

## ASPECTS OF AKAN ORAL LITERATURE IN THE MEDIA

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### Abstract

This paper discusses Akan oral literature in the media, concentrating on Radio and TV. The paper looks at the various oral literary genres performed via these modern media of communication. The paper further discusses the adaptations that are made in response to the needs and circumstances of the urban environment. It hints at the change in oral literary genres from interpersonal face to face interaction to sound and air waves interaction.

### Introduction

Akan oral literature genres have been performed on the media since the establishment of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). Unfortunately, the air time allotted for Ghanaian language programmes has been infinitesimal.<sup>1</sup>

The recent freedom of expression has resulted in the proliferation of private FM radio stations which design new programmes in the Ghanaian languages. A greater percentage of the Ghanaian language programmes are in Akan. The communication system in Ghana has developed so fast that these days many radio talk shows and programmes also include telephone calls. This system has stimulated many of the private FM stations to embark on proverbs competitions, riddles and puzzles, all types of Ghanaian folk and popular songs, and "advertisement". The paper discusses Akan drama and concert party on GBC TV, on Saturdays and Sundays. In discussing the genres we shall look at the innovations in response to the media. Stylistic features discussed will include ideophones, hyperbole, proverbs, idioms, and euphemisms.

The paper discusses the role and performance of oral literature in the media and its ultimate effect on the Akan society and the entire Ghanaian community. It will consider the potential promotion, development, and the preservation of the Akan language and culture. It is through such oral literature programmes that the youth learn the language, culture and history of the Akan society and hence cherish their cultural heritage. The paper treats oral literature and advertisements. It also considers oral literature and the media, trends and deviations, and makes suggestions for the prospects and development of Akan oral literature and language through the media.

### **The Role of Oral Literature in the Media**

This section discusses the use of oral literature in portraying the philosophy, environmental knowledge, and socio-cultural norms and values of the Akan people via the media.

Most Akan songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles, drama and concert on TV and Radio reflect the experiences of the people and it is a way by which oral literature educates the public via the media. A caller on the *Afisem* programme on Radio Universe congratulated the host and said "you people must continue for I am learning a lot of expressions and proverbs from you". Okpewho (1992: 115) confirms this function in saying that "through oral literature younger members of the society absorb the ideas that will guide them through life and the older ones are constantly reminded of the rules and ideas that must be kept alive for the benefit of those coming behind them."

The genres on the electronic media touch on all aspects of traditional and contemporary life. They cover marriage, urbanisation, morality, service to the aged and the entire family, conformity to tradition and culture, etc. In the following sections we shall look at some data that reflect the above features of Oral Literature and the media.

Some aspects of oral literature as presented by the media, portray some of the Akan customs and institutions. They further show how valuable these traditions are and the need to promote and preserve them. The performers of such oral literature programmes build their plots around customs and cultural traditions of the Akan. It is possible for the citizens of society to acquire knowledge about culture and to preserve it for the sake of cultural continuity through oral literature. Oral literature may also deal with some historical events. It may portray the deeds and the excellence of the earlier generations of the society which the contemporary generation should emulate so as to maintain the dignity of the group. Such aspects of oral history try to promote the group over and above all other societies. These historical notions inculcate nationalistic and patriotic ideologies in the new generation. Such ideas are embodied in the oral literature practised daily in the form of proverbs, songs, praise poetry, narratives, riddles, etc. (Okpewho 1992: 115). For example, on the death of the Asantehene and Okyehene in 1999, I recited various praise poetry on the *Afisem* programme that revealed the history and achievements of these two important Akan states.

There was an episode on GTV on the 30th of December 1997 by the *Nteasee* Concert Party. It focused on the installation of chiefs and the need for chiefs to have stool wives (see Appendix I at the end of this paper.) The playwrights use these episodes on customs and cultural practices to build their plots and in so doing they expect their listeners or viewers to learn a lot about their culture.

Oral Literature in the media also teaches on morality, the Akan family structure, and social responsibilities. There are oral literature genres in the media which educate people and draw their attention to the fact that despite westernisation, Christianity and modernisation, people cannot do away with some of the traditional family systems and the opportunities and responsibilities that accompany them. In most of the drama on Radio and TV, there are portions that clearly depict marriage and family issues. Through these programmes both the youth and adults come to know more about the family structures, systems and patterns of inheritance and the interrelations between family members. In appendix 2 of this paper, I cite one of such episodes on GTV. This excerpt is an episode performed by the *Kristo Asafo* Concert Party on the 22nd of November 1997. The major theme of the episode is *Ateasefo Ho Hia Sene Awufo*, 'The Living are More Important than the Dead'.

