harkness (2015) notes that “the first condition of having to deal with somebody at all is to know with whom one has to deal” (p. 306, emphasis added). This implies that it is important for a speaker to know the kind of person their addressee is in any social discourse. For this reason, this section explicates the lexical semantics of Ewe social categories that are very prominent among Ghanaians in terms of age and social status. Five categories are explicated.
The age-related social categories explicated are:

*ametsitsi* [ame – person+tsiti – old = ‘elderly person’]
(a person who is advanced in age)

*fofo/tɔ*21 *kple dada/nɔ*22 [fofo/tɔ – father; kple – and; dada/nɔ – mother = ‘parents’]
(a person of one’s parent’s age)

*fo kple daa*23 [fo – elder brother; kple – and; daa – elder sister = ‘elder sibling’]
(a relatively older person)

The social status categories explicated are:

*amegã* [ame – person + gã – big = ‘high ranking person’]
(a person who has or represent authority)

*tɔgbu* [‘chief/traditional ruler’]

Among several ethnic groups in Ghana, individuals belonging to these social categories are recognized as deserving of special respect or deference due to their roles in decision-making processes, the welfare of others or the development of the communities in which they live. They are generally held in high regard as they are considered to be “people above others”. If one’s social behaviour demonstrates an act of disrespect towards these individuals, they are likely to incur repercussions either from the target or from “concerned observers” who constantly monitor others to determine the extent to which their behaviour is acceptable. The semantic explications below encapsulate key characteristics of these Ewe social categories. Being social categories, all five explications [E] begin with the component, ‘someone of one kind’. For ease of reference, the components of the explications are each given an identifying letter.

______________

21 *Etɔ* is a dialectal variant of *fofo* meaning ‘father’.

22 *Enɔ* is a dialectal variant of *dada* meaning ‘mother’.

23 Older brother could also be rendered as *fo(fo)vi* and older sister as *dadavi*. 
4.2.1 Age-related Categories

Ametsitsi ‘elderly person’

The word ametsitsi designates a person who is advanced in age, but the full content of the Ewe word goes well beyond this. Age is a natural marker of asymmetry. Thus, the maxim ‘being taller than your father does not make you his equal’ (Korem & Abissath, 2004; Salifu, 2014). van der Geest had this to say while describing the concept of the elderly person among Ghanaians:

In my own culture, that of The Netherlands, “old” is a mainly negative concept. When the adjective is used for people, it expresses loss of physical strength and social importance, but it is believed that in other cultures a more positive appreciation of “old” exists (van der Geest, 1998, p. 453).

In line with this comment, it is not uncommon in Ghana to find people having a big celebration during an individual’s 60th, 70th and 80th birthdays to mark the person’s passage into old age. This is because age is regarded above other social variables, due to the belief that there is a link between growing old and becoming wise (van der Geest, 1998).

It is assumed that when people become old, they exude wisdom and have more knowledge because of their life experiences. The maxim, “wisdom comes with the years” attests to this (van der Geest, 1998). Ametsitsi among Ghanaians is regarded as “the symbol of wisdom” and “society’s memory databank” (Agyekum, 2004c, p. 137). Generally, it is believed that they can make predictions and advise people on how to act in order to attract good fortune and avoid mishaps. They are, therefore, relied upon for important decisions that can serve the best interest of their relatives and other people around them, as they are always supposed to know better.

Below, [E 4.1] presents the semantic explication for ametsitsi ‘elderly person’.

[E 4.1] Semantic explication for ametsitsi ‘elderly person’

(a) someone of one kind
(b) this someone was born [m] a long time ago before many other people were born [m]
(c) many people don’t know how people can live well, this someone can know it
(d) these other people can know it if this person says some things to them at some time
   often if these other people want to know what is good for them to do at some time,
   they can know it if this someone says something to them
(e) because of this, people can think about someone of this kind like this:
   “this someone is someone above many people”
As expressed in component (b), the *ametsitsi* is considered primarily in terms of their age with the implication of greater experience. Components (c) and (d) capture the idea that the elderly are expected to transmit their knowledge to the younger members of the family and/or community who seek their counsel. The expression “live well” in (c) is compatible with either being morally upright or with living comfortably (in terms of wealth and luxury), based on the admonitions of an elderly person.

Whenever people, especially in traditional settings, have to deal with a challenge or make a decision on a crucial issue, it is often necessary that they consult with an *ametsitsi*. Thus, it is a common practice for them to say something like, “you will hear from us after we have seen the old (wo)man”. This understanding is presented in component (d). Component (e) highlights the idea that being *ametsitsi* attracts a lot of prestige and respect.

*Fofokple dada ‘father and mother’*

Apart from showing deference to people of advanced age, it is also expected that one shows deference to people in the same age-range as one’s parents. Ofori (2015) notes that this Ghanaian value is in agreement with a principle in the bible verse, “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12 New International Version)” (p. 24). The people in this social category, although not necessarily as old as *ametsitsi*, are prototypically old enough to be one’s father or mother. That is, *fofo kple dada* refers to anyone who is assumed to be old enough to give birth to a person, but not necessarily their actual biological parents.

In Example C4.1 below for instance, Dan’s use of “your fathers and your mother” does not mean he is referring to the parents of the co-participants on GhanaWeb. Rather, it means that “intended referents” of the co-participants can be the contemporaries of their parents. This is made clearer in the comments of Kwame and Sir Levels in C4.2 and C4.3, respectively.

| C4.1 | you [are] talking to your **fathers** and your **mother** this way because of politics. (Dan 20-10-16 15:50) |
| C4.2 | u pp [you people] are hear seriously insulting **someone who is old enough to be your father** (Kwame 2016-06-30 09:13) |
Two explications are presented below for *fofo kple dada* ‘father and mother’, to indicate that although the category is typically conjoined, it can be split depending on the context, as shown in C4.2 and C4.3. The semantic explication for *fofo* is given in [E 4.2a] and for *dada* in [E 4.2b].

[E 4.2a] Semantic explication for *fofo* ‘father’
(a) someone of one kind
(b) this someone can be the father [m] of someone else like me
(c) because of this, many people can think about someone of this kind like this:
   “this someone is someone above me
    at the same time, this someone is someone above many people like me”

[E 4.2b] Semantic explication for *dada* ‘mother’
(a) someone of one kind
(b) this someone can be the mother [m] of someone else like me
(c) because of this, many people can think about someone of this kind like this:
   “this someone is someone above me
    at the same time, this someone is someone above many people like me”

As component (b) of [E 4.2] shows, a person of this social category is considered to be of the same generational rank as one’s father or mother. They may even have children who are within the same age range as the person. It can be understood from component (c) that the difference in generation means that such a person can be construed as “above” oneself or others.
**Fo/daa**

‘elder brother/elder sister’

The Ghanaian culture encourages people to show respect to seniority in age even within one’s generation (Forson, Calveley, Shelley, & George, 2017). That is, socioculturally, it is required that both advanced age and relative age are respected. During social interactions, an age difference of even one year is very significant. Sometimes, in a speech event, people who are just a few months older, or even a few days older, may (jokingly) remind their interlocutors of their higher status and ask that they are shown some respect.

In Ewe, a relatively older person is known as *ŋutsu tsitsu*/nɔnuvi tsitsu*. The word *tsitsu* ‘old’ in *ametsitsi* ‘elderly person’ is also seen in *ŋutsu vil/nɔnuvi tsitsu* ‘older person’. To distinguish between advanced age and relative age, Ewe speakers add the diminutive *vi* ‘small’ to *ŋutsu* ‘man’ or *nɔnu* ‘woman’. Note that morphologically, the diminutive *vi* cannot be added to *ame* ‘person’. That is, the term *amevitsitsu* [#ame – person + vi – small + tsitsu - old] does not exist in the language. As a result, the terms for an older person (i.e. signifying relative age) also clearly mark difference in gender.

Every *ŋutsu tsitsu* can be a part of the social category *fo* ‘elder brother’, while every *nɔnuvi tsitsu* can be a part of the social category *daa* ‘elder sister’. There is very little or no social expectation that people in these social categories will be wiser or have much life experiences. Therefore, the younger person is not obliged to show them deference, as they should in the case of *ametsitsi* ‘elderly person’. Nevertheless, the assumption is that people in the social category *fo/daa* will, in future, take up leadership roles and responsibilities in their families; thus, they are important and should be treated with respect (Ameka, 1991).

[E 4.3] describes one who is part of the social category *fo/daa* ‘elder brother/elder sister’.

**[E 4.3] Semantic explication for *fo/daa* ‘elder brother/elder sister’**

(a) someone of one kind  
(b) this someone was born [m] before me; not a long time before me  
(c) because of this, it is good if I think about this someone like this:  
   “this someone is someone above me”

---

24 The term *fo/daa* is polysemous. Apart from being a social category: (1) it can be a title prefixing a person’s name as in *Fo Yao* ‘elder brother Yao’ or *Da Adzo* ‘elder sister Adzo’, (2) it can also be an address term for a person whose name a speaker does not know but considers as one with whom they want to relate in a manner that people relate to their elder brothers and sisters, respectively.
In the semantic explication above, component (b) shows that though a fo/daa is older than a person, he/she is in the same generation as the person. Therefore, as indicated in component (c), it is appropriate for the person to be mindful of the age difference.

4.2.2 Social Status-related Categories

Amegâ ‘high ranking person’

The word amegâ (literally, big person) refers to an influential person or one who represents authority either politically, territorially, academically, religiously, economically or socially. People who have not been directly or indirectly impacted by the achievements of the amegâ may not hold them in such high esteem as those who have benefitted in one way or the other from their achievements or wealth. It is expected that a speaker, especially one who has not achieved the feat of an amegâ, concedes precedence and accords them some form of deference when addressing any person of this social category in a speech event (Yankah, 1995; Ameka, 1991; Agyekum, 2004b; Salifu, 2014).

Consider the use of amegâ in the bible verses below from Biblica Ewe and their equivalents from the New American Standard Bible:

O4.23  Asrafo fe amegâ la gblô na ḍekakpuia be …
‘So the commander told the young man that …’ (Acts 23:22)

O4.24  Zaxeo nye nudzola wo fe amegâ eye wônye kesinôtô hâ.
‘Zaccheus was a chief tax collector, and he was rich.’ (Luke 19:2)

In (O4.23), the ‘commander’ is translated literally as ‘big person [amegâ] of soldiers’, while in (O4.24), ‘chief tax collector’ is ‘big person [amegâ] of tax collectors’. These examples illustrate that amegâ refers to a person who is the head of a group of people or simply, a “boss”. Other persons of this social category include wealthy people, professors, medical directors, religious leaders, school principals, and political leaders including all the key personalities involved in the 2016 presidential election that were introduced in Chapter 2.

The following is an explication for amegâ.

[E 4.4] Semantic explication for amegâ ‘high ranking person’

(a) someone of one kind
(b) people can think about someone of this kind like this:
“few people are like this someone
this someone can do many good things for many people if this someone wants
not many other people can do things like this
(c) because of this, many people can think about someone of this kind like this:
‘this someone is someone above many people’

[E 4.4b] Semantic explication for amegã ‘high ranking person’ (in Ewe)

(a) ame aɖe deka ṭogbi
(b) amewo aʈeŋu abu tame tso ame sia ṭogbi ŋu ale:
‘ame sue aɖewoe le abe ame sia
ame sia aʈeŋu awo nunyuie ɖeʃe na ame gbogbowo ne ame sia dzi
menye ame ɖeʃe wo aʈeŋu awo nuwo abe esia ne o
(c) esiata ame ɖeʃe wo aʈeŋu abu tame tso amesia ṭogbi ŋu ale:
‘ame sia nye ame si le ngo ne ame ɖeʃe’

It is pointed out in the second line of component (b) of [E 4.4] that the masses in various
social sects do not belong to the social category, amegã. Unlike ametsitsi, whose superiority
to others is as a result of their advanced age, being an amegã is not necessarily based on age
but on recognition of a person’s achievements, position, and services to the society on
account of special personal abilities, education, and/or wealth. This is reflected in the third
and fourth lines of component (b). The high social status of amegã is presented in component
(c).

Tɔgbui ‘traditional ruler/chief’

The second category to be considered in this section is tɔgbui. It should be noted that the term
ɔgbui, as used among Ewes, has other meanings in addition to ‘traditional ruler/chief’; that
is, it is polysemous. It can be used to designate a traditional ruler or as title for a traditional
ruler, as in (O4.25a) and (O4.25b), but also a kinship term (grandfather) as shown in (O4.26),
as a term of address for an ancestor/forefather, as in (O4.27), and for a (respected) old man,
as in (O4.28). Note that a speaker can use tɔgbui as an address term for any old man,
regardless of whether they know him or not. By using this address term, the speaker
acknowledges the social distance between them, and is telling the addressee, “I think about
you as I think about my grandfather (and I want to relate to you as such)”.

O4.25a Tɔgbui la le takpekolpmle kple eʃe ametsitsiwo
‘The chief is in a meeting with his elders.’
The meaning of primary concern to this study is the category of ‘traditional ruler’, as in (O4.25a) and (O4.25b). Tagbi falls into a different status category when compared to ametsitsi and amegã because his status is not earned through advanced age or achievements, but it is ascribed by their birth into the royal family of the traditional area.

Symbols 1 and 2 represent a visual proverb that can be found on the staff of an okyeame ‘chief’s spokesperson’ among the Akans. They show two men seated at a table with a bowl of food; one reaches for the food while the other looks on. The message this symbol conveys is as follows:

*Nea adeε wɔ no na odie, enye nea ɔkom de no* (Akan)
(Literally: He who owns the food is the one who eats it, not the one who is hungry.)
‘Chieftaincy is for the rightful heir and not for the one who yearns for power.’

In this context, the food represents chieftaincy, which is meant only for the rightful heir. Anyone who is not legitimate to be a traditional ruler must not desire that status, even if they have all the qualities to lead or rule the people. In line with this, Act 759 of the Fourth Republic Constitution and the Chieftaincy Act of Ghana (2008) describes a chief as “a person who hails from appropriate family and lineage, who has been validly nominated, elected or selected and enstooled, enskinned or installed as a chief or queen mother in accordance with the relevant customary law and usage” (Asamoah, 2012; Owusu-Mensah, 2013).
Tɔgbui is also considered as the father of the people in the area. The following statement made by the Paramount Chief of the Lambussie Traditional Area in the Upper West Region, Kuoro Salifu Dy-Yaka, as captured by www.graphic.com.gh on September 9, 2016 can attest to this: “As a chief, I am a father, and as you visit the traditional area, I am the father of all.”

As the father of the traditional area, the people must claim their allegiance to the tɔgbui, revere him, and not disobey him on any occasion, lest they face the necessary sociocultural sanctions (see Yankah, 1999). The position of a tɔgbui among Ghanaians, as noted by Owusu-Mensah (2013), is “a prestigious enterprise because of the social, political and cultural powers they possess” (p. 44). He represents a sort of a demigod and is supposed to be above reproach of any kind. Consider [E 4.5] below.

[E 4.5] *Semantic explication for* tɔgbui “traditional ruler/chief”

(a) someone of one kind
(b) people in a place can think about someone of this kind like this:
   “this someone is someone above other people in this place”
(c) this someone can do many good things for many people in this place if this someone wants
   at the same time, this someone can do many bad things to many people in this place if this someone wants
(d) when someone of this kind says to people in this place
   “I want you to do this”, they can’t not do it
if at some time, someone doesn’t do it, bad things can happen to this person because of it
(e) there is one someone of this kind in a place, not more

The “high position” components, linked to ‘people in a place’, as seen in components (a) and (b), appear at the top of this explication because they are of primary importance to the concept of tɔgbuī. Tɔgbuī represents the main figurehead of the traditional area he governs, as depicted in (b). As expressed in component (c), he can perform various functions that ensure the welfare of his subjects, including codifying customary laws, settling disputes, organizing ceremonies and festivals, assisting individuals to secure basic social needs, and promoting socio-economic development in the area (see Kleist, 2011). On the negative side, he can be an authoritarian and a despot.

It is demonstrated in (d) that there is a degree of awe connected to the traditional power, and one cannot defy the orders or the expressed wishes of a tɔgbuī. Failure to comply with his wishes attracts a possibility of harsh punishments, which in times past included banishment or even execution, in extreme cases. Component (e) depicts the idea that although there could be several wealthy and influential people in a traditional area, none of them possesses as much power as the tɔgbuī, as they are all his subjects as long as they live within his domain.

4.3 GHANAIAN CULTURAL SCRIPTS FOR INTERACTING WITH SOMEONE CONSIDERED “ABOVE” ONESELF/Others

Section 4.2 presented a picture of individuals who belong to the Ewe social categories ametsitsi ‘elderly person’, fofo kple dada ‘parents’, fo/daa ‘elder brother/elder sister’, amegă ‘high ranking person’, and tɔgbuī ‘traditional ruler’. It is required that whenever a person’s interactant belongs to any of these social categories, they must endeavour to adhere to certain cultural communicative norms and expectations or they face certain sanctions. When a person’s communicative behaviour is consistent with the norms, they are regarded as communicatively competent. Also, they are regarded as those who can maintain and signal to others (by the way they address the interactant) the elevated social status of their interactant. In contrast, when a person disregards communicative norms, it is considered
socially unacceptable and such behaviour is seen as disrespectful. This can easily trigger an unintended offence and/or a breakdown in the interaction, as a lack of knowledge about communication norms and expectations could easily imply that traditionally, one is not “well bred” (Agyekum, 2010b).

In this section, some of these cultural communicative norms and expectations are drawn out using the cultural script method. Four cultural scripts (S) are proposed for social interactions with certain people considered as “people above oneself/others” in the Ghanaian context. These scripts indicate that speakers in such interactions should have regard for the feelings of their addressee(s) and should be conscious of their own public image and even that of their family members. Cultural scripts [4.1, 4.2, and 4.3] show how a person’s way of speaking ought to exhibit a positive attitude to anybody perceived as someone “above” oneself/others, while Script 4.4 comprises additional components that relate specifically to the special category, ṭogybüi ‘traditional ruler/Chief’.

The introductory component (a) of cultural scripts [4.1, 4.2, and 4.3] model the thoughts of many Ghanaians about an interlocutor who is superior or who is of a higher social status. It is expected that these thoughts will influence how they would normally express and reinforce notable hierarchical differences through their linguistic forms and behaviour. Obviously, the phrases ‘someone above me’ and ‘someone above many other people’ in component (a) invoke the high status of the social categories described in Section 4.2.

[S 4.1] Ghanaian cultural script for general behaviour when one is with someone “above” oneself/others

(a) many people think like this:
   when I am with someone, if I think about this someone like this:
   “this someone is someone above me
   at the same time, this someone is someone above many other people”
(b) it is good if I think like this at the same time:
(c) “I don’t want this someone to feel something bad because I do something
(d) I don’t want this someone to think something bad about me”

Components (b) and (c) in [S 4.1] illustrate the culturally recommended mindset that when with a superior, one must not displease or offend them with their speech behaviour or general conduct in any way. This implies that one must be conscious of expectations and patterned behaviours that are understood and observed by all at any social event. The idea that the
person must behave in a way which meets the expectations of the superior and prevents the superior from forming negative thoughts about them is reflected in component (d).

Cultural script [4.2] below is specifically about speaking. It is focused on the general notion that one must speak differently to one’s superiors or face the prospect of disapproval from them and/or the general public, extending also to one’s family. Look at how the idea that refusing to speak differently to someone considered “above” oneself can have certain consequences is captured in components (b), (c) and (d).

[S 4.2] Ghanaian cultural script for speaking with one who is someone “above” oneself/others

(a) many people think like this:
   when I want to say something to someone, if I think about this someone like this:
   “this someone is someone above me
   at the same time, this someone is someone above many other people”

(b) I can’t speak (=say things) to this someone like I can speak to many other people

(c) if I speak to this someone like I speak to many other people, it can be like this:
   this someone can feel something bad, this someone can think something bad about me
   other people can say something bad about me because of this
   at the same time, they can say something bad about my family [m]

(d) I don’t want this

Component (b) of [S 4.2] draws attention to the fact that one’s use of language must be “self-censored” and must reflect the socially sanctioned mode of asymmetrical interaction. For instance, there are call-and-response forms that indicate social relations and status. Among the Ewes, a person can respond to a call from one who is their social equal with only the caller’s first name. However, if the caller is higher in terms of age or social status, the person cannot respond with the caller’s first name, they have to respond with address forms that indicate asymmetry, such as papa [papa:] ‘daddy’ and efo ‘elder brother’ (if the caller is a male) or mami [mami:] ‘mummy’ and daa ‘elder sister’ (if the caller is a female). In the same vein, among the Dagombas, there are two response forms to a call: ɛɛɛɛ and nááp/náá. The response ɛɛɛɛ can be used to respond to a call from a person who is considered to be one’s social equal, while nááp/náá must be used to respond to a call from a superior (see Salifu, 2014).
Component (c) highlights the fact that apart from working at not facing the disapproval of the superior and other people, a speaker must avoid causing the superior any form of discomfort or negative feeling. In this regard, the speaker must be more inclined to use language forms that express respect and deference, otherwise as previously mentioned, the repercussions of their misbehaviour could be directed at their family. This is expressed in the last line of component (c).

Consider the following comment thread from CGCGE16.

Background

It had been reported that Nana Konadu stated in one of her campaign messages that she could not see the achievements of JDM, so Ghanaians should not retain him in office but should rather vote for her. This news report was published on GhanaWeb with the headline, “I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu”.

Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu

C4.4 I see you are struggling to open ur eyes. I shall supply you with super glue so your eye lid shall continue to stay open. Ofui.
(Oku 10-03-16 10:01)

Re: Oku’s comment

C4.5 Nonsense By the word ofui, I believe you are referring to yourself. Old dirty guy (Jo Alaa 10-04-16 01:16)

C4.6 You are the ofui, do you understand ofui? You are just as useless … kwasea ask your mother or father to form a party for you so you can defend that.
(RM 10-03-16 18:23)

C4.7 YOU ARE CALLING HER OFUI. CAN YOU COMPARE YOUR MOTHER TO NANA KONADU? SHE HAS DONE A LOT FOR THE PARTY (VIJA 10-03-16 11:13)

In C4.4, Oku disagrees with Nana Konadu. While expressing the disagreement, Oku completely disregards the expected communicative norm and even ends the comment with an insult in Akan, ofui ‘idiot’. That is, Oku’s comment violates component (b) of cultural script 4.1. The negative consequences of this violation, as reflected in component (c) of the cultural script are seen in the replies (C4.5 - C4.7) above. Example (C4.5) is an attack on only Oku, while (C4.6) and (C4.7) are indirect attacks on Oku’s mother and father.

The following is an attempt to zero in on the need for specific “honorific” words and relevant “politeness” markers during asymmetrical interactions. The choice of such
expressions is generally determined by the social and psychological distance between the speech participants (Agyekum, 2003). When a superior has a title, the speaker must not omit this title when referring to them (Afful, 2006). It is acceptable to refer to people of certain occupations, such as doctors, lawyers, and professors, by their occupational titles alone.

Religious titles such as Bishop, Pastor, Prophet, Reverend, Afa, Alhaji/Hajia, Mallam, and Sheikh are also used to refer to people who occupy such positions (see Dakubu, 2000; Agyekum, 2003). Example O4.29, from Afful (2006, p. 281), is an exchange (call and response) between a young priest and a female congregant, who was about 60 years old.

O4.29  A: Maame Esi Kakraba Ghann!
      B: Sɔfo, mepa kyew, mereba o! (Akan)
      ‘Reverend, please, I am coming.’

Even though the congregant is older than the priest, she responds to his call with his identity marker, Sɔfo ‘Reverend’. The use of the identity marker shows that the congregant acknowledges and values the social status of the priest. In the case where an interlocutor of a higher social status has no known title, the subordinate is expected to choose from a range of appropriate kinship terms, such as dada ‘mother’, mama ‘grandmother’, ete ‘aunt’, papa ‘father’, tɔga ‘uncle’, and efo ‘elder brother’ in Ewe; agya ‘father’, maame ‘mother’, sewaa ‘aunt’, wɔfa ‘uncle’, and nana ‘grandmother/grandfather’ in Akan; and ma ‘mother’, ba ‘father’, and beli ‘elder brother’ in Dagbani. English titles such as Mister, Sir, Madam, Miss, and Mrs. (if the referent is a married woman) can also be used.

Apart from the use of address terms, the subordinate is also expected to use, as often as possible, politeness markers, including mede kuku (Ewe)/mepa kyew (Akan) ‘I doff my hat’ (please) when they want to say something, make a request or pose a question. Apologetic expressions such as enye me anisa (Akan) ‘I don’t mean to be impolite’ or sebe/taflatse ‘apologies’ can also be used when a speaker needs to say something that could trigger offence. Example O4.30 is an utterance in Akan from a young man who was called before a group of elders to answer questions relating to an accusation laid against him (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2016, p. 130).

O4.30  Mesrε meka, mete hɔ yi, sebe, mensa mu ye
       ‘I beg to say, in my life, I am quite wealthy.’
The use of the apologetic signals, *mesre meka* and *sebe*, to precede the statement *mensa mu yɛ ‘I am wealthy’* is the speaker’s way of saying, I do not mean to be arrogant or prideful before you, but it is necessary I make this point. These expressions indicate the speaker’s deference to the elders.

The preceding discussion leads us to cultural script [4.3] below.

[S 4.3] Ghanaian cultural script for the use of deferential terms in asymmetrical interactions

(a) many people think like this:
(b) when I say something to someone, if I think about this someone like this:
   “this someone is someone above me
   at the same time, this someone is someone above many other people”
(c) I can’t not say some words to this someone (I don’t say these words to many other people)
(d) I want people to know that I think about this someone like this:
   “this someone is someone not like many other people
   I feel something good towards this someone”

Component (b) of cultural script [4.3] indicates that the use of deferential terms as exemplified in the preceding paragraphs is essential in subordinate-superior speech events among Ghanaians. In component (c), it is specified that it is obligatory for one to employ the appropriate honorifics and titles for someone considered to be socially higher. Employing such linguistic forms displays the speaker’s knowledge of the superior’s status, constantly reinforcing the message that the addressee (superior) is worthy of the speaker’s honour and respect, as expressed in (d).

It has already been mentioned that the social category *tɔgbui* is a special one. Even though one must also take cognizance of cultural scripts [4.1, 4.2, and 4.3] when talking to a *tɔgbui* and observe the norms highlighted therein, there are some expected communicative norms that are peculiar to an interaction with anyone who belongs to that social category. For example, one cannot talk directly to a chief but must talk through an intermediary. According to Agyekum (2004b), messages to a chief are channelled through an intermediary because “his face will become vulnerable if anybody could speak directly to him” (p. 84).

Before presenting cultural script 4.4, consider the following speech event in Akan which involves an interaction with a person who belongs to the social category *tɔgbui*.

Venue: Otumfoɔ’s Palace – Kumase
KO has regretted his actions, but it is socially unacceptable for him to ask for forgiveness from the traditional ruler directly. Therefore, he engages an intermediary to speak to the traditional ruler and intervene on his behalf.

As earlier mentioned, any interlocutor of a traditional ruler must employ cultural scripts in his speech. In line with these scripts, the intervener embellishes his utterances with traditional honorifics, “Oburumuankoma”, “Daasebre”, “Otumfoɔ”, and “Oburu” to show his honour for the addressee. Also, he uses an apologetic expression in the form of an adage, “if the child excretes on the lap of his father it is wiped away, but the lap is not cut off” and further belittles KO, as he refers to him (KO) as a “servant” to indicate the social distance between KO and the traditional ruler. The intervener employs these strategies to mark the elevated status of the addressee, as well as to show him deference as demanded by the norms regarding interactions with a traditional ruler.

The following is a cultural script (in both English and Ewe) posited specifically to capture the peculiarities involved in an interaction with anyone of the social category togbiui.

[S 4.4a] Ghanaian cultural script for interacting with togbiui

(a) many people think like this:
(b) when I am with togbiui, if I want to say something, it is good if I think like this:
(c) “I can’t say something to togbiui like I can say to other people
   if I want to say something to togbiui, it is good if I say it to someone else of one kind
   a short time after, this someone else can say it to togbiui
   if I don’t do it like this, people can say something bad about me
at the same time, they can say something bad about my family[m] something very bad can happen to me”

(d) I don’t want this

[S 4.4b] Ghanaian cultural script for interacting with ṭogbui (in Ewe)

(a) ṁe gêjëg bâa ṭâm e ałe:
(b) ne méle ṭogbui gbô, né médi bê magblo nâqê la, enyo bê magblo tâme ałe:
(c) “nê mëteru agblo nâqê ne ṭogbui abe ałe mëteru agblo ne ałe bëbuwu o
ne médi bê magblo nâqê ne ṭogbui la, enyo bê magblo ne ałe bëbuwu ałe
le yâyiyi kpuí ałê ñégbê la, ałe bëbuu sia ałëtu agblo ne ṭogbui
ne mëwëne ałê o la, amëwë ałëtu agblo nu baqâa tso ñunye
le yâyiyi më ma hâ la, woałëtu agblo nu baqâa tso më fômetôwo[m] më
nu baqâa ałê ałëtu adzo ñeu dzii më
(d) nye me nu sia dzim o

In all formal situations, the intermediary (identified as ‘someone else’ in the second and third lines of component (c) above) between the chief and his subjects is often an elderly person who holds the position of tsiame (Ewe) or ɔkyeame (Akan). Yankah (1995) describes this intermediary as the chief’s “mouth” and “ear”. Traditionally, the chief’s words are conveyed to people through him, and the words of the people reach the chief through him (see Yankah (1995) and Ameka (2004) for details on the role of the tsiame/ɔkyeame). The fourth and fifth lines of component (c) show that a person who refuses to adhere to this regulation can be described as one who is uncultured or lacks proper upbringing or the person’s family can be described as irresponsible. Apart from allowing people to have negative perceptions about the person or about the family, the person is susceptible to harsh punishments, such as banishment and execution, mentioned in the discussion of explication [4.5]. This is expressed in the last line of component (c). Component (d) reflects the idea that people would want to avoid such repercussions.

