

In the Voice of the Chief: The Role of the ‘Okyeame’ in Protecting the Gates of Traditional Royal Communication

Naa Korkor Leeyoo Watson-Nortey
University of Education, Winneba.

Abstract

The study set out to explore the rhetoric language of the Okyeame and the part it played as a gatekeeping strategy in Akan royal communication in the traditional court. As the art of using skill in language writing and speaking to persuade and influence, Rhetoric takes its source from a wide selection of human discourse. The research revealed that the Okyeame employs the use of certain linguistics arts such as proverbs, metaphors and symbols in communication which serve as a means of polishing and summarizing messages to and from the chief in the traditional court. In his desire to keep the royal gates of communication, the Okyeame exercises his skill in language use for the chief and audiences gathered at the traditional court. It was revealed that the Okyeame’s use of rhetoric language enhances brevity and precision in Akan royal communication in the performance of his duty as the Okyeame.

Keywords: Rhetoric; Okyeame; gatekeeping; proverbs; metaphors

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric generally is the art of speaking or writing with a main purpose to persuade or influence. Rhetoric takes its source from a wide selection of human discourse in terms of speaking and writing with an intention to persuade. Rhetoric is defined as ‘the skill of using language in speech or writing in a special way that influences or entertains people’. In speaking or writing, one has to in a way appeal to certain faculties. There are three forms of appeal in rhetoric; these are the persuasive appeal to reason, emotion and authority. According to rhetoricians, these three forms of appeal must be present at a stage in the process of preparing a persuasive speech. Rhetoric is first and foremost the art of persuasive speaking. Persuasive speech also could depose or empower tyrants, determine public policy and administer laws. Early on, in the 5th Century BCE (Before Common Era), rhetoric developed in the Greek Probate Courts and flourished under Greek democracy; then some enterprising orators such as Aristotle, tended to teaching the art of persuasive speech as well as practicing it. Speeches require argument that would convince and stories that would move an individual. Rhetoric designates the practice of persuasive oratory and description of ways to construct a successful speech. It selects from a vast realm of human discourse, occasions for speaking and writing that can be regarded as persuasive in intent. It categorises the types of discourse it has selected, analyses each of the types in terms of structure and purpose and identifies the means for successful construction of each types.

In following these goals stated above concerning rhetoricians and art of speaking, rhetoric comes to endorse quotes for linguistic correctness and to make taxonomies¹ of artful ways to use language. It also divides the minds into faculties to which persuasive appeals to both logical and psychological can be addressed. The system of classical rhetoric was too powerful to be limited to the new forms of public speaking to which it was originally applied and the question about language and knowledge raised by classical rhetoricians were never to be put to rest. Until present, classical rhetoric encompasses virtually all forms of discourse and symbolic communication. Among the types of rhetorical discourse is the Legal or Forensic Speech which takes place in the courtroom and concerns judgment about an action which may be in the past. In the traditional court, the *Okyeame* makes use of speech meant to appeal to reason, emotion and authority in his delivery to the audience and the chief. In the Akan traditional court, the *Okyeame* carries a staff known as *akyeampoma* as a symbol of authority².

Rhetoric in its broadest sense is the theory and practice of eloquence, whether spoken or written. Spoken rhetoric is oratory. Rhetoric defines the rules that should govern all prose composition or speech designed to influence judgment or the feelings of people. It therefore treats of all matters relating to beauty or forcefulness of style as in figurative language. From ancient times to the present, such figurative locutions have been extensively employed by orators and writers to strengthen and embellish their styles of speech and composition. The *Okyeame*’s use of rhetoric is basically to persuade and by being witty and skilful in the use of language he entertains the audience through the use of figurative language filled with knowledge and ability to reason in order to aid and ease understanding. The *Okyeame* makes use of ‘verbal felicity’³ in the traditional court through his use of wrapped

¹ System of classification

² K. Ansu-Kyeremeh(2005:183)

³The use of appropriate language for effective rhetorical effect.

language.

In human communication, particularly in journalism, gatekeeping is the process through which ideas and information are filtered for publication. The internal decision making process of relaying or withholding information from the media to the masses. Gatekeeping occurs at all levels of the media structure from a reporter deciding which sources are chosen to include in a story to editors deciding which stories are printed, or even covered. Kurt Lewin was the first one to use the term 'gatekeeping', which he used to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which foods end up on the family's dinner table (Lewin, 1947). Lewin argued that food reaches the table through 'channels', which start with the grocery store, where food is purchased (El- Nawawy, 2002). The gatekeeper is the person who decides what shall pass through each gate section, of which, in any process, there are several.

In the 1970's, McCombs and Shaw took a different direction when they looked at the effects of the gatekeeper's decision. The gatekeeper concept has slipped into the language of many disciplines, including gatekeeping in organization and even in the palaces of chiefs in royal Akan courts in Ghana. McCombs et al, (1976), argues that the gatekeeper decides which information will go forward and which will not. In a social system, a gatekeeper is the one who decides which commodity be it material, goods and information may enter the system. McCombs et al, (1976), bring out the issue that gatekeepers are able to control the public's knowledge of the actual events by allowing some stories pass through the system but keeping others out.