Some of the oral literature genres in the media develop the audience or listeners' philosophical understanding of the Akan language and culture. Most of this understanding is couched in witticisms, proverbs, quizzes and puzzles. There are various programmes on Ghanaian FM Radio which feature these topics. We shall look at proverbs, and talk shows.

### **Proverbs on the Media**

The Garden City FM in Kumasi has a programme on Akan Proverb Competition which comes on at 5 p.m. every Sunday. A similar programme is on Peace FM in Accra on Sundays from 7.00. pm to 8.00. pm. There are always two competitors who cite hundreds of proverbs in each encounter. The audience learn many proverbs and deepen their insight and knowledge of the Akan language, culture and environment. One could hear archaic proverbs and language. There are also proverbs that are said to have been composed by animals, birds, and trees. Such proverbs depict some of their characteristics and behaviour.

Any time I listen to the proverb competitors, I realise that they try to deviate from the notion of anonymous authorship of Akan proverbs which are usually attributed collectively to the elders and the ancestors. The tendency is so strong that some proverbs which I personally know from my infancy, have now been attributed to kinsmen of the competitors and also to people from their own towns and villages. They usually come out to say:

*Me ara me nua/macme/papa/wofa/yere X a ofiri Y na kaa n'asem se Z*

My own brother/sister/ mother/father/uncle/wife X from village Y who said his matter that Z.

The deviation is very real. The speaker makes a direct reference to the "so-called author" of the proverb to assert that it is authentic and wholly true. If need be one can consult the person and find out the truth of the matter.

In most cases, in an attempt to outwit their competitors they begin with questions and long narratives before they come out with the actual proverb. These preludes are meant to confuse the opponents and make them forget what they intend to give. One other feature of the media proverb is that competitors are able to take semantic and lexical cues from proverbs given by the other competitors. They use the stylistic device of **piling and association** to come out with their proverbs (see Okpewho 1992 for details of piling and association.)

A: *Abusua hwedee gu nkuruwa.*

The family sugarcane is placed in groups.

B: *Ahwedee Abenaa ode nkosi nkon.*

Sugar cane Abenaa sweetness does not continue to the end.

A: *Apupuo Abenaa a meboo m'asuo meda nsukakye.*

The river-snail Abenaa, I, who commanded the rainfall, I am cast into the banks of the river.

B: *Nsuo kyere ahina mu a eyi hwa.*

When water stays too long in the pot it stinks.

In fact, this piling, association and taking up lexical cues can go on and on, and it is the technique that facilitates the quick recall of the proverbs (Okpewho 1992). The lexical items underlined in the above exchanges are the cues. Apart from the semantic and logical relations of the verbal cues, there is also an entertainment aspect to the whole competition.

### Quiz, Riddles, and Puzzles

Riddles and puzzles are performed on radio and TV. They test the listeners, especially children, on environmental studies, history and other aspects of the Akan language, culture, and politics. The answers to riddles and questions develop deep philosophical thinking in listeners. They teach the characteristics and behaviour of animals and also outline the succession of the events.

David Dontoh's *Agoro* programme on GTV comes on Saturdays from 7.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. It tests some aspects of Akan culture, history, vocabulary, environmental studies, and literature. The participants, the audience at the recording studio, and the viewers at home, learn a lot of Akan language and culture through this programme. It is very entertaining and educative for the youth who normally patronise it either as participants and or as audience.<sup>2</sup>

Contestants pick some envelopes with questions they are to answer. Marks are awarded for correct answers and the marks are then converted into monetary prizes to be drawn from the Agricultural Development Bank. Below are some of the questions asked on the 13th of May 1998 edition *Agoro* Programme.

1. Question: *Dua ben na eso akakono?* (Which tree produces the "tree maggot?")

Answer: *abe* (Palm tree)

2. Question: *Kokosakyi kasa kyere bonukyerefoo a ote nso ote no abebuo mu. Deeben ne Kokosakyi* (If the *Kokosakyi* speaks to *bonukyerefoo* it understands it in proverbs. What is *Kokosakyi*?)

Answer: *opete* (vulture)

3. Question: *Aboa bi de kraman wɔ Twi mu, sen na Fantefo fre no?* (There is an animal called *kraman* in Twi, how do the Fantes call it?)

Answer: *Bɔdɔm*.

Question 2 was testing archaic vocabulary viz knowledge of the archaic and present day Akan term for vulture. The last question was testing knowledge of the dialectal differences between certain words in Akan.