4.4 GHANAIAN CULTURAL SCRIPT AGAINST CRITICIZING SOMEONE CONSIDERED “ABOVE” ONESELF/OTHERS

Readers familiar with the political discourse (especially, pre-election discourse) in Western countries, such as Australia or USA, can attest to the fact that exchange of insults and name-calling is not prohibited or considered alien to these cultures. Indeed, Winberg (2017: 5) stresses that the use of “name-calling”, “criticism”, and “verbal attack” is a fundamental part of politics in America. In these societies, the use of such language forms may be considered
uncivil and unsophisticated. However, as compared to Ghana, it is not completely against their cultural values for one to use words like ‘liar’ or ‘cheat’ against people in authority. As Agyekum (2004a) observes, some expressions regarded as invective in Ghana’s political discourse would not be regarded as such in some western societies due to the cultural and societal perceptions about what invective is or what is not (p. 347). Criticizing political figures especially with invective and insults has been of serious concern to many Ghanaians and is widely condemned through metalinguistic phrases like “alien to the Ghanaian culture”, “not a part of the Ghanaian cultural heritage”, and “an affront to Ghanaian values”.

Cultural script [4.5] is a script against criticizing a person of authority among Ghanaians.

[S 4.5] Ghanaian cultural script against criticizing someone considered “above” others

(a) many people think like this:
   when I want to say something about someone, if I think about this someone like this:
   “this someone is someone above many other people, everyone knows this”
(b) I can’t say bad things about this someone
(c) if I say bad things about this someone: other people can say something bad about me because of this
   at the same time, they can say something bad about my family [m]
(d) I don’t want this

It demonstrates the general mindset that when one wants to make a comment about someone who is of “higher rank”, as set out in component (a), they must be mindful of social expectations and patterned behaviours that are understood by all. Normally, their choice of language must meet such expectations and must be acceptable to other members of the society. Criticizing a person of a higher status directly or publicly is unacceptable. It is even more so when the criticism is couched in potentially offensive or conflictive language. This is posited in component (b).

If the speaker fails to comply with the stipulated norm, that is, ‘I can’t say bad things about this someone’, they can face the disapproval of concerned observers. Such disapproval can even extend to members of their family (see Mosha, 2000; Agyekum, 2004b). As stated in component (d), a speaker would want to necessarily avoid such consequences.

As is shown in Chapters 5 and 6, however, that cultural script [4.5] is often defied during online political discussions among Ghanaians.
4.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has dwelt on the notion that Ghana is a status-conscious society and thus, speakers must choose language forms that reflect positively on interlocutors who are considered as socially higher. They must avoid criticizing such individuals and not use any form of demeaning and derogatory language which includes invective and insults against them, regardless of the situation. It articulated in detail some expected norms for communicative behaviours during asymmetrical interactional events among Ghanaians. This was done to serve as the backdrop for why the use of invective and insults against national leaders can be considered a transgression of traditional Ghanaian sociocultural norms.

The chapter showed that although Ghanaians value their legal right to freedom of speech, it is expected that citizens exercise the right within the limits of the underlying interactional norms and values of their society. This was shown by extracts from the public speeches of people with diverse backgrounds, such as traditional rulers, members of the clergy, civil society organization leaders, political leaders, academics, media critics, and newspaper columnists. By means of the semantic explication method, five Ewe social categories related to age and social status were identified as local social categories that are recognized and deemed to be “above” others in the Ghanaian society. They are, ametsitsi ‘elderly person’, fofo kple dada ‘parents’, fo/daa ‘elder brother/elder sister’, amegâ ‘high ranking person’, and tɔgbui ‘traditional ruler’. The idea that a person who belongs to any of these five local social categories is “above” others is related to their presumed significance to the society.

For instance, ametsitsi is a person of advanced age, who is filled with much wisdom and knowledge to direct and support others to reach their goals. Amegâ is one who, based on social achievements, occupies a leadership or headship position and makes significant contributions to the society. Tɔgbui is the ruler of a traditional area. He plays a fatherly role to people in the area and sees to their welfare, cooperation, and peaceful existence. Normally, the social demands and responsibilities of persons in any of these categories elevate them above others and make them icons of dignity in the Ghanaian culture.

The chapter further explained that in Ghana, specific emphasis is placed on respect or deference for hierarchical differences in that there is a marked difference between the way a
person is expected to communicate with interlocutors of equal social status, and interlocutors of higher social status. This implies that the knowledge that one’s interlocutor belongs to any of the social categories described in Section 4.2 must inform their speech behaviour. Otherwise, they are likely going to face some negative consequences.

Following the semantic explications, cultural scripts were posited in Section 4.3 to capture some normative expectations for interacting with people of the social categories presented, that is, what is expected when one must interact with a person thought of as someone “above” oneself or others. In Section 4.4, a cultural script against criticizing people “above” others was proposed. This script represents the idea that one should be attentive to hierarchy when criticizing a person of authority.

Components of all these cultural scripts were carefully phrased and discussed to reflect the shared social understandings of showing respect to these kinds of people during social interactions among Ewes, as well as among other ethnic groups in Ghana. Although there is a wide range of appropriate communicative behaviour among Ghanaians, the cultural scripts discussed in this chapter provide basic guidelines and specify some key verbal attitudes expected of interlocutors of lower social status during asymmetrical interactions.

In light of the discussion in Section 4.2, one can categorically state that all the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner involved in Ghana’s 2016 general election fall into the social category, *amegâ* ‘high ranking person’. This means that they are deserving of the sociocultural privileges that are given to people of that social status. It is therefore in order to state that the act of using invective and insults against these individuals (as shown in subsequent chapters) does not conform to the expected sociocultural norms of communication stipulated in the cultural scripts presented above. It rather violates them.
CHAPTER FIVE
INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS AND ABUSIVE LANGUAGE ON GHANAWEB

This chapter analyzes the characteristics of interactions on GhanaWeb using the coding system established in Chapter 3 and examines invective and insult-filled comments in CGCGE16. It considers, among other things, the extent to which commenters respond to one another’s posts in a comment thread, how the commenters identify themselves, and the extent to which a comment is related to the topic of a news report. The chapter is organized as follows: Section 5.1 explores how commenters engage with one another on the platform. In order to establish the degree of anonymity on GhanaWeb, Section 5.2 shows the results of the frequency analysis of the kind of identification types with which commenters sign their contribution. Section 5.3 gives results of the frequency analysis done in terms of the variables, ‘relations’, ‘targets’, and ‘tone’. Before the presentation of each result, a number of comments that exemplify the various categories of these variables are provided. Section 5.4 presents the insult types and the characteristic features of negative, antagonistic comments in CGCGE16. Section 5.5 examines the rhetorical and graphological techniques that the commenters employed, and Section 5.6 closes the chapter.

5.1 DISCOURSE PATTERNS ON GHANAWEB

The analysis here considers the discourse pattern of comments in CGCGE16. It determines the extent to which participants engaged with each other on the platform. Below, Table 5.1 shows the number of threads as compared to the number of single comments in CGCGE16. Table 5.2 presents the number of comments in the threads.

Table 5.1 Threads and single comments in CGCGE16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All comments</th>
<th>1882</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Threads</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single comments</td>
<td>1142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2 *Threads by number of comments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments in threads</th>
<th>Number of threads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 comments</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 comments</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 comments</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 comments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10 comments</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–20 comments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–30 comments</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>183</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 5.1, out of the 1,882 comments, 1142 were single standalone comments, and the remaining 740 comments formed 183 threads. It is shown in Table 5.2 that the least number of threads (n = 4) in CGCGE16 has the highest number of comments (n = 21-30), while the highest number of threads (n = 98) has the least number of comments (n = 2).

**Discussion**

The results above demonstrate that most of the contributions in CGCGE16 are not interactional. They express individual views on the news report or, more commonly, the politician or public figure featured in the report. Some contributions have no bearing on the specific topic of the news report. This finding is in contrast to that of Gillmor (2009) that news reports uploaded on news sites serve only as a catalyst for conversation among commenters. Rather, it confirms Friedman’s (2011) assertion that lack of interaction on news sites reflects the desire of commenters to express a certain position, whether or not it is relevant to the topic.

Also, it can be deduced that there is practically, very little deliberation on the platform. The preponderance of standalone comments indicates that comments in CGCGE16 tend not to form a discussion or an argument. Dahlberg’s (2001) claim that socio-political issues are addressed through deliberative debates online does not apply to the discourse in CGCGE16. Even though GhanaWeb has the necessary technical features to encourage free and open discourse, participants do little to connect with one another in dialogue or debate. It can thus be said about the average commenter on GhanaWeb that their goal is to “yell his or her
opinion without any intention of engaging in a constructive dialogue” (Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013, p. 366).

5.2 COMMENTERS’ “IDENTITY” ON GHANAWEB

As mentioned in Chapter 3, registration of personal details or subsequent sign-in is not required for one to participate (read and/or post comments) on GhanaWeb. However, there is a space for a name which should be completed by a commenter. Since there is no verification process, one cannot be sure if the names posted by the commenters accurately or truthfully reflect their identity. Therefore, the categories, (1) Full name, (2) Full name + Location, (3) Name only, (4) Name + Location, (5) Initials, (6) Name + Initials, (7) Nickname, (8) Message, and (9) Others, are what the identity types posted with comments on GhanaWeb appear to be, at least to Ghanaians. In the following, each of the categories mentioned above is exemplified and discussed:

1. **Full name:** This refers to either first name and last name or first name, middle name and last name. For instance, the names, “Ama Boateng”, “Kwesi Agyeman”, “Adu Phillips”, “Sarah Atopoh”, “Mahamudu Ali”, “Issa Abongo”, “Nancy Forson”, “Anike van Tilboug”, “Prince Awuah David”, and “Emmanuel Ofori Manu” in CGCGE16 are considered as full names in the sociocultural context of Ghana (see Dzameshie, 1998, Agyekum, 2006). They are names that some citizens could be officially identified with such that even if the commenters who post these names do not bear them in reality, they point specifically to certain individuals.

2. **Full name + location:** Some of the commenters do not sign with full names alone but also add a location, which may be a country or a city/town outside or within Ghana. This identity type reduces the number of people who bear the full names used and even makes them more identifiable. Examples include, “Collins Anane Bonsu, Italy”, “Adu Phillips, Toronto”, “John Adams, Tamale”, “Kwesi Koomson - (Tadi)”, and “Nana Kuffuor, Abeka”. In these examples, Italy is a country, Toronto is the capital city of Ontario, one of the provinces of Canada, Tamale and Tadi (the shortened form of Takoradi) are the
capital cities of the Northern and the Western regions of Ghana respectively, while Abeka is a suburb of Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

3. **Name only:** This captures single names. These names may be (a) Western names (either main or shortened/diminutive forms) - “Graham”, “Rosemary”, “Anna”, “Albert”, “Arthur”, or “Gabby”, “Sam”, “Lyn”, “Mike”, and “Emma”; (b) Arabic names - “Mahmoud”, “Yussif”, “Habib”, “Mohammed”, and “Halid”; (c) Ghanaian birthday names – “Kojo” (male born on Monday), “Kweku” (male born on Wednesday), “Yaa” (female born on Thursday), and “Akosua” (female born on Sunday); and (d) Indigenous Ghanaian personal names – “Appiah”, “Sikanhyira”, “Dela”, “Dotse”, “Nii”, and “Yaro”.

4. **Name + Location:** This comprises a single name and a location. Examples include, “Owen, New York”, “Joe, Canada”, “Ama, USA”, “Atsu, London”, “Kwame-Belgium”, “Kojo, Monrovia”, “Bono, Holland”, “Anthonio, Keta”, “Azure, Bolga”, and “Mike from Ho”.

5. **Initials:** Some comments were not signed with names but with the initial letters of names. Generally, the number of letters was between 2 and 4. For example, “TK”, “BB”, “YD”, “CK”, “JJ”, “PPP”, “KKD”, “CHN”, “BBB”, “RPG”, “HCNN”, and “TMKN”.

6. **Name + Initials:** Some of the initials were preceded or followed by “name” as described in category (3). Some examples are “Kofi, K. K”, “Paa KW”, “Sam Y”, “Andy K”, “Chris C”, “K. B. Frimpong”, “K Mensah”, and “KK BOSTON”.

7. **Nickname:** Unlike the names in category (1) – category (4), nicknames are not real and cannot be used for official purposes. They are bestowed on the bearers by themselves or their peers, relations, or associates based on certain characteristics or physical traits they exhibit (Bechar-Israeli, 1995; Agyekum, 2006). Nicknames show how their bearers perceive themselves or how they are perceived by others (Aggarwal, 2016). In CGCGE16, some of the nicknames found are “Nobody”, “Ghost Name”, “Whatever”, “The Future Force”, “Jetmoney”, “Mother Africa”, “Wiseman”, “Aponkye (‘goat’ in Akan)”, and “Nokofiou (‘something small’ in Ga)”. 
8. **Message:** Even though there is no limit to the number of characters or words one can use on GhanaWeb, some of the commenters in CGCGE16 use the space designated for names to provide an additional message to their main message. Examples include “NDC IS A CURSE”, “KILL ME SOFTLY”, “KICK MAHAMA OUT”, “WE EWES ARE BECOMING WISE NOW”, “Nana Addo will WIN”, “Save Ghana”, “Ghana must know”, “#Comment to Article”, “MAHAMA B3 KO (Akan: Mahama will go)”, and “KANAWU (Akan: say it and die)”.

9. **Others:** This residue category is made up of different identity types that do not fall in any of the categories listed above. It was decided not to create individual categories for these identity types because each was used less than ten times in the corpus. They include multiple punctuation marks, such as “###########”, “!!!!!!!!!!!!!”, “@@@@@@@@”; first name + punctuation mark, such as Nana!!!!; and nickname + punctuation, such as “Seeman?”, “Apuuu!!!”. In reality, these forms cannot identify a person.

Figure 5.1 shows the frequency of each identity type explained as found in CGCGE16.

![COMMENTERS' "IDENTITY" chart](image)

*Figure 5.1. “Identity” types in CGCGE16*

The majority of identity types as identified in CGCGE16, as presented in Figure 5.1, is **nickname** (47 percent, n = 887), followed by **name only** (30 percent, n = 563). The least
occurring identity types are the most specific ones, **full name + location** (1 percent, n = 26) and the most unconventional, **others** (1 percent, n = 14).

**Discussion**

Apart from identity types 8 and 9, all the identity types listed are conventional forms of identity among Ghanaians. However, their acceptability of use often depends on whether the setting is a formal (official) or an informal (unofficial) one. The conventional identity types 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 may be used in some formal settings, while type 7 can only be used in an informal setting. The preference for conventional forms of identity in CGCGE16 aligns with Lev and Lewinsky’s (2004) finding that the majority of participants in online discourse do not choose unconventional identity forms, even though it is within their means to do so. The reason for this, as Chester and Gwynne (1998) suggest, is that many online interactants prefer an online persona that can pass for a real-life identity.

Since there is no registration and verification process, it is reasonable to assume that most of the identity forms presented above are “screen names”. This is because one cannot ascertain whether a commenter who signed themselves with a conventional identity type like **full name** or **full name + location** is presenting their true identity or deliberately pretending to be someone else. Obviously, allowing commenters to employ screen names that do not identify anyone, most especially nicknames, is giving them an opportunity to actively hide their real-life identity (Chester & Gwynne, 1998). In different settings, this opportunity may be given for specific reasons which include ensuring that the less powerful have the ability to speak without fear (Catterall & Maclaran, 2002).

It should be noted that, among Ghanaians, concealing one’s identity in order to speak to power (authority figures) or to provide one's opinion on conflictive issues is not unique to online interaction. Columnists and the authors of ‘letters to the editor’ in Ghanaian newspapers often use pseudonyms when expressing views on political issues or on a socially powerful individual. For example, during the book launch ceremony of *Ogyakrom: The Missing Pages of June 4*, on 2 November 2017, the author, Professor Kwesi Yankah, a renowned Ghanaian linguist, disclosed that he was the popular satirical columnist,
‘Abonsam\textsuperscript{25} Fireman’ of the Catholic Standard Newspaper between the late 70s and early 80s. Abonsam Fireman, who wrote to capture what he describes as “an accurate heartbeat of a people under intense political paralysis”, was then a lecturer at the University of Ghana. Considering that Ghana was under military rule at that time, it cannot be overemphasized that writing under a pseudonym was the only way he could author such pieces and still be alive in 2017.

The use of message (identity type 8), instead of any of the conventional forms of identity in CGCGE16 serves some communicative purposes. While this study agrees with Klienke (2008) and Dori-Hacohen and Shavit (2013) that such messages are additional parts of the commenter’s primary message, it must be added that they are of some significance as they can serve as the summary of the comment. They may be new or a repetition of some parts of the primary message. Either way, they serve as what the commenter may regard as the core of the message he wants to convey to other participants on the platform. This could account for why they are often written in capital letters (Obeng, 2000; Turnage, 2007).

It is demonstrated in subsequent sections that being able to hide one’s real identity allows online contributors to freely express their discontent towards authority figures and engage in discussions that can contribute positively to socio-political issues. Nevertheless, it also promotes uncivil discourse as established by previous studies (e.g. Citron & Norton, 2011; Dori-Hacohen & Shavit, 2013; Santana, 2013). At every given opportunity, commenters on GhanaWeb seemingly employ antagonistic and intemperate language against people of authority and display communicative behaviours that violate the norms and values of Ghanaians.

\textsuperscript{25}Abonsam means Satan in Akan.
5.3 ANALYSIS OF VARIABLES: RELATIONS, TARGETS AND TONE

5.3.1 Relations

In terms of how the comments in CGCGE16 are related to the selected news report, three categories were distinguished: related, loosely related, and not related. The related comments dwell on the news report either as a direct response or as a response to a previous comment. The focus of the loosely related comments is not the content of the news report, but some other actions or speeches of the leader that has very little or no link with the report. Comments in the last category, not related comment, do not have any bearing on the news report.

Consider examples of comments in the various categories below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News report Caption</th>
<th>Related</th>
<th>Loosely related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama</td>
<td>C5.1 Magician or Dwarf? In 2017, what will change? You have ruled for 7 years and NYEP has not yet provided up to 400000 jobs but suddenly in just 3 months you are promising that it will. Evidence-based President where is the evidence. Will you become a magician or a dwarf? (PAB 12-09-16 06:52)</td>
<td>C5.2 INCOMPETENT MONUMENTAL FAILURE NANA Easier to create jobs than it is to build a factory in each district and a dam in each village. The NPP's clueless Serial Loser Akufo-Addo makes delusional promises while President Mahama makes realistic and feasible promises (NOBODY 11-09-16 21:40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not related</td>
<td>C5.3 ONLINE BUSINESS JOB HELLO, ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RUNNING A PERSONAL HOME BASE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY THAT CAN EARN YOU OVER 200GHC DAILY WITH JUST THE USE OF YOUR MOBILE PHONE OR ANY INTERNET DEVICE AND GET PAID THROUGH MOBILE MONEY NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE. (merlin 12-09-16 06:55)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example C5.1 is categorized as related because the commenter limits the comment to the news report. In Pab’s opinion, the realization of the promise that the NYEP (i.e. National Youth Employment Programme) would provide job opportunities in 2017 is futile. In C5.2,
the commenter’s attention is more on the opposition leader rather than on Mahama, as he begins his comment with “INCOMPETENT MONUMENTAL FAILURE NANA”. Even though the news report made no mention of Nana, the commenter saw it as an opportunity to attack the opposition leader. This example is therefore categorized as loosely related. Example C5.3 is not related because the commenter is promoting an online business which has nothing to do with the news report or the 2016 presidential election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News report Caption</th>
<th>Re: I’ll introduce ‘Thinking’ as a subject at basic level – Edward Mahama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Related</td>
<td>C5.4 Edward Mahama u re a fool, u ur self u lack basic thinking, how can a subject thinking emphasize on resources and management. This is pure Economics or Social Science. U re simply not a Presidential material. (Wil 24-11-16 22:35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loosely related</td>
<td>C5.5 Npp is not thinking. We must start the teaching from that party. They have been a great problem on Ghana. Their crab mentality is a bother (Johnson 25-11-16 08:24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not related</td>
<td>C5.6 ACHILINKS Tour Dubai and South Africa this festive season with an all inclusive package of $1500 and $2100 respectively. Package includes * 6nights accommodation * 2months Visa * Plane ticket Contact: 0322000298/0544692577 (Achilinks 25-11-16 12:33)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wil in C5.4 calls Edward Mahama a ‘fool’ and further describes him as one who is not presidential material. Wil implies that Edward Mahama’s campaign message of introducing ‘thinking’ as a school subject at the basic level will not impact on the management of the nation’s resources. Like C5.1, this comment is directly related to the news report in question. In Example C5.5, Johnson uses the opportunity to attack members of the NPP. Even though Edward Mahama stated that the subject ‘thinking’ should be taught at the basic level, Johnson recommends that it should first be taught to the members of the NPP. Example C5.6 is an advertisement for a travel and tour package and thus, not related to the news report.

The results in Figure 5.2 below show that more than half of the comments (83 percent) in CGCGE16 have some connection to the selected news reports. This implies that the majority of the commenters contributed directly or indirectly to the discourse on the 2016 presidential election. The figure also shows that a significant number of commenters (17 percent) paid no attention to the issues about the election.
5.3.2 Targets

Targets are the individuals to whom or against whom the comments are directed. They are the addressees that can be described as the “intended recipients” (Held, 2014, p. 68). Given that the entire readership of the online comments may not include the people at which the comments are directed, all the participants on the platform can be described as the “actual recipients” (Held, 2014, p. 68). On an online platform, the “actual recipients” may not be the direct addressees, but may be the active co-speech-participants (commenters) or passive co-speech-participants (readers). In CGCGE16, the targets are (1) the key figures of concern to the study, that is, the electoral commissioner and the 2016 presidential candidates – leader(s); (2) other commenters on the platform – co-participant(s); (3) people who are not necessarily involved in the news report but in a way related to the leader – others; (4) the journalists or the staff of GhanaWeb – news provider.

Figure 5.2. Relation of comments to news reports
Example C5.7 has two referents; JDM (the president and the NDC presidential candidate) and Nduom (the PPP presidential candidate). The commenter first addresses JDM saying, *JM toaso* in Akan which means “JM continue”, and then he asks Nduom to “dream again”.

In C5.8, Arnold cautions the participants on the platform (i.e. readers and commenters) against voting for Nduom or JDM. The members of the NPP, some of whom may not be on the platform, are the referents of C5.9. Gab’s comment in C5.10 is directed at the webmaster. Similar examples are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>News Report Caption</strong></th>
<th><strong>Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader(s)</td>
<td>C5.11 Stop fooling yourself,you will not be,never,nobody will make you a president,you have lost your credibility,don't even think about it,you will not get even 1% of the votes (CORNEY 10-11-16 15:53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-participant(s)</td>
<td>C5.12 CORNEY SHE SHOULD THINK OF BEING THE PRESIDENT OF NSAWAM CANNERY NOT GHANA. AFTER CALLING MAHAMA,HIS FAMILY AND HIS MINISTERS AS THIEVES, HER DAUGHTER WANTS TO BE AN MP FOR THE NDC. THAT MEANS HER DAUGHTER MAY BE A THIEF TOO. (PRINCE 10-11-16 16:10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In C5.12, Prince responds directly to Corney, a preceding commenter, that is, a co-participant of the discourse. In Example C5.13, Kwame’s referent is Zanetor, the eldest daughter of Konadu. Zanetor is identified as other because there is no evidence that she is one of the participants on the platform. She is not politically affiliated to Konadu. Moreover, her name was not mentioned in the news report.

Figure 5.3 represents the frequency of the various categories of the variable, target.

![Figure 5.3. Targets of comments in CGCGE16](image_url)

Figure 5.3 indicates that the overwhelming majority of all the comments (81 percent) were either directed at one of the presidential candidates or at the electoral commissioner, even though only 31 percent of the comments were directly related to the news reports. The percentage of comments directed at the news provider is insignificant.

### 5.3.3 Tone

With respect to tone, the comments were categorized as (a) antagonistic, (b) endorsing, (c) antagonistic-endorse, (d) neutral, and (e) metapragmatic. An antagonistic comment shows open hostility towards the referent or their idea, and it involves invective and offensive language. An endorsing comment commends the referent it is directed at and/or support their idea. A comment categorized as antagonistic-endorse has two referents. To one referent,
it is “antagonistic”, and to the other, it is “endorsing”. A **neutral** comment focuses on the content of the news report and is not explicitly positive or negative, while a **metapragmatic** comment is one that condemns the communicative behaviour of a commenter(s). Consider the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Report Caption</th>
<th>I’m a man with new ideas and fresh direction - Akufo-Addo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antagonistic</td>
<td>C5.14 1 nana Addo 1 wee!!! Arrongant [sic] dwarf!! (Emma 05-09-16 09:57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsing</td>
<td>C5.15 Ghana needs no other man but a man who has proven to understand the needs of Ghanaians at this time and its on other person than President Mahama. President Mahama in just three years has transformed the face of the country in many diverse ways. In the areas of education, transport, energy and power, bilateral relations, security and the economy. Ghana now is very much recognised by the international world as has made an enviable inroad. (NF 05-09-16 08:33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antagonistic-Endorsing</td>
<td>C5.16 So nana Addo has new ideas? I believe him. New ideas to robb [sic] our coffers again, no way Mahama all the way (TRUSTY 05-09-16 10:38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>C5.17 I read the article three times looking for the new ideas and fresh direction, if anybody out there finds it, please let me know. (retirement 05-09-16 15:50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metapragmatic</td>
<td>C5.18 We need to reason and not be emotional and irrational. (VP 05-09-16 11:04)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.4 shows that nearly two-thirds of the comments in CGCGE16 have a derogatory or offensive tone. The most uncommon comments are the metapragmatic ones, but they will be discussed further in Chapter 7 because they illustrate some reactions of Ghanaians to the use of negative, antagonistic language against the elderly and authority figures.
Figure 5.4. Tone of comments in CGCGE16

Discussion

The great majority of the comments in CGCGE16 are “loosely related” to the news report and “antagonistic” towards the “leaders”. This is in consonance with Langlotz and Locher’s (2012) observation that online comments on news reports are often not explicitly linked to the publication, but “refer to actors, facts, positions not raised or elaborated on …” (p. 1600). Considering that the comments in CGCGE16 were posted during an election campaign period, it is just expected that some participants will utilize every opportunity to promote their political stance and their preferred candidate or attack other candidates (Borton, 2013).

In this study, the major political actors were the most attacked, while the news provider was the least attacked. This is in contrast with results reported by Kohn and Neiger (2007), Neurauter-Kessels (2011), and Erjavec & Kovačič (2013), which indicate that journalists (i.e. news providers) were mainly the targets of attack in the various online corpora they investigated. From the number of standalone comments in CGCGE16, it is evident that there is not much dialogue or multi-participant interaction on GhanaWeb. The majority of the commenters are anonymous not only in terms of their real persona, but also, they do not have an established online persona either. The high level of anonymity minimizes the inhibition to insult others. This, in the words of Boczkowski (1999), leads to “the frequent occurrence of utterly aggressive content posted” (p. 105).
5.4 INSULT TYPES AND CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF READER COMMENTS IN CGCGE16

This section first shows the results of the lexical search done with the word list tool of AntConc 3.4.0w (Windows). It then examines the bases of the various invective expressions in CGCGE16, followed by the forms of attack employed against the targets, and lastly, the negative content choices used in the comments.

5.4.1 Insult Types in CGCGE16

Out of the 42,446 lexical forms in CGCGE16, 1,352 lexical tokens, which comprise 168 lexical types, could be described as insulting in the Ghanaian context. The term ‘token’ here refers to individual occurrences of a lexical form in the corpus, regardless of how often they are repeated (either as the original form or as variants), while ‘type’ refers to the number of distinct lexical forms in the corpus. Consider example C5.19.

C5.19 Tweaaaah Konadu as president? Tweaaaaqaah [sic]!!

This comment contains five lexical tokens and four lexical types because there are two variants of the Akan interjection, tweaa in it. “Tweaaaah” is an elongated form, while “tweaaaaqaah” (tweakai) is the extreme variant of tweaa.

The 168 insult types in CGCGE16 came from six languages namely, English, Akan, Ga, Hausa, Ewe, and GhPE. Some examples of these insults are ‘beast’, ‘crazy’, and ‘lunatic’ in English; aponkyifunu ‘dead goat’, akronfuo ‘thieves’, and bodamni ‘mad person’ in Akan; ashawo ‘prostitute’, kapuepue ‘dwarf’, and yaka gbɔmo ‘worthless person’ in Ga; barrawo ‘thief’ and mutum banza ‘nonentity’ in Hausa; adzetor ‘witch’ and dzimakpla ‘uncultured person’ in Ewe; and bushiatic ‘savage’ and kpanyaman ‘conman/trickster’ in GhPE.

Due to space limitations, only insult types that occurred three times or more in the corpus are presented in Table 5.3. They are 74 in all. The frequency (FQ) of each in the corpus totalled to 1,236. As the table shows, only English and Akan insult types occur three or more times in CGCGE16. The Akan insult types are highlighted. The meaning of the first five frequently occurring Akan insults, kwasea ‘oaf/fool’, aboa ‘animal/beast’, gyimii ‘retard/stupid person’, tweaa ‘an interjection that expresses contempt’, and apuu ‘an interjection used to express disbelief’, are explicated and discussed in Chapter 5.
Table 5.3  *Lexical forms classified as insults in CGCGE16*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Insult type</th>
<th>FQ</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Insult type</th>
<th>FQ</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Insult type</th>
<th>FQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fool</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>TWEAA</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Miserable</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thieves</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>whore</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Pathetic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stupid</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>killers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>drug addict</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>incompetent</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>animal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>ANANSE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Useless</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>hypocrite</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>ashamed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Corrupt</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>shit</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>ass</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Idiot</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>criminal</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>BUBUAF0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Foolish</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>witch</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>bullshit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Liar</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Jezebel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>crazy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>KWASEA</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>bastard</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>dubious</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Bitch</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>cursed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>lazy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Clueless</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>crook</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>stooge</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Disgrace</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>OFUI</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>fraudulent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>archaic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Evil</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>ignorant</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>brainless</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Fuck</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>selfish</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>disappointment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ABOA</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>senseless</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>hopeless</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Greedy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>visionless</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>illuminati</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Blind</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>APUU</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>junkie</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Fake</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>arrogant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>shameless</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ugly</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>conman</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>smelling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Disastrous</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>silly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>worthless</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>devil</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>shaame</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Loser</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>GYIMII</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>mtchew</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Wicked</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>mad</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>TOTAL 1236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A critical consideration of the frequency of insult types in Table 5.3 brings to light the preferences of Ghanaians when they engage in negative antagonistic language use during political discourse. This points to the fact that although abusive language use in politics is a practice in many parts of the world, the choices of abusive terms for this practice are often not the same across cultures. For instance, whereas the data from CGCGE16 suggests that *fool* is the most frequently used insult type in Ghanaian politics, data from the Oxford New Monitor Corpus (ONMC) shows that *idiot* is the most frequently used insult type in American politics (see Martin, 2014). In addition to *fool* and *idiot*, the other frequently occurring insult types that can be found in both corpora are *crazy* and *loser*. It was observed that common
insult types in ONMC that are not in CGCGE16 include *elitist, racist, fanatic, extremist, bigot, ideologue, moron, obstructionist, zealot, and misogynist*.