Most communication planning roles include some aspect of gatekeeping. The concept of gatekeeping is applicable to contemporary form of communication; it also applies to traditional forms of communication. A gatekeeper in the media is the one who determines what the audience or the public reads, sees or hears. In a political system there are gatekeepers, individuals or institutions which control access to positions of power and regulate the flow of information and political influence. The gatekeeper's choices are a complex web of influences, preferences, motives and common values. Gatekeeping is inevitable and in some circumstances it can be useful. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005) cites that 'the role of a filter to messages originating from, or addressed to, the chief certainly controls and moderates mistakes and errors of judgment of what turns out to be the chief's final pronouncement (as stated by the *Okyeame*) and improves the richness of the language while enhancing audition. Again, it provides redundancy at the same time as it controls it through the use of figures of speech, proverbs and synonyms.'

Gatekeeping can also be dangerous since it can lead to abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass. People rely on mediators to transform information about billions of events into a manageable number of messages. Messages from the chief must be channelled through the *Okyeame*; a position which shows that he plays an important role as the bridge in traditional oratory in the traditional court. In his position as the mediator, the *Okyeame* filters messages originating from or addressed to the chief.

Communication serves many functions and takes place in a variety of settings. Among these functions are communicating to meet one's social needs, to enhance and maintain one's sense of self, to develop relationships, to exchange information, and to influence others. One of the functions of communication that the *Okyeame* in the traditional court communicates to the chief and audience in rhetoric language is to influence, to enhance and maintain his sense of self as the chief's mediator. Communication in the traditional court also builds relationship among members of the community who appear as audience in the chief's palace. Transferring information to and from the chief in the traditional court by the *Okyeame*, aids in enhancing the exchange of information with an attribute of clarity.

Oral and personal communication plays an important structural role in African societies. Joy Morrison (1984) describes communication as the 'glue that bonds people and communities'. In Africa, oral communication is important and can be said to be needed for life. Oral communication can be described as indispensable. Joy Morrison quotes Laye (1984:26) in Ansu- Kyeremeh (2005, p. 132) as saying:

"We touch upon one of the fundamental aspects of the African soul: the word, the love of palaver and dialogue, the rhythm of talk that love of speech that can keep the old men a whole month under the palaver tree settling some disputes- that is what really characterizes the African people".

In her article which she wrote as a contribution to Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005), Joy Morrison continues to talk about how the love of words and speech manifests itself in Africa. She cites Burkina Faso, as an example when she elaborates how speech is held in high esteem. She says '... there is an aesthetic and a respect for speech that is inscribed in the culture' in Africa. The art of rhetoric constitutes one of the artistic forms most appreciated in the tradition. Joy Morrison emphasizes that Burkinabe 'griots' otherwise known to be experts in the singing of praise songs and storytelling, have in times past and present aided in the spread of information and news are regarded as instruments influence. Unlike the *Okyeame*, whose duty is mainly seen in the chief's palace and other traditional occasion and gatherings, the Burkinabe 'griots' as described by Joy Morrison are 'road keepers, chronicling births, deaths and the history of relationships within and outside the community.

Similar to the language of the *Okyeame* in traditional Akan royal court setting, the Burkinabe griots makes

use of proverbs- words which are said to be powerful and forms part of the ‘common collective consciousness’ of language in speech and communication. Marie Riley quotes Ong 1982: 35 in Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005:149) as saying:

“Proverbs in oral cultures ‘form the substance of thought itself’. The use of proverbs in communication involves thought processes. It requires deep and critical thinking and analysis of words which may be said in simple and less complex forms. Marie Riley further quotes Ong 1982:34 “Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antithesis, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings... in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory system”. (As quoted by Marie Riley in Ansu-Kyeremeh (2005:150).

In communicating in the traditional court, the *Okyeame*’s use of rhetorical language such as proverbs aid in managing and economizing words whilst employing listeners and the audience to engage in deep thinking. Communication and the use of proverbs clothes speech and make it rich and beautiful. It adds to the crafty and witty nature of the linguist (*Okyeame*) in traditional oratory in the Ghanaian culture. The *Okyeame* through the use of proverbs in communicating educates by the attention of the audience present to himself since what he mostly says is simple and short but condensed with information and is didactic¹ in nature.

Language is the basic means whereby individuals regulate social attitudes. To quote the words of Claire Kramche (1998:3), ‘*language expresses cultural reality*’. Language brings out facts about ideas, events and other situations since they make reference to a body of knowledge about the world. Language, the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another. Language is primarily spoken, although it can be transferred to other media, such as writing. There are also visual means by which language can be expressed and this is by the use of sign language. In the context of communication, language is linked to culture in several ways. Through the use of language, individuals learn to communicate with one another either by face-to-face interaction, sending or receiving messages or any medium which may be preferable to the parties involved in the communication process. Kramche (1998)² brings out the idea that ‘speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity’. If an individual is denied the opportunity to use language it is regarded as a rejection of that individual by the society and a violation of culture.

2.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The use of rhetorical language comes with a spice of wittiness, excellence and knowledge. The worth of the *Okyeame* in the Akan traditional court and other traditional functions is very vital. In the Akan culture and in traditional Ghanaian culture, individuals are expected not to speak directly to a chief. Issues, be it goodwill messages or grievances are channelled through the *Okyeame* who in turn speaks to the chief. The *Okyeame* in performing this task makes use of flowery language, sometimes to persuade, educate and entertain.