### **The Media and Folk Tales**

Folk tales narrated and dramatised on GTV on Saturdays on the programme "By the Fireside" are considered as one of the aspects of oral literature designed to posit and teach specific aspects of moral behaviour to the audience especially to school children. They are expected to develop certain virtues such as kindness, patience, sympathy and to deplore vices like greed, bullying, oppression, etc. In effect, we realise that the tales are direct replicas of the fundamental ways of life in the society couched in indirect forms to avoid face threatening.

There are also aspects of language learning involving the lexicon, proverbs, poetry, etc. Apart from this, there is drumming and dancing and both the children who are performing on the screen and those watching develop some traditional skills. The children also come to know the behaviour of certain animals, birds, insects, and other creatures. Little and bigger creatures are assigned various roles that show their respective values in the animal kingdom. By this medium, the beneficiaries improve and develop their environmental and ecological knowledge. One cannot overemphasise the philosophical gains from folktales.

### **Oral Literature and the Development of Akan Vocabulary**

Another fascinating aspect of Akan Programmes on the media is the development of the Akan language, especially in the *Talk Shows*.

In this paper, I am considering a talk show as an oral literary genre. It has the ingredients of oral literature. It has a presenter (performer) and an audience. As the presenter sits at the studio s/he performs except that only the verbal aspect, including the diction, style, and sound quality are heard. Even here, those with him/her at the studio can view some aspects of the non-verbal performance. The audience do not only listen but also participate and contribute by calling in. The presenter is also vulnerable to criticism by the audience. He can also be praised for his performance on air. In the case of the TV, there is a visual component. Unlike the face to face interaction in a prototypical oral literature performance, a talk show can be classified as non-physical interaction.

There is a marriage counsellor called Opanin Kwadwo Kyere who hosts a Marriage Talk Show on TV3 and Radio Gold all in Accra. He combines humour, euphemisms, idioms, metaphor, proverbs, simile, circumlocution and other literary devices with factual information. I cite below some of his indirect statements on Radio Gold.

(a) *Kyere senea wope w'ahemfie, na wope se wosiesie ho. Obi wo ho a ope nsensan a yeadɔ ama eso reba kakra. Obi nso pe nsensan a yeadɔ ama eko fam pa ara.*

Indicate how you like your palace to be and how you want to tidy it up. Somebody would want to have grass which has been weeded and is sprouting. Another person may want grass that has been weeded very low to the ground.

In this incident, he was talking about the cleanliness of women with regard to the shaving of their pubic hair. The sexual organ was metaphorically depicted as the palace and the pubic hair as grass to be trimmed.

Other talk shows are *Afisem*, *Obiara Nka bi* and *Fa Adwene* on Radio Universe. The *Afisem* Programme comes on between 4.00 pm and 5.00 pm every Thursday. It is repeated on Saturdays between 8.30 am and 10.00 am. I (the host and presenter) translate the editorial opinions of the major newspapers from English to Akan. In the translation, I bring in proverbs, euphemisms, idioms, simile, metaphor and other stylistic devices.

In the *Afisem* programme we try to find new vocabulary to capture modern concepts in politics, economy, health education, science, technology and other related modern ways of life. Through this programme listeners become familiar with the neologisms used in describing these modern concepts, for example, I have been using *prepre ne foefoe* for 'power outage'.

There is another programme called the *Odiyifo Talk Show* on *Vibe FM* in Accra. The *Odiyifo* Show is very entertaining and has made the *Vibe* radio station very popular. The presenter called *Odiyifo* introduces humorous quizzes, and humorous translations of English words into Akan. An example is:

Computer: *afidie badwemma*. 'The thinkable little machine'

### **Etymologies of Certain Words in Akan on Talk Shows**

Some of the oral literature genres on the media try to teach the Akan about the etymologies of certain expressions and words. Below are such items. Listeners really enjoy such programmes and learn a lot from them.

#### **Radio Universe: Katawere and Kɔhwɛ Programme, Wednesday, February 4, 1998**

Trying to explain the meaning of the word *mansotwe* 'litigation' in Akan, Kɔhwɛ<sup>3</sup> narrated as follows:

*Osikani bi sii ne dan na da a ɔrebue ano no, ɔtoo ne nsa free nnipa pii se wɔmmeboa no. Anigyee no boroo so maa nnipa pii antumi anko na ewɔ se wɔdeda. ɔmaa wɔn baabi dedae, nanso onipa baako bi a wɔfre no Manso dee wannya baabiara anna se Osikani no dan mu ankasa. Yei na efie wura no se ehene ne ha. ɔhyee ase twee Manso se ɔnsɔre mfiri ho. ɔretwe no no na obiara rebisa no se aden, na edeen na woreye yi? Obiara rebisa no a ɔse Manso adee a ɔretwe no twann no nti na meretwe no saa no. Yei na ebedanee mansotwe .*

A rich man built a house and on the day that he was officially opening it, he invited many people to come to help him. Many of them were so happy that they could not go back to their houses, and had to sleep. But one of them named Manso could not get any other place to sleep apart from the rich man's own chamber. The owner did not take this kindly. He began to pull Manso to move out. While he was pulling him anyone who came there asked about it. He answered that it was because of what Manso was doing that he was pulling him. It was out of this that we got the word *mansotwe* (literally) 'pulling Manso' but which really translates as 'litigation'.