The results displayed in the table above confirms Ofori’s (2015) assertion that Ghanaians freely employ harsh insulting expressions against their political leaders in online commentary. Despite the notion that in Ghana hierarchical relationships is of great significance for speech composition and citizens have a clear understanding that it is unacceptable to openly use derogatory and offensive language forms against authority figures, this behaviour is common on online platforms. The general impression which remains uncontested in this study is that the display of such communicative behaviour on online platforms such as GhanaWeb is not surprising due to the lack of monitoring, gatekeeping, and accountability associated with the interactions. The participants are well aware that they would not be held responsible for their linguistic choices and so they engage in more expressive and affective communication that easily leads to violations of communicative norms.

Apart from all these factors that promote the use of insults online, it should be noted that the use of insults against authority figures, especially in the political context is not a phenomenon in the Ghanaian culture that began only with the advent of online interactions. It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that traditionally, there is a well-regulated practice whereby a day is set aside during certain annual festivals for members of the community to openly criticize and even insult their traditional rulers through oral performances such as music or poetry. Also, as posited by Kukubor (2011), the use of insults in the political history of Ghana has been there before Ghana’s independence. The insult type ‘stooge’ found in Table 5.3, was used in 1955. Other insult types, ‘stupid’, ‘fool’, ‘thieves’, ‘animal’, ‘junkie’, ‘devil’, and ‘dog’ found in Table 5.3 were noted as part of the insults used in politics between 1992 and 2011 (Agyekum, 2010b; Kukubor, 2011). Insult types used in this period that are not in Table 5.3 but can be found in some comments analyzed in the subsequent sections include ‘womanizer’, ‘wee smoker’, and ‘arsonist’.

Figure 5.5, extracted from Kukubor (2011), is a newspaper cartoon named as ‘the big thief’ that shows a group of people hurling insults at Dr Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana’s first president). Dr Kwame Nkrumah is described as a thief in Ga, Ewe, Akan, Hausa, and
Ghanaian Pidgin English (from right to left). The Ga speaker’s *AMÔ LE..EE...EI KWAME NKRUMAH JULO!* translates as ARREST HIM, KWAME NKRUMAH THE THIEF!.

*Figure 5.5.* A representation of the use of political insults in the past
(Photo: [https://www.modernghana.com/news](https://www.modernghana.com/news))

Even though it has been established that direct and open use of insults against authority figures contravenes the norms of the Ghanaian society, it has been demonstrated that this behaviour has been a part of Ghana’s political history. Hence, one can say the use of insults in political interactions on online platforms is just an extension of a ‘normal’ behaviour. However, the reason why it has become an issue of concern presently is that, on online platforms, this communicative practice has attained an extraordinary level (Ofori, 2015). Various stakeholders find it alarming and are therefore calling for a more civil form of communication during citizen participation in socio-political issues.

It looks as if Yankah (1998) predicted the present negative communicative behaviour among Ghanaians in online discourse with this assertion: “as communication becomes more faceless, the indigenous norms of restrained discourse are bound to slacken, taken over by greater openness and candour where affront is inevitable. But this also deepens the communication crisis” (p. 40). One could justifiably argue that the “communication crisis” in political discussions today has “deepened”. Unlike in the past where derogatory verbal exchanges in the media were mainly exchanged among the politicians, presently, the inherent
features of the internet have allowed ordinary citizens to also engage in the practice more liberally, without any form of restraint. The use of insults in political discussions is increasingly becoming more of a ‘citizen-politician’ than just a ‘politician-politician’ phenomenon. The online reader comments presented as examples in the subsequent sections can attest to this.

5.4.2 Bases of Invective

Many scholars agree that the content of invective and insult-filled comments is usually arbitrary as the impact is not necessarily dependent on its veracity (e.g. Agyekum, 2004a; Neu, 2008; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009; Culpeper, 2011). The negative content of the majority of comments in CGCGE16 have no basis and are therefore referred to as “empty” invective in this study. The “empty” invective, such as ‘ugly’, ‘fool’, ‘animal’, ‘stupid’, and ‘failure’, involve severely negative views of the commenters about their targets and are only meant to strike at the feelings, positive self-image, pride or ego of these targets. For example, in C5.20, the commenter opines that the mouth of the electoral commissioner is like a punctured tyre. They lay emphasis on their assertion by not only repeating the statement but by mentioning specifically ‘a car tyre’. Also, they refer to her as an ‘idiot’. More comments such as C5.20 are discussed in the subsequent subsections.

C5.20 Charlotte’s mouth is like punctured tyre. Her mouth is like a punctured car tyre. Idiot (Tacos 12-11-16 05:36)

Apart from the “empty” invective expressions in CGCGE16, there are a number of invective expressions that appear to be “well-founded”. They are not mere attacks on the personality of the targets, but are based on certain socio-political issues that citizens in tune with socio-political occurrences in Ghana are aware of. Some of these comments are also based on public and sociocultural knowledge. As a result, readers who are not familiar with the communicative contexts of such comments may not be able to appropriately interpret them and have a full understanding of the content. Below are some examples of the well-founded invective and insults.
Various socio-political occurrences in Ghana heavily informed the invective expressions employed to discredit Nana in this example. The noun phrase ‘a foolish wee smoker’ can be related to an allegation levelled against Nana over the years from different sources. It was written in a Wikileaks in 2011 that Nana smokes *wee* ‘marijuana’. While some Ghanaians claimed that he likes to smoke for breakfast, others claimed that he was dismissed from Oxford University after he was caught smoking.

The rhetorical question “where is your law certificate?” is often used to question Nana’s competence as a lawyer. Konadu (the presidential candidate of the National Democratic Party), in 2008 stated that Nana is a fake lawyer. In 2013, a similar claim was made by retired Justice Francis Kpegah that Nana has not been called to the Ghana Bar Association. In the bid to defend himself, Nana responded that his qualifying and enrollment certificates are lost. He then provided a letter signed in 2007 that he was enrolled and called to the Ghana Bar Association at a meeting of the General Legal Council held at the Supreme Court on July 8, 1975. Regardless of this evidence, some political rivals still refer to Nana as ‘a fake lawyer’.

The expression ‘one kenkey, one fish’ is used to ridicule Nana. Nana, in some of his campaign messages for the 2016 election, promised that if he is voted into power, Ghana will have “one district, one factory” and “one village, one dam”. This means he will build a factory in every district and build a dam in every village. Many affiliates of the other political parties saw these promises as unrealistic and unfeasible. Making a jest of him, some of them, like the commenter in this example, came up with similar patterns like ‘one man, one woman’; ‘one student, one classroom’ among others.

---

26 Kenkey is one of the staple dishes in Ghana, particularly, among the Gas, and Fantes. It is prepared from fermented ground corn (maize) and typically served with ground chili pepper and a black sauce locally known as ‘*ṣhiṭo*’ and fried fish. However, it can be served with many different types of soups and stews.
In addition, the commenter refers to Nana as *yaka gbɔmɔ*. *Yaka gbɔmɔ* is an insult in the Ga language that can be translated as a ‘worthless person’ or ‘a person without any tangible achievement’. The commenter validates it with his sociocultural knowledge as a Ghanaian as he adds that Nana is still living in his father’s stolen properties (i.e. house) at age 73. Among some Ghanaians, great achievements and worthiness are characterized by the number of houses one has built (for themselves and other people) and the number of cars and other properties they own. A person, especially a male, who is of age, married and has children and still lives in his parents’ house is regarded as disreputable by some people, regardless of who he is in the society. Even if such a person is the only child of his parents, he is expected to leave his parents’ house for it to be occupied by other relatives. Also, the use of “his father’s stolen properties” shows that the commenter did not spare Nana’s father as they imply that Nana’s father was a thief. The commenter could be calling Nana’s father a thief because he was also a politician whom the commenter believes stole from the state.

The comment ends with “useless and hopeless denture smelling drill ship thief”. The name-calling expression, ‘drill ship thief’, is modified with ‘useless’, ‘hopeless’ and ‘smelling’ as a means to heighten the impact of the insult. The commenter draws this insult from their socio-political knowledge. In 2001, it was reported that a drillship, Discoverer 511, was sold for US$24 million to defray a debt of US$19.5 million Ghana owed the French Bank, Societe Generale at the time. Nana, who was then the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, prepared a Power of Attorney for the transfer of the ship to the buyers. The remaining US$4.5 million of the proceeds, including its documentation, could not be traced. Since Nana was the one in charge of the transaction, he was blamed, especially by his political opponents, for the loss.

C5.22 Re: Try the NPP market – Akufo-Addo

Foolish gorilla. When you kept on reducing the voters, how can you come to power?????. Your self know it too well that you can't win ???? again. Stop disturbing Ghanaians. You're too old. You're too short. You're too stupid. You’re too ugly. You’re too myopic. You’re too all die be die. You’re too incompetent. You’re too violence minded. Ect... [sic] (Nature 01-09-16 14:07)

The use of gorilla here is metaphorical. Here, the commenter suggests that that Nana has some negative characteristics of a gorilla such as ‘short with a bulky body’ and ‘aggressive’
These characteristics are reiterated in the statements, “You’re too short”, and “You’re too all die be die”, respectively. The phrase all die be die can be translated as ‘every death is death’ and used to suggest that everybody is going to die, or death is inevitable, so the cause of one’s death does not really matter. Normally, the presupposition attached to its use is that a person or a group of people should rise and fight for a particular cause.

This commenter also relied on some past political occurrence. In 2011, it was reported that Nana told a group of NPP members that they should gear up for an electoral battle in 2012 because the ruling NDC would try to hold on to power by all means. He was quoted as saying “our leaders who formed this party that has now become the biggest political movement in Ghana were not cowards. So, in 2012, we need to be courageous because all die be die. All die be die”. Bearing in mind the meaning, the use of all die be die was not taken lightly by many people in the country. Nana was criticized for warmongering and was described as an aggressive and a violent person, who wanted to win the presidential election at all cost, even at the peril of the lives of citizens.

The rhetorical question “when you kept on reducing the voters, how can you come to power????.” is also based on the notion that under Nana’s leadership, there has been division in the NPP. It was believed that some internal battles that were fought in the party in 2014, and the suspensions of National Chairman; General Secretary, and second vice Chairman had left the party divided ahead of the election. The general view was that those in support of these suspended key executive members were not going to vote for Nana.

The commenter demonstrates a strong conviction, by the disproportionate use of the question mark at the end of the rhetorical question and after ‘win’, that per Nana’s own behaviour and actions, on no account will he succeed in the election. That conviction is demonstrated again in the use of the imperative sentence “stop disturbing Ghanaians”.

The first sentence “You need a 2nd term to steal more” is based on the public opinion that politicians are thieves. The use of ‘more’ in the sentence implies that JDM stole in his first
term and he is asking for a second term to steal again. The expression ‘greedy bastard’ became common in Ghanaian political discourse and was often used to describe the activities of the high-ranking members of the NDC in terms of corruption after former President J. J. Rawlings said it in 2011. President Rawlings accused the then President Atta Mills of appointing and surrounding himself with “greedy bastards”. Recall that at the time, JDM was the vice president of President Atta Mills.

Further, calling JDM “a bribe taker” alludes to a scandal involving a Ford Expedition vehicle JDM received from a Burkinabe contractor. According to reports, the contractor was later awarded two government contracts worth over GH₵100 million. This sparked condemnation from a section of the public. Members of the opposition insisted that JDM is corrupt and takes bribes for petty things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C5.24 Re: Election 2016: I can’t be influenced - EC Chair</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madam Alata Is a danger To Peace in Ghana Mrs. Osei's pride, intransigence and arrogance reflect the wishes of those in power to steal the verdict of Ghanaians for them. Madam Alata is surely not an impartial political referee working for advancement of democracy and peaceful transfer of power in our system, she is actually a rigging machine installed at the EC by Mr. Incompetent to rig the elections for him again. Madam Alata is, therefore, a danger to peace and democracy in our country. (Mahmoud 03-11-16 13:11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this comment, the electoral commissioner is repeatedly referred to as Madam Alata. The term *alata* is often used by Ghanaians to describe Nigerians and those who are aware of the term do not appreciate it as it is related to pepper in the Yoruba language. The commenter is referring to the electoral commissioner as a Nigerian by using this negative form. This choice of reference is derived from the claim that although the electoral commissioner is married to a Ghanaian, she was born in Nigeria to a Nigerian woman. Some Ghanaians maintained that they do not understand why “a foreigner” should be appointed as the electoral commissioner. There were several opinion articles to this effect after her appointment. The electoral commissioner refuted the claim and stated that her primary education was in Nigeria because her mother who is a Ghanaian, got married to a Nigerian (her stepfather). Many people who think this is false still refer to her as a Nigerian.

The statement “she is actually a rigging machine installed at the EC by Mr. Incompetent to rig the elections for him again” highlights the allegation by members of the opposition
parties that the president appointed Mrs Osei as the electoral commissioner so that she could help him retain power. “Mr. Incompetent” refers to JDM, who, as mentioned earlier, was labelled “incompetent” by the leaders of the NPP.

C5.25 Re: No room for corrupt religious leaders under my government - Edward Mahama
You are such a fool, Dr. Mahama. What makes you think you will ever win the presidency in Ghana? This fruitless ambition of yours is getting too old and must be abandoned. How many times have you ran for elections knowing that the party you belong to is just as trivial as your utterances. (Paapidi 01-09-16 21:26)

The spiteful nature of the derogatory but rhetorical questions posed can be seen in the context that Edward Mahama has contested four elections already as a presidential candidate of the PNC and the 2016 election is his fifth attempt. The question “what makes you think you will ever win the presidency in Ghana?” is a hint from the commenter that Edward Mahama will never win. The sentence that follows attests to this. The commenter does not only describe his ambition as fruitless but further, recommends that he abandons it. In light of the cultural knowledge that the elderly in the Ghanaian society are wise and make significant contributions, saying Edward Mahama’s utterances are ‘trivial’ is insulting.

C5.26 Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through - Greenstreet
INSTEAD OF THIS GUY SELLING HIS PARTY FOR VOTES. HE IS ATTACKING NPP. THIS SHOWS THAT HE HAS BEEN BRIBED BY NDC. HOW SHOULD A PARTY LIKE CPP SACRIFICED [sic] THEIR LEADERSHIP TO A CRIPPLE WHO SHOULD BE PUSHED AROUND. NO MERCY FOR THE CRIPPLE. NO SYMPATHY VOTE. (OWEN 13-11-16 15:46)

Owen first accuses Greenstreet of being bribed by the NDC because they cannot understand why Greenstreet would focus on attacking the campaign message of another opposition party when he is not sharing his own campaign message. To this commenter, members of the Convention People’s Party have “SACRIFICED THEIR LEADERSHIP” position. This statement can be seen in terms of the fact that although Greenstreet contested for the presidential candidate position with others with no physical disability, he was nevertheless elected. They further attack Greenstreet, pointing out that he would not be president just
because the electorate would see him as a person with a disability and show him sympathy by voting for him, “NO MERCY FOR THE CRIPPLE. NO SYMPATHY VOTE”.

Remarks

The discussion of examples C5.20 to C5.26 shows that in CGCGE16, some “well-founded” invective expressions were used in addition to the “empty” invective expressions to incite bad feelings against the targets. Some of the commenters drew on their historical, sociocultural, socio-political, and public knowledge to form the “well-founded” invective and insults to inflict emotional harm on the targets or their associates. Without an account of the communicative contexts of such invective, readers who do not have enough background knowledge may not get the full intended meaning. Also, cultural, political or situational based expressions such as yaka gboma ‘worthless person’, ‘greedy bastards’, ‘Mr Incompetent’, and ‘Madam Alata’ may remain unintelligible to these readers especially, the non-Ghanaians or those not familiar with language use in Ghana.

5.4.3 Forms of Attack

This subsection outlines the forms of attack commenters in CGCGE16 applied to arouse the negative sentiments of readers towards the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner. These forms of attack challenge the positive self-esteem of these individuals (Conley, 2010). Where possible, examples from the corpus directed at all or majority of the presidential candidates as well as the electoral commissioner were presented for each form of attack. This was done to capture how the commenters characterized each of them. In all, six forms of attack were identified. They are:

A) Attack on mental/intellectual ability

C5.27  Re: Let’s send ‘tired’ Mahama out of power - Nduom
     Governance is not for empty heads like JOHNMAHAMA...
     (ROSEMARY 23-10-16 12:51)

C5.28  Re: I'm a man with new ideas and fresh direction - Akufo-Addo
     Nana is demented and no have no ideas. (Kkd 05-09-16 07:32)
C5.29 Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu
You are deranged by fooling yourself that you become a president.
(Kakaminamor 03-10-16 14:07)

C5.30 Re: NPP campaign promises are for votes, not feasible – Ivor Greenstreet
Ivor is not sound in the mind. Talk about what you Greenstreet would do when
come to power. He mentally is bankrupt due to the accident he had.
(Poly 14-11-16 14:23)

C5.31 Re: I’ll introduce ‘Thinking’ as subject at basic level - Edward Mahama
i. u re a fool, u ur self u lack basic thinking (Boss 24-11-16 21:23)
ii. …Stupid, empty-head Edward Mahama. (Habib 07-09-16 17:07)

C5.32 Re: Let’s send ‘tired’ Mahama out of power - Nduom
Ndoum YOU ARE MAD (yaro 23-10-16 18:08)

C5.33 Re: I am God’s favorite – Joy
Nutcase Is there no place in the asylum for such nut case (Nietsaan 18-10-16 13:17)

C5.34 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election results – Charlotte Osei
Brainless Nigerian Bitch Do not Burn Ghana for us. (HCNN 03-11-16 15:22)

The attack on the intellectual and mental abilities of the presidential candidates and the
electoral commissioner can be seen in the use of certain keywords against them as shown in
examples C5.27 to C5.34. The keywords include ‘brainless’, ‘empty head’, ‘demented’,
‘deranged’, ‘mentally bankrupt’, ‘mad’, and ‘nutcase’. By the use of these keywords, the
commenters discredit their targets as being intellectually and mentally unfit.

B) Attack on competence

C5.35 Re: Don’t vote for last-minute roads – Ivor Greenstreet
i. Mahama is incompetent, visionless and useless. He doesn't understand the seat he
occupied as president. (ONE LOVE 07-09-16 16:04)
ii. The most corrupt, inept, incompetent, president in Ghanian history.
   (Anglia 07-09-16 05:14)

C5.36 Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo-Addo
THIS UGLY DWARF HAS STARTED AGAIN WITH HIS FOOLISHNESS …
GOOD FOR NOTHING OLD MAN. (MOI 04-09-16 16:30)
C5.37  Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
Presidency is not about dancing. You cant manage your 31st Dec Woman movt [sic] without presidential support. How can you manage Ghana. (Makiman 03-10-16 10:29)

C5.38  Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through - Greenstreet
This Green Street man must be **** and have been hired. instead of projecting CPP you are attacking npp. incompetent flag bearer. disgraceful man. shame!!!. Do u think CPP made u flag bearer to be used by someone. Shaaame!!!! (Chitototos 13-11-16 20:07)

C5.39  Re: Let’s send ‘tired’ Mahama out of power - Nduom
See the incompetent man who can’t even complete common nominations forms wanting to be president!!! (Appiah 23-10-16 16:59)

C5.40  Re: Trump's victory has given me more vim – Edward Mahama
…just useless what do you do for pnc after dr limann Allah is watching you (this bagaya 10-11-16 20:00)

C5.41  Re: I am God’s favorite - Joy
You sound too Ignorant to be President You need to grow up and acquire some education (Wiafe 18-10-16 15:40)

C5.42  Re: I've learnt to handle attacks with grace - Charlotte Osei
She lacks the temprement to lead EC Simply incompetent. (DrJay 04-11-16 01:53)

In C5.35 to C5.41, the commenters point out why each of the candidates is not competent enough to be president. The commenter in C5.42 gives reasons why the electoral commissioner is not worthy of her position.

C) Attack on moral behaviour

C5.43  Re: Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama
i.  The Organized Crime Industry Will Appoint Mahama as Leader when Mahama is Voted Out because he is a Fantastic Fraud,con-Man,Fake and Thief (# KICK MAHAMAH OUT ! 06-09-16 12:58)

ii.  So killing of our late president John Fefi Mills you killed him for Ghanaians, too much corruption in our society you are doing it for Ghanaians (Omanba Pa 03-09-16 05:15)
iii. … Shame on you Mr womanizing President. (Kwame 11-10-16 18:04)

C5.44 Re: Have faith in my campaign promises - Nana Addo
   i. Nana lied he attended law school Ask Nana to name the law school he attended
      and he will look the other side do not trust him … (Kusasi 04-09-16 13:05)
   ii. Nana is fraudster, he's alwys lyin n deceiving. Fraudulent indeed
       (INNO 11-11 20:57)
   iii. HE IS FOR VIOLENT, HE SHD CHANGE, HE WILL NEVER WIN, WE
       DONT WANT VIOLENT LEADER (LYDIA, KNUST 29-10-16 08:03)

C5.45 Re: I'll break glass ceiling for women - Nana Konadu
   i. THIEF! Konadu the arsonist. (Chopper 09-11-16 23:18)
   ii. You are damn naughty woman who is full of hatred, greediness, selfishness.
       (Okai 03-10-16 11:54)

C5.46 Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet
   Attack NDC not NPP YOU RATHER ARE A LIAR (Gkasoma 13-11-16 18:21)

C5.47 Re: Don't believe fake promises - Nduom
   As for me I know Papa Kwesi Nduom from the days in the flagstaff house as selfish
   and vindictive character never to be trusted, never! (Amega 05-09-16 10:41)

C5.48 Re: You cannot be with the NDC if you are not corrupt – Edward Mahama
   But you Edward Mahama corrupted and won Hassan Ayariga and that was his
   reason he left the party (Mansuru 07-09-16 16:57)

C5.49 Re: EC boss has perfected electoral system - Jacob Osei
   Jacob the ass kisser This guy is a criminal, I can't believe people like this wants be
   president [sic]. (Osei 14-10-16 19:33)

C5.50 i. Re: I don’t regret accepting EC job – Charlotte Osei
   Mrs. Osei’s pride, intransigence and arrogance reflect the wishes of those in power
   to steal the verdict of Ghanaians for them. (Mahmoud 03-11-16 16:40)
   ii. Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election – Charlotte Osei
       a. U are a con woman, u can deceive ur husband and family but not all of us, u are
          really con waman [sic] (kofi 03-11-16 15:13)

       b. Charlotte lies with a straight face (Tish 03-11-16 14:21)
The examples above portray the negative characteristics attributed to the targets. Among other things, the presidential candidates are described as ‘untrustworthy’, ‘dishonest’, ‘corrupt’, ‘selfish’, ‘criminals’, and ‘murderers’ and the electoral commissioner is presented as ‘arrogant’, ‘prideful’, and a ‘conwoman’.

D) Attack on physical appearance/characteristics

C5.51 Re: The battle is the Lord’s – Nana Addo
   i. I don't understand why Nana Addo has less appeal. Maybe he has committed some secret heinous sin or crime. Or better still, it might be becos of his ugly face, head and dangling lips. (Ekuma 29-10-16 04:18)
   ii. MR SHORT STUFF WITH BIG STOMACH ...SHOULDN'T A PRESIDENT HAVE A BIT OF A CHARISMA? (APARAHARA WITH A BIG BEER GUT 29-10-16 05:40)
   iii. This guy looks wicked. I'll be ashamed to call him my president. No height, no hair, potbelly. (Ash T 29-10-16 03:44)

C5.52 Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
   Nana Addo is handsome 100% than this gorilla you are following, how many people look so good in their 70s like this man Do you know what John mahama will look like when he gets to that age? No difference from an ape with his long face. (NDC IS SATANIC 10-03 18:30)

C5.53 Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
   i. Foolish ugly dirty stinking woman. (Badbad 05-10-16 13:50)
   ii. OLD LADY LIKE YOU, SO SO PLENTY EYE SHADOW EVEN YOUR HUSBAND JJ SOMETIME STRUGGLES TO MAKE YOU UP AROUND HIM. (NII 03-10-16 16:33)

C5.54 Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet
   Hello mr wheelchair .if you cant do it. keep mute (Brotherc 13-11-16 12:39)

C5.55 Re: Let’s send ‘tired’ Mahama out of power - Nduom
   MY FRIEND WITH THE CHICKEN HEAD CALLED NDUOM , YOU DON’T COUNT AT ALL SO SHUT YOUR BEAK UP. (######## 23-10-16 12:55)

C5.56 Re: I am God’s favorite - Joy
   Look at his hungry face (Jimmy 18-10-16 15:37)
C5.57 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election – Charlotte Osei
   i. Charlotte loves controversy. She likes her bleached face in the papers all the time (Eshun 12-11-16 05:28)
   ii. The woman lies every time she opens her big mouth. (Foli 03-11-16 14:36)
   iii. Get some toothpaste with whitening Charlotte while in UK get some toothpaste with whitening to clean your yellow teeth (Kachina 03-11-16 14:30)

In C5.51 to C5.57, the commenters describe their targets in an abusive manner by drawing the attention of readers to certain physical characteristics of these targets or to certain parts of their body. The parts of the body the commenters concentrated on included the head, face, and stomach.

E) Attack on political affiliates

C5.58 Re: NDC will not make untenable promises - Prez Mahama
   i. Keep on giving cheap nonsubstantiated untenable promises as you and your corrupt NDC political misfits dierespectedly take Ghanaians for granted to make us believe that a dog is a big cow. (Adongo 11-10-16 05:53)
   ii. Ghanaians will vote the incompetent Mahama and his dumb VP out in December (Gyamfi. 03-10-16 18:27)

C5.59 Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo Addo
   NPP is a den of hypocritical serial liars and thieving crooks. All the NPP has left is its bag of NPP evil deceptions and demented serial lies. No wonder the NPP and its clueless incompetent monumental failure flagbearer Serial Loser Akufo-Addo are slowly inching towards their third loss in December. (NOBODY 04-09-16 17:00)

C5.60 Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu
   Sick woman with a sick running mate This woman and that stammering nurse running mate who calls himself a businessman are jokers. (Boateng 10-11-16 15:53)

C5.61 Re: NPP campaign promises are for votes, not feasible - Greenstreet
   God should have taken off both legs to the waist level during the 1997 accident so he could not have sat in a wheel chair now to come out with such stupid comments. He together with the biggest fool and cockroach Kwesi Pratt (Bibi 13-11-16 13:55)

The comments above illustrate how the commenters extend the abuse to associates of a presidential candidate or members of the political party to which they belong. In C5.58, members of the NDC are described as “corrupt political misfits” and JDM’s vice president.
who was also his running mate for the 2016 presidential election is described as “dumb”. The NPP is referred to as “a den of hypocritical serial liars and thieving crooks” in C5.59. The running mate of Konadu is described as “sick” and “a joker” in C5.60. In C5.61, a key member of the CPP, Mr Kwesi Pratt is called “the biggest fool and cockroach”.

F) Attack on ethnicity

C5.62 Re: I used my first term to lay a solid foundation - Mahama
Kwasea u will need 10 more years, not another a term. Go and rare [sic] your cows in the north. (Joe 07-09-16 12:47)

C5.63 Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president - Nana Konadu
…No wonder you are an Ashanti and therefore the psche [sic] of the Ashantis which is selfishness and greed had covered you from A to Z, a very bad thing to see in a life of a person who thinks of becoming a president of a nation. (Okai 03-10-16 11:54)

C5.64 Re: I’m sad residents of Central Region support NPP, NDC’ - Nduom
NDUOM IS A DIRTY MAN Just like all central region filthy people, they shit all over the beaches & everywhere, that's why cholera is killing them all, Ghana govt. must boycott fish from central region on our markets cos they're infected & not healthy, Nduom will never be president of Ghana!!period (Nana 14-11-16 20:43)

Apart from attacking the associates of these political leaders as in C5.58 to C5.61, the commenters also attacked the ethnic groups to which some of the presidential candidates belong. The use of the statement “go and rare [sic] your cows in the north” in C5.62 connotes a stereotype of northerners in Ghana as herdsmen. In northern Ghana, where JDM hails from, one of the major occupations of the people is cattle rearing, and many households possess cattle. Thus, the commenter speculates that JDM owns some cows in his hometown and that he will be better at rearing cattle than leading the nation. In C5.63, the Ashantis (people from the Ashanti Region) are described as selfish and greedy and in C5.64, the people from the Central Region are described as filthy.
Remarks

The forms of attack described above demonstrate how online participants on GhanaWeb display open antagonism and lay bare in a negative manner their passionate feelings and strong opinions against national leaders and authority figures. The comments involve negative assessments of everything that concerns these targets (i.e. their intellectual capacity, expertise, attitude, looks, and associates). That is, the commenters indicated their objection to their non-preferred candidate by challenging their reputation and social competence. It can be deduced from C5.51, for instance, that some Ghanaians are of the view that, in addition to a president’s intellectual abilities, moral behaviour, and competence, they should be good looking or have certain physical features. The emotional characterizations and evaluations displayed in the comments may be aimed at damaging the positive public image of the targets (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995).

The discussion that follows highlights the specific negative content choices of the commenters in CGCGE16.