3.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study set out to investigate the following:

1. The use of rhetorical language by the *Okyeame* in the traditional court.
2. The factor of gatekeeping in the use of rhetoric language by the *Okyeame*.
3. The effect of the use of rhetorical language by the *Okyeame* in the traditional court.

4.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study found responses for the following research questions which guided the research work:

1. What does the art of rhetorical language do to the *Okyeame* in the performance of his duty?
2. How does the *Okyeame* protect the gates of royal communication?
3. How does rhetorical language enrich communication in the performance of the *Okyeame*’s duty at the traditional court?

5.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sproule (1991) the Greeks and Romans gave a special name to speechmaking. The art of being rhetorical comes with speechmaking. Roman philosophers such as Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote on rhetoric from his own observations and experiences in the Roman Senate (Sproule, 1991, p.11). Cicero acknowledged speakers who used complete rhetorical approaches as the best speakers. Yankah (1995, p.49) brings out the fact that

¹ That which teaches morals and tends to educate the members of the society

² Kramche Claire (1998) *Language and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

'absence of speech in a critical moment may worsen a crisis.' Therefore, speech made at a critical time will eventually curtail an unforeseen situation which may follow.

Since classical times, good speaking has been regarded in high esteem and has been closely linked to *knowledge, attitude and skills*. An individual will be a rhetorically competent individual when one takes into consideration *knowledge, attitude and skills* and the art of speechmaking. Sproule (1991, p.6) argues that the first measure of achieving rhetorical competence is knowledge. Knowledge acquired concerning the primary lessons of public speaking. This comes with good ethical practices, logic and a great degree of delivery techniques. Wolvin, et al (1993)¹ also view public communication as dynamic in that it is not static. It has a potential to change. To Wolvin et al (1993), public speaking competency is the ability to create appropriate and effective messages, based on an understanding of the symbolic, dynamic, and transactional nature of communication.

In the Akan society, several instances and situations call for public speaking. These range from informal situations such as conversations, speaking in a public assembly and 'dwamu kasa' otherwise known as oratory which is highly celebrated in the Akan society. There are laudable issues which concern challenges in 'dwamu kasa' otherwise known as oratory or public speaking. Yankah (1995, p.53)² identifies that oratory or public speaking lies in exercising speaking skills that can persuade two or more individuals at a formal forum as an example which may be a sitting of chief in the traditional court.

Dwamu kasa typically occurs at a public location such as an ahenfie (chief's palace) or abusuafe (house of a lineage head), which are spatially designed to cater to large audiences (Yankah, 1995, p.53).

In several instances the setting determines the sort of speech which will be required by the speaker, whether formal or informal. Public speaking has a great number of people listening. In view of the great number of audience listening or sometimes reading, the personal and the private aspect in communication is reduced and the social aspect is highly raised, thereby increasing formality. Individuals hold public speakers in high esteem and thus good speakers are expected not only to know what to say but what not to say as well. Public communication or public speaking in several instances tends to be business oriented because of its formality. In Akan royal speech, the *Okyeame* may be considered to be superior to the chief in the art of public speaking. A clear picture is given by Caseley Hayford (1903, p. 68) of the Akan royal orator. He says:

"When the linguist rises to speak in public, he leans upon the king's gold cane, or a subordinate holds it in front of him. He is going to make a speech now, and it is sure to be a happy effort. It will sparkle with wit and humour. He will make free use of parables to illustrate points in speech. He will indulge in epigrams, and all the while he will seem not to possess any nerves- so cool, so collected, so self-complacent! He comes of a stock used to public speaking and public function." (also cited by Finnegan 1970, p. 447, Yankah 1995, p.16)

In Africa, individuals having the skill and ability of self-expression during public events and gathering are revered and shown love. Oratory is closely related to eloquence, thus societies look on such skills to appoint individuals to hold certain positions even at the political levels. In his contribution in the *Legon Journal of Humanities*³, Ansu- Kyeremeh writes 'Africans in general delight in effective public speaking, whether as litigants in courts, members of a jury, participants in public debate or in general conversation.' Finnegan (1970) agrees with the art of oratory when she describes the various situations in which oratory is employed. She says:

The art of oratory is in West Africa carried to a remarkable pitch of perfection. At public palavers each linguist, or official spokesman stands up in turn and pours forth a flood of speech, the readiness and exuberance of which strikes the stranger with amazement, and accompanies his words with gestures so various, graceful and appropriate that it is a pleasure to look on, though the matter of the oration cannot be understood (Finnegan 1970, p. 444, also cited by Ansu- Kyeremeh in Legon Journal of Humanities)

The *Okyeame* takes pride in the skill and attitude exhibited in the art of public speaking. The *Okyeame* enhances the art of rhetoric competence in public speaking by holding the staff which depicts rank, authority and proverbial statement. In Akan royal palaces, the staff of office is used by royal orators on diplomatic missions and is a symbol of, royalty, power, oratory and authoritative performance in communication. Several offices especially in the political sphere exhibit their authority through the use of one type of symbol or another. In Ghana, the Clerk of Parliament holds a scepter during the seating of parliamentarians, a symbol of parliamentary authority of the speaker of parliament. The use of symbols of office dates back to Homeric period in classical Greek civilization and it also had the significance of the relationship between a staff and authoritative oratory.