The etymology here is meant to be humorous. The presenters on this particular Akan radio programme are dramatists who perform various episodes on Ghana TV and as part of their profession they also perform comedy. The above is one of such. Sometimes such presenters also give proverb variants to suit modern life.

#### **Oral Literature and *Abibigorɔ* Programme on Capital Radio, Kumasi**

There is an Akan programme called *Abibigorɔ* on Capital Radio in the city of Kumasi. The host, Yaw Adusi-Poku, deals with all aspects of oral literature including folksongs, proverbs, etymology and explanation of certain words. He opens the programme with a popular *nwonkorɔ* folksong. He always points out that what he is teaching is good for both JSS and SSS students as well as parents. He insists that parents should advise their children to listen to the programme frequently since it is very educative. In one of the programmes, he tried to differentiate between the following words which confused many Akan speakers; *ntam* 'reminiscential<sup>4</sup> oath', *nsuae* 'swearing', *bɔhye* 'promise', *anohoba* 'vow', and *nsedie* 'religious self-imprecatory oath'. The programme comes on on Wednesdays and Fridays from 2:00-3:00 p.m. I present here an excerpt of the programme held on the 21st of August, 1998.

The host gave the morphological analysis of the following words which have the morpheme *kwaa*. According to Adusi-Poku, the semantic meaning of the suffix *-kwaa* is derived from *akoa* 'servant'. It is extended to mean a native of a place. In these instances, *akoa* → *akwaa* implies a person who does everything to depict that s/he is a native of the place. S/he is a 'diehard' member of the group and thus the meaning can be extended to a "nationalist".

- (i) *ahenkwaa* → *ɔhene* + *akoa* 'servant of the king'
- (ii) *awurakwaa* → *owura* + *akoa* 'servant of the master'

- (iii) *Asantekwaa* → *Asante + akoo* 'servant of Asante' (nationalist of Asante)
- (iv) *Fantekwaa* → *Fante + akoo* 'servant of Fante' (nationalist of Fante)
- (v) *Akyenkwaa* → *Akyem + akoo* 'servant of Akyem' (nationalist of Akyem)
- (vi) *atetekwaa* → *tete + akoo* 'servant of tradition' (adherent to tradition)
- (vii) *aberantekwaa* → *aberante + akoo* 'servant of youth' (adherent to youth)

### **Oral Literature and the Media for Entertainment and Relaxation**

The most outstanding feature of Akan performance on the media is its entertainment value. Any form of literature offers delight and also relieves us of various pressures and tensions both physically and mentally (Okpehwo 1992: 106-109). This is why there are occupational songs among many African societies. After a day's work full of tension and exhaustion, members of these traditional occupations meet to sing and to enjoy themselves. Oral literature moves us temporarily from our wearisome monotonous duties. Among the Akan, there are hunters' songs called *abɔfodwom*. The hunters meet to sing to relieve themselves of boredom. Their lyrics also depict the nature of their work and their usefulness in the society. In doing this, they keep their spirits high (see Nketia 1973). Okpehwo (1992: 106-109) cites examples of the entertainment value of occupational songs from various societies in Africa. He mentions hunting songs from Zimbabwe, and the cattle songs from the Dinka of Sudan. Apart from the occupational songs much entertainment is also derived from moonlight games played by both adults and children in most African societies.

The Akan Drama shown on Sundays at 8.30 pm and the Concert Party held on Saturdays at 9.30 pm are substitutes for the traditional oral literary genres mentioned above. They serve as a source of entertainment for most Akan and even non-Akan families. One cannot ignore the fact that pent-up emotions, frustrations and conflicts in families cease at least temporarily during this period when people join together to watch and comment on the drama on the TV. Most of the episodes featured especially on Akan Concert Party are very comical. During these performances, the audience not only relax their bodies after a hard day's work but their anxieties are also psychologically relieved. I demonstrate below an aspect of humour and comedy on radio show and Akan Concert Party on GTV.