5.4.4 Negative Content Choices

The content of the invective used in CGCGE16 are mainly name-calling expressions, derogatory adjectives, animal terms, negative gender-specific terms, disability/disease related terms, swear/taboo words, evil related terms, and derogatory interjections. Their frequency in the corpus is displayed in Figure 5.6. Technically, categories such as animal terms and devil-related terms could be classified as name-calling expressions. However, they are classified separately because they are not explicit references such as ‘thief’, ‘liar’, and ‘cheat’ that identify a person based on their negative characteristics or behaviour. They are metaphorical, and they invoke certain senses that heighten the intended offence (Allan & Burridge, 2006). Allocating them to distinct categories in this study helps to highlight the extra sense(s) they connote.
Figure 5.6. Frequency of negative content choices in CGCGE16

Name-calling expressions

Name-calling expressions are negative labels a commenter bestows on their target(s) to attack their identity and stir up negative emotions of readers towards them. As shown in Figure 5.6, they are the most common negative content choices in CGCGE16. These expressions are typically in the form of a noun or a noun modified by adjectives, or nouns among others. Consider how these forms manifest in the comments below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Manifestation in comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun only</td>
<td>C5.65 i. When? <strong>Fool!</strong> you are a goner You being kicked out. Your time is up. Stop day dreaming. <strong>Idiot.</strong> (Passah 09-09-16 19:59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. You are a <strong>joker.</strong> And we don't want people who are not serious to lead us. (atwei 09-09-16 20:55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. <strong>THIEF!</strong> Konadu the <strong>arsonist.</strong> (Chopper 09-11-16 23:18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C5.66 i. Mr Mahama, you are a <strong>fraud</strong> and a <strong>disgrace</strong> to Ghana!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Tmkn 02-09-16 15:40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conjoined Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective(s) + Noun</th>
<th>ii. YOU ARE A <strong>LIAR, THIEF AND HYPOCRITE</strong> YOU DID NOT LAY ANY FOUNDATION (AGBEVI 06-09-16 14:47)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C5.67 i. fake lawyer, <strong>empty barrel</strong> nana fuck off (kusasi 04-09-16 17:41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. YOU ARE A <strong>BIG LIAR AND A BIG FOOL</strong> LOOK AT YOU (MAMA[USA] 11-09-16 23:45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. <strong>WORTHLESS ANIMAL</strong> WHOM ARE YOU FOOLING (VOICE 12-09-16 00:36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. nana addo is a <strong>desperate old cargo</strong>. (Kkd 13-11-16 11:55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v. <strong>Clumsy Cocaine Elixir Fool</strong> (GNASHING 30-10-16 05:20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun + Noun</td>
<td>C5.68 i. This <strong>wee smoker</strong> and an old fool should stop insulting Mahama. (Poku - USA 04-09-16 19:25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Faith in <strong>cocaine dealer</strong> certificate free aspirant indeed. (addo 04-09-16 14:37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title + Noun (Phrase)</td>
<td>C5.69 i. you've wasted 8yrs for nothing only corruptions. <strong>Mr thief</strong> give us a break (matt 11-09-16 19:23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Only fools will believe <strong>Mr. Dead Goat</strong> (Joe 11-09-16 18:47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Derogatory adjectives**

In Figure 5.6, derogatory adjectives follow name-calling expressions as the second most prevalent negative content choice in CGCGE16. Adjectives, in the words of Taboada, Trnavac, and Goddard (2017), “carry a large proportion of the evaluative load in language” (p. 64). Thus, the use of these adjectives reveals the negative evaluation of these leaders by the commenters. They manifest as predicate adjectives or attributive adjectives. The attributive adjectives considered as part of the category *derogatory adjectives*, and not as part of the category *name-calling expressions* were those that had head nouns that are not insults. For instance, ‘stupid’ in ‘stupid president’ is counted as a derogatory adjective, while ‘stupid’ in ‘stupid fool’ is not. This is because the use of the latter is meant to heighten the intended
effect of the use of ‘fool’. Whether predicative or attributive, the adjectives were either single words, superlative forms or two or more adjectives joined with a conjunction. Consider examples of derogatory adjectives in CGCGE16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Manifestation in comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predicative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5.70 i.</td>
<td>You are aged and archaic. Your ideas are promises you can't fulfil. (Kofi 02-10-16 19:03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Mahama is incompetent, visionless and useless. (LOVE 07-09-16 16:04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. Mahama has Proven to be the most Shameful Miserable Failed President Since Ghana Existed. (# KICK MAHAMA OUT! 06-09-16 12:57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. Nana Addo...you are Stale, Prehistoric, Waste, Out of date, Archaic, Scrap, Crap, Obsolete, Outmoded, Antiquated, Unfashionable, Behind times, Defunct, Antediluvian ....we are in a modern age moving on (DON 04-09-16 16:34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C5.71 i.</td>
<td>CLUELESS AKUFO-ADDO WILL LOSE AGAIN (NOBODY 04-09-16 17:00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. Corrupt and incompetent leader. your days are numbered to stay in Jubilee house.visionless President. (Adjei 09-09-16 21:17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iii. The most corrupt, inept, incompetent president in Ghanian [sic] history. (Anglia 07-09-16 05:14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>iv. Useless, clueless,visionless, corrupt and incompetent mahama get out. (UWR 12-09-16 05:27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Animal terms*

Referring to a person with an animal name means ascribing the negative characteristics of the animal to the person (Agyekum, 2004a). In many cultures, the inferences drawn by the people from the perceived negative characteristics of that particular animal are actually what determines how badly the target has been denigrated (Allan & Burridge, 2006). From Ghanaian folk view (as gathered from the informants), calling a person *ananse* ‘spider’ means the person is a trickster; *ofui* ‘hyena’ means the person is stupid or unintelligent; ‘billy
'goat' means the person has body odour, is destructive, extremely stubborn, or promiscuous; ‘frog’ means the person has bulging eyes; ‘dog’ means the person is greedy, promiscuous, quarrelsome, or a thief. Examples C.5.72 to C.5.76 are some comments that show how these animal terms are used in CGCGE16.

C.5.72  Re: Have faith in my campaign promises - Nana Addo
Nana, your best bet is president of Nima Nana Addict aka kwaku Ananse if you promise me one man one woman, I will vote for you. (Abeka 04-09-16 16:24)

C.5.73  Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
I shall supply you with super glue so your eye lid shall continue to stay open. Ofui (Oku 03-10-16 10:01)

C.5.74  Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet
The animal is also speaking Am surprised that this idiot is a presidential candidate to CPP rather than NDC and the CPP is keeping looking at him n he keep [sic] on fooling as a billigoat. (Garu 14-11-16 08:43)

C.5.75  Re: The battle is the Lord’s – Nana Addo
nana too old…if you ask me,he looks like a frog on the wall. (hard one 29-10-16 07:41)

C.5.76  Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo Addo
NDC rabies infested wild dogs who are sub human. These are the supporters of the useless NDC party. (Mensah 04-09-16 19:22)

Negative gender-specific terms

These insult types are gender-specific and are somehow related to social perceptions or the sociocultural expectations placed on a particular gender. They highlight certain negative traits associated with that gender in the Ghanaian society. Thus, upon hearing them, one is able to decipher what the gender of the target is. Some examples in CGCGE16 as shown in C.5.77 to C.5.82 are kstibɔ, otoolege, and ‘womanizer’ for males, and ‘jezebel’, ‘bimbo’, and ‘whore’ for females.
Males only

C5.77  Re: The battle is the Lord’s - Nana Addo
DO NOT MIND THIS HIPOCRATE … HOW CAN KORTIBORTOR
(UN-CIRCUMSCISE) [sic] KOKOASE MAN GO TO A JEWISH SHRINE?
(ATINGA 29-10-16 05:46)

C5.78  Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
You're blind No time to waste on a witch like you... I Pity your oodolege [sic]
Husband Rawlings (Nelson 03-10-16 17:55)

C5.79  Re: NDC will not make untenable promises - Prez Mahama
Mahama cannot simply be trusted. Every womanizer is a lier [sic]. Mark my word.
The deceit is too much. (agyeman 10-11-16 08:43)

Kortibortor (kɔtibɔtɔ) refers to an ‘uncircumcised man’ in Akan. Ghanaians value
circumcision and consider it as one of the processes a male child must go through during
childhood in order to become a man. The assumption is that any man who was not
circumcised is less of a man. Using it as an insult against Nana in example C5.77 suggests
that he is not manly enough. Oodolege (otoolege) is an Akan term which means a man who
has been stupefied by love or a man who is acting foolishly because of love. It is applied to
a man whom people believe has lost his sense of reasoning due to his love for a woman (i.e.
wife or girlfriend). In C5.78, the commenter not only attacks Konadu, but he also attacks her
husband, who is a former president of Ghana. Womanizer refers to a man who has many
female sexual partners. Calling JDM, who is a married man, a womanizer in C5.79 is to signal
that he is an adulterer.

Females only

C5.80  Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu
IN YOUR UGLY HEAD, JEZEBEL KONADU. (######## 10-11-16 16:21)

C5.81  Re: I don’t regret accepting EC job – Charlotte Osei
Listen to this bimbo trying to sound neutral. Why would a President nominate a
woman who made no mark at NCCE as EC boss. We didn't even hear her name once
whilst she was the NCCE boss. Now listen to her talking down at US because of
JDM's protection. (NoCrap 03-11-16 14:06)
In Ghana, the term ‘jezebel’ in C5.80 is mainly used by people with some background in Christianity. It refers in a derogatory sense to a woman who often wears a lot of make-up and dresses indecently. The term can also be applied to a woman who is considered as domineering over her husband, or a woman who is considered as promiscuous. Calling a woman ‘a bimbo’, as in C5.81 implies that she is beautiful but intellectually deficient, while ‘a whore’, as in C5.82, means a female prostitute.

**Disability/disease related terms**

As exemplified in C5.83 to C5.85, some commenters in CGCGE16 resorted to disability/disease related terms to indicate their disagreement and disapproval of their targets. Note that, in Ghana, it is generally considered taboo to refer to someone by their disability as seen in C5.85 (Agyekum, 2010b).

**Swear/taboo words**

Some of the commenters employed swear or taboo words to abuse their targets. While many of such commenters used ‘fuck’ with its related expressions, the others used forms such as ‘cunt’, ‘pussy’, ‘ass kisser’, ‘ass hole’, and ‘bitch’ among others. The following are examples.
Evil-related terms

Evil-related terms form another category of insults in CGCGE16. They include ‘demonic’, ‘devil’, ‘evil’, ‘witch’, and ‘lucifer’. These insults particularly indicate that the target is evil and as noted by Vienne-Guerrin (2016), they verbalize a strong rejection of them. Some examples are:

C5.89 Re: NPP campaign promises are for votes, not feasible – Greenstreet
You’re not a leader of the CPP but a planter to destroy [sic] the MOVEMENT of that Great Party. A devil and an Impersonate.
(Kobi 13-11-16 12:27)

C5.90 Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
Listen to this bitch. I hate to see her on my computer. You mother fucker greedy witch.
(Amoako 03-10-16 11:03)

C5.91 Re: I will develop the country for all to benefit - Mahama
VOTE LUCIFER MAHAMA OUT ! Ghanaians Are Suffocating Under a heavy Weight of Mahama Corrupt Acts.
(# VOTE MAHAMA OUT ! 09-09-16 19:55)

Infantilizing expressions

Expressions categorized as infantilizing expressions in CGCGE16 are those that challenge the status of a target as an adult because of their speech or deeds. With such expressions, the
commenters directly or indirectly refer to or represent known adults as children. This form of portrayal is considered as an insult among Ghanaians because it belittles or degrades the target (see Agyekum, 2010b; Ofori, 2017). For example:

C5.92  Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama

   Stupid the most useless president in the history of Ghana John mahama vote him out.
   he speaks like 6-month child. (Ice cool 11-09-16 22:34)

C5.93  Re: One district, one factory policy bogus - Greenstreet

   INITIALLY I THOUGHT THIS GREENSTREET BOY WAS SENSIBLE BUT
   UNFORTUNATELY HE HAS EXHIBITED FOOLISHNESS AND UTTER
   STUPIDITY. (TOM 11-11-16 20:04)

C5.94  Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu

   Haba what an infantile thinking. You mentioned a school built at dormaa yet you
   say you can’t see anything. (Sam 06-10-16 02:16)

C5.95  Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet

   You are not ready for ma vote You are not serious masa, tell us what you can do
   and stop the childish talk (joe 13-11-16 19:13)

The use of ‘6-month child’, ‘boy’, ‘infantile’ and ‘childish’ in the context of the examples above shows how the commenters perceive their targets. The commenters insinuate that the viewpoints of their targets run converse to what society expects of them as matured people. These examples validate the findings of Ofori (2017) that during political interactions in Ghana, citizens infantilize the people in authority.

*Derogatory interjections*

Figure 5.6 demonstrates that the category, ‘derogatory interjections’ is the least occurring negative content choice in CGCGE16. The infrequency in the corpus is not unexpected because interjections are not commonly found in text. These linguistic forms index elements in the extralinguistic context and usually, without the appropriate discourse, they cannot be fully interpreted (Ameka, 2006). In addition to the most common interjections in CGCGE16, tweaa and apuu which are discussed in Chapter 6, other derogatory interjections in the corpus are:
❖ ‘shame onto you’ – implies that the target should feel ashamed of what they are doing or saying.

C5.96 Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet
Shame onto you kwasea Greenstreet. Are you looking for power or what? …
(Bibi 13-11-16 14:58)

❖ ‘shut up’ – often said to interrupt a speaker and to command them to stop talking.

C5.97 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election
Oh shut up useless woman (Vida 03-11-16 15:40)

❖ ‘mtcheew’ - onomatopoeic and imitates the sound of sucking one’s teeth to express annoyance at a target’s behaviour.

C5.98 Re: Nana Konadu blasts Mahama over NDC's advert
Mchewwww.... Grandma Nana go and perform your grandma duties.
(Obaasima 05-12-16 11:00)

Remarks

In this section, the various contents of the invective used in CGCGE16 to discredit the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner involved in the 2016 general election in Ghana were identified and discussed. Insult types such as ‘fool’, ‘liar’, ‘thief’, ‘hypocrite’, ‘wee smoker’, ‘bimbo’, ‘womanizer’, ‘bitch’, ‘incompetent’, ‘visionless’, ‘corrupt’, and ‘blind’ were employed to perform certain sociocultural communicative functions. These functions include drawing the reader’s attention to some (perceived) wrongdoings the target has engaged in, protesting against the target and/or signalling strong disapproval of them (Yankah, 1998; Agyekum, 2010b; Kampf, 2015). Regardless of these functions, using such language forms in public settings is one of the morally unjustifiable and unacceptable communicative behaviours among Ghanaians. It violates canonical cultural values, and anyone who engages in this behaviour may be referred to as one who is “uncivilized” or “uncultured” (Asante & Ma, 2015). The reason is that the users (in the context of this study, the commenters) are well aware of the potential negative impact of vilifying the targets with the abovementioned insult types on GhanaWeb, which is a public platform. The commenters wish to achieve such an effect, as they know that the negative impact is not dependent on the veracity of the insult.
5.5 RHETORICAL AND GRAPHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES

This section analyzes how the commenters in CGCGE16 employ certain mechanisms to express meaning and to convey important social and relational information. Kalman and Gargle (2014) term such mechanisms “computer-mediated communication (CMC) cues” (p. 187). They explain that the information that CMC cues convey is often not obtained from the lexical or literal meaning of the words that make up a comment, and their interpretation is generally dependent on context.

5.5.1 Rhetorical Techniques

The rhetorical techniques explored here are ‘code-switching’, ‘coded messages’, ‘rhetorical questions’, and ‘repetition and parallelism’.

Code-switching

The main language of communication on GhanaWeb is English, but as previously mentioned, some commenters switch between English and Ghanaian languages to convey their messages. Employing this technique online may on the one hand isolate the non-Ghanaian readership of GhanaWeb or readers who do not understand the local language. It may on the other hand be the commenters’ way of getting their messages across to the authority figures and/or their associates in a manner they can relate with. The common phenomenon in CGCGE16 is that these commenters use insulting expressions from Ghanaian languages in their English comments. Apart from the obvious reason that the commenter is displaying his bilingual or multilingual identity, the analysis shows that code-switching was employed in CGCGE16 to achieve three purposes.

The first purpose is to lay emphasis on a particular insult and at the same time, avoid being monotonous.

C5.99 Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo Addo
mahama is a thief, ballawo, ahwi, corrupt, ashawo, womanizer, incompetent, dead goat, failure, atopahene, cheater, wife snatcher, deceiver, gold digger, bribe taker, fords taker, adulterer, fornicate, gay, mastervator, stealer, what else.
(Ebenezer 04-09-16 18:57)
In example C5.100, **fool** and **kwasea** are the words for ‘thief’ in Hausa and Akan respectively, and in C5.100, **kwasea** in Akan is translated as ‘fool’. Therefore, it can be said that the commenters in the individual instances have repeated ‘thief’ and ‘fool’, but in different languages.

The second purpose of the switch is to avoid losing some meaning content of the expressions the commenters want to use through translation. For example:

**C5.101** Re: Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama

MAHAMA IS THE MOST DISGRACEFUL PRESIDENT GHANA EVER HAD. AFTER HE AND HIS BROTHER IBRAHIM AND THE NDC STEALING BRIGADE **CHOP GHANA MONEY NYAFU NYAFU** FOR 8 YEARS THEY WANT 4 MORE YEARS TO MAKE IT 12 YEARS OF NDC PUNISHMENT FOR GHANA PEOPLE. (Seidu 02-09-16 21:04)

**C5.102** Re: December polls: I’m God’s favourite – JOY

no campaign message just nonsense **apuuuu** (apuuuu 18-10-16 17:51)

**C5.103** Re: I’ve learnt to handle attacks with grace - Charlotte Osei

sex for job? **Tweaaa** (Appiah 03-11-16 20:32)

The bolded expressions in C5.101 to C5.103 do not have precise equivalents in English, and so any attempt at translating them will make them lose some meaning content. **Chop money nyafu nyafu** in C5.101 is an expression in Ghanaian Pidgin English which can be translated as incessant spending with the implication that the spender is greedy; **apuu** and **tweaa**, in C5.102 and C5.103, respectively, are Akan-specific interjections. Through code-switching, the actual meaning of these expressions is preserved, and commenters can convey their message with minimal linguistic forms.

The third purpose of switching code is to avoid minimizing or mitigating the intended impact of an insult. For instance:
C5.104 Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo-Addo
A foolish wee smoker. Where is your law certificate? Go clean your mucus smelling nose. One kenkey, one fish. Yaka gbomo. Still living in his father's stolen properties at age 73 (Prince 04-09-16 17:14)

C5.105 Re: ‘Disastrous’ Mahama must be kicked out - Akufo Addo
***MIND YOUR WORDS KAPUEPUE***** (Don 04-09-16 16:34)
The expressions in both examples are in Ga. Yaka gbomo (Yaka gbɔmɔ) translates as a ‘worthless person’ and kapuepue translates as a ‘short person’. Arguably, as insults, these expressions have more value in Ga than in English. That is, a Ga speaker would regard them as more derogatory than their English equivalents. The assumption, therefore, is that when the commenter switches code and use these expressions in the original language, the target(s) can feel the intended effect in an unmitigated manner.

*Coded messages*
Some of the commenters in CGCGE16 adopted what this study describes as “a more Ghanaian way” of using invective when it is deemed necessary in public settings. That is, they avoided the use of explicitly derogatory expressions and used expressions that can only be understood as offensive through shared sociocultural background knowledge or contextual familiarity. In this study, such expressions are referred to as “coded messages”. With these expressions, the commenters can attack their targets in such a subtle way that even if GhanaWeb were to be a moderated online platform, such comments would not have been deleted (see Erjavec & Kovačič, 2013). Some examples are:

C5.106 Re: NDC has made us slaves in our own country – Greenstreet
I saw this guy as a fine gentleman and with some grey matter in his head but it is turning out to be cotton wool. (Atoa 11-11-16 13:40:16)

C5.107 Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama:
Mahama go to hell with your stupid and 419 promises (Otanii ba 11-09-16 17:37)

C5.108 Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama
What about sept to dec 2016 Defer your hunger for job 2017. Kwaku ananse stories (Kofi 11-09-16 22:41)
The commenter in C5.106 is implying that his target, Greenstreet, is behaving foolishly. ‘Grey matter’ as used in this example means grey hair which is a symbol of wisdom in many African cultures including Ghana (see Sulamoyo, 2010). Thus, a person with grey hair is expected to exhibit wisdom and approach every situation with tact. If someone with grey hair appears as one not to meet this expectation, their grey hair is considered to be cotton wool, a very light substance. That is, they lack the capability to handle critical and significant issues. The commenter’s choice of that expression is signalling their disappointment in Greenstreet.

The number, 419, as used in C5.107 means fraudulent. It is originally a Nigerian slang but has been borrowed into Ghanaian English. According to Warner (2011: 742), 419 refers to “advanced-fee fraud”, a scam related to credit-card fraud that was common in Nigeria in the 1980s and 1990s. As for Kwéku Ananse stories in C5.108, these represent trickster tales in Akan oral narratives. The main character, known as Kwéku Ananse, is often despised because in the words of Tekpetey (2006) “he develops a philosophy of the acquisitive way of life through self-reliance and trickery, both as compensation and survival technique” (p. 77). The use of Kwéku Ananse stories in C5.108 is, therefore, a concise but an indirect way of saying that JDM’s promise that “NYEP²⁷ will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017” is fake and should be disregarded.

Considering the nature of the expressions used in comments C5.106 to C5.108, it is possible that readers who do not have a similar sociocultural background as Ghanaians would not get the intended message. Regardless of this drawback, commenters who use coded messages can escape sociocultural sanctions (Obeng, 2003).

Rhetorical questions
Rhetorical questions are questions that are asked not because the speaker wants an answer but because the speaker wants to achieve a purpose. They involve an emotional dimension and seek to affirm or deny a point strongly (Taboada et al., 2017). According to Špago (2016: 103), the message that rhetorical questions convey would not be as “memorable” and as “persuasive” if they were expressed as straightforward statements. Consider the following.

²⁷ NYEP is an abbreviation for National Youth Employment Programme.
Clearly, the commenters’ intention is not to obtain the information the question asks. In C5.109 and C5.110, the commenters, through their questions, are expressing their disagreement with what Nduom and JDM said, respectively. In C5.111, the commenter is indirectly saying, ‘Greenstreet is not normal’. The present study subscribes to Špago’s (2016) observation that rhetorical questions can be powerful weapons in political interactions. In CGCGE16, by asking rhetorical questions, the commenters not only “discredit” a presidential candidate, they are also able to invite readers to form their own negative judgments about the candidate.

Repetition and parallelism

Repetition is generally regarded as a rhetorical technique that is used to draw attention to a particular linguistic form for emphasis and other effects (Tannen, 2007). The linguistic form may be words, as in C5.112 and C5.113, or phrases, as in C5.114 and C5.115, or parts of a sentence with the same or similar grammatical pattern, as in C5.116. The type of repetition in C5.116 is known as parallelism (Mueller, 2017).

C5.112 Re: Election 2016: I can’t be influenced – EC boss
liar liar liar u dare not dont subvert the will of ghanains (Anna 03-11-16 20:12)

C5.113 Re: Retire Mahama, NDC MPs – Nduom
BLOODY JOKER J.O.K.E.R J.O.K.E.R, YOUR PARTY CANNOT EVEN ON SEAT IN PARLIAMENT (koag 12-11-16 08:58)

C5.114 Re: Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama
It is not shock of awe that our idiot useless president vomit nonsense. It is a disgrace and humiliation for our useless president John Dramani Mahama to say everything
he do he did it for Ghanaians. Anyway he has spoken the truth that all every decision and debt he has accumulated was done for Ghanaians. Currently president John Dramani Mahama has borrowed GHC 150 billion and achieve nothing for Ghanaians. Our **useless president** John Dramani Mahama dole $250 million to AMERI without a sweat for Ghanaians and dole $1 million to Momodu Dele without a sweat for Ghanaians.

(Mr Bond 02-09-16 23:37)

C5.115 Re: I will develop the country for all to benefit – Mahama

The NPP allowed a clueless and **monumental failure Serial Loser** Akufo-Addo to hijack it and wreck it with his cluelessness and incompetence, leaving the NPP confused and desperate. No the NPP, in an act of desperation, is left to spew nothing but serial lies and demented deceptions while it’s clueless Akufo-Addo runs around Ghana with his hallucinatory promises to build a factory in each district and a dam in every village. Even the Alan Kyeremanten camp within the NPP has labeled **clueless Serial Loser** Akufo-Addo as “incompetent and a **monumental failure**”. The Ghanaian electorate will not elect NPP flag bearer Akufo-Addo whose own NPP officials and members have labeled him as incompetent and a **monumental failure**. NPP’s **clueless Serial Loser** Akufo-Addo is a failed politician who will once again be defeated by President Mahama and the NDC in December.

(NOBODY 11-09-16 16:17)

C5.116 Re: Try the NPP market – Akufo-Addo

**You’re too** old. **You’re too** short. **You’re too** stupid. **You’re too** ugly. **You’re too** myopic. **You’re too** all die be die. **You’re too** incompetent. **You’re too** violence minded. (Nature 01-09-16 14:07)

The repetition of the insults in examples C5.112 to C5.116 makes the commenters’ characterization of their target more vigorous and emphatic because they can get the repeated words or phrases fixed in the minds of readers (Vickers, 1994). Also, the strategy of repetition can enhance belief and lead to the conviction of readers (Koch & Zerback, 2013). Through the technique of parallelism, the commenter in C5.116 draws attention to some salient points ‘old’, ‘short’, ‘ugly’, ‘myopic’, ‘all die be die’, ‘incompetent’ and ‘violence minded’. As Jones and Peccei (2004) put it, using parallel patterns is the best way to “draw attention to a particular part of a message and make it stand out” (p. 51).

Employing parallelism to attack Nana’s physical appearance, competence, character, and general self-concept makes the negative evaluation memorable and easier to process.
(Chory-Assad, 2004). In potentially conflictive interactions such as political interactions, the combative effect of repetition and parallelism can be better understood from this statement: “reiteration … makes a deep impression upon the hearer and inflicts a major wound upon the opposition – as if a weapon should repeatedly pierce the same part of the body” (Vickers, 1994, p. 92).

5.5.2 Graphological Techniques

The graphological techniques, ‘word lengthening’, ‘capitalization’, and ‘multiple question marks and exclamation marks’, are described below.

Word lengthening/elongation

The technique of repeating the letters in a word to the point where it (visually) appears as if the word has been “stretched” is known as word lengthening or word elongation. This CMC cue can be viewed as a written emulation of an elongated phoneme that can be articulated in oral speech (Kalman & Gergle, 2010, 2014; Darics, 2013). In the cases of words that express emotions/feelings such as insults, word lengthening is not applied arbitrarily but generally, suggests an emphasis on the emotion/feeling a speaker wants to express, be it disappointment, frustration, anger, contempt, or disgust (Brody & Diakopoulos, 2011). The level of the stretch can be related to the intensity of the emotion/feeling being displayed. The examples below illustrate how ‘nonsense’, ‘failure’, aboa ‘animal/beast’, kwasea ‘oaf/fool’ and the Akan-specific interjection, apuu were elongated in CGCCGE16.

C5.117 Re: I used my first term to lay a solid foundation – Mahama
Nooooooooooooooooookses Faaaaaaaaaailure
(Anglia 06-09-16 13:20)

C5.118 Re: Trump’s victory has given me more vim – Edward Mahama
YOU MUST BE A FOOL LIKE HIM!!! ABOAAAAAA COPY
(JJ 10-11-16 20:03)

C5.119 Re: 2016 polls: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet
Kwasiaaaaa party Say big NO to violent/ Acid bath party (Npp)
(Metez 14-11-16 12:25)
C5.120 Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Konadu

Apppaaaaa … John Mahama will win
(Gbagbladza 10-11-16 15:57)

Capitalization
This cue is the use of capital letters to emphasize a word or a string of words just as pitch and/or loudness does in oral speech. It may be considered as the equivalent of prosodic marking (Vandergriff, 2013). In CGCGGE16, capitalization is applied in various ways. As can be seen, capital letters are used for the entire message in C5.121. In C5.122, they are used for a string of words that form a part of the comment and in C5.123, only the insult ATOPAHENE ‘sex king’ is in capital letters. The last example differs slightly. It is only the initial letters of the significant words of the commenter’s message arecapitalized, i.e. ‘You’, ‘Ignorant’, and ‘President’.

C5.121 Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Nana Konadu
YOU DONT HAVE TO SEE IT, BITCH. GHANAIANS CAN SEE AND LIVING IT. (Ma'am 03-10-16 11:42)

C5.122 Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama
WHAT A JOKE OF A PRESIDENT This man is not serious at all!
(Nanfuri 11-09-16 17:40)

C5.123 Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama
I am "pissed" because this useless ATOPAHENE Present is insulting our intelligence. (SARPONG 11-09-16 19:21)

C5.124 Re: December polls: I’m God’s favourite – JOY
You sound too Ignorant to be President
(Wiafe 18-10-16 15:40)

In C5.122 to C5.124, it appears that the commenters strategically use both uppercase letters and lowercase letters. The uppercase letters draw the reader’s attention to what may be considered as the highlights or core of their message, that is, the negative characterization of the target.
Multiple question marks and exclamation marks

The repetition of terminal punctuation marks, though unconventional in formal texts, is another way of accentuating emotions in online interactions (Angouri & Tseliga, 2010). Question marks and exclamation marks are commonly used for this purpose in CGCGE16. Some comments use multiple question marks or multiple exclamation marks only, as shown in C5.125 and C5.126. Others have both in different parts of the comments, as in C5.127, or in succession, as in C5.128.