The scepter was what keyed the performance of public speech, signaling that the speaker had the floor. It was held by heralds and taken by speakers who wanted to make a solemn statement at a

¹ Wolvin, A. D., Berko. R. M., and Wolvin, D. R. (1993) *The Public Speaker/ The Public Listener*. U.S.A: Houghton Mifflin Company.

² Yankah, K. (1995) *Speaking For the Chief. Okyeame and the politics of Akan Royal Oratory*. U.S.A: Indiana University Press.

³ K. Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) 'The communication factor in the Pan- African heritage.' E. Kweku Osam (Ed) *Legon Journal of Humanities*. Volume 11, p.6

public assembly (Yankah, 1995, p.32)

Similarly, the *Okyeame*'s staff symbolizes a combination of the positions mentioned above. Yankah (1995) traces the use of the staff by the Akan as far back as the seventeenth century and makes reference to oral traditions, when he refers to the first *Okyeame* to use a staff. The first *Okyeame* to use a staff was a woman who was very weak and needed a stick to support her. The symbols embossed on the staff are rhetorical and are emblems which show identity based on myths of origins. He further brings out the distinctions of some staffs when he describes the staffs used by the *Okyeame* on behalf of the chief as generally covered in gold or silver, except for one particular staff, which is mostly singled out and covered with the dark skin of a monitor lizard.

Sproule (1991) also talks about attitude as a factor of enhancing rhetorical competence. A speaker in a delivery of speech must be confident, and must have positive interest as well as enthusiasm in sharing with people in which case the people will be the audience. Attitude towards the speechmaking should be positive in order to skillfully project one's ideas to listeners. The third component of rhetorical competence as elaborated by Sproule (1991, p.6) is skill. This component must be demonstrated in the delivery of the speech itself by the speaker. Sproule (1991) continues to say that skill is the 'bottom line' of speaking. Wolvin, et al (1993), holds the idea that public communication comes with certain components among which are the source, code, perceptions and attitudes.

Also, Wolvin et al (1993) mention the channel, the receiver, feedback, noise and the environment in which communication occurs. According to Wolvin et al (1993, p.9), speakers are influenced by several factors in the communication process. One of these factors includes 'perceptions' and attitudes'. 'Perceptions' concern the views people hold on an issue and 'attitudes' which dwells on the listeners present during the delivery of a speech. These attitudes may be positive or negative. Here, Wolvin, et al (1993) and Sproule (1991) share similar opinions when it comes to attitude since they all agree that attitude towards speechmaking and public communication must be positive in order to ease communication. Gruner et al¹ (1972, p.137), comment that the way one conducts one's self during the period of confrontation in the process of communication has a lot to contribute to the success of the communication.

If a speaker is smooth, poised, and seemingly at ease with himself, the audience will likewise feel comfortable and poised. If the speaker demonstrates orally and visibly that he is energetic and sincerely interested in his audience's perceiving his message, that audience will, emphatically, return his energy and enthusiasm as active listeners (Gruner, et al, 1972, p.137).

The *Okyeame* is the most visible personality in the 'chief's executive wing'. The *Okyeame* performs duties in various aspects in the royal domain among which are social, political, religious and rhetorical functions on behalf of the chief. Yankah (1995, p. 85) explains that, 'in addition to being the chief's orator, diplomat, envoy, prosecutor, protocol officer, and prayer officiant², the *Okyeame* is also the chief's confidant and counselor.' The *Okyeame* is expected to be abreast with the traditions, history, and custom of the land. The *Okyeame* is also expected to be experienced, skilful as well as be filled with wisdom in the art of forensic arts, oratory, and public relations. In order to be credible, the *Okyeame* must possess certain moral qualities such as sincerity, loyalty to the chief and to his duties as well as selfless devotion. These and other exemplary qualities must be exhibited in the attitude of the *Okyeame* at all times. Hierarchically, the position held by the *Okyeame* in the political sphere in traditional court makes him visible and known by many than the chief. However the *Okyeame* cannot ascend to the position of the chief, likewise it is derogatory for a chief to take up the role of an *Okyeame* in the traditional court.

6.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aristotle³ is generally credited with explaining the dynamics of public speaking. West and Turner (2008) make it clear that *The Rhetoric* consists of three books- one primarily concerned with public speakers, the second focusing on the audience, and the third attending to the speech itself. Aristotle recommended that speakers go beyond their first instincts when they want to persuade others. Speakers need to consider every aspect of speech making including their audience. Aristotle's *Rhetorical Theory* is guided by two assumptions:

1. Effective public speakers must consider their audience
2. Effective public speakers utilize a number of proofs in their presentations

Aristotle suggests that within a public speaking context, speaker-audience relationship must be acknowledged. Communication by nature is a transactional process; a form of a give and take affair. Hence, the *Okyeame* needs to consider the audience present in the traditional court in order to communicate effectively despite his/her use of rhetorical language. The *Okyeame* should be highly audience centered, by considering the level of his/her audience at every given situation.

¹Gruner, C. R., Logue, C. M., Freshley, D. L., and Huseman, R. C. (1972) *Speech Communication in Society*. U.S.A: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

²A leader in traditional prayer where libation is poured to the gods and ancestors of a land in request for special assistance. Libation is poured by the *Okyeame* during royal gatherings, family gathering and on festive occasions.