In the 10th February 1998 edition of *Odiyifo* Programme, the presenter (Odiyifo) was trying to depict the nature and behaviour of the Akuapems as being very respectful and polite. He put it in a very humorous manner. He said:

1. *M'adamfo bi se yen Akuapemfo de yebu ade ara ma se yerefa afiri koraa a yebɔ kɔkɔkɔ.*

A friend of mine says that we, the Akuapems, are so respectful that even when we are boarding a truck we have to knock.



It is true that the Akuapems are very respectful but to knock at a truck before boarding is a hyperbole, humorous and unreal.

The second episode below is from Bob Okala, one of the renowned comedians on the GTV Concert Party show.

2. *Da bi nso a yerebo bɔɔlo, ekɔɔ soro 4.30 pm. ebeduruu fam na abɔ 5.30 pm.*

At another time we were playing football it went high in the air at 4.30pm. When it landed on the ground it was 5.30 pm .

The question is what could have held the ball in space for one hour? This is an exaggeration, a hyperbole and very ridiculous.

Okala continued further by narrating a trip he made with one of the comedians called Nkɔmmɔde . The episode is narrated here in 3.

3. *Mene Nkɔmmɔde tuu kwan kɔɔ Aburokyire. Aduplen no kɔshɔɔto petro ehɔ ara na yese Nkɔmmɔde gye galam kɔɔ petro wɔ fam bra.*

*ɔbae na yese aduplen drɔba no nsi fam. Nkɔmmɔde kɔɔɔ mu no behwe spidi hwii hwii. Afei yehunuu se trafefe abloko. Ehɔ ara na mese Nkɔmmɔde fa nu mu. Afei yekɔto esie bi enna mese fa bɔ mu! Afei yebehwe a na abaayefɔɔ yi ni mese esoro hɔ nyinaa nso see wɔwɔ hɔ o.*

*Nkusie ni o, hwe Kade nkusie, Asamnakese nkusie, Boagyaa nkusie ne ade. Yede nkusie nkusie saa ara na yenyaa kwan enna huu huu Gyaaman eepɔto santan. Yefaa bɔɔso enna bɔɔso drɔba tiaa so. "Tanwenwenwe. Maye adwuma aye aye menya sika da." Asem no ne se bɔɔso drɔba no ye adwuma a, ɔmma bɔɔso no sika no bi. Afei yesree bɔɔso no se ɔmfa yen nko. "Tanwenwenwe nwe yi. Afei dee meko no saa."*

I travelled overseas with Nkɔmmɔde. The aeroplane was short of fuel and we gave money and gallon to Nkɔmmɔde to go and buy petrol from the ground.

When he came we asked the pilot to get off his seats. When Nkɔmmɔde took over, come and see speed *hwii hwii*. Later on we realised there was a traffic jam. I told him to just fly through. Then we met an ant hill and I said just carry on. We then turned off and saw street overseers and I asked, are these people here too?

Rats, look! Kade rats, Asamnakese rats, Boagyaa rats etc. We passed through the rats like that before we had our way and then we sped to German airport. We took a bus and the bus driver sped. "Tanwenwenwe, I have worked and worked but I don't get money." said the bus. When the bus driver works, he does not give the bus some of the money gained. We then pleaded that the bus should send us. "Tanwenwenwenwe I would now go like that", said the bus.

There is constant use of hyperbole and ideophones for comic effect. The voice quality and the variations were so superb that they made the whole story seem to be very real and true. There is the frequent use of neologism as in words like *petro*, 'petrol', *galam* 'gallon', *kae* 'car', *bɔɔso* 'bus', *supidi* 'speed', *eepɔto* 'airport', *trafefe* 'traffic', *aduplen* 'aeroplane', *abloko* 'has blocked', *kɔshɔɔto* 'to get short of fuel', etc. In the case of *abloko* the verb 'block' is inflected for the perfect by using the Akan perfect prefix *a-*.<sup>5</sup>

The comedian also uses personification in the case of the bus talking about its driver's attitude towards it for not giving it part of the daily proceeds. Personification is also seen in the case of the travellers begging the bus to move and the bus agreeing to do so. Other issues which are not real in life are brought in to make the narration very entertaining. Such a fantasy is the case of meeting an ant hill in the sky. Another fantasy is recognised where Nkommode had to get a gallon and come down from space to buy petrol while the aircraft was still hanging in the air. These are typical aspects of make believe.

### **Akan Songs and the Media**

This section particularly looks at Akan folk songs since they are very pervasive in most of the programmes on the media. In almost all scenarios for oral literature, Akan songs abound. Songs are used in the rites of passage namely; birth, initiation, marriage, title taking and death. The drama series on GTV, Akan Drama, Concert Party, and Cantata, have portions where traditional and high life songs are sung as integral parts of the performances or to curb boredom. These songs may be brought in to highlight important themes of the play.