C5.125 Re: Try the NPP market – Akufo-Addo
When you kept on reducing the voters, how can you come to power?????. Your self know it too well that you can't win ???? again. (Nature 01-09-16 14:07)

C5.126 Re: Don't believe fake promises - Nduom
THINK WELL wae!!!!!! (kaketonti 05-09-16 11:36)

C5.127 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election results – Charlotte Osei
Listen to the Nigerian Whore ??? What's is taken you too long to allow the other candidates to contest. Is that free and fair when candidates can't campaign!!! Shut the fuck up and resign before you trigger our country into flames. (CHN 03-11-16 15:08)

C5.128 Re: I’m ready to beg for the presidency – Akufo-Addo
r u really correct,????!!! u r insane right??? (C-CAB 06-09-16 06:32)

Remarks

This section has illustrated how rhetorical and graphological techniques in CGCGE16 were used to communicate social, relational, or affective information that cannot be obtained from the lexical or literal meaning of the words. It was shown that the commenters drew on their linguistic repertoire as bilinguals/multilinguals for different interactional goals, not simply to display the fact that they speak two or more languages. It appears that the primary goal is consistent with some observations in the code-switching literature that bilinguals or multilinguals often switch between languages to use highly emotive expressions towards others in a more precise and effective way.

The negative feelings expressed with language forms in their original language are more likely to have a greater impact on those with whom the commenter shares the same
linguistic background. Also, ‘coded messages’ and ‘rhetorical questions’ served as indirect means through which commenters could attack and state their negative evaluations of a target. Generally, the other online participants with the same or similar sociocultural knowledge can make the appropriate deductions, yet the commenter can claim, “that is not what I meant” (for a coded message) or “I only asked a question” (for a rhetorical question).

The commenters also employed ‘repetition and parallelism’, ‘word lengthening’, ‘capitalization’, and ‘multiple question marks and exclamation marks’ to signal emphasis or the intensity of their emotions or feelings towards their targets. Using these linguistic resources compensated for the lack of prosodic and/or paralinguistic features that enhance speech during face-to-face communication on a text-only online platform such as GhanaWeb. Overall, it can be said that these CMC cues added “character and richness” to the comments in CGCGE16, and “allow[ed] the fine-tuning and personalization of the message” being conveyed by the commenters (Kalman & Gergle, 2014, p. 193).

5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter examined the discourse pattern on GhanaWeb and the invective and insults deployed against the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner of the 2016 general election. The result of the quantitative survey is obviously not a comprehensive or conclusive one, especially when one considers the volume of comments that are posted daily on the various news reports published on GhanaWeb. Notwithstanding, it can be regarded as an initial step towards identifying the patterns of commentary on the platform, specifically related to news reports on socio-political issues of national interest.

It was identified that the commenters attacked the intellectual abilities, moral behaviour, competence, physical characteristics, and the associates of their targets. The content of these attacks were mainly name-calling expressions, derogatory adjectives, animal terms, negative gender-specific terms, disability/disease related terms, swear/taboo words, infantilizing expressions, evil related terms, and derogatory interjections. The discussion showed that although the insulting expressions in the corpus are in English, Akan, Ga, Ewe, Hausa, and GhPE, the ones with a high frequency of occurrence were in English and Akan.
The level at which abusive language is used during citizen participation in Ghanaian politics, as demonstrated in this chapter, is not necessarily different from what happens in other countries. In the United States of America for instance, various studies have observed that incivility in political interactions between citizens has become more “tense”, and for many Americans, the current state of political discourse is a subject of concern (Boatright, Shaffer, Young, & Sobieraj, 2019). This behaviour can be attributed to the physical anonymity which generally leads to lesser inhibition in online interactions.

However, this study is inclined to attribute it to the perceived goal of the commenters, which may be to make the targets less appealing to other participants on the platform, who are a part of the electorate. As stated above, presently, the practice of invective and insults use in citizen participation appears to be a global phenomenon, nevertheless this study has shown that the choice of words for this practice may not be the same across the nations. It was also observed that the most common insult type used among Americans is idiot, but among Ghanaians, it is fool.

The use of abusive language on GhanaWeb can be likened to the traditional way of people criticizing and insulting their leaders openly during the Kundum, Apɔɔ, and Hogbetsotso festivals. As mentioned in Chapter 2, verbal abuses are essential parts of political criticism during these festivals where traditional rulers, government officials and political leaders are insulted and reprimanded by ordinary citizens. It is done in such a way that those regarded as socially higher or social superiors can hear the invective and insults the people hurl at them because it is a communicative strategy aimed at helping to reform and moralize them. However, unlike this traditional practice, (1) the communicative behaviour on GhanaWeb is not moderated or regulated and so what is seen on the website is a constant breach of the communicative norms of Ghanaians; (2) there is no reconciliation mechanisms between the users of the abusive language and their targets; (3) the fact that the verbal attack on these authority figures on an online platform can be viewed by a large audience both nationally and internationally augments the effect.
CHAPTER SIX

SEMANTICS OF CULTURE-SPECIFIC INSULTING EXPRESSIONS IN CGCGE16: AN NSM ANALYSIS

Studies have shown that, generally, the meaning of culture-specific terms, such as the Akan insult types in Table 5.3, do not directly match the meaning of their English translations as they differ in certain respects, which are more congruent with the values of the people of that particular culture. Gyekye (1996: 78), for instance, states that although kwasea is usually translated as ‘fool’, kwasea connotes more than just a fool. The meaning of kwasea in Akan goes beyond one who is not wise and refers to “one who is considered to be “irresponsible”, “worthless”, “good-for-nothing”, and “contemptible” (Gyekye, 1996, p. 78). Accordingly, Mensa-Bonsu (2001) argues that any translation of kwasea as ‘fool’ is a loose translation. The implication of simply glossing culture-specific insults, such as kwasea, into their nearest English equivalents is that they cannot reflect to cultural outsiders what they mean to cultural insiders. That is, their cultural significance and social impact remain opaque to cultural outsiders. There is, thus, a need to capture the semantic content of such terms.

This chapter shows how precisely pinning down the semantics of culture-specific terms can be used to illuminate pragmatic concerns such as political communication and the impact of social hierarchies on communication. The semantic explication method is used to capture the meaning of five common Akan insulting expressions and to highlight their social impact. Section 6.1 examines the explications of three name-calling terms; kwasea ‘oaf/fool’, aboa ‘animal/beast’ and gyimii ‘retard/stupid person’. Section 6.2 discusses the explications of two derogatory interjections; tweaa and apuu. Section 6.3 presents the concluding remarks.
6.1 NSM ANALYSIS OF KWASEA, ABOA AND GYIMII

Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that kwasea ‘oaf/fool’, aboa ‘animal/beast’, and gyimii ‘retard/stupid person’ are common Akan insults used among Ghanaians. Thus, their high frequency of occurrence as compared to other Ghanaian language insults in CGCGE16 would not be considered as unexpected or shocking by anyone who is familiar with the use of invective and insults among Ghanaians. They are part of the category of insults that Sekyi-Baidoo (2009) describes as “common everyday insults” used to evaluate the “prudence of behaviour” (p. 13). About four decades ago, Warren (1975) observed that among the many abusive phrases used by Akans, the two most common are kwasea ‘fool’ and aboa ‘animal’ (p. 18).

A relatively recent occurrence that arguably confirms how common these insults are among Ghanaians, particularly in political deliberations, can be seen in a news report published on GhanaWeb on September 20, 2013. It was noted that during a Presidential Thanksgiving Service, the president at the time, John Dramani Mahama, appealed to citizens to engage in constructive criticisms and said:

“If you want to criticize the president, do so, but it makes it easier for the president to ingest your criticism if you don’t say the president is ‘aboa’ or ‘kwasia’ meaning animal or fool. Criticize politely and civilly”28 (emphasis added).

It can be said that the statement, “don’t say the president is aboa or kwasia” is synonymous to “don’t insult the president”. The president’s choice of words, however, is to make his comment sound more practical to his audience, given that these insult types are ubiquitous in the Ghanaian society. Having shown how prominent these terms of abuse in Ghanaian sociocultural and socio-political discourses, consider below how they manifest in speech.

Generally, name-calling terms in Akan are in two forms: explicitly predicative expressions and appellative expressions. In the present study, an explicitly predicative expression is identified as having the structure “PRO/N + be + term” while an appellative expression is identified as “term only”. The “PRO/N + be + term” is made up of a pronoun (as in O6.1a) or a noun (as in O6.4), the verb ‘to be’ (which in this context is ye in Akan) and

---

28 https://www.ghanaweb.com/ghanahomepage/newsarchive/stop-calling-me-a-fool-Mahama-286426
the name-calling term. The “term only” is made up of the name-calling term only. Kwasea and gyimii, for instance, are typically regarded as insults in both forms:

O6.1a ɔ-ye kwasea
3SG-be term
‘He/she is an oaf/fool.’

O6.1b kwasea
term
‘oaf/fool’

O6.2a ɔ-ye gyimii
3SG-be term
‘He/She is a retard/stupid person.’

O6.2b gyimii
term
‘retard/stupid person’

Aboa, unlike kwasea and gyimii, is typically regarded as an insult in the “PRO/N + be + term” form only. A speaker who utters the words kwasea or gyimii, even without contextual information, is most certainly directing an insult at someone; on the other hand, when a speaker says aboa, again without any contextual information, one cannot conclude once and for all that the intended referent is a human being. To show that the intended referent is a human being, the speaker can direct it at someone, as in O6.3 or mention the target’s name, as in O6.4.

O6.3 wo-ye aboa
2SG-be term
‘you are an animal/beast.’

O6.4 Vija ye aboa
Vija be term
‘Vija is an animal/beast.’

Bearing these structures in mind, the respective meanings of kwasea and gyimii are captured in the subsections that follow in two different explications, whereas the meaning of aboa is captured in a single explication.
6.1.1 Kwasea ‘oaf/fool’

Gyekye (1996) notes that kwasea is a highly abusive word in the Akan culture, meaning more than what the English word ‘fool’ conveys. The informants from Kumasi emphasized that it is a taboo for a woman to refer to a man as kwasea, irrespective of his misbehaviour. The rule is yense barima kwasea ‘a man is not referred to as kwasea’. Brokensha (2008) confirms this view as he states that “amongst the Ashanti, the death penalty was formerly exacted if a woman called a man kwasea” (p. 146). One of the informants narrated the following story about a man who divorced his wife because she insulted him as kwasea.

Not long ago, there was a couple in Bantama (a town in the Ashanti Region) who had an argument. While they were exchanging words, the woman said woyɛ kwasea pa ‘you are a fool indeed’. Immediately, the husband went silent, and the next thing he did was to visit the wife’s family to seek a divorce. No amount of pleading from the wife or her family saved the situation.

The story substantiates the point that socioculturally, among the Akans, it is unacceptable and unpardonable for a man to be referred to as kwasea by a woman.

Kwasea is commonly glossed as ‘fool’ (see Boni, 2002; Agyekum, 2009; Kpogo & Abrefa, 2017). Kwasea, according to Gyekye (1996), is anyone who “refuses to bear his share of social responsibility and thus behaves antisocially, unfairly, and unethically” (p. 78). Consider how the following Akan maxims depict who kwasea is:

O6.5 se anene ye kwasea a anka enwera a egu ne kom mu no aye fi
‘If the pied crow had been kwasea, it would have dirtied the white collar around its neck.’ (It is only a fool that destroys its source of pride)
(Cole & Ross, 1977/2010, p. 166)

O6.6 Kwasea na ɔse, ‘ye de me yonko, yênne me’
‘It is a fool that says, ‘my neighbour is the butt of the attack, not me.’
(A foolish person is oblivious to the concerns of others) (Coetzee & Roux, 2004, p. 342)

O6.7 Kwasea mantam odwan a, ṣnte: wu na awuo.
“If the fool ties a sheep, it cannot free itself: its only choice is to die.”
(A foolish person’s excess of zeal has disastrous results.) (Appiah et al., 2001, p. 689)

All three expressions indicate that a kwasea is someone who is really contemptible. In O6.5, the white collar around the pied crow’s neck is considered among the Akans as a symbol of
purity. It serves as a source of pride to the bird as it makes the bird worthy of admiration. Thus, it would be unwise and irresponsible on the part of the bird to make the collar dirty and lose its admirers. Example O6.6 focuses on the value placed on collectivism rather than individualism in the Akan community. Anyone who refuses to contribute to this sense of communal belonging is seen as one who is unfit to be a part of the community. It can be seen in O6.7 that the *kwasea* is a good-for-nothing whose endeavours yield no positive result.

Belgrave and Allison (2014) agree with Gyekye (1996) that in traditional and even contemporary Akan communities in Ghana, a man is regarded as *kwasea* if he reaches the age at which he is expected to marry but does not make any attempt to do so. He is not only considered irresponsible and unwise but as one who falls short of the ideals and expectations of being a man. The label *kwasea* is normally applicable when a person behaves foolishly in a situation under certain circumstances. Thus, everybody can be a *kwasea* at a point in time (K. Agyekum, personal communication, July 31, 2018).

Misbehaviours that can cause someone to be called *kwasea* include dressing indecently, spitting in public for no reason, using the wrong address term for someone, using non-verbal forms of communication inappropriately, refusing to greet (especially an elderly person) and not greeting in the right manner. Among the Akans, in any gathering (be it a funeral, marriage or naming ceremony), greeting is normally done with a handshake. A person who wants to greet others must move from right to left (i.e. in a clockwise manner) and not the other way around. If this norm is not observed, the person can be called *kwasea* (K. Agyekum, personal communication, July 31, 2018). Calling someone *kwasea* shows a strong disapproval of that individual’s behaviour or action (Sekyi-Baidoo 2009).

Explication [6.1] is proposed for *kwasea*:

[E 6.1] *Kwasea* ‘oaf/fool’

(a) this someone can think well, this someone can know how to do/say things well
(b) at the same time, it is often like this:
   - when this someone wants to do something, this someone does not do/say it well
(c) people often feel something bad because of this
(d) it is very bad if someone is like this

Component (a) of [E 6.1] shows that someone who is referred to as a *kwasea* does not lack cognitive abilities, unlike *fools* in English. This is evident in the maxim *kwasea mpo nyansa*
**wo ne trimu**, which literally means ‘even the *kwasea* has wisdom in his head’. However, a *kwasea* generally does not make use of the *nyansa* ‘wisdom’ that they have and fail, as per component (b), to apply the cognitive abilities they do have. Component (c) describes the effect of the *kwasea*’s failure to behave as is expected of someone who has the ability to act in line with social expectations.

Since it is only natural that when someone wants to do or say something, they would try to do or say it in a way that conforms to such expectations, people tend to react negatively. Not only do they react negatively: irrespective of current circumstances, they judge anyone who, in spite of their cognitive abilities, does not conform to expectation, in the harshest possible terms. The Akan proverb *wo ne kwasea goru a, ne kwasea san wo* ‘if you play with a fool, their folly rubs off on you’ implies that people should desist from associating with a *kwasea* or avoid a *kwasea*’s company.

Consider now the explication of the “PRO/N + be + term” form of the insult:

**[E 6.2]**  *Woye kwasea* ‘you are an oaf/fool’

(a) I know: you did something very bad
(b) I think something very bad about you because of it
   at the same time, I feel something bad towards you
(c) I want to say something very bad to you now
(d) I say this word: *kwasea*
(e) I say this word to you because I want you to feel something
   very bad at this moment

Component (a) of [E 6.2] shows that in using *woye kwasea* ‘you are *kwasea*’, speakers are aware of their target’s wrongdoing (either in deed or in speech). Component (b) captures the idea that reactions to bad behaviour exhibited by the target involve, firstly, a bad thought about the target and, secondly, a bad feeling directed to the target. Subsequently, as reflected in component (c), speakers feel the urge to immediately express their thoughts and feelings indicating their disapproval. Component (d) shows a specific insult type is used in order to satisfy this urge. The goal for using *kwasea*, as expressed in component (e), is to hurt the feelings of the target.

The following are some examples that illustrate the use of *kwasea* in CGCGE16:
Background [6.1]
It was reported that H. E. John Dramani Mahama (the president at the time who was seeking a second term during the 2016 elections) stated in one of his campaign messages that his ambition is to develop the country to a standard which would be of greater benefit to present and future generations. Due to this, the government has initiated and implemented lots of projects in areas such as health, education, and security. Therefore, there is a need for him to be retained in office to complete the developmental projects. This news report was published on GhanaWeb with the headline, “I will develop the country for all to benefit – Mahama”.

Comments

C6.1 President who goes to facebook to admire the number of "likes” very silly and petty. Graduates have no jobs and corruption is every where [sic] and the President is saying "i will develop" cheek of it and your development. Kwasia (KOO 09-09-16 20:20)

C6.2 SHUT UP KWASEAMPANI [Kwaseapanyin] Useless and clueless idiot president (Otani ba 09-09-16 19:54)

In Example C6.1, it is evident that before the commenter refers to the president as kwasea, they provide some form of background that justifies the use of the term. The president is described as “very silly and petty” because, in the commenter’s opinion, the president engages in things that run converse to his mandate as the leader of the nation. The expression of contempt for the president is a reaction to his statement in the future tense, “I will develop”, which is not anticipated from a presidential candidate who is already president. The commenter claims that instead of dealing with the issue of corruption and creating job opportunities for the citizens, the president spends time appreciating the number of “likes” his comments and photos obtain on Facebook.

The term kwaseapanyin, as in C6.2, is a combination of kwasea ‘fool’ and opanyin ‘elder’ that can be translated as ‘elderly fool’. It expresses foolishness of a subject who is older than the speaker. The Akan term opanyin, just like the Ewe term ametsitsi, does not just mean an old person but it connotes much prestige, and respect for the target because elders are considered to be wise and responsible (see van der Geest (1998) for more on opanyin). According to the informants from Kumasi, kwaseapanyin ‘elderly fool’ is a severe
and more offensive variant of *kwasea*. Its use signals that the speaker acknowledges the social status of the target while at the same time declaring the target contemptible. It can, therefore, be deduced that calling the president *kwaseapanyin* and describing him as a “useless and clueless idiot” is the commenter’s way of vividly highlighting the fact that the president falls short of the ideals of his social status. Considering the above, one can conclude that both commenters’ use of *kwasea* is aimed at making readers understand that the president’s behaviour or actions are contrary to the social expectations placed on him.

Other variants of *kwasea* identified in CGCGE are found in the examples below:

| C6.3 | … You people are ungrateful and we shall see if you will call yourselves ndc when you are in opposition a year today. Nkwaseafuo (NDC IS SATANIC 03-10-16 18:40) |
| C6.4 | Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama  
Corrupt and incompetent President Useless president and useless promises. After 8 wasted years with a messed economy and high unemployment rates, you want another 4 years. For what? To steal more money? Nkwasiasem... (Eric 09-11-16 20:17) |

The plural form of *kwasea* is *nkwaseafuo*. The commenter uses *nkwaseafuo* because, as evident in the comment, they are referring to members of the NDC (i.e. National Democratic Congress) generally.

*Nkwasiasem* is a blend of *nkwaseafuo* (i.e. the plural form of *kwasea*) and *asem* ‘matter’. It can be translated as foolish behaviour, that is, the target is behaving like fools do (Ofori, 2015). In response to the president’s promise that when he is re-elected, 400,000 jobs would be provided, the commenter first describes him as “corrupt”, “incompetent”, and “useless”, and also describes the promise(s) as “useless”. This commenter further questions the president’s request for another term in office because, in their opinion, under the president’s watch, the nation has “a messed economy” with “high unemployment rates”. To them, the president’s desire for another term is a case of foolishness.
The term *kwaseabaa* ‘foolish woman’ employed in C6.5 against the electoral commissioner is a variant of *kwasea* used for females only. It is a blend of *kwasea* and *ɔbaa* ‘girl/woman’.

### 6.1.2 *Aboa* ‘animal/beast’

The generic term for all animals, including beasts, in Akan is *aboa* (Agyekum, 2004a). The plural form is *mmoa* ‘animals’. Naturally, an *aboa* has feelings and can do some things as *nipa* ‘a human being’, but lacks the ability to speak or think and also lacks the sense to distinguish between right and wrong. Goddard (2018) thoroughly explicates the English term ‘animal’ with eight components. The explication, though in English, closely corresponds to the meaning of *aboa* in Akan. In respect of the present study, only the last component, captioned “HOW PEOPLE THINK ABOUT THEM” is presented below.

people can think about creatures [m] of all these kinds like this:
“they can do many things, they can feel many things”
at the same time, people can think about them like this:
“they can’t know many things like people know many things
they can’t say something with words like people can say something with words
they can’t think like people can think, they can’t think like this about something:
‘it will be good if I do this, it will be bad if I do this’”
(Goddard, 2018, p. 548).

Akans believe that there is a distinction between *nipa* ‘human being’ and *aboa* ‘animal/beast’, because human beings have what is called *tiboa* ‘conscience/moral sense’. *Tiboa* allows a person to distinguish between what is good/right and what is bad/wrong/evil. In this regard, Gyekye (1995) maintains that among the Akans, “the comparison between man and beast is intended as a distinction between moral sense and amoral sense on the one hand and between rationality (intelligence) and irrationality (non-intelligence) on the other hand” (p. 126). *Tiboa* is acquired “through socialization”, “through habituation”, and “through moral experience”; it is not something that is necessarily “innate to man” (Gyekye, 1995, p. 143).
The idea that tiboa is acquired forms the basis for the derogatory phrase ɔmanfrani aboa ‘foreigner’s animal/beast’. This phrase can be directed at a person whose actions (e.g. stealing) contravene the social norms and values of the Akans. The expression ɔmanfrani is made up of the ɔman ‘country’, fra ‘to mix’ and ni, an Akan agentive suffix. Fretheim and Amfo (2008: 190) explain that:

In present-day Akan, the word ɔmanfrani is offensive and is used only in contexts where provocation is intended. It still has the negative connotations pertaining to someone who was originally bought as a slave from outside of the geographical domain in question, but who has acclimatized much to the dislike of some natives.

Referring to someone as an aboa belonging to an ɔmanfrani is tantamount to saying that they have behaved inappropriately, like an animal, because their parents are “alien” to the Akan culture and, thus, have not taken them through the Akan socialization processes (Fretheim & Amfo, 2008). The insult ɔmanfrani aboa extends beyond the target, embracing the target’s parents as well.

It is relevant to note that unlike in some Western households, it is uncommon to find animals with human names in Ghana. The use of a human name for pets is normally frowned upon, even when observed among expatriates. The reason, according to the informants from Kumasi, is that it is considered a form of denigration towards any person who bears that name. In the section Odds ‘n bits of sociologist Phil Bartles Akan Studies, it is noted that Akans do not recognize Homo sapiens as just another species of primates. This is echoed in the use of aboa as one of the most insulting names to call a person. It is said that when the Akwapems (an Akan ethnic group known to be excessively or exceptionally polite) want to insult someone, they say “mepa wo kyew se, woye aboa”, meaning ‘please, you are an animal/beast’.

Calling someone aboa implies that the person is not behaving like a human being. The insult form woye aboa ‘you are an animal/beast’ means the speaker has considered the negative qualities of animals and bestowed them on the target (Agyekum, 2010). Below is the explication of the insulting expression woye aboa ‘you are an animal/beast’:

[E 6.3] *Woye aboa* ‘you are an animal/beast’

(a) I know: you did something very bad  
   everyone knows this:  
   people don’t do something like this  
   other people can feel something bad because of it

(b) I think like this about you:  
   you are doing something like animals [m] do  
   other people can’t not think the same

(c) I want to say something very bad to you

(d) I say this word: *[aboa]*

(e) I say this word to you because I want you to feel something  
   very bad at this moment

The explication, [E 6.3] starts with the idea that a person referred to as *aboa* must have done something or must have engaged in acts that are considered as unacceptable among the Akans, such as theft, adultery, lying, backbiting, cheating, and betrayal (see Asante and Mazama 2009). Component (a) embodies the claim that it is common knowledge that what the target did is unacceptable and offensive. The assumption is that, at a very tender age, people have been socialized into culturally acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours, and they are expected to abide by such tenets till they die in order to have harmonious interpersonal relationships. That is why, as previously mentioned, people can be insulted as *ɔmanfrani aboa* ‘foreigner’s animal/beast’ if they do things contrary to social principles.

As reflected in component (b), once a person’s behaviour or characteristics appear to be incompatible with those of other human beings in the society, generally speaking, the likely interpretation based on sociocultural knowledge is that this person is exhibiting the characteristics of an animal (Agyekum, 2004a; Ofori, 2017). As shown in the third line of component (b), this interpretation cannot be disputed by others. The purpose of saying *woye aboa* ‘you are an animal/beast’, as component (e) depicts, is to hurt the feelings of the target.

Consider the following incident which took place at Seikwa in the Bono Region of Ghana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Regional Archives Sunyani: WDC I/17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plaintiff:</td>
<td>Akosua Korome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defendant:</td>
<td>Kwabena Broni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case:</td>
<td>Plaintiff asserts that defendant’s statement “<em>woye oboofo dadew fa, aboa ba</em>” (You are half slave horn and a <em>daughter of an animal/beast</em>) exposed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

171
plaintiff to ridicule or contempt and therefore claimed £5 damages from defendant. Defendant pleaded guilty.

Judgement: £1.11 shillings damages awarded with costs assessed at £2.5 shillings to plaintiff.

(cf. Perbi, 2007, p. 22, emphasis added)

The scenario in Perbi (2007) is that Akosua Korome had filed a suit against Kwabena Broni for calling her names including *aboa ba* ‘a daughter of an animal/beast’, which implies that she, too, is an animal/beast. She, therefore, claimed money compensation. As evident in the report, Akosua won the case and was awarded a high payout. This portrays how, traditionally, in the Akan society, it is unjustifiable and unpardonable to refer to a person as *aboa*.

Even though calling someone *aboa* is not tolerated, its use against people who may even be considered as higher than the speaker in terms of social status is common on GhanaWeb. Consider the following examples from CGCGE16 in which *aboa* occurs:

**Background [6.2]**

Dr Edward Mahama, the presidential candidate of the People’s Congress Party, during one of his campaign speeches, mentioned that the victory of Donald Trump inspired him that he will be the victor in Ghana’s presidential election. He is reported to have said that “Donald Trump has never been in politics but upon his first contest he won. God did it for him and it is likely he will do it for me too to win this presidential election”.

**Comment**

**C6.6** RE: Trump’s victory has given me more vim – Edward Mahama

YOU MUST BE A FOOL LIKE HIM!!! ABOAAAAAAAAAAAAA

(JJ 11-10-16 20:03)

It is evident that the commenter, JJ, is not a supporter of Trump, and JJ expects that other people will also disregard the American president. As it appears that Edward Mahama is doing something different than expected by saying that Trump’s victory serves as an assurance to him, the commenter considers him an animal.

**Background [6.3]**

In an interview, Nana Konadu Agyemang-Rawlings, a former first lady and the 2016 presidential candidate of the National Democratic Party, said that “I don’t see what the
president is talking about because he is lying to us and we won’t accept it”. To her, the
president and his party’s claim of unprecedented infrastructural development in the country
was a sham so Ghanaians should vote him out in the upcoming presidential election.

Comment
C6.7  Re: I can't see Mahama’s achievements - Konadu
… ABOA … YOU CAN NEVER BEE LIKE OUR HARD WORKING
PRESIDENT    MAHAMA …
(maslarry 10-04-16 00:50)

In this example, the commenter completely disagrees with the former first lady. By referring
to Konadu as aboa, Maslarry indicates that she is out of line for suggesting that the president
has not achieved anything. Describing President Mahama as hardworking and declaring that
Konadu can never be like him implies that Maslarry sees her as one who lacks the merit to
work hard as the president does.

To describe or represent someone as aboa is to say, in Ofori’s (2017: 139) words, “they
have broken the social contract of how normal human beings should behave and do not have
to exist alongside humans”. This means their behaviour does not conform to that of humans
and therefore they deserve to live in the bush with animals. A variant of the term aboa is
aboafunu ‘dead animal’. It is considered the most offensive way of describing someone
because the speaker, in that case, is indicating that not only does the target lack the qualities
and features of a human being, they also lack those of a living animal/beast (Agyekum,
2004a). That is, the target is irrational and useless. Comment C6.8 is an example.

C6.8  Re: I will develop the country for all to benefit - Mahama
… aimless and senseless incompetent president … aboafunu
(shakamora 09-10-16 06:03)

The use of aboafunu ‘dead animal’ in C6.8 places emphasis on what the commenter has said
in English. It embodies a lot more and conveys a stronger statement of disapproval compared
to the English derogatory adjectives used. The commenter’s choice of aboafunu expresses
the degree of his contempt towards the president much better, especially to cultural insiders.
Another variant of *aboa*, as shown in Example C6.9, is *mmoasɛm*. Ofori (2017) translates this variant as “animalistic behavior” (p. 139). It is made up of the plural form, *mmoa* and *asɛm* ‘case/matter’. The use of *mmoasɛm*, as an insult, is to draw the attention of the target to the point that their speech or action at a particular moment is more consistent with the behaviour of animals than of human beings.

### 6.1.3 *Gyimii* ‘retard/stupid person’

*Gyimii* is a nominalized form of the term *gyimi* which is often glossed as ‘stupid’ or ‘foolish’ (see Warren and Brempong 1977, Sekyi-Baidoo 2009). Other nominalized forms of *gyimi* are *gyimini* and *gyimifo*. *Gyimi* in Akan is polysemous. In addition to being used as an insult, it is also a term associated with comedians. A comedian is described in Akan as *gyimii* ‘fool’ or *obi aogyimi* ‘someone who fools’ (Donkor, 2016). It is common to hear from an elated audience during a comedy show, *Akoa wei de, w'agyimi o* ‘this person is really a fool’ as a compliment. *Gyimii* in this sense can roughly be translated as a ‘jester’ in English. Since this is clearly a separate meaning, it is not considered further in this study.

As an insulting expression, any of the forms, *gyimi*, *gyimifo* or *gyimini* can be used or one can directly say to another *Woye gyimii/gyimifo/gyimini* ‘you are a stupid person’ or *W'agyimi* ‘you are stupid’. The statement, *W'agyimi* ‘you are stupid’, from Warren and Brempong’s (1977) perspective, “indicates that the victim has no brains, is crazy, senseless, and thoughtless” (p. 155). However, the informants from Kumasi for the present study had this to say:

“*Sε yε kasε obi agyimi a, ɛkyεrε sε, n'adwene a εwɔ ne tirimu no ahoɔden wɔ fɔm; ne nyansa a εwɔ sε ɛde yε adee no sua.*”

’to say someone is *gyimii* means that their mind is weak; the wisdom they need to carry out certain duties is inadequate.’