³A Greek philosopher and scientist.384-322BC.

“Of the three elements in speech making- speaker, subject and person addressed- it is the last one, the hearer that determines the speeches end and object” (cited in Roberts, 1984).

Each listener is unique implying that what works with one listener during delivery of a speech may fail with another.

The second assumption pertains to what speakers do in speech preparation and delivery. Aristotle proofs refer to the means of persuasion, and, for Aristotle, three proofs exist: *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*¹. *Ethos* refers to the perceived character, intelligence and goodwill of a speaker as they become revealed through his/her speech. The *Okyeame* builds a character for him/herself through the use of rhetorical language. The *Okyeame*'s way of speaking expresses a level of intelligence and the use of crafty language also comes with a measure of goodwill. *Ethos* is a broad term that refers to the mutual influence that speakers and listeners have on each other. At a time of performing his/her duties at the traditional court, the *Okyeame* has influence over audience in the traditional court. However, this influence is a mutual one. The audience enjoys a privilege of having influence on the *Okyeame* as well. The audience builds trust in the *Okyeame*, and this trust grants the *Okyeame* the will to be persuasive in his/her delivery of speech and use of language.

Logos is the logical proof that speakers employ during speech delivery; their arguments, rationalizations, and discourse (West and Turner, 2008, p.262). For Aristotle, *logos* involves using a number of practices including using logical claims and clear language. Aristotle regards speeches made in poetic phrases as unnatural and that which lacks clarity. *Pathos* pertains to the emotions that are drawn out of listeners. Aristotle argued that listeners become the instrument of proof when emotion is stirred in them; listeners judge differently when they are influenced by joy, pain, hatred or fear.

Aristotle argued that for a persuasive speech to be effective, speakers must follow certain guidelines or principles, which he called ‘canons’. Classical rhetoricians have maintained Aristotle’s observations and to present, most writers of public speaking texts in communication follow Aristotle’s canon for effective speech delivery. Despite the fact that Rhetoric focused on persuasion, the canons apply in a number of speaking situations. Aristotle points to five recommendations for effective oratory: Invention, Arrangement, Style, Delivery and Memory (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005).

Invention, the first of the five of the canons is closely connected to *logos*². It aids in the development of an argument that is relevant to the purpose of a speech. Invention is broadly interpreted as the body of information and knowledge that a speaker brings to the speaking situation. In speech delivery, the *Okyeame* may commence by using a proverb related to the issue under discussion at a particular point in time. If the *Okyeame* is inviting guests into the traditional court, he/she would appeal to the logical faculty of the guests by making them aware of the environment in which they are.

The second of the canons is Arrangement. Arrangement concerns itself with the speaker’s ability to organize a speech. Organization of speech enhances speech effectiveness. Aristotle adores simplicity and makes it a priority in speech. Introductions are meant to precede speeches. It aids in gaining the audience attention and serves as a connection with the audience. George Kennedy (1991) cited by West and Turner, 2008, p.266) relates Aristotle’s word in the light of introductions:

“All sorts of things will lead the audience to receptivity if the speaker wants, including his/her seeing to be a reasonable person. They pay more attention to those people. And they are attentive to great things, things that concern themselves, marvels, and pleasures. As a result, one should imply that the speech is concerned with such things” (p.263).

The *Okyeame* may arrange his/her speech by beginning to make some pronouncements to the Almighty God, especially in situations which requires the pouring of libation, then to lesser gods and ancestors of the land. In inviting a chief to deliver a speech, the *Okyeame* may say some appellations of the chief. Yankah (1995) brings out the idea of metacommunication. According to Yankah, ‘metacommunicative structures particularly refer to organizing signals or markers by the speaker to ensure the structural integrity of his address. As seen in speech formulae used by the *Okyeame*, there is the use of itemization formulae such as ‘nea edi kan’, ‘nea eto so’ (first, secondly)’ (p.57). In Akan societies, public speaking or oratory is known as ‘dwamu kasa’ (Yankah, 1995, p. 52). The word ‘dwamu’ denotes public whereby ‘kasa’ denotes speech. Similarly, the individual in the midst of an audience who makes a speech introduces his/her speech by first addressing the chief through the *Okyeame*. Yankah (1995, p. 54) makes use of examples of expressions of deference in formal speech. These include traditional titles, appellations, or honorifics which refer to dignitaries. Most of these expressions are used in the introduction of a speech to draw the attention of audience to the speaker in which case it is the *Okyeame*.

The third of the canons is ‘Style’ which Aristotle tends to treat as decoration. The use of language to express

¹Logical(Logos), Ethical(Ethos) and Pathetic(Pathos) Appeals as defined by Aristotle.