Even among the talk shows there are musical interludes where DJs try to select songs related to the subject matter of the programmes. During the *Afitem* programmes we apply this mechanism very well. I had one DJ called Natt Arthur who was superb in this field of tallying the allusive songs with the subject matters. Most songs played on radio are based on the major themes of Akan social life, such as marriage, love, death, hard work, unity, etc.

The songs on the media apart from giving us much needed entertainment and relaxation also dwell on certain aspects of morality and education in the society.<sup>6</sup> Songs are dialogues and interactive talks in their own right. These characteristics have existed from time immemorial and almost all African traditional songs share this quality.

Traditional and folk songs deal with current issues whether political, cultural or social. There are certain satirical songs and lampoons which are meant to bring shame on the culprits and to discourage future misconduct. Others also cast insinuation and innuendo and even verbal assault not only on individuals but on current governments and draw their attention to certain faults in their governance. There is also the effective use of humour, metaphor and parody. Yankah (1997: 54) aptly points out that:

Political critique under these conditions is handed over to the singer of tales, a culturally revered voice of the dominated who creatively manipulates cultural symbolism to convey themes celebrating the resilience of the deprived and exposing the gluttony of the dominant.

Some of these songs are styled in the form of stories full of indirection and ambiguity and the composers can defend themselves when called up. In most cases verbal artists would deny

any political motivation, and claim that their works are purely fictional. The style of indirection is a face-saving mechanism aimed at avoiding face-affront and open confrontation.

In 1998, there came a song entitled, *Yen nyinaa behunu kakra* 'We shall all suffer a little' by Asebu Amamfi, a highlife composer based in Kumasi. To save his face, he narrated the coming of Rawlings, and his entire period in the form of a story which has the cat as the main character. Here is a summary of the song:

*There was a man called Agya Agyen who travelled and bought a cat. The cat was so beautiful that they all started hailing it thus "Akwasi Atta small boy what shall we do to you. You are fantastic!" Everybody told him that when it had kittens they would come for some. Agya Agyen hinted that the cat was too troublesome, but they insisted that they wanted it. The cat grew up very quickly and started tormenting the masses. All those who had collected some started to complain. Meanwhile Agya Agyen had died. Any time they saw his wife, they complained. But she remarked that "My husband told you but you refused to accept! 'We are all here to see what is going on. The sore would suffer and the pad would suffer too'.*

This particular song is an allusion to the suffering of the Ghanaian masses who had gone against all advice to refrain from voting the NDC back to power.<sup>7</sup> The message is that those who voted for the NDC and the opposition are all tasting the agonies of its governance.

During the first republic of Ghana, Nana Ampadu (a renowned highlife composer and social commentator) composed a song *Ebi te yie, ebi nso nte yie*, 'Some are well seated, others are not.' This depicted the situation where most people were suffering and others were enjoying life. He portrayed this in the form of a meeting of the animal kingdom where animals like the leopard were tampering with the rights of the smaller ones like the antelope; a reminder of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (Yankah 1997).

In fact, such satirical songs can only become popular when played constantly on the media, especially on the radio. It is the radio which has a greater percentage of listeners, since affordability is not too much of a problem as compared to the TV, cassette tape recorders, and the newspapers.

The use of songs on the media has been so strong a tool that in Ghana there have been various instances where certain songs have been banned from air play by the authorities. In 1988-89, there was a song by Rex Omar, a Kumasi based highlife composer entitled *Akwadaa Ketekete* 'You small chap'. This song focused on the youth who have been lured into immorality by the elders and those in the government. A friend of mine who was working at the GBC said that one day he went to work to find that there was a notice that the song was banned from air play. This was so because it had stepped on the toes of some 'big men'.

Some of the songs played on the air belong to the early forties and fifties and some really belong to the ages. Specific traditional programmes are carried on various FM stations meant for such types of songs. The names of the programmes explain themselves. At Radio Universe at the University of Ghana Legon, we have *Sankɔfa*. The word *Sankɔfa* means 'go back for it'. Garden City Radio in Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Region, has *Adadamu*. This word is derived from *dada* an adjective which means 'old' and the postposition *mu* 'inside'. The Top Radio FM based in Accra has a programme called *Metee Bi Akyɛ*, 'It has been a long time since I heard such songs.' All the songs played on these programmes celebrate old Akan popular folk music. I cite below an excerpt from an *Adadamu* Programme from Kumasi.