---

C6.9 Re: I will be Ghana’s first female president – Nana Konadu

Mmoasɛm, the witch thinks winning election is the same as plotting murders and grabbing lands ... Old witch!
(atia 11-11-16 08:41)
In Akan communities, a person’s ‘stupidity’ can be blamed on supernatural forces, such as evil spirits, magic, and curses or emotions, especially love. It is possible to hear Example O6.8 said about someone who seems to be making illogical decisions, or whose sense of judgment appears to be incongruous based on their expectations. Example O6.9 is commonly used as a form of insinuation when the person is in love. The idea that a person in love has an impaired sense of judgment, though it may be based on observation or traditional knowledge, is in line with some scientific studies. For instance, Zeki (2007) and van Steenbergen, Langeslag, Band, and Hommel (2014) found that being in love can temporarily reduce one’s cognitive resources.

O6.8  *Ye gyimi no*
‘S/he has been stupefied.’

O6.9  *Odɔ ma nipa gyimi*
‘Love makes human beings stupid.’

Bearing the foregoing in mind, Warren and Brempong’s (1977) explanation, cited above can be said to be too extreme. It relates more to *W’abɔdam* ‘you are crazy/insane’ or *bɔdamfo* ‘an insane person’ than to *W’agyimi* ‘you are stupid’. While the brain or mental faculty of the *bɔdamfo* is considered to be defective, that of the *gyimi(-i/-fo/-ni)* is considered to be underdeveloped or impaired. The impairment is what the second line of component (a) in explication [6.4] captures as “… this someone can’t think well”. A defect would have been captured as “… this someone can’t think”. The study proposes the following semantic explication for *gyimi(-i/-fo/-ni)*:

[E 6.4] *Gyimi(-i/-fo/-ni)* ‘retard/stupid person’

(a) this someone is not like other people:
   other people can think well, this someone can’t think well
   other people can do things well, this someone can’t do things well
(b) people can feel something bad towards this someone because of this
(c) it is very very bad if someone is like this

The idea behind component (a) is that a person regarded as *gyimii* is one who has a “feeble mind”. The target’s sense of judgment is impaired, or their action or speech portrays that their wisdom is below par. The use of ‘well’ in the second and third lines of component (a)
conveys the idea that the target is not absolutely senseless, but rather they have limited mental capacity. Generally, this person can communicate with others and can even perform some simple tasks, especially when under supervision.

For example, if there are two bottles of beverage on a table (one containing alcohol and the other soft drink) and a gyimii is asked to give a baby something to drink, one cannot be confident that the baby will not be given the alcohol. In the instance where the baby is given the alcohol, it is possible to hear the following statement about the person:

O6.10 Ne gyimi nte m'asem ase
‘Due to his stupidity, he does not understand my words.’

The gyimii may, however, be able to give the baby what is expected if the instruction is given in more detail. Component (b) shows that, consequently, such a person is not respected or appreciated as they may be considered as ‘useless’ for not being able to do things that are expected of them. As presented in component (c), it is considered ‘very very bad’ if a person is often disappointing others and frustrating them. [E 6.5] explicates the “PRO/N + be + term” form of the insult.

[E 6.5] Woye gyimi(-i/-fo/-ni) ‘you are a stupid person’ or W’agyimi ‘you are stupid’

(a) I know: you did something very bad
(b) I think something very bad about you because of it
   at the same time, I feel something bad towards you
(c) I want to say something very bad to you now
(d) I say this word: [gyimii]
(e) I say this word to you because I want you to feel something very bad at this moment

Just as in Explication [6.2], it is the speaker’s knowledge of an inappropriate action carried out by the target that motivates this verbal abuse. With the intention of expressing disappointment in the target’s action, the speaker tells the target directly, in their face: woye gyimii ‘you are a stupid person’. The idea behind this insult is to make the target feel ‘useless’ and therefore undeserving of respect.

Examples C6.10 – C6.12 illustrate how gyimii was employed as an abusive term in CGCGE16:
Background [6.4]
During one of his campaign tours, President John Dramani Mahama mentioned that there will be 400,000 available jobs from 2017 under the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP).

Comment
C6.10 Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama

this idiot thinks he can fool us again gyimii wait till we teach you lesson come December 7th. gyimii.even everyone knows that Npp will win this election except ndc fools (KSK 11-09-16 20:03)

The commenter, KSK refers to the president as gyimii because to them, the president has disappointed the electorate, and they feel the president made a fool of them with similar promises during the previous campaign period. This can be deduced from, “this idiot thinks he can fool us again …”. The use of gyimii indicates that in KSK’s opinion, the president has not lived up to the expectations of Ghanaians. The repetition of gyimii in this example signals the commenter’s immense discontentment towards the president.

Background [6.5]
The presidential candidate of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) Ivor Greenstreet, in an interview, described the campaign promises of the National Patriotic Party (NPP) opposition, as impractical. He said, “trust me, the NPP’s promise of giving you one-district-one-factory is not feasible. They are only telling lies for your votes”. Some people, especially members of the NPP questioned why Greenstreet would attack the campaign message of another opposition party instead of sharing his own campaign messages.

Comment
C6.11 Re: NPP lying their way through – Greenstreet

One of the stupid NDC good for nothings … Gyimini the-se [te se] wo.
‘One of the stupid NDC good for nothings … stupid person like you’
(Citizen Ghana 13-11-16 15:08)

Citizen Ghana is suggesting that Greenstreet, the presidential candidate of CPP, is an NDC member. Citizen first describes Greenstreet as a “stupid NDC good for nothing” and then switches to Akan. Calling Greenstreet gyimini is a way of emphasizing that the presidential candidate of the CPP is stupid. As it appears, Citizen expected that as a candidate in
opposition, Greenstreet would speak against the party in power and not another party in opposition.

Background [6.6]
Speaking in an interview with the BBC, the electoral commissioner who had been accused of doing everything possible to ensure that the president retains power made it clear that no one can influence the results of elections due to the processes involved. In her words, “it is impossible for the Electoral Commission to be influenced by government because our processes are so transparent and so inclusive that it is impossible for the Electoral Commission itself to even manipulate...one election day, if you want to influence the process, you have to change your election sheet and change all the result sheets being held by all the candidates’ agents... So it is really impossible”.

Comment
C6.12 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election – EC Boss
Those who voted for ndc in power. all them [sic] are fools nkurasefoɔ nkoa na eto aba ma won agyimifɔɔ party
‘All those who voted for NDC are fools. It is only villagers who vote for them. Party of stupid people. (zulutuza 03-11-16 13:40)

This comment has no bearing on the news report. Zulutuza attacks all the members of the NDC party and those who voted them into power. Without any attempt at justification, Zulutuza refers to them as ‘fools’, nkurasefoɔ ‘villagers’, and agyimifɔɔ ‘retards/stupid people’. Agyimifɔɔ, as used in this comment, is the plural form of gyimifo.

6.2 NSM ANALYSIS OF TWEAA AND APUU
Tweaa and apuu are derogatory interjections in Akan. They are “word-like primary interjections” that are not based on already existing words in the language (see Goddard, 2014a, p. 54). In social interactions, they are usually used among peers and can also be used among interactants of unequal social status (in age or authority), provided that the speaker is socially higher than the addressee. However, their use is not tolerated when the speaker is younger or considered socially lower than the addressee because they pose a direct challenge to the system of “age-and-status-graded respect hierarchies” which is deeply entrenched among Ghanaians (Flamenbaum, 2016, p 140).
Generally, interjections are used to express, but not to describe, a speaker’s emotions or mental state, attitude, action, or reaction to a situation. They may suggest what someone feels, thinks, wants, believes or knows at a particular moment (Goddard, 2014a). Research shows that interjections generally occur in spoken language, however, they sometimes occur in texts that reflect spoken language (Sauciuc, 2006; Støle, 2012; Forster et al., 2012; Bednarczyk, 2015). With the current trend of online interaction, it is not uncommon to find interjections in discussions on some interactive news websites and social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube (see Lockyer, 2014; van Halteren & Oostdijk, 2014; Miličević, Ljubešić, & Fišer, 2017; Verheijen, 2017). The case is not different among Ghanaians who interact on these online platforms.

According to Wierzbicka (1992), interjections are language-specific, and thus their meanings do not map precisely onto the meaning of their equivalents in other languages. In her words, “they are neither universal nor meaningless. On the contrary, they are language-specific, and they are meaningful” (p. 163). This section demonstrates that the meaning of *apuu* and *tweaa* can be rigorously stated and expanded using a culture-free semantic metalanguage. Before the semantic explications of *apuu* and *tweaa* are presented, and subsequently, some reader comments in CGCGE16 are discussed, a number of examples are provided to illustrate how they are used in face-to-face and social media interactions, respectively.

6.2.1 *Tweaa* [tɕʰaa]

*Tweaa* [tɕʰaa], as used in CGCGE16, is an Akan emotive interjection that expresses “contempt” for a person, or an idea espoused by the person. This interjection was promoted into general Ghanaian usage after the release of a video recording of an episode where a single utterance of *tweaa* caused a Ghanaian politician and government official to discontinue the delivery of his speech at a social function. The video recording was widely circulated on YouTube and other social media platforms in Ghana in late January to early February 2014.

In the video, the then District Chief Executive (DCE) of the Ahafo Ano South District in the Ashanti Region, Mr Gabriel Barima, was delivering a speech to a group of health

---

30 See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRedItpW8nY](www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRedItpW8nY) for the *who said tweaa* video.
workers and others at a public function in his district. He was asking his audience to listen to him because he is the privileged one who has the floor. This statement earned him some cheers and applause from his audience, so Mr Barima had to pause briefly. Just before he could resume his speech, an unidentified member of the audience exclaimed *tweaa*! [te⁹rt⁹a⁹t⁹]. Mr Barima retorted, “Who said *tweaa*?”. Nobody owned up to saying *tweaa*, and the other people present dared not to expose the person, considering how angry the DCE was at the time. While switching between Akan and English, Mr Barima reminded the audience of the unequal power relations and the social distance between him and the unidentified speaker. He then walked out of the gathering, refusing to continue with the speech and ignoring the calls of the people who were imploring him to return. The following is a rough transcription of the angry outburst from Mr Barima in English:

‘Am I your mate? Do you think you are my mate? Why are you saying *tweaa*? What does *tweaa* mean? What do you mean by *tweaa*? … You sit somewhere and behave like you are talking to your co-equal. Am I your co-equal? If you’re a hospital worker, who are you? Why do you have to behave in that manner? I have ended my speech. I’m not talking again. If you don’t respect people … I’m not talking again. Take your programme’.

Apart from the spread of the video on social media, the traditional media (i.e. television and radio) took it up and aired it several times either as an entertainment news flash or a funny video/audio of the day. Thus, citizens who did not have access to social media platforms also became acquainted with the incident. Within a short period, *tweaa* had gone beyond the Akan speaking areas of Ghana to, arguably, every part of the country and had taken over the social discourse of the country in both formal and informal settings (e.g. parliament\(^{31}\), religious gatherings\(^{32}\)) for comic relief. The term *tweaa* was used across the nation in both face-to-face and online interactions\(^{33}\). Some Ghanaian music compositions and comedy skits were produced (both locally and internationally) with only the interjection *Tweaa* or the line, *Tweaa!*… *Are you my co-equal*. As shown below, there were photoshopped

---

31 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RIh1hNgsss

32 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_6auG0MA1w

33 As far as I know, there is no existing corpora on Ghanaian discourse that demonstrates how widely *tweaa* was used at the time, but no one abreast with social issues in Ghana will dispute this assertion.
advertisements for some imaginary products online such as ‘tweaa pendants’, ‘tweaa T-shirts’, and ‘tweaa alcoholic drinks’.

(Tweaa pendant) Tweaa T-shirt Tweaa Alcoholic drink
(Photos: scontent.fbne3-1.fna.fbcdn.net/v/t1-09)

In a television discussion about the meaning of tweaa and why its use as captured by the video recording was considered inappropriate, Mr Jonathan Offei-Ansah, a journalist and publisher, explained that it is an interjection used to express “disapproval”, “defiance”, or “contempt”. It is, therefore, “an insult” and a sign of “gross disrespect” when an elderly person is talking, and someone interjects with tweaa. Other native speakers of Akan who were also interviewed on the meaning of tweaa had similar views as Mr Jonathan Offei-Ansah. During the campaign period of the 2016 general election, which is obviously a tense period in the country, tweaa was not employed by the citizens for comic relief. Suffice it to say that Ghanaians had gained a shared understanding of the interjection, because of the incident displayed in the “who said tweaa” video and some explanations provided by various Akan native speakers that were aired across the country. They realized its potency as a self-contained utterance to express contempt and show disrespect and thus, employed it against some of the presidential candidates, and the electoral commissioner.

Before the spread of the “who said tweaa” video and its aftermath in Ghana, the meaning of tweaa had been stated in some scholarly works. For instance, in Rickford and Rickford (1976), tweaa is described as “an interjection of uttermost contempt” (p. 307). Agyekum (2004a) states that the use of tweaa shows “an utmost disregard and contempt for

---

34 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7tuRGpX6k
the addressee as a subhuman” (p. 370). Consider its use in the following face-to-face discourse:

O6.11 AK: *Me dee mempe onipa a m’anɔ beka no. Nea one no awo mpo na mereye no deen na menese nea ne sosɔ atɔ Birim mu Tweaa.* (Akan)

‘As for me, I don’t like one who comes close to my lips [one whom I have to insult]. I don’t even have regard for the one who has had a child with her, let alone the one whose hoe has fallen into the Birim River [one who is impotent] Tweaa’ (Obeng, 1994, p. 55).

Example O6.11 is an excerpt from a recorded conversation presented in Obeng (1994). AK is a 70-year-old woman who is being spiteful towards her son-in-law, whom she regards as impotent. In the second sentence, AK implies how she disregards her target by explicitly stating that she does not even have regard for the one (this could be an ex-partner of her daughter) who has had a child with her daughter. Expressing this with *tweaa* shows the degree of the speaker’s contempt for her son-in-law.

Example O6.12 is an utterance from a conversation between two friends, Fosua and Aba in a scene of the Akan movie, *Medowo be ba*[^35]. The background is that Aba was trying to urge Fosua to consider a gentleman (Kobby) who has expressed his interest in marrying her because the gentleman is affluent. In response, Fosua said:

O6.12 Fosua: *Wo gyafo ye guy guy kwa, stae kɔ sre atade wɔ Nimo boutique. Tweaa! obetumi aware me?* (Akan)

‘Your colleague is just a show-off, he often goes to borrow clothes from Nimo’s boutique, *tweaa!* Can he marry me?’

Fosua refers to Kobby as *wo gyafo* ‘your colleague’ (used in a casual conversation, sometimes, when one wants to avoid the name of a referent in a potentially conflictive situation) and claims he is *guy guy kwa* ‘merely a show-off’. She indicates that Kobby is not worthy of having her hand in marriage because he even borrows the clothes he wears. She uses *tweaa* to express the idea that Kobby is disreputable.

Consider (O6.13) and (O6.14), which are examples of the use of *tweaa* on Facebook and Twitter, respectively.

[^35]: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdjA3upAVJp
O6.13 An inefficient coach, and a number of old players to ‘inspire’ an ineffective B. Stars team? Tweaa! #UprootKAppiah
[Jomawi 04-09-2017 (www.facebook.com)]

O6.14 *Manchester United dec anka my school team kraa gud, tweaa this be team*

(Ghanaian Pidgin English)

‘Even my school’s team is better than Manchester United. Tweaa! Is this a team?’
[Bema 05-05-2018 (www.twitter.com)]

The use of *tweaa* in O6.13 shows Jomawi’s contempt for the old players of the Ghana National Football Team and for their coach, whom he describes as “inefficient” because of the poor performance of the team during the football matches for the World Cup qualifiers. The comment ends with the hashtag “#UprootKAppiah”, which means the coach, Mr Kwesi Appiah, should be fired. In Example O6.14, Bema employs *tweaa* to express strong resentment for Manchester United for losing 1-0 to Brighton in the English Premier League on May 4, 2018. He denigrates the team by comparing it to his school team, which he claims is better. Bema is, obviously, very disappointed in Manchester United, thus, his comment.

Semantic explication [6.6] is proposed for *tweaa* as follows:

[6.6] *Tweaa* [tweepaa]

(a) I think like this now:
   “people can know something bad about this someone
   I feel something very bad towards this someone because of it
   I can’t not feel like this”

(b) I want other people to know this

This semantic explication demonstrates that the use of *tweaa* involves a connection between (a) a negative emotion, triggered in the speaker towards the target as a result of a negative perception or evaluation about the target, and (b) a communicative impulse (the speaker wants other people to know how he feels about the target). The first component of the explication relates an immediate thought with a “very bad” feeling that is based on the speaker’s knowledge about the target.

The second line in component (a) indicates that the speaker believes that there is some knowledge of something negative about the target which may be a publicly available fact or notion. For instance, in the case of the DCE in the “who said tweaa” video, it could be a
general perception that politicians are corrupt, thieves, or liars. In Example O6.11, the speaker knows that her son-in-law is impotent and in Example O6.12, Fosua knows that Kobby portrays himself as an affluent person, but he borrows clothes from Nimo’s boutique to keep appearances. Other people may or may not be privy to these pieces of information.

The “very bad feeling” in the next line could be a feeling of disgust or any form of negative feeling such as disrespect or resentment. The last line of component (a) “I can’t not feel like this”, shows the strength of the feeling that triggers the outburst of tweaa. As reflected in component (b), by the utterance of tweaa, a speaker openly expresses his emotion towards the target to let other people know that the target is contemptible. This explication can ensure a fuller understanding of how tweaa was employed to express strong disapproval for national leaders in online political commentary as discussed in the following.

C6.13 Re: Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama

Wat do u do 4 Ghanaians. Tweaaa. We ghanaians made a huge mistake voting 4u to become president in de first place. But we wil never make such a mistake again. Bcos u don even no why Ghanaians gave u the power if not 4 our welfare. But u make ghanaians very sad wid d dis suffering.
(Boach 02-09-16 21:15)

The commenter shows their disagreement with the president by posing the question wat do u do 4 Ghanaians ‘what do you do for Ghanaians?’ They then express their contempt for Mahama’s (in)actions. As indicated in the second line of component (a) of the explication, the use of tweaa suggests that it is a publicly available notion that the president has done a lot of self-serving things, things that have not been good for Ghana. Therefore, it is contemptible for him to say ‘everything I do, I do for Ghanaians’. Furthermore, the commenter states how they and all other Ghanaians feel disappointed and regret voting the president into power, and how they are determined not to make that mistake again.

C6.14 Re: I used my first term to lay a solid foundation - Mahama

Anything this man speaks, I feel like vomiting...tweaaa!! Solid foundation of thievery!!
(AB 06-09-16 18:43)
The expression of disgust in this comment is explicitly presented with a visually repugnant act “vomiting” and augmented with tweaa. It appears that the expression of disgust, as expressed in this example, is for the words of the target, and not necessarily his person. This can be seen in “Anything this man speaks…”. That is, AB states their physical reaction to anything Mahama says and expresses their feelings by using the interjection. Nevertheless, it is impossible to rule out the implication of disrespect for Mahama totally. The implication of disrespect is amplified if one considers the first part of the comment together with the concluding remark, “Solid foundation of thievery!!”, in terms of the fact that Mahama was the president at the time. With regard to the Ghanaian sociocultural norms of communication, it is unacceptable for a citizen to speak about him in this manner on a public platform.

C6.15 Re: Ghana needs a female leader now - Nana Konadu

TWEAAAAA, NO KAKAI UGLY FEMALE PRESIDENT Keep on dreaming on your wishful-thinking fantasy, that will never come to pass till your grave, Ghana deserves much more better than you this kakai ugly witch konadu
(FONKAR 11-10-16 15:57)

FONKAR is not objecting to the need of a female president, but the use of “TWEAAAAA” at the beginning of the comment implies their revulsion against Nana Konadu being that female president. They employ name calling, referring to her as KAKAI (‘monster’ in Ga language) and ‘ugly witch’. FONKAR’s strong disapproval towards her can be seen through the hyperbolic phrase “much more better” used in the statement “Ghana deserves much more better than you …”. Apart from the use of the hyperbolic phrase, the extremity of the negative feeling expressed towards Nana Konadu in this comment is also shown by the use of an elongated form of tweaa in uppercase letters.

Refer to Background [6.6]

C6.16 Re: It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election - Charlotte Osei

This witch will only bring misfortune to gh is care is not taken. a liar like you, Charlotte Osei tweeeaaaaa (KILL ME SOFTLY 03-11-16 14:36)

The electoral commissioner is described as a witch and a liar. The use of the pronoun ‘you’ in the phrase “a liar like you, Charlotte Osei” indicates a direct attack on her integrity. The
commenter reinforces the attack as they elongate *tweaa* just like the commenter in example (C6.16) and ends the comment with it. The use of *tweaa* in addition to ‘witch’ and ‘liar’ is a signal to the public to treat the commissioner’s assertion with contempt, and subsequently, disregard it.

6.2.2 *Apuu* [*apuː*]

*Apuu* expresses strong disbelief of what someone said. It is used to instantly invalidate the speaker’s assertion. That is, its use suggests that the target’s claim should be completely disregarded or should not be heeded. Generally speaking, the expression of this strong unbelief can be as a result of the speaker’s cultural, religious, social or public knowledge about what was said. The following dialogues exemplify the use of *apuu* in face-to-face interactions.

O6.15  (Context: Alex is talking to his school mates about his parents.)

Alex: Mummy is very nice; she cooks and serves the food. Mummy always brings us new clothes …

Eben: But the money she uses for all that comes from your dad …

Alex: *Apuu*!

In the above dialogue, the use of *apuu* indicates Alex’s disbelief that his father gives money to his mother to provide their needs.

For an extended example, consider the following exchange. It is a transcription of an Akan movie scene named *Apuu Neke*.

O6.16  (Context: The king’s son has become a Christian, contrary to his father’s will. The father has decided to disown him and throw him out of the palace if he does not denounce his faith.)

King: *Kɔ…w'agyimi…wo nim nyansa…wo nin ka a m'ahɔ wo ṣ-ho… wo mni adwene..akonedi be ku wo..tegari e-nku wo.. me na me ka kyere wo.. train n'ebe bɔ wo.*

---

36 adapted from https://sah3.wordpress.com/2016/06/19/why-fathers-arent-as-appreciated/-as-mothers/

37 https://brcinema.com/post/akrobeto-apuu-neke-5SJOeR4m1Mw.html
'Go, are you stupid? Are you senseless? Do you know how much I have spent on you? Are you senseless? Akonedi (a deity) will kill you. Tegari (a deity) should kill you. I tell you! You will be hit by a train.'

Son: Asem a wo kaa ne nyina..w'atwɔro se, edin bia nni asaase so, asaase ase, anaa epɔ mu a ema nipa nkwa kyen Jesus.

‘Of all the words you have spoken, it is written, there is no name on the earth, beneath the earth, or in the sea, which gives life, but Jesus.’

King: Apuu! Apuu!

Son: Se yia ena Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel Chapter 3 ḍ-dane aboa

‘It is this same way that Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel Chapter 3 turned into an animal.’

King: ṣ-ne pe n'ẹdane aboa, ẹno na ẹpe n'ẹdane aboa

‘He chose to turn into an animal.’

Son: Herod, ọde n'asem kọọ deɛ awurade asra no so. Papa w'atworo oo se dia awurade asra no ye nye no bone

‘Herod spoke against the anointed of God. Father, it is written that no harm should be done to God's anointed.’

King: Apuu!

Son: Herod se yiaa, ṣ-dane mmoa

‘Herod in this same way turned into animals.’

King: Apuu!, ṣ-n'ọ pe, ṣ-n'ọ pe n'ọdane aboa

‘Apuu!, he chose to turn into an animal.’

It can be seen that the king employs apuu to refute all the claims made by his son. In his second utterance, the king repeats the interjection to express his utter disbelief of his son’s assertion that the only name on the earth, beneath the earth, or in the sea that gives life is Jesus.

Besides the use of apuu in these face-face-interactions, consider its use below in comments on the social media platforms, Instagram, and YouTube, respectively.

| Background | [www.yabaleftonline.com], an entertainment news website made a list of “top 20 most beautiful Ghanaian female celebrities” and ranked Deborah Vannessa (a television show host, musician, and model) as Number 1. The list was later published on GhanaWeb as part of the |
entertainment news. Deborah took a screenshot of the news headline and posted it on her Instagram page.

| Photo Caption | Deborah Vannessa ranked most beautiful Ghanaian celebrity |
| Comments | O6.17 papa_qwodjo: Through [True] African beauty is hihegt [sic] with curves...not what am seeing here ... apuuu |
| Comments | O6.18 nana_dwomoh: Apuu most beautiful for where?? whiles there are more prettier celebs in ghana..nonsense |

It is clear that the commenters in O6.17 and O6.18, papa_qwodjo and nana_dwomoh, disagree with the report. In papa_qwodjo’s opinion, a true African beauty is one who is tall and curvy. He ends his comment with apuu to lay emphasis on his point that Deborah does not have what it takes to be ranked as “most beautiful Ghanaian celebrity”; thus, the report should be disregarded. Nana_dwomoh starts his comment with apuu and poses a rhetorical question in GhPE, most beautiful for where ‘where is she the most beautiful?’ . He further supports the interjection and the rhetorical question with the statement that there are prettier celebrities in Ghana. The use of apuu in both instances implies that the report should not be given any attention.

In response to the following video caption, Evangelist Nat opines that why would Anas call himself an investigative journalist and not be able to investigate the death of his colleague. In this commenter’s view, Anas does no investigation but only sets people up. Nat adds apuu to establish that he has strong doubt about the assertion that Anas is an investigative journalist.

| Background | Anas (Anas Aremeyaw Anas) is a Ghanaian undercover investigative journalist. His investigations are mainly on issues of corruption and human rights abuse. In January 2019, one of his team members, Ahmed (Ahmed Hussein-Suale) was shot by unknown assailants. Just before this incident, their team had uncovered corruption in Ghana’s football leagues. Their report led to a lifetime ban for the then president of Ghana’s Football Association. |
| Video Caption | Anas Accuses Powerful People in Football of being Behind Ahmed’s Dėاث |
The semantic explication for *apuu* is as follows:

[E 6.7] *Apoo [apuː]*

I think like this:
this someone said about something: it is like this
I want to say now: “it can’t be like this, I know it”
I can’t not say it

As shown in [E 6.7], a speaker can respond to someone’s assertion with *apuu* if they believe that they have certain knowledge to the contrary. That is, what the speaker knows as opposed to what someone said can be the trigger for the use of *apuu*. It is indicated in the last two lines of the explication that the speaker’s urge to instantly refute the claim leads to the use of the interjection.

For instance, papa_qwodjo’s use of *apuu* in O6.17 is based on his “sociocultural” knowledge that true African beauty is marked by height with curves. In O6.15, the use of the interjection as the response to Eben’s assertion implies that Alex considers his father as one who is irresponsible or who hardly parts with money. By the utterance of *apuu*, a speaker openly expresses their disbelief or reservation about what was said. Recall from Chapter 2 that it is traditionally unacceptable for a speaker to question the integrity or the capability of an elderly person or an authority figure. Bearing in mind the explication of *apuu*, it can be observed that this norm was violated during the campaign period of the 2016 general election.

Consider the following examples:

C6.17  Re: Everything I do, I do for Ghanaians – Mahama

Apuuuuuuuuu thieve [sic] man your days are sinking change is here.
(Akua 02-09-16 21:51)

By the use of *apuu*, the commenter is expressing their strong disbelief that everything Mahama does, he does it for Ghanaians and also, implying that the other participants should
completely disregard that assertion. The call to disregard the assertion is reinforced as they describe Mahama as a thief. It thus becomes clear that the choice of apuu at the start of the comment is informed by how the commenter perceives the president.

C6.18  Re: I’m a man with new ideas and fresh direction – Akufo-Addo
Ghanaians will not make that mistake apuuuuu
(King P 05-09-16 07:28)

King P avers that Ghanaians will not vote for Nana to become president, and further employs the interjection to express strong reservation about the target being a man with new ideas and fresh direction. As reflected in explication [6.7], the use of apuu here is triggered by the commenter’s evaluation of Nana.

C6.19  Re: NYEP will provide 400,000 jobs in 2017 – Mahama
this is election days [sic] gimmick … apuuuu
(apuuuu 12-09-16 05:41)

The commenter describes Mahama’s campaign message as “election day gimmick” and ends with apuu. As the explication established, the use of the interjection intimates that considering what the commenter knows about Mahama, the promise he made will not be fulfilled. Thus, the commenter wants the other participants to know so that they do not give attention to Mahama’s words.

C6.20  Re: NDP will attract the good people in NDC – Konadu
The greatest Witchcraft is talking apuu
(JM 2017 lovely President 13-10-16 14:50)

The commenter first refers to Konadu as a witch and then retorts with apuu to her statement. By employing the interjection, the commenter insinuates strong doubt about the possibility that NDP38 (National Democratic Party) will draw to itself the members of NDC.

38 NDP is the party Konadu founded after breaking away from the NDC.
6.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The goal of this chapter was to capture the meanings of the name-calling terms, *kwasea* ‘oaf/fool’, *aboa* ‘animal/beast’, *gyimii* ‘retard/stupid person’ as well as the derogatory interjections, *tweaa* and *apuu*. The explications presented have articulated the culture-internal conceptualizations underlying these Akan name-calling terms and derogatory interjections. It is seen that as individual abusive terms, each of them has a specifiable meaning. However, like all other insults, they are employed with the primary aim of making the referent feel very bad: “I say this word to you because I want you to feel something very bad at this moment”.