²Logical appeal to reason as defined by Aristotle as a form of persuasion.

ideas in a certain manner and peculiar way is referred to as Style. In talking about style, Aristotle includes word choice, word imagery, and word appropriateness. Aristotle holds the view that style is unique to each type of rhetoric. Aristotle further debunks the usage of outdated words as they make style and the use of language insignificant. In spite of this, Aristotle accepts that speaking in terms that sound simplistic also drives audience interest away from the speech and the speaker which makes audience experience boring. In order to link the unknown to the known, Aristotle introduces the notion of metaphor, or a figure of speech that helps to make the unclear and that which has an in depth meaning more understandable and comprehensible. Metaphors are essential devices to use in speeches. According to Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory, metaphors have the capacity to 'alter' the content and activities of 'one's mind' (Moran, 1996, p.391 as cited by West and Turner, 2008). The *Okyeame* employs the use of certain rhetorical devices in speech delivery. In Akan traditional oratory, public speech is characterized by a large amount of sayings such as proverbs and metaphors. The nature of the proverb as stated by Yankah (1995) is ascribed to a third source and as a cultural truism makes it an appropriate rhetorical device in the negotiation of delicate discourse. The *Okyeame's* use of devices and figurative language adds a spice of complexity in the language to cause people to delve into deep thinking and analysis which eventually educate them in the process.

Aristotle also takes keen interest in how speech is delivered. Delivery is the fourth canon and it basically includes a host of behaviour ranging from eye contact, vocal cues, pronunciation, dialect, body movement, and physical appearance. Here, speakers are urged to make correct use of pitch, rhythm, volume and emotion. Aristotle believed that the way in which something is said affects its intelligibility. In the traditional court, the *Okyeame* is the primary focus of all formal discourse. In the absence of an *Okyeame*, a public discourse risks losing its formality. In varying situations such as marriage ceremonies and family gathering the *Okyeame* facilitates the smooth running of proceedings with respect to the delivery of speech. 'Any form of formal speech is incomplete without reference to the required kinesics compartment on the part of the speaker' (Yankah, 1995, p.57). A speaker in the delivery of speech may bow, make a conscious effort not to use the left hand and in the case of the *Okyeame*, there are situations whereby s/he may slightly drop the traditional cloth off the shoulder and partially remove the native sandals or footwear to symbolize reverence. Speakers may not get close to the chief as it is considered an act of impoliteness. As an Akan royal orator, the *Okyeame* makes use of the staff which is a symbol of authority. The staff is held in the left hand of the *Okyeame* as s/he makes a speech. The *Okyeame* maintains a good eye contact with the audience whilst he performs his/her duties.

Memory, the last of the canons is storing Invention, Arrangement and Style in the mind of the speaker. Aristotle gives little importance to memory. He requires that speakers may have memorized a great deal of delivery techniques, metaphors and the like in order to familiarize and understand the speech content. The *Okyeame* sometimes memorizes the contents of the message of the chief and audience and relays it. He has a memory of metaphors, proverbs and other sayings which s/he employs in speech delivery. He uses oratorical skills to bring out issues from memory.

"At sittings of the Kumasi Traditional Council at the palace of the king of Ashanti, the king rarely makes a lengthy speech uninterrupted by reframing. After every two sentences or so the king pauses, and one of his akyeame¹ amplifies his word to the audience" (Yankah, 1995, p.135).

7.0 METHODOLOGY

The focus of the research was to bring to the fore the flowery language of the *Okyeame* whilst performing his duties at the traditional court. The research took the form of qualitative research. The procedure involved in-depth interviews of some linguists (*Okyeame*) in the Juansa Traditional Council and the Agogo Traditional Council as a supplement to observation. The study adopted the participant observer method in order to check validity and reliability. Although the observation method is designed for respondents who may not be capable to give verbal reports of their feelings the researcher found it expedient in order to ensure accurate responses. The type of sampling technique used was the type of non-probability sampling, which is the purposive sampling technique. The reason for the choice of this sampling technique is because the type of information needed was only available at a particular place which concerns where the *Okyeame* is mostly seen performing his duties (palace). A one-on-one interviews with three traditional linguists to gather the necessary information needed for the research. The interview took place at the respective palaces of the linguists. These palaces are the Juansa Royal Palace and the Agogo Royal Palace, all in the Asante Akyem North District in the Ashanti Region. The researcher also made use of personal interview method by using the unstructured interview technique to ask questions concerning the *Okyeame* to solicit the views of few people in the palace. Personal interview was chosen in order to meet the respondent in a face-to-face contact. The study made use of unstructured interviews in order to facilitate a level of flexibility of approach to questioning and freedom on the part of the researcher to ask questions any time need

¹Plural form of *Okyeame*.

arose. Unstructured interview has been variously described as naturalistic, autobiographic, in-depth, narrative or non-directive (Holland and Ramazanoglu 1994,p.135 as quoted by Blaxter, et al 1996). The data of the study was transcribed and translated into English since the data was collected in Twi. The study was qualitative in nature, hence the analysis was done descriptively and the data assembled quoted extensively to support the issues of the Okyeame in the light of the research problem. The duties and the gatekeeping aspect found in the performance of his duties was not left out.

8.0 ANALYSIS

The analysis will be discussed in cases as they were done at the research areas with respect to the traditional palaces. Cases discussed and analyzed were based on observation at the traditional palaces.

8.1 Interview Case One with Okyeame Amoako at the Agogo Traditional Court and Okyeame Asamoah at Juansa Traditional Court.

As part of the research, the traditional linguists interviewed provided responses to questions among them are the use of proverbs.