The *Adadamu* Programme comes on at the Garden City Radio, Kumasi on Sundays between 7:30 pm and 8:00 pm On the 10th of May 1998, Bosie Amponsah (the host) featured the *Manhyia Kete Nnwonkorɔ* of Kumasi on the *Adadamu* Programme. The leader of the group Maame Afua Abasa gave the role of *nnwonkorɔ* and folk songs in general. She hinted at the indirectness of folksongs. She said in Akan:

*Nsem bi wɔ hɔ a, wontumi nka no pen, gye se wode fa sabuakwan. Enti yetumi de biribi konkwan mu (nkonkwanmu).*

There are certain things you cannot say them in plain words. There are some of them you have to use indirection.

Later on the group played one of their recorded songs entitled *Kwaamaa ee*.

*Kwaamaa ee! Kwaamaa ee! Kwaamaa! (2x)*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din*

*Kwaamaa Kɔkɔkɔ se mprengo*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din..*

*Kwaamaa tuntuntum se akye aba.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

*Kwaamaa tuntuntum se eyuo.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

*Wotwe me twe me twe me twe me.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

*Wotwe me ma me ka ntini.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

*Wohye me hye me, hye me.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

*Wohye me ma meka nso.*

*Nnyeso: Mɛbɔ wo din.*

Response: I will mention your name.

Kwaamaa fair coloured like furniture polish.

Response: I will mention your name.

Kwaamaa dark as the seed of the *phialodiscus unijugatus* tree.

Response: I will mention your name.

Kwaamaa dark as the duiker.

Response: I will mention your name.

If you pull me, pull me, pull me, pull me.

Response: I will mention your name.

If you pull me and I am left with only the veins.

Response: I will mention your name.

If you burn me, burn me, burn me.

Response: I will mention your name.

If you burn me into ashes.

Response: I will mention your name.

During an interview, the leader of the group was able to educate her listeners on aspects of Akan vocabulary and literature. She explained some of the words and gave their semantic connotations. She gave the theme of the song as "deep love which withstands all sorts of

problems and interruptions.” She said that was the type of love that our elders showed to their lovers. She described the lover with imagery and similes using plants and animals:

*Kwaamaa Kɔkɔkɔ se mprenge*

*Kwaamaa tuntuuntum se akye aba.*

*Kwaamaa tuntuuntum se eyuo.*

Kwaamaa fair coloured like furniture polish.

Kwaamaa dark as the seed of the *phialodiscus unijugatus* tree (Irvine 1930: 332).

Kwaamaa dark as the duiker.

In order to portray how firm the lover stands against all obstacles, the artist uses these metaphors

*Wotwe me, twe me, twe me, twe me*

*Wotwe me ma me ka ntini*

*Wohye me hye me, hye me*

*Wohye me ma meka nso*

*Wobɔ me tekrema pɔw*

*Wobɔ me nsateaa pɔw*

*Mebo ne din.*

If you pull me, pull me pull me and pull me  
If you pull me and I am left with only the veins in my body  
If you burn me, burn me, burn me  
If you burn me into ashes  
If you tie my tongue  
If you tie my fore finger  
I will mention her name.

The repeated use of the causative verbs *pulling* and *burning* indicate the lover's zeal to withstand all obstacles. Through the media we have insight into some aspects of literature.

### **Oral Literature and Advertising on Radio and TV**

The dynamics and inventive use of language finds itself in modern advertisement and marketing. In Ghana many firms, industries, organisations and sometimes the government advertise and announce some important events on Radio and TV. They advertise products and goods. The government puts out advertisements on social and political education like AIDS prevention, environmental protection, payment of taxes, and other forms of taxation, voters' registration. During electioneering campaigns of the year 2000 in Ghana, almost all the political parties had some of their campaign messages in the form of songs and short dramatic episodes.

These advertisements and messages were couched in songs and drama to catch the attention of listeners and viewers. Children were often heard singing these slogans and adverts. The performance aspects reveal some of the aspects of the Ghanaian life system. Based on the performance, the performer, the audience, the structure, creativity, and stylistic devices used including the figures of speech and the sound quality, I argue that advertising is a new literary genre in Akan.

The sales and the impact of the adverts depend on how well they are performed. The nature of the advertisements shows the skills of the artists and makes people enjoy these commercials. It is for these reasons that good artists are considered for adverts. In the case of adverts on the TV, business people look out for people who can dramatise very well while on the radio they look out for people whose voices are very persuasive. In this way, oral literature plays a commercial role in the Ghanaian community. Let us consider the following:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| A: <i>Mese mentumi menna o!</i>                  | I say I cannot sleep!                               |
| B: <i>Aden?</i>                                  | Why?  |
| A: <i>Ntonton nso dee esum aba yi-</i>           | Mosquitoes, and now that there is darkness.         |
| B: <i>Na eye a wompe koele a?</i>                | But can't you find some coil?                       |
| A: <i>Koele a aba yi yese dee ewo he na eye.</i> | As for these new coils none of them is good.        |
| B: <i>Woate koele a ye ato ne din "nokaoto"?</i> | Have you heard about the coil named "knockout"?     |
| A: <i>Ono nokaoto paa, Abokosafo dee yi bi?</i>  | And knockout really, is it that of the boxers?      |
| B: <i>Wo paa wo dee to bi hwe.</i>               | As for you, you just buy one and try and see.       |
| A: <i>Ntonton ne hwan a wanya nokaoto?</i>       | Who is mosquito to have got a knockout?             |
| B: <i>Ntonton ne hwan a orekoto onyina kese</i>  | Who is mosquito that can wrestle with the oak tree? |

Most commercials and adverts are full of humour, hyperbole, ideophones, parallelism, and repetition.

### Oral Literature and the Media: Trends and Deviations

In a prototypical and traditional Oral Literature performance, the performer(s) is/are in a face to face interaction with the audience, and the audience exerts a lot of influence on the performer. They may support him to enable him to achieve his aim and in some cases force the performer to make extempore compositions to improve the artistry of his performance. On the other hand, the audience can pressurise a performer to make him perform badly. However, the influence of the audience may differ from place to place and from genre to genre.

In the case of oral literature in the media, the face to face interaction is absolutely absent. If it is on the radio, the oral artist finds himself only at the radio studio and the only partial audience will be the technical man or his producer or host whose contribution would be zero. With the present state of oral literature on the radio which involves phone-ins, the audience will be the unseen audience. However, their contributions may go a long way to affect the performance.

In the case of oral literature on the television which is currently on the ascendancy, the performers normally have to rehearse and become perfect before they draw to the TV studio for

the recording before telecasting to the general public. Many changes and modifications can be made during the rehearsals. This character of oral literature as opera is now situated within the modern and western type of filming. It thus deviates from the normal composition and performance of oral literature which is co-temporal (Lord 1960). In this sense the composition is separate from performance.

It must be emphasised that since most of the listeners and the audience of oral literature on the media are contemporary folk, performers try to design their performances to suit the taste of the modern person. They are faced with the challenge of combining cultural preservation and continuity on one hand, with cultural modernisation on the other hand, and must work out the nature of cultural compatibility. It is in view of this that we see drama based on modern society. Again we encounter a lot of code-switching and terms borrowed from English and other foreign languages. Most performers of oral literature genres on radio and TV are people who have been to formal schools. They therefore combine English and Akan. This is why we notice code switching and code mixing in comedies and advertisements.

#### **Suggestion for the Development of Akan Oral Literature Through the Media**

Since the media are doing a tremendous job in the development of Akan Oral Literature, the following suggestions should be taken into consideration:

1. Various programmes covering the different genres in oral literature should be on radio and TV. It would not be a bad idea to have a channel like African Music Television to cater solely for Traditional African Music.
2. There is the need for a newspaper in Akan, as there was in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup>
3. Various talk shows of the kind of *Afisem* on Radio Universe hosted by Kofi Agyekum and that by Opanin Kwadwo Kyere on Gold FM should be encouraged.
4. The Adult Literacy and *Mmaa Nkommo* programme on GTV hosted by Afua Saa Ampene, the programme 'By the Fire Side' hosted by Maame Dokono on GTV and *Wo Haw ne Sen* 'What is your worry?' on Peace FM by Afua Konadu should all be encouraged.
5. Indigenous Book Reading on Ghanaian Oral and Written Literature, as done on Garden City FM in Kumasi and Peace FM in Accra, should be encouraged.

Apart from the above enumerated suggestions, I recommend programme sharing by the different FM stations, especially those which are oral literature oriented. Such programmes must be relayed from region to region. People have advocated that the *Afisem* programme on Radio Universe be played in Kumasi and other Regional centres for the people there to listen to.

## Conclusion

This paper has focused attention on the performance of Akan Oral Literature and the Media. It has concentrated on radio and TV. As far as TV shows were concerned it concentrated on Akan Concert Party and Akan Drama. It looked at the language and stylistic qualities, and the literary devices used. We asserted that most of these shows involved humour and comedy.

We have also seen that most Akan oral literature genres are covered on the radio. This is a recent development due to the increased freedom of the press and the proliferation of