The chapter has demonstrated that the use of the name-calling terms, *kwasea*, *aboa*, and *gyimii*, signals that the commenters are extremely dissatisfied with the national leaders who are the targets. It is understood that an individual’s social competence is of concern since social ineptitude is not tolerated among the Akans and Ghanaians in general. Anyone who transgresses set social standards and violates the norms and values of Ghanaians can be disapproved of and verbally attacked with any of these terms. Also, the chapter has illustrated that instead of merely defining *tweaa* as “an interjection that expresses contempt” and *apuu* as “an interjection that expresses disbelief”, they can be described with the semantic explication technique to reflect what they actually mean to culture-insiders. The explications of these interjections have provided the understanding needed to see how they were serviceable as rhetorical devices in online reader comments during the 2016 general election in Ghana. It can be deduced from the examples presented that generally, *tweaa* and *apuu* were deployed during the campaign period of the 2016 general election to directly challenge and undermine the reputation of the targets.
CHAPTER SEVEN
METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTS ON GHANAWEB

This chapter sheds light on how some commenters participate as “regulatory figures” to evaluate the communicative behaviour of others on GhanaWeb. It focuses on metapragmatic comments that share the same platform with invective and insult-filled comments aimed at national leaders in Ghana. Some of these comments cannot be easily interpreted at the pragmatic level, especially by cultural outsiders. There is, therefore, a need for a cultural insider to interpret the messages embedded in them accurately.

Recall that Suler (2004) attributes unrestrained and antisocial online behaviour to factors such as dissociative anonymity (you do not know me); invisibility (you cannot see me); pseudonymity (you do not know my name); asynchronicity (no immediate feedback available to constrain emotional displays); and minimizing authority (no regulatory figure). All these factors influence the discourse on GhanaWeb, thus the negative communicative behaviour on the news site. Although online interactions on GhanaWeb are effectively anonymous and not regulated/controlled in any way by the administrators of the website, participants who rely on invective and insults do not always get away with it. It is evident in the sections that follow that some commenters perform the role of “regulatory figures” and post comments to reprove others.

According to Hübler and Bublitz (2007), speech participants can judge or evaluate one another’s utterances as “true or false, cooperative or uncooperative, and appropriate or inappropriate” in order to maintain or change their lines of communication (p. 3). This may be, on the one hand, to create or preserve expedient social relationships or on the other hand, to disrupt or contest them. The possibility of making a good judgment about the utterances of speech participants is dependent on one’s knowledge and understanding of the set of shared conventions and norms among the speech participants (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

Evaluation of a person or a group of people’s communicative behaviour as (in)appropriate is often done with statements that comment on their language choices in specific social contexts. These statements are known as metapragmatic utterances/comments (Caffi, 1998). Metapragmatic comments not only provide an assessment on the
appropriateness of the communicative behaviours, but they also give one the opportunity to learn something about the perception of (in)appropriateness by the speech community at large (Verschueren, 2000; Stadler, 2006; Culpeper, 2012). That is, they “index the interactional norms that govern language use” in that community (Blum-Kulka & Scheffer, 1993, p. 200).

Metapragmatic comments are generally not dispassionate assessments, devoid of societal implications (Cameron, 2004). Rather, they situate these speech practices in a larger moral order and offer important insights into the social norms and values that regulate interactive events (Paternoster, 2012). Certainly, the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 afford significant insights into Ghanaian norms and values.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. Section 7.1 explores the motivation for the evaluation of abusive comments on a news site which is anonymous and asynchronous. Section 7.2 shows the types of metapragmatic comments in the corpus. Section 7.3 identifies the people who are being metapragmatically reprimanded (i.e. all the abusive commenters on the platform, a specific abusive commenter or even their relatives). Section 7.4 considers how the metapragmatic commenters react to the negative speech behaviour.

7.1 MOTIVATION FOR METAPRAGMATIC RESPONSES ON GHANAWEB

Metapragmatic commenters on GhanaWeb usually evaluate the communicative behaviour of other participants negatively and/or appeal to these participants to express their opinions in a more acceptable manner. Some go to the extent of rebuking the participants and/or their relatives with harsher or equally unacceptable linguistic forms. In the corpus, it is rare to find a response to a metapragmatic comment that seeks to justify a comment or defend its author. This may be because the authors of the negative comments would rather not engage in a rebuttal. It may also be that due to the asynchronous nature of the interaction on GhanaWeb, some of them do not come back to view the reactions of other participants to their comments.

Commenters who respond to the metapragmatic comments make similar metapragmatic comments, thereby creating a form of a sequence. For instance, in Example (C7.1), Amenyo describes Nana Akufo-Addo as a “short man devil” and “irresponsible”. The
first metapragmatic response comes from Chris who describes Amenyo as “a disgrace to his family”. Togbega, who responds to Chris, does not engage in favour of Amenyo but rather, also condemns the comment of Amenyo. Chris and Togbega’s comments form a sequence of metapragmatic acts beneath Amenyo’s comment. It can be observed that Chris and Togbega are participating on the platform as “regulatory figures/traditional gatekeepers”. Although both comments are meant to serve the same purpose, Togbega’s choice of language is civil and relatively more appropriate than that of Chris, who employs counter abusive language forms.

| C7.1 Amenyo: Please short man devil let us rest … How can a 72yr old man sit unconcerned to allow his home to be in chaos and divided. It shows the old man is irresponsible. Chris: Hi amenyo from Tema you're a disgrace to your family stupid, idiot Togbega: Amenyo, I don't know how old you are and how long you are going to live. But if you are lucky to attain age 72 and are able to walk without without [sic] support and are coherent like Nana Addo, you be thankful to your maker. Stop the insukt[sic]; it will not do you any good |

All the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 like the examples in [C7.1] are triggered by prior comments on the online platform. Practically, they do not contribute to the issue of interest in a comment thread, but they focus on the negative communicative practice of others and attempt to reinforce cultural script [4.5] in Chapter 4. This is consistent with an observation by Spencer-Oatey (2011) who stated that “behavior that conforms to participants’ normative expectations is perceived as unmarked and goes largely unnoticed” (p. 3566), while “behavior that breaches normative expectations is perceived as marked and can be noticed in several ways: as inappropriate and perceived negatively” (p. 3567).

It has already been established that GhanaWeb is characterized by effective anonymity and pseudonymity. Moreover, interaction on the platform is asynchronous. To the advantage of the metapragmatic commenters, the asynchronous nature of the interaction allows them to reflect on and make possible interpretations of the contributions of other participants before posting their own comments (Tanskanen, 2007; Kleinke & Bös, 2015). On a negative note, their metapragmatic comments may not have any influence on the subsequent post of their actual referents, because the “intended addressees” may never notice the reproof or the
criticisms directed at them. The question therefore is, what motivates these metapragmatic commenters to respond to the posters of invective and insult-filled comments?

Research suggests that, sometimes, people expect others to follow the rules of acceptable communication during face-to-face interactions even when they are communicating online (see Graham, 2007; Darics, 2010; Chen & Abedin, 2014). That is, online discussants’ choice of expressions should not violate the expected and/or prescribed norms of communication in the speech community in which they find themselves (Papacharissi, 2004). As part of the sociocultural mechanisms of Ghana, older people especially the elderly, are obliged to criticize any form of behaviour that is considered as inappropriate around them. If they do not do that, they have failed in their duty to uphold the principles of the society. This is reflected in the Akan proverb, *panyin a ṭena fie ma mmɔfra we nanka no, yebu nankawefoɔ a ɔka ho* ‘if an elderly person stays in the house unconcerned for the children in the household to eat python, he will also be viewed as a python eater’. Bearing this proverb in mind, it is in order to say that the metapragmatic commenters respond to the abusive commenters as “elders” (i.e. traditional gatekeepers) who have to discharge their social responsibility.

Consistent with this, the content of the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 channels the kind of cultural orthodoxy that was seen in the public discourse presented in Section 4.1. As evident in this chapter, these metapragmatic comments are more value oriented and not about the possible dangers that abusive language use in political discourse can pose to peace and national development. The comments below exemplify the views of the metapragmatic commenters in CGCGE16 that there is a need for the contributions of their co-participants to (i) exhibit regard for pertinent social variables; (ii) demonstrate a proper upbringing; and (iii) reflect a (perceived) identity.

*Regard for pertinent social variables (i.e. age, social status, and disability)*

C7.2 FEELIX PLEASE AS WE ALSO GROW WE MUST RESPECT THE ELDERLY SO THAT WE CAN ALSO BE RESPECTED WHEN WE REACH THEIR AGE. (MUMIN 11-09-16 20:40)

C7.3 Respect for their age at least what goes up comes down pray to live long. God is our judge (THINK BIG 20-10-16 19:39)

C7.4 Show reverence to your leaders (Menz 05-09-16 14:56)
C7.5  I AM NOT AN NPP BUT IT IS THIS FOOLISH AND STUPID INSULT ON GREAT PERSONALITIES I DETEST IN GHANAIAN POLITICS.  
(Adjao 28-09-16 18:53)

C7.6  Sister Ama, freedom of speech is good but not with an insult of a disability attached to it. It's not okey [okay] to use his stammerer [sic] issues against him.  
(DEE KAY 10-11-16 16:09)

C7.7  You fools get restless and insulting when other start to bring on Nana Addo’s body structural deficiencies. Learn to respect the disabled. (PRAD 11-11-16 21:06)

Recall again from Chapter 4 that Ghana is a status-conscious society and socioculturally, it is against its communicative values to insult an elderly person or a person of high social status. This is evident in Examples C7.2 to C7.5. Regarding the act of reverence to one’s leaders as specified in C7.4, Adjao in C7.5 categorically states that the use of derogatory words such as “foolish” and “stupid” against people of high social status (great personalities) is what he finds detestable about Ghanaian politics. In C7.6, the concern of Dee Kay stems from the fact that the insult towards the political leader is centered on his disability. In the same vein, Prad in C7.7 suggests that persons with disabilities need to be respected.

*Demonstrate a proper upbringing*

C7.8  Comments here should be full of sense not insults. Koliko or whoever u call yourself, your comment shows that you were reared. You should show that you are a human being. (Addo 20-10-16 17:01)

C7.9  A very foolish uncouth girl from a very destabilized home whose parents are irresponsible for that matter you Vida through any cultured, disciplined and ethical training. I don’t blame you but your useless and indisciplined parents (Kwame 03-11-16 19:30)

C7.10  So, people can insult president of state and the[re] is nothing wrong with it … so those who insult president do they also have that primary socialization?  
(yevugah 20-10-16 21:43)

Considering the negative speech behaviour exhibited, Koliko is described as one who was “reared” in Example C7.8. In C7.9, Kwame’s description of Vida well explains the concept
of being “reared” among Ghanaians, one who has not gone through “any cultured, disciplined and ethical training”. In many Ghanaian languages, there is a distinction between being reared and being properly nurtured or trained. Consider the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>You were <strong>reared</strong></th>
<th>You were <strong>trained</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akan</td>
<td>Ye <em>nyie</em> wo</td>
<td>Ye <em>tetee</em> wo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewe</td>
<td>Wo <em>nyi</em> wo</td>
<td>Wo <em>he</em> wo / Wo <em>kpla</em> wo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga</td>
<td>A <em>le bo</em></td>
<td>A <em>tsɔse bo</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A person who was “reared” is one who violates sociocultural norms at every given opportunity. Such a person is considered as one who was only fed to grow, like an animal, in their formative ages and thus did not undergo the needed socialization. Yevugah’s rhetorical question in Example C7.10, “so those who insult [the] president do they also have that primary socialization?” attests to this. A reared person is often disapproved of and seen as not having the required knowledge to participate in social activities. By contrast, a person who is considered as well nurtured or properly trained is highly regarded in the society (Opuni-Frimpong, 2012). Identifying a person as “reared” reflects negatively on their parents or family. This explains why, in Example C7.9, Kwame describes Vida as “a very foolish uncouth girl from a very destabilized home whose parents are irresponsible”.

**Reflect a (perceived) identity**

C7.11 I wonder who paid this son of a gun to insult someone who can give birth to him. Northerners are noted for their respect for the elderly. Not sure where this imbecile comes from. (Kokuvi 28-09-16 19:08)

C7.12 Apuu, You as an educated person should rather speak in a more civilised manner. ... (De-Graft 20-10-16 16:50)

C7.13 … It's sad that after we make such unpleasant comments on our elders, we still call ourselves christians … (AGP 03-11-16 20:47)

In the examples presented here, the commenters try to draw the attention of their referents to the fact that their communicative behaviour falls short of what is expected of them, on the
basis of their (perceived) identities as “a northerner” (in C7.56), “an educated person” (in C7.57) and “Christians” (in C7.58).

Remarks

The discussion above demonstrates the idea that although the interaction on GhanaWeb is asynchronous and anonymous, the metapragmatic commenters respond to abusive commenters on the platform to meet a social obligation. It has been established that these commenters who play regulatory roles on GhanaWeb call for comments which (1) contribute to the matters at hand and show respect for the elderly, authority figures, and people with disabilities; (2) show that their co-participants have had a proper upbringing in terms of the norms and values of Ghana; and (3) reflect the distinct social identities (e.g. as educated people) of their co-participants.

7.2 TYPES OF METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTS IN CGCGE16

The metapragmatic comments identified in CGCGE16 are of two types: either part of an on-going political discussion (i.e. on-topic metapragmatic acts) or parallel with it (i.e. off-topic metapragmatic acts). Examples (C7.14 – C7.17) are metapragmatic comments to insult-filled comments on the news report, “It’s impossible for gov’t to influence election – Charlotte Osei”.

7.2.1 On-Topic Metapragmatic Acts

C7.14 I personally don't think the insult on the EC chairperson will declare any of the candidates winner … pray for forgiveness, she could be your mom.  (Sir Levels 03-11-16 18:21)

C7.15 God forgive u!!! ... [the] bad luck you wish on this woman should come to you and your families first going forward (Zargon 04-11-16 06:55)

C7.14 and C7.15 can be categorized as on-topic metapragmatic acts as both align explicitly to the verbal abuse against the chairperson of the electoral commission. Sir Levels implies that their behaviour is a sin and draws their attention to the fact that the referent of their attacks could be their mother. Thus, he asks them to “pray for forgiveness”. Zargon, who
seems to agree with Sir Levels asks God to forgive them. In the next statement, Zargon invokes ill fortune not only on the abusive commenters but on their families as well.

### 7.2.2 Off-Topic Metapragmatic Acts

Examples C7.16 and C7.17 are off-topic metapragmatic acts in CGCGE16. The commenters do not address the attack on the EC Chairperson, but they use the platform to signal that the insults and unpleasant comments against people of higher status in Ghana are in bad taste.

C7.16  **WE NEED TO RESPECT OUR LEADERS I THINK GHANAIANS ARE LOSING THEIR MORAL VALUES BY INSULTING LEADERS A VERY [every] BLESSED DAY …** (EKEKE 02-11-16 05:09)

C7.17  **God save your people It's sad that after we make such unpleasant comments on our elders, we still call ourselves christians and hoping that God listens to our prayers.** (AGP 03-11-16 20:47)

In Ekeke’s opinion, the daily habit shows that “Ghanaians are losing their moral values”. The use of capital letters emphasizes the importance of the commenter’s concern. In C7.17, AGP who appears to be a religious person, “we still call ourselves Christians”, implies that making “unpleasant comments” against people who are higher than the commenters in terms of age, can obstruct the answers to their prayers.

Examples (C7.14 - C7.17) show that some of the metapragmatic comments are posted as an admonition to all participants while others are with direct reference to a specific commenter. The communication flow of metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 is considered in detail in the subsection that follows.

### 7.3 COMMUNICATION FLOW OF METAPRAGMATIC COMMENTS IN CGCGE16

This section concentrates on the referents or targets of the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16. As Figure 7.1 below shows, the metapragmatic comments can be broadly categorized as ‘we-directed’ or ‘you-directed’ in terms of their attentional focus. The ‘we-directed’ metapragmatic comments are typically characterized by the pronouns, ‘we’, ‘us’,

199
and ‘our’, while the ‘you-directed’ metapragmatic comments are marked by the pronouns, ‘you’ and ‘your’. The referent identified as ‘you’ may be just one participant (i.e. you singular) or many participants (i.e. you plural). In the instances where ‘you’ or ‘your’ are not explicitly used, the ‘you-directed’ comments are in the form of imperatives, or they involve the calling out of specific names.

The use of ‘we’ in an utterance can depict a kind of collectivity which may be national, religious, sociocultural, or ideological (Woller, 1999). It suggests that the speaker and their referents share a communal experience. In CGCGE16, the kind of collectivity that is being projected can be regarded as national or sociocultural. By the use of ‘we’, the commenters claim that they belong to the same community (i.e. Ghana) and share the same beliefs, norms and values as their co-participants (van Swol & Carlson, 2017). In other words, the attentional focus of the ‘we-directed’ metapragmatic comments is on the entire online community. These comments implicate not only the users of abusive language but also, the readers and the commenters themselves (Marcus, 2008). They are more “collaborative”, and they signal the commenters’ “affiliation” with all other participants (Kane & Rink, 2015).

Figure 7.1. Communication flow of metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16

The use of ‘we’ in an utterance can depict a kind of collectivity which may be national, religious, sociocultural, or ideological (Woller, 1999). It suggests that the speaker and their referents share a communal experience. In CGCGE16, the kind of collectivity that is being projected can be regarded as national or sociocultural. By the use of ‘we’, the commenters claim that they belong to the same community (i.e. Ghana) and share the same beliefs, norms and values as their co-participants (van Swol & Carlson, 2017). In other words, the attentional focus of the ‘we-directed’ metapragmatic comments is on the entire online community. These comments implicate not only the users of abusive language but also, the readers and the commenters themselves (Marcus, 2008). They are more “collaborative”, and they signal the commenters’ “affiliation” with all other participants (Kane & Rink, 2015).
On the other hand, the use of ‘you’ shows that a speaker’s utterance is directed at an individual or a group of people. It can help elicit the attention of a referent as it addresses him/her directly. It can also help to individualize a person or a group of people in order to get them involved in a practice or an event (Teterina, 2012). In CGCGE16, the attentional focus of the ‘you-directed’ metapragmatic comments is on the co-participant(s) and some other people who may not even be on the interactive platform. These comments connote the idea of “pointing a finger” at another (Pennebaker, 2011, p. 75). They suggest accusation, blaming, confrontation, and criticism among others (van Swol, MacGeorge, & Prahl, 2017).

Generally, the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16 are more ‘you-directed’ than ‘we-directed’. The following are examples of the ‘we-directed’ comments.

‘We-directed’ Metapragmatic Comments

C7.18 It would be good for us to desist from personal insults and have a hearty and genuine discourse on matters that affect our nation. (KOA 27-09-16 22:03)

C7.19 We must respect the elderly (KDT 28-09-16 19:08)

C7.20 What is wrong with some of us ... please let’s have the fear of God in us (SA 04-09-16 12:23)

C7.21 Please my dear brothers and sisters, let us try as much as we can to stop the politics of insult, we should all bear in mind that our culture does not allow us to insult the elderly, so let us try to polish our thoughts and comments on political issues. (De Don 13-10-16 16:57)

C7.22 Avoid this please I wish young men and women of Ghana, especially those of us who pass comments here, shall embrace our culture of civility and respect for elders and mutually, for colleagues. (Mark 13-10-16 15:18)

Echoing familiar themes, these commenters find it disturbing that the manner in which opinions and views are shared is not in line with the “culture of civility and respect”, especially for the elderly. By the use of ‘we’ and ‘us’ the commenters are not just invoking shared identity, but they are drawing attention to the fact that the use of insults in Ghanaian politics has to be dealt with collectively. The use of ‘please’ in the Examples C7.20 to C7.22 implies that the commenters would want their contributions to be appreciated as an appeal rather than an imposition on the other participants. Even though the participants do not know
one another, these commenters attempt to establish some form of solidarity. In Example C7.21, for instance, the commenter first addresses the participant with kinship terms after an endearment term, “my dear brothers and sisters”. This, in a way, creates an equal social relationship between him and his referents.

‘You-directed’ Metapragmatic Comments

As shown in Figure 7.1, ‘you-directed’ metapragmatic comments can further be sub-classified into two groups: internal and external. The internal ‘you-directed’ comments are directed at either a specific participant, as in Examples [C7.23 – C7.26] or a group or all of the participants on the platform, as in Examples [C7.27 – C7.29].

a. Internal ‘you-directed’ comments

Specific participants

C7.23 You are part of the foolish Ghanaian majority. Mind your comment. (ruth 30-09-16 10:04)

C7.24 Irresponsible statement with no evidence, broaden your horizon n stay away from partisan politics [politics] for Ignorance is expensive than education. (Kal 30-09-16 12:05)

C7.25 Kofi USA be respect [sic] Nana Addo, he will be [the] next president in Ghana... (KK 02-10-16 19:23)

C7.26 Otanii ba or what ever u call yourself Do you have sense at all ? … foolish idiot next time talke like u r carrying a head (Agumu 09-11-16 23:54)

As mentioned earlier, one of the strategies used is the use of insults in political discussions is the “name-and-shame” approach (Ofori, 2015). Names of politicians and activists who engage in insulting others during political interactions are mentioned or published in the media for everyone to identify them. This is to serve as a form of public punishment to transgressors and be a system of reinforcing moral boundaries. The belief is that people would want to avoid public humiliation, which extends to one’s family. The “name and shame” approach is reflected in Examples C7.25, and C7.26 as the commenters call out the referents who signed their comments with “Kofi USA” and “Otanii ba”. While Kofi is an actual name, Otanii ba is not a recognized given name; it may be a nickname or a ‘nonce’
pseudonym. Agumu, in Example C7.26, like others in subsequent examples, adds “or whatever you call yourself” to highlight that the referent’s actual name is not presented on the platform.

The following examples are not in reference to a particular person, but a specific group of people (Ashantis in C7.27 and members of the NPP in C7.28) or all of the participants on the platform (in C7.29).

**Group or all of the participants**

C7.27 Ashantis please stop the insults [sic] for that will not help win elections Other tribe are equally waching [sic] and reading (Yaw 04-09-16 11:03)

C7.28 Why NPP? Why insult others who don't agree with you. Anyone who says anything contrary to yours in NPP is agent of NDC? Learn to be torelant [tolerant] a little bit, for we are in democracy (SON OF GOD 13-11-16 15:30)

C7.29 u pp are hear [you people are here] seriously insulting someone who is old enough to be your father. u must respect ur elders. (Kwame 30-09-16 13:33)

All of the examples imply a directive from the commenters to the other participants; however, the author of Example C7.29 uses the “pointing your finger” approach as he begins with the pronoun ‘you’ (van Swol et al., 2017).

**b. External ‘you-directed’ comments**

The external ‘you-directed’ comments are not directed at the participants on the platform, but at three other categories of people: the family of the participants, other members of the political party that their comments suggest they are affiliated to, and the staff of GhanaWeb.

Notice that the same lexicon of insults, that is, words like ‘useless’, ‘stupid’, and *kwasiaso* (plural of *kwasea*), are employed against the father, mother or family of the original commenters.

**Family**

C7.30 Watch your mouth. [It] Is your father who is useless. … (Oga 30-09-16 12:47)

C7.31 STUPID LIKE YOUR MOTHER RIGHT? Or your mom is more stupid? Kwasiasem!. (Stoway 03-11-16 13:23)
C7.32 … kwasia,u and ya [you and your] entire useless family are kwasiafo) … Ofui (Sikanhyira 03-11-16 17:06)

C7.33 YOU KNOW A BITCH IF YOUR MOTHER IS ONE At least she is very intelligent and your mom is a dirty dumb bitch!!! (Stally 03-11-16 22:13)

The following represent instances where some metapragmatic comments are directed at the affiliates of the political party of a participant or a group of participants insulting others.

**Political party affiliates**

C7.34 J J RAWLINGS AND HIS WIFE BROUGHT VOLTARIANS TO NDC AND YOU ARE CALLING HER OFUI. CAN YOU COMPARE YOUR MOTHER TO NANA KONADU? SHE HAS DONE A LOT FOR THE PARTY AND NOW USELESS PPLS LIKE KOFI ADAMS, KOKU ANYIDAHO, ASIEDU NKETIA ONE LITHER, SOLOMON NKANSAH AND OTHERS ENJOYING FOOOOOOOOOOOOLS. (VICENT 03-10-16 11:13)

C7.35 You are the ofui,do you understand ofui? You are just as useless as the John mahama you are following. (Ruby 03-10-16 18:23)

C7.36 Npp supporters are soo disrespectful. …. (sam Y 13-11-16 20:52)

In C7.34, the top members of the NDC National Executive Committee including Kofi Adams (National Organiser), Koku Anyidoho (Deputy General Secretary), and Asiedu Nketia (General Secretary) are labelled by Vicent as “useless people”. As a response to the same commenter, Ruby in C7.35 also refers to the president (John Mahama) as useless. In Example C7.36, the supporters of NPP are characterized as “so disrespectful”.

Some metapragmatic comments, directed at the staff of GhanaWeb, imply that the negative communicative behaviour on GhanaWeb is massive because the site is not moderated or monitored.

**Staff of GhanaWeb**

C7.37 … I THINK GHANAIANS ARE LOSING THEIR MORAL VALUES BY INSULTING LEADERS A VERY [EVERY] BLESSED DAY, MY MOST SURPRISE IS THE SITE CAN’T BE CONTROL BY IT OWNERS, I’M VERY MUCH DISAPPOINTED IN GHANA WEB. (EKEKE 02-11-16 05:09)
C7.38 Please can the webmaster filter the comments on this site. It is too bad.  
(Gab 18-11-16 16:48)

Remarks

Section 7.3 has illustrated the evaluative or affective reactions of some commenters to invective and insults against the elderly and authority figures during online political discourse. The analysis showed that the metapragmatic comments were either ‘we-directed’ or ‘you-directed’. The ‘you-directed’ comments were either directed at a single commenter (i.e. you-singular) or at a group/all of the commenters (i.e. you-plural) on the platform. Sometimes, the content of the comment extends to non-participants of the discourse, such as the relatives of commenters, other affiliates of the political party to which they belong, and the staff of GhanaWeb.

7.4 REACTING TO INVECTIVE AND INSULT-FILLED COMMENTS ON GHANAWEB

This section explores the various communicative acts used by the metapragmatic commenters on GhanaWeb, which include ‘insulting’, ‘giving directives’, and ‘calling down misfortune on the transgressor’.

“Insults”

In this study, the use of insults has been considered as an unacceptable behaviour among Ghanaians. However, few studies show, and it is evident in the examples that follow, that the use of insults can perform some regulatory roles, despite the negative evaluation it generally attracts (see Yankah, 2002; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2009; Kampf, 2015).

C7.39 … A NONENTITY OF YOUR KIND WHO BENEFITED FROM FREE EDUCATION TO BECOME SOMETHING HAVE THE AUDACITY AND IMPUDENCE TO INSULT AN HONOURABLE MAN LIKE NANA ADDO? … (A.D. 04-09-16 18:20)

C7.40 U are so stupid guy. U know no respect at all. Is Nana Addo your target or the presidency? foolish idiot!! (Peter 28-09-16 21:18)
C7.41  Hi amenyo from Tema you're a disgrace to your family stupid, idiot
    (Chris 30-09-16 03:19)

C7.42  Brew craig u re a stupid 4 insulting the president. (barkobly 11-10-16 11:58)

C7.43  Big fool Vincent you are fool. U calling somebody useless. You are good for nothing. (Adjoa 04-10-16 17:26)

In the comments shown here, it can be realized that apart from Example C7.41, the
commenters do not just abuse their targets without supplying any justification. In C7.39 and
C7.40, the addressee’s “offence” is specified as insulting and disrespecting Nana Addo and
in C7.42, insulting the president. In the same vein, in C7.43, it is for calling somebody
useless. In these contexts, the purpose of the insults is to draw attention to the target’s specific
wrongdoing. These examples substantiate Sekyi-Baidoo’s (2009) assertion that among
Ghanaians, insults can be employed to signal disapproval and attempt to compel the
addressee to stop subverting sociocultural norms and values.

Directives

The act of giving a directive, which is considered as an attempt by the speaker to get the
addressee to do something, is another way of reacting to the use of insults in political
Generally, the directive can be given in a straightforward or mitigated form. Consider
Examples C7.44 to C7.52.

Bare imperatives

C7.44  Respect your leaders. (Kweku 05-09-16 14:19)

C7.45  Take matters serious [sic] and stop insulting elders. (Talk 28-10-16 10:26)

C7.46  Stop insulting n just share a reasonable idea. … (Boy 13-11-16 17:56)

Examples C7.44 to C7.46 are directives in the form of bare imperatives. They are straight to
the point and do not have an overt subject. The omitted subject is ‘you’; that is the speaker’s
addressee (see Zwicky, 1988; Aikhenvald, 2010).
First person plural imperatives

C7.47  Please my dear brothers and sisters, let us try as much as we can to stop the politics of insult, we should all bear in mind that our culture does not allow us to insult the elderly, so let us try to polish our thoughts and comments on political issues. God bless you all and God bless our homeland Ghana. (De Don 13-10-16 16:57)

C7.48  It's shameful to come to the comments section and the first word: kwasia, stupid etc. Please, let us desist from this habit. Thanks (Nana 13-10-16 15:53)

C7.49  I AM DISAPPOINTED. IS POLITICS NOW AN OPPORTUNITY TO INSULT ANYBODY AT THE LEAST OPPORTUNITY? PLEASE LET US BE DECENT AND SERIOUS (Fiifi 28-09-16 11:41)

In examples C7.47 to C7.49, the directive is in the form of the first-person plural imperative, which is generally introduced by ‘let us’, a phrase that calls for mutual participation. The commenters make themselves part of the addressees, that is, a collective way of persuading others to take part in the proposed action (Friginal, 2009; Xiang, 2016). Friginal (2009) posits that “let” in the construction can be paraphrased with “should” in that “let us desist from this habit” in Example C7.48 can be paraphrased as “we should desist from this habit”.

Considering the potentially conflictive nature of directives (telling others what to do), the phrase ‘let us’ at the beginning of these examples functions as a downtoner (Hutchby, 1995; Locher & Hoffman, 2006). Compared to Examples C7.44 to C7.46, it can be understood that the use of “let us” which is preceded by “please” in Examples C7.47 to C7.49 lessens the assertiveness of the directive.

Declaratives (Agent [you] + modal [must/should])

The directives in Examples C7.50 to C7.52 take the form of declaratives. The subject ‘you’ is followed by ‘must’ in C7.50, and by ‘should’ in C7.51 and C7.52. The use of ‘must’ in C7.50 can be interpreted as “you can’t not do it, I want you to do it” and the use of ‘should’ in C7.51 and C7.52 as “it is good if you do this something, it is bad if you don’t do it” (Goddard, 2014b).