At the Agogo Traditional Council, Okyeame Amoako pointed out that proverbs are not used in isolation. He points out that the occasion determines the language and form of discourse to use. One has to consider the audience, the situation and determine the line of communication. When an Okyeame uses rhetoric language, his main target must be the audience. He must take the level of the audience into consideration. He explains this point by using another scenario in a proverbial and veiled language.

He says:

'Proverbs come with the issue being discussed; you only dream when you sleep'

He vividly compares the use of proverbs in speech delivery to 'sleep' and 'dream' which move hand-in hand with one complementing the other. This significantly establishes the fact that proverbs are not used in isolation but are linked to issues under discussion in order to trace the meaning from the source given or event occurred. The comparison of the proverb linked to sleep spells out how inevitable sleep is. Moreover, everyone sleeps and is conversant with the idea that dream only comes when one sleeps. In effect when one wishes to dream, one has to sleep because dreams are derived from sleep.

8.2 Interview Case Two with Okyeame Asamoah at Juansa Traditional Court

At Juansa, Okyeame Asamoah reiterates that proverbs are not said or uttered in isolation. Appropriately, proverbs are used when there is a case or an issue on the floor up for discussion and contribution. In any given situation, the one who tries to employ the use of proverbs must have the ability to correctly interpret it to suit what it is meant to. Failure to give the correct interpretation attracts severe penalty.

Okyeame Asamoah says:

'Every issue has its corresponding proverb. So many people do not know how to use it so they abstain from using it. One may charged if the wrong thing is said'

Significantly, what is said above implies that, most people avoid the use of proverbs or veiled language at traditional courts and palaces especially when they do not understand. Anyone who employs the use of this kind of flowery language must have the potential to explain it to suit what he or she intends to put across in plain language. The speaker is however liable to punitive penalties coupled with fines and other requirements which may be used to pacify the elders in the court. This, according to Okyeame Asamoah serves as a deterrent to others who may take the intelligence of elders seated for granted. Rhetoric languages such as proverbs are meant to sweeten language and make it pleasing to listen to.

8.3 The Gatekeeping Factor

Gatekeeping as earlier said in this piece of work is the process through which ideas and information are filtered for publication. Kurt Lewin (1947) was the first one to use the term 'gatekeeping', which he used to describe a wife or mother as the person who decides which foods end up on the family's dinner table. The concept of gatekeeping is applicable to contemporary form of communication and it also applies to traditional forms of communication.

At the Agogo Traditional Council, Okyeame Amoako states his position and the positions of the other Okyeame at the palace. His duty at the traditional court starts when the chief and his elders are seated. This implies that, outside the confines of the traditional court has no autonomy over the use of speech and how it is delivered. At the sitting of Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs, the position and duty of the Okyeame comes to play.

'When the chief and elders sit, then the linguists also sit

'If anyone brings an issue in the presence of chiefs, the message passes through the Okyeame who in turn tells the chief'. When I tell the chief, response to the issue again passes through me (Okyeame); for instance Nana Kyeame please listen and let Nana know that...'

A chief sitting in state or at a traditional gathering of elders and town folks, speaks through the linguist to the audience. In response to the chief's speech, the audiences also do same by routing their message through the linguist who in this case is the Okyeame. In a given situation, the Okyeame may pretend not to have heard what the chief said if he is not addressed by the chief before he (chief) speaks.

8.4 Gatekeeping and rhetorical language

All messages to and from the chief must pass through the Okyeame, in which case he becomes the gatekeeper at the palace. As the mediator in the traditional court, everything which deals with communication is impossible if he is not present. Although chiefs are expected to be skilful in the use of words and language, in several instances what the chief says is clear to the audience and does not need to be restated by an orator. However, the chief himself has no will power to speak without beckoning the Okyeame. When this happens, whatever the chief says will not be recognized. Knowledgeable ways of speaking are attributed to the chief and may be ridiculed if he lacks skill in this area.

Okyeame Asamoah recognizes his position at the palace as an 'interpreter' who interprets the words of the chief to the audience. He further makes it clear that, due to his movement with the chief, concerning his role and duty, he is also said to be '4hene yere' which means *'the chief's wife'*.

'The Okyeame is always in flight with the chief'

Similar to the gatekeeper who decides what passes through the gates and what stays, the Okyeame decides what to say and what not to say depending mainly on the language uttered by the chief and the audience. He cites an example when he creates a scenario in which a chief uses foul language. This form of language is seen as 'verbal taboo', 'apologizing for their use' in order not to step on the power of spoken word. In the quotation below, the Okyeame begins his example by apologizing for the use of the insulting word he is about to make mention of. In several ways, he maintains his image by not coming out plainly to utter what is considered an insulting word without wrapping it and also applying the gatekeeping technique of what to say and what not to say.

'...with all apologies if the chief calls someone a fool, the Okyeame must not say that Nana says the fellow is a fool. He will change the language and say it in wrapped form. That is what is called Kasakoa'.

By playing the role of the gatekeeper, the Okyeame has no ultimate right to say what he desires. At any moment, he is under scrutiny by the sub-chiefs and an audience and may not consider their silence as an act of ignorance. Just like the situation stated by the Okyeame at the Juansa Traditional Council, an Okyeame no matter the circumstance should repeat or echo the foul language of the chief. As the 'mouthpiece' of the chief it is expected that he says only what is suitable to the public. Okyeame Asamoah tells the consequences of uttering unsuitable language.

8.5 The dangers of gatekeeping to the Okyeame.

Gatekeeping can be dangerous since it can lead to abuse of power by deciding what information to discard and what to let pass. In the above quotation, the Okyeame lays out the punitive measures which may be leveled against him, should he flout the use of language in the presence of the chief. The Okyeame may be the master of oratory in the traditional palace, he may be the final recipient of messages to and from the chief before the message reaches the final destination, but all these privileges have limits. In a given situation such as the one above, the Okyeame stands the risk of punitive measure. He may be charged to pay a fine in the form of an amount of money for playing on the intelligence of the Chief, his fellow linguists and the sub-chiefs. He may be fined to pacify the Okyeame 'stool', which happens to be his official and traditional stool at palace. His act is considered an insult to the authority which he holds at the palace. However, he may or may not be forgiven even after performing the necessary rituals to pacify the stool. He then outlines his punishment by saying:

'...when I am fined, I will be asked to pay one hundred thousand or I should slaughter a sheep and then pacify the stool'

As a warning and to serve as a deterrent to others, he may be asked to slaughter a sheep for further pacification, to pay an amount of money as a form of settlement and also thank all elders by again giving them money. All these and more are measures laid down to check the freedom the Okyeame enjoys as the sole mediator in traditional oratory. Littlejohn and Foss (2005) argue that every aspect of the daily life of humans is affected on one and another. Similarly, messages from unknown people, be it distant or close has major effects. Each individual has a unique of decoding messages depending on the situation which leads to what is said.

As it clearly stands gatekeeping in traditional communication and particularly at the traditional court is inevitable and is very useful but must not be taken for granted as it may result in drastic decisions taken on the accuser who in the traditional court is the Okyeame.

9.0 CONCLUSION

The researcher arrived at the conclusion that, rhetoric language aids in brevity and precision. When the Okyeame makes use of rhetoric language most messages which are not intended for the chief or audience is craftily removed

and replaced with a more wrapped message. It helps in enriching communication in the performance of duty by the Okyeame in the traditional court.

Further, meaning intended is kept safe and not altered. This is an affront to the chief if his words are altered. The words of the messages may change due to the use of the rhetoric competence added by the Okyeame, however the meaning intended is kept sacred.

Also, the research gave insight into the relationship of the Okyeame, the chief and the palace. Here, it is accepted that the Okyeame speaks the words of the chief, therefore anyone willing to bring an issue to the chief must do so in the presence of the Okyeame. This position requires that the Okyeame must always be present at the traditional court in order to facilitate this form of triadic communication. Unless, the Okyeame is present no case is called for settlement. In any given situation at the traditional court, a chief can not sit on a case in the absence of an Okyeame; the one he regards as his confidant and mouthpiece.

Finally, it showed that the power to speak and what is meant for the hearing of the chief and audience gathered lie solely on the Okyeame. He does exercise this knowingly and unknowingly since this form of communication has been there for several generations. They say 'one's son is his linguist'. Therefore, speeches and messages will always be routed through an Okyeame be it in the traditional court or in the gathering of family members so far as Akan communication is concerned.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

What is your gender				
Male		Female		
What is your age group				
Over 18- under 21	Over 21- under 25	Over 25- under 35	Over 35- under 45	Over 45
What is your education level: Current level of study				
Higher Diploma	Bachelor's	Master's	PhD	Other
How often do you access Twitter				
Several times per day	Once a day	Once every few days	Once a week	Occasionally
How often do you post something on Twitter				
Several times per day	Once a day	Once every few days	Once a week	Occasionally
How much time do you spend on Twitter				
Several hours per day	Few minutes per day	Few minutes every few days	Few minutes a month	Very little time occasionally
How many people do you follow on twitter?				
<5	Between 5-50	Between 51-1000	Between 1001-10000	>10000
How many people follow you on Twitter?				
<5	Between 5-50	Between 51-1000	Between 1001-10000	>10000
How many Tweets have you posted within last one month?				
<5	Between 6 and 25	Between 26 and 100	between 101 and 500	More than 500
Linguistic- Using Twitter has significantly improved my English vocabulary				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Linguistic- Twitter use has allowed me better at English grammar				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Linguistic-Due to Twitter use I understand the use of punctuation in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Linguistic- Twitter has given me the knowledge to form correct and understandable sentences in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Discourse- Due to the use of Twitter I understand how ideas are connected through different patterns of organisation				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Discourse- Understand how ideas are connected through cohesive and transitional devices				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Discourse- I understand how to different words and sentences can mean different things in different contexts				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Strategic- After starting to use Twitter, I have started using English more frequently in my communication				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Strategic- I can plan my sentences in the English language, keeping in mind how the other person will understand it.				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not

Strategic- Due to the use of Twitter I can form full sentences in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Sociolinguistic- I understand which words to use to express politeness in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Sociolinguistic- I can write formal sentences in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Sociolinguistic- I know how to communicate directly in the English language				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Sociolinguistic- I understand somehow to use some words commonly used in English language but are not actually part of the English dictionary.				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not
Sociolinguistic- I know what will be offensive to say to others in the English language and what will be complementary to say.				
Definitely	Yes	Cannot say	No	Definitely not