C7.50  u pp are hear [you people are here] seriously insulting someone who is old enough to be your father. u must respect ur elders. (Kwame 30-09-16 13:33)
Both modals imply that it is necessary for an individual to do what is being asked of them, but ‘should’ tends to communicate a less forceful necessity than ‘must’ (Orta, 2010). The use of “can’t not” in the interpretation of “must’” shows that it is more forceful and more of an imposition. As noted by Depraetere (2017), in many situations, ‘must’ is used to enforce a rule/law, while ‘should’ is used to make a recommendation. This implies that ‘should’ indicates some form of “concern” for the referent(s), thereby softening the impact of the directive given.

“Calling down misfortune on the transgressor”

According to Agyekum (1999), utterances that specify a misfortune or an undesirable circumstance on an individual or a group of people can be used to express one’s reaction or feelings about the (in)actions of others. Often, saying that something bad happens to a person is a way of pronouncing judgment on the person for having done something offensive or objectionable (Tweneboah, 2017). The social effect is “to restore moral balance, harmony and order” (Ugonna, 1982, p.77 cited in Teilanyo, 2015, p. 77).

Many African societies, including Ghanaians, believe in the “power of words” to physically, mentally or emotionally affect the target of the words. They also believe that the power of words goes beyond the physical into the spiritual, metaphysical or supernatural. Thus, whether as an invocation of misfortune or an expression of anger, the import of these negative utterances is understood by interlocutors on the basis of their shared background knowledge (Teilanyo, 2015). To non-Africans or anyone who does not believe in the potency or efficacy of utterances, they may find comments such as Examples C7.53 to C7.55 below to be innocuous and may even feel amused by them. However, an African may find them very offensive.

C7.53  Be responsible how I wish God can slap this guy in his left ear. (sam Y 13-11-16 20:52)
Example C7.53 involves the invocation of a supernatural agent (i.e. God). This often happens when the speaker acknowledges that they are not in the position to punish the offender but believes that there is an agent (specified or unspecified) who can (Agyekum, 1999). Where no supernatural agent is literally invoked, as in Examples C7.54 and C7.55, the cultural assumption is that expressions like “die” and “bad luck” are inherently potent. Thus, in Example C7.55, it is observed that the commenter redirects any ill-wish on the electoral commissioner “this woman” back to those declaring it, as well as their families.

Religious formulaic expression ‘May God forgive you’

Examples C7.56 to C7.58 present what looks on the surface like a wish that God forgives the abusive commenters involved. Many religious people believe that God can forgive any transgression or wrongdoing, so the expression “may God forgive you” is an invocation which also points to the fact that the referent has misbehaved or done something very offensive (Samarah, 2015). As used in the examples below, it is a device which implies that the target did something extremely bad. That is, it is a way of condemning a person’s behaviour, without using any negative, antagonistic language.

C7.56  May the God you all serve (if any) for give you for your disgusting language.  
(Zargon 04-11-16 06:58)

C7.57  @bibi May God forgive you for your unguided comment (kimathi 13-11-16 18:39)

C7.58  Sam do you know that what happened to Greenstreet can happen to any other person? May God forgive you (Father 13-11-16 19:45)

Remarks

This section has considered the communicative acts by which the ‘regulatory figures’ on GhanaWeb draw the attention of commenters to the inappropriateness of invective and insults against a person who is higher than a speaker in terms of age or social status. These are the

### 7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The chapter has specifically explored metapragmatic responses to the use of abusive language on GhanaWeb against the presidential candidates and electoral commissioner involved in the 2016 general election. The reactions have come from commenters performing the role of regulatory figures and traditional gatekeepers of appropriate communicative behaviour on the website. These metapragmatic commenters opine that people should exercise restraint and avoid resorting to verbal abuse whenever they have the opportunity to contribute to issues of national interest.

It can be observed that, in CGCGE16, the comments presented about the use of invective and insults in politics focused on the principles of communication in Ghana. In this chapter, the metalinguistic labels for this behaviour include ‘disrespectful’, ‘undisciplined’, ‘uncouth’, ‘acrimonious’, ‘unguided’, ‘intemperate’, and ‘uncivilized’. In contrast to the general notion in Western-based literature that the use of invective and insults can cause “offence” (e.g. Culpeper, 2011; Landrigan, 2013; Archard, 2014; Korostelina, 2014; Haugh, 2015; Boatright et al., 2019), there was not a single mention of “offence” in CGCGE16.

Looking back at the extracts discussed in Section 4.1 of Chapter 4, it is evident that the question of whether the use of negative, antagonistic language is “offensive” to one’s target is hardly raised among Ghanaians. Except for a single use of the expression “offensive language” in Example O4.3, generally the public discourse on the use of invective and insults in Ghanaian politics, as shown in this study, collectively give emphasis to the following: (1) Ghanaian norms and values prohibit people from disrespecting anyone higher than them in terms of age or social status. (2) Such behaviour is a threat to the peaceful state of the nation and can be detrimental to national development.
CHAPTER EIGHT
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed at exploring how the prevalence of invective and insults directed at national leaders on GhanaWeb figures against the backdrop of traditional Ghanaian speech culture, which places a high value on respect for the elderly and authority. To this end, the study was guided by four research questions:

1. What are the Ghanaian cultural scripts for appropriate ways of interacting with socially elevated categories?

2. a. What are the interactional patterns displayed on GhanaWeb?
   b. What are the characteristic insulting words and expressions used by commenters during online political discourse on GhanaWeb?

3. What are the meanings of common local language abusive terms and their social value in terms of offence in the Ghanaian context?

4. What are the metapragmatic reactions from other commenters to the practice of using invective and insults towards others on news sites in Ghana?

With regard to these research questions (RQs), the primary data for the study was the Corpus of GhanaWeb Comments on Ghana’s 2016 Election (CGCGE16). CGCGE16 was supported by insights of key informants obtained from interviews, comments from social media platforms, and evidence from scholarly works. The study was situated within the ethnopragmatic approach, established on the premise of a set of basic, universal meanings. The results were described in Chapters 4-7 with each chapter providing the answers that directly correspond to RQs 1-4, respectively. Bearing in mind the above-stated research aim, it was essential to see the cultural assumptions behind the characterization of the use of abusive language against authority figures as inappropriate among Ghanaians. These cultural assumptions were presented in Chapter 4, prior to the analysis of comments sourced from GhanaWeb in Chapters 5-7. In Chapters 6 and 7, it became clear how cultural nuanced many of the speech practices on GhanaWeb are, regardless of the fact that online interaction is, presently, a universal practice.
In the sections that follow in this chapter, the major findings of the study are summarized. Subsequently, the limitations of the study are outlined. Then the implications of the study, along with some recommendations for future research, are highlighted.

8.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

The study focused on online Ghanaian political news reports and examined invective and insults in the comments about them. It has examined how citizens, through online platforms, used abusive language against the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner involved in Ghana’s 2016 election. It has also taken account of the particularities of anonymous online communication. Through the ethnopragmatic approach, the meaning of local social categories and key insults in this study that do not have exact equivalents in English have been rigorously stated by means of the semantic explication method. Additionally, the study has demonstrated that it is feasible, and in some ways revealing, to use universal human concepts to describe communicative norms in various cultures in a fashion that makes the descriptions easily comprehensible to cultural insiders and cultural outsiders alike. The explanation of communicative norms among Ghanaians through the cultural script method provided very fine-grained accounts while avoiding any form of ethnocentrism.

The analysis in this study was founded on the fact that in Ghana, it is traditionally unacceptable for a person to openly disrespect or dishonour anyone regarded as “above” oneself/others, regardless of their (in)actions. Thus, in an interaction with a person considered as a superior, one must choose language forms such as honorifics and “politeness” markers, and assume communicative behaviours that portray a positive attitude, reflect the status differences, and dignify the person. Speakers have to be mindful of this and act accordingly; else they incur the displeasure of others in a way that could extend to their family. It was observed from CGCGE16 that, in contrast to these sociocultural expectations and norms of asymmetrical interactions, online commenters employ various forms of invective to vilify known authority figures. The possibility of sharing opinions by commenting on news reports online have empowered citizens to react to issues affecting their lives and to freely express
their frustrations and dissatisfaction with people of a higher social status in culturally unacceptable fashions.

Results from the frequency analysis showed that most of the comments following the news reports in CGCGE16 do not directly address the content. They are, rather, personal attacks on authority in a way that violates acceptable Ghanaian communicative norms and expectations for respect. In an immediate sense, this behaviour was attributed to the absolute anonymity that GhanaWeb provides, which shields commenters from the repercussions their speech behaviours necessitate. More broadly, this behaviour can be attributed to the right to freedom of speech, the repeal of the criminal libel law, as well as the tradition of venting during the annual festival celebrations of some ethnic groups in Ghana. Such traditions can be regarded as cultural models or precedents to the free use of insults against authority on online platforms. It was also realized that the opportunities offered on GhanaWeb to the ordinary Ghanaian to participate in political discussions and to deliberate on issues of national concern are in a more unrestrained fashion than in the traditional forms of citizen participation, such as writing letters to editors.

Invective and insults in CGCGE16 were expressed both overtly and covertly. The commenters often drew on past socio-political occurrences, scandals, their public or sociocultural knowledge, and other contexts that may not be known to everybody to engage in a negative emotional characterization and evaluation of the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner. By means of name-calling expressions (e.g. liar, thief, fool), swear/taboo words (e.g. bitch, ass kisser, cunt), derogatory adjectives (e.g. incompetent, corrupt, stupid) and derogatory interjections (e.g. tweaa, apuu), the commenters attack the targets’ intellectual abilities, moral behaviour, social competence, and physical characteristics among other things. Some commenters expressed their negative feelings through “indirect” language forms. For instance, the use of “indirect” forms, such as rhetorical questions and coded messages, demonstrates how some of the commenters are able to attack their targets and at the same time stay in line with the communicative norms that apply to criticizing authority figures among Ghanaians. In respect of the fact that GhanaWeb is a text-based platform, commenters employ communicative techniques such as repetition and capitalization which do not add any verbal information to the invective and insults but emphasize the emotions being displayed.
The multilingual situation in Ghana is reflected in language use on GhanaWeb. In Chapter 5, instances were shown of how Ghanaian languages such as Akan, Ewe, Ga, Hausa, and Ghanaian Pidgin English were used in CGCGE16. It was also evident that Akan is the most widely used local language among Ghanaians, as it was the predominant local language used in CGCGE16. Some of the commenters draw from the languages in their linguistic repertoire and code-switch when making their contributions online. This may be for many reasons, which include maintaining the import they carry among Ghanaians, and to boost the strength of the desired impact on the target.

It was established that common Akan insulting expressions in CGCGE16, *kwasea, aboa, gyimii, tweaa, and apuu* embody some particular conceptualizations which correspond more to Akan, and to some extent, Ghanaian values. For instance, *kwasea* which is often translated as ‘fool’, implies that one is socially inept rather than mentally deficient; *tweaa* is described as “an interjection that expresses contempt”, but “contempt” is an English word which does not have an exact equivalent in Akan. This means that if these insulting expressions are merely glossed into their nearest English translations, readers who do not share a similar background knowledge as Akans may understand their social value differently compared to readers who do. With the semantic explication technique, Chapter 6 described each of the insulting expressions in a way that reflects what they signify to Akan speakers in Ghana. It was evident that the content of each term explicated is very informative.

The study further examined the evaluative or affective reactions of commenters to the use of invective and insults against the elderly and people of higher status. Chapter 7 demonstrated that although the interaction on GhanaWeb is asynchronous, some commenters play the role of regulatory figures and traditional gatekeepers of appropriate communicative behaviour as they disapprove of the use of invective and insults on the platform. The communicative acts they employ to point out the transgressions of their co-participants include ‘insulting’, ‘giving directives’, ‘calling down misfortune on the transgressor’, and ‘using the formulaic religious expression, *May God forgive you*’.

Chapter 7 also showed that in the metapragmatic comments in CGCGE16, there was practically no mention of “offence”, which is often the concern of Western-based discourse on abusive language use online. Rather, the metapragmatic commenters highlight the clear position of the Ghanaian culture on respect for elders and people in authority. They also stress
on the fact that the exchange of invective and insults in politics can result in violence which may have adverse effects on the development of the nation. They, therefore, suggest to political actors and citizens that as much as possible, their choice of language forms during socio-political interactions should be devoid of abuse.

In broad terms, the practice of trading invective and insults on GhanaWeb is similar to what is going on presently on similar platforms in other parts of the world, such as America, Australia, and the United Kingdom (see Neurauter-Kessels, 2011; Boatright et al., 2019). However, it is clear that although the language of communication on GhanaWeb is English, participants deploy some local insults in their comments based on the value of such insults among Ghanaians and they do not always depend on English terms to abuse others. That is, they would rather deliver the insults in their original languages. The abuse goes beyond the linguistic forms that constitute the online reader comments and can be seen in terms of the norms, values, and communicative practices of Ghanaians. The choice of the local linguistic forms highlights some peculiarities of the Ghanaian culture and points to the fact that using insult-filled comments to send one’s message across on internet platforms is not a culture-free communicative practice.

Even though the comment section of GhanaWeb could be used by ordinary citizens to contribute to ongoing democratic deliberations, such potentials have yet to be realized. The massive participation in socio-political interactions does not constitute civic participation. Considering the results of this study, the comment section of GhanaWeb is currently more of a platform for emotional outbursts, rather than a platform where issues of national concern are addressed. The platform provided to citizens to engage in issues of national interest is, thus, only as operational and effective as the degree to which citizens prefer to use it.

8.2 LIMITATIONS

This thesis is not a sociological study. It is a study about political discourse, that is, language use in politics in a sociocultural context. The limitations of the study are related to the main research site and some aspects of the quantitative analyses. First, because one does not have to register and/or log in with their details to be a participant (i.e. a reader or commenter) on GhanaWeb, it was impossible to obtain the demographic or social background of any of the
participants. That is, the background of these participants in terms of whether they are young or old, male or female, resident or non-resident Ghanaians, among other things remains unknown.

Some screen names used to sign the comments may seem to give away the sex of their authors, but one cannot be sure if those identities are even genuine or false. Sometimes, the metapragmatic comments suggest that the presidential candidates and the electoral commissioner are the contemporaries of the parents of the abusive commenters. This would imply that the abusive commenters are young. However, this assumption is based on the perceptions of the metapragmatic commenters.

Accordingly, the present study cannot answer the question of which category of people engages in the use of abusive language on the platform; which category plays the role of traditional gatekeepers; or which category participates as readers. In relation to politics, the question of whether the politicians or their associates read the abusive comments directed at them can also not be answered. As a matter of fact, even if the targets of the verbal abuses read the comments, the extent to which they affect their persons, emotions, or political ambitions (if at all) cannot be known.

Secondly, the present study cannot identify the number of unique commenters on the platform. It is possible that the 100 or more comments under a given news report were actually posted by less than 20 participants since a single person can post as many comments as they want on the platform with different screen names. With regard to the 2016 presidential election, the study cannot state categorically that the abusive comments are from citizens who want to vent their feelings or express their dissatisfaction about a candidate. It is possible that some of the abusive commenters may be staffers of the various political parties, whose job is to undermine the eligibility and suitability of their opponents for the presidency in front of other online participants, who form a part of the electorate. These demographic and social background of participants on GhanaWeb are not relevant to the study as the focus is on the use of language in the comment threads.

Lastly, the results of quantitative analyses in the study can only provide glimpses of the occurrences on GhanaWeb, as the results do not cover the discourse or the contents of the reader comments in other sections, such as ‘Entertainment’, ‘Sports’, or ‘Business’. Moreover, it would be an “overstretch” for the study to claim that the results for the
interactional patterns and contents of the abusive language herein presented hold true for reader comments on every news report in the ‘General News’ and ‘Politics’ sections. Comments in these two sections which were not bearing on the 2016 presidential election may not exhibit all or even some of the features explored in this study.

Regardless of the abovementioned limitations, the study has provided valuable insights on the use of invective and insults in online political discourse among Ghanaians. The following are some implications of the study.

8.3 IMPLICATIONS

8.3.1 Theoretical Implications

This thesis is the first to extend the ethnopragmatic approach, underpinned by the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) framework, to the study of (1) communicative norms in asymmetrical interactions among Ghanaians, (2) political discourse, and (3) insults in an online context. Although this study is more of an analysis of discourse in a political context, from a theoretical perspective, there are some thematic and methodological overlaps with other areas of linguistics. That is, aspects of the study are relevant to other areas such as anthropological linguistics, which explores “the relationships between language(s) and culture(s)”, and sociolinguistics, which considers “the ways in which social relationships, statuses, patterns, and networks interact with language structure and use” (Verschueren, 1999, p. 7).

The twin methodological tools of the ethnopragmatic approach (i.e. cultural scripts and semantic explications), as applied to this study, make the approach compatible, first, with any theoretical framework that considers culture-specific aspects of speech practices. One of such frameworks is interactional discourse pragmatics, which Al-Hindawi and Saffah (2017: 97) describe as a “field of inquiry [that] stresses the idea that pragmatic research has to take into consideration social and cultural restrictions on language use”. Interactional discourse pragmatics, just as the ethnopragmatic approach, aims at giving attention to the sociocultural models and norms that represent the speech community to which a speaker(s) belongs when investigating their speech practices. Considering this similarity, the present author is of the
view that the cultural script method can be an effective tool to lay bare the “social and cultural restrictions” which interactional discourse pragmatics is concerned about.

The ethnopragmatic approach is also compatible with lexical semantics, that is, “the systematic study of word meanings” (Cruse, 2001, p. 8758). The technique of semantic explication, which has been applied to the meaning of social categories (e.g. *ametsitsi*), cultural terms that suggest social ineptness (e.g. *kwasea*), and derogatory interjections (e.g. *tweaa*) in this study, is very useful as far as word meanings are concerned. It can provide additional clarity about the meaning of the culture- and language-specific terms and deepen their understanding, thereby making them more intelligible to cultural outsiders. Moreover, the meaning of words by this method can be transposed into any language without distortion. This is possible because the vocabulary and grammar of NSM have equivalents in almost all human languages.

This thesis, unlike previous NSM-inspired ethnopragmatic studies, does not focus on the speech practices of Anglo speakers of English. It diverges from the “norm” of looking into the use of a language in its “indigenous home” (i.e. Anglo English). To some extent, it is comparable to Wong (2014) which explains the relationship between meaning and culture by using the NSM approach to explore aspects of Singapore English including cultural categories and interjections and to link certain expressions to particular cultural norms.

This thesis is an extensive study that gives much insight into English language use among Ghanaians (i.e. Outer-Circle English speakers) on online platforms, and generally in Ghana. The normative standards of English use in Ghana are strong normative standards connected with British English, in that, often, “British Standard English (BSE) is the written target language” (Dako & Quarcoo, 2017, p. 21). However, it is clear from this study that the speech practices on online platforms patronized by people in Ghana greatly differ from practices on platforms patronized by people in England, although the medium of communication on all these platforms is English. This thesis is, therefore, inclined towards the notion that “understanding local discourse and ideologies of media technology is crucial since speakers incorporate new technologies of communication from existing communicative repertoires, which influence new and emerging cultural practices” (Wilson & Peterson, 2002, p. 461).
Undoubtedly, online interactions all over the world have some similarities, which include the fact that they are more uncivil compared to face-to-face interactions, and they are often rich in insulting expressions. However, giving an account of the use of abusive language in online interaction from a specific sociocultural perspective well situates the study. Without reference to culture and context, one may not be able to pin down what makes online interactions more inappropriate or uncivil and they may not be able to fully understand the implications of abusive commenters’ choice of insulting expressions. Making generalizations on the basis of what is reported by research works that focus on Inner-Circle English speakers may wash out to an unknown extent the differences and peculiarities of online interactions among Outer-Circle English speakers. A culturally-situated or contextualized study can highlight a range of differences.

This thesis is the first extensive research work to draw attention to news sites in Ghana as another platform where the use of unmitigated invective and insults against authority figures and people of higher social status is increasingly becoming the norm. It is not a mere academic exercise of describing invective and insults in online political discussions among Ghanaians, but it involves an integration of lexical semantics, pragmatics and structural discourse analysis. The insulting expressions in the corpus are analyzed to elucidate the ways in which they reflect cultural assumptions in Ghana. As a culturally-situated study of online citizen participation and abusive language use, it can contribute to the debates within and among the above-mentioned disciplines. In addition, it can serve as a springboard for future research works on invective and insults, not only on the comment sections of news sites in other communities but on social media platforms as well. It can serve also as a reference material for further studies involving language-specific concepts and cultural values among Ghanaians.

8.3.2 Practical Implications

In terms of the practical applications of the study, it is hoped that the details provided on the norms associated with asymmetrical interactions among Ghanaians can speak to audiences, even outside of academia. The description of various social categories and related indigenous cultural speech values provides a good contribution to the ethnography of speaking in Ghana. It can enhance the cultural understanding of foreigners and also contribute to improved
intercultural dialogues with anyone who belongs to a social category that can be thought of as people “above” oneself/others in Ghana. The knowledge and understanding of pertinent Ghanaian communicative norms and values can further contribute to the enculturation processes of cultural outsiders such as expatriates, exchange students, and foreigners who are spouses or partners to Ghanaians. In short, the semantic explications and cultural scripts presented in this study can be expanded and employed as serviceable pedagogical resources for effective cross-cultural training.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has aimed at investigating the use of invective and insults on an anonymous news site as a deviation from the sociocultural norms of Ghanaians. In doing so, it has prepared the ground for much follow-up research works which are highlighted below.

The present research can be replicated in another election year in Ghana (i.e. 2020 or 2024) to find out if the discourse dynamics and the negative linguistic choices will be different or similar.

It can also be replicated with reader comments of news reports in any other section on GhanaWeb, such as ‘Entertainment’, ‘Sports’, or ‘Business’, in order to show the variation in language use in different sections on GhanaWeb.

The study suggested that invective and insults may have negative effects on the targets. A sociological study could be conducted among politicians to find out the various ways the use of abusive language against them impacts negatively on them.

The coding results showed that some of the comments in CGCGE16 signal an endorsement of a preferred presidential candidate. In a further study, the linguistic strategies that commenters employed to endorse their preferred candidates could be explored.

The semantic explication method can be employed to explore the meaning of any culture- and language-specific term or concept and the cultural script method can help in the understanding of any appropriate communicative behaviour among Ghanaians.

Future research could focus on a comparative linguistic analysis of the invective and insults involved in the data in CGCGE16 and the data gathered by the MFWA in 2016. The MFWA’s data corpus consists of abusive language used during political discussions on
morning radio shows and other interactive radio programmes related to the election. This comparative study could help ascertain whether or not the effectively anonymous participation on GhanaWeb influenced the way citizens expressed themselves.

The common assumption in the literature is that interactants tend to be more civil on internet platforms where there is a need for them to identify themselves. It is, therefore, recommended that the communicative behaviour of Ghanaians who participate in political discussions on interactive platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which require registration and formal log-in should be examined in future research.

Future studies can draw attention to the dynamics of political discourse on online interactive platforms in other countries with similar cultures (e.g. in Nigeria) or countries with different cultures (e.g. in Australia) by exploring the reader comments on their news sites, as well as social media platforms. It would be very interesting to also investigate, in these other cultures, the linguistic strategies employed to communicate the idea that the use of negative, antagonistic language transgresses their norms and values.

8.5 CLOSING REMARKS

It cannot be overemphasized that participation in socio-political issues by a large number of citizens is a basic necessity for a healthy democracy and deliberation on developmental issues in any nation. Nevertheless, the multi-participant interactive platform provided by GhanaWeb, which could have been used for citizen participation and the free exchange of critical ideas, has been largely abused, as the site is currently characterized by the frequent use of invective and insults.

Some of the insults in CGCGE16 were first used by political actors on television, radio, or campaign platforms against their political opponents. Thus, to help combat abusive language in political discussions generally, the politicians must desist from insulting and disrespecting people of divergent political backgrounds or persuasions and concentrate on substantive issues in their public speeches. They must protect the Ghanaian heritage of moral values and sociocultural norms by exercising their right to freedom of speech in a responsible manner, especially in open spaces. Leaders of the various political parties should boldly sanction their members, especially those who are high ranking, when they engage in abusing their opponents verbally. Individuals who engage in deploying invective and insults to tackle
issues of national concern rather than coming up with more convincing arguments should be openly condemned. This can be done by encouraging the MFWA to carry on with the name-and-shame approach which is practised every election year. The initiative must be supported by the government of the day so that it will extend beyond the period of elections.

To conclude, it is understandable that the comment section of GhanaWeb is meant to be a platform where citizens can express themselves freely without the fear of censorship. Instead of taking advantage of this platform to evaluate public policies or hold state officials and public officers accountable for their (in)actions in a constructive manner, the commenters use it as a “safe space” for vilification and personal attack on authority. The communicative behaviour displayed on the platform during political discussions is not reflective of the “respect for others” that the traditional gatekeepers and other national stakeholders seek in Ghanaian political discourse. It is in sharp contrast to the communicative ideals that are projected by the norms and values of the Ghanaian society and any other society in the world that cherishes social harmony. Therefore, some mechanisms should be devised by the web providers of GhanaWeb to curb the use of abusive language in order to promote effective citizen participation that can facilitate national development.
REFERENCES


Ameka, F. K., & Thompson, R. (2017). *Ewe semantic primes, with English equivalents* [https://intranet.secure.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0031/345991/Ewe_Table_NSM-Primes_05_2017.docx](https://intranet.secure.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0031/345991/Ewe_Table_NSM-Primes_05_2017.docx)


Angouri, J., & Tseliga, T. (2010). You have no idea what you are talking about! From e-disagreement to e-impoliteness in two online fora. *Journal of Politeness, 6*(1), 57-82.


Borton, B. A. (2013). What can reader comments to news online contribute to engagement and interactivity? A quantitative approach. (Doctoral dissertation). University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, USA.


Fish, S. (1994). *There’s no such thing as free speech…and it's a good thing too*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.


Goddard, C. (2014b). Have to, have got to, and must: NSM analyses of English modal verbs of ‘necessity’. In M. Taboada, & R. Trnavac (Eds.), *Nonveridicality and evaluation* (pp. 50-75). Leiden: BRILL.


Held, G. (2014). Figura ... or Face? Reflections on two sociopragmatic key concepts in the light of a recent media conflict between Italians and Germans and its negotiation in Italian internet forums. In K. Bedijs, G. Held, & C. Maaß (Eds.), *Face work and social media* (pp. 32-81). Münster: Lit-Verlag.


Zhang, W., Cao, X., & Tran, M. N. (2013). The structural features and the deliberative quality of online discussions. *Telematics and informatics, 30*(2), 74-86.

Dear Editor,

I am Rachel Thompson, a PhD student at Griffith University, Australia. My research topic is "Ethnopragnatic perspectives on political discourse on news sites in Ghana". This research is under the supervision of Professors Cliff Goddard and Andy Kirkpatrick. I wish to request for a written approval to use comments on your reputable website as data for the research.

The aim of this research is basically to investigate how language is used in the interactive platform given Ghanaians to post comments as a way of sharing opinions on certain socio-political issues. The research seeks to explore linguistic items (e.g. neologisms, coinages, Ghanaian English words and expressions) that Ghanaians have developed and/or use augment of the posted comments on these news sites. The research will also examine the use of insults, proverbs, metaphors, code switching, and other stylistic devices Ghanaians employ during interactions on this platform to enhance communication flow.

I believe GhanaWeb is the best website to use for this research because of several factors which include:

- It publishes news from different media agencies (both print and electronic) in Ghana and therefore serves as a host platform for all these news agencies.
- It is very popular and patronized by Ghanaians both at home and in the diaspora which suggests that opinions shared on this platform are of diverse backgrounds.
It is easily accessible since it is not only available on computers but on the mobile phone which has become an indispensable tool in our world today.

The best of these factors is that GhanaWeb guarantees absolute freedom of speech and guarantees anonymity to its users. This implies that commentators on this platform feel free to share their opinions naturally.

The research is purely for academic purposes and will not in any way, to the best of my knowledge, bring GhanaWeb into disrepute.

If you will permit me, the data I will obtain from your website will involve some news items published, the comment threads following these news items, the date and time, and pseudonyms of commentators.

I would be very grateful if you can give me your permission by giving me a written approval to use your website as my research site. I am available to respond to any query from you either via email, rachel.thompson2@griffithuni.edu.au or phone, +61 435878109. I hope to hear favourably from you soon.

Many thanks.

Sincerely,

Rachel Thompson
APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF APPROVAL

Griffith University
School of Languages and Linguistics
Building N16, Room 0.17, Nathan Campus
170 Kessels Road, Nathan
Brisbane QLD 4111
Australia

Amsterdam, 12th August, 2016

To whom it may concern,

This is to permit Ms Rachel Thompson from the School of Languages and Linguistics, Griffith University, Australia. To use the news stories and comment threads following these news items, the date and time, and pseudonyms of commentators on www.ghanaweb.com to conduct her research on “Ethnopragnmatic perspectives on political discourse on news sites in Ghana”.

The research will be purely for academic purposes and will not in any way bring GhanaWeb B.V. into disrepute.

Kind regards,

Rob Bellaart,
CEO GhanaWeb B.V.
APPENDIX 3: NOTICE OF ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Your Human Ethics Protocol 2016/671 has been Fully approved

RIMS Griffith

To: Rachel Thompson <rachel.thompson2@griffithuni.edu.au>; Cliff Goddard <c.goddard@griffith.edu.au>

cc: research-ethics <research-ethics@griffith.edu.au>; Kim Madison <k.madison@griffith.edu.au>

Importance: High

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Dear Prof Cliff Goddard

I write in relation to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Ethnopragmatic perspectives on political discourse on news sites in Ghana" (GU Ref No: 2016/671). The research ethics reviewers resolved to grant your application a clearance status of "Fully Approved".

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply. Regards

Kim Madison
Human Research Ethics and Integrity
Office for Research
Bray Centre, Nathan Campus
Griffith University ph: +61 (0)7 373 58043 fax: +61 (07) 373 57994
email: k.madison@griffith.edu.au

Researchers are reminded that the Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research provides guidance to researchers in areas such as conflict of interest, authorship, storage of data, & the training of research students.

You can find further information, resources and a link to the University’s Code by visiting Griffith’s webpage: Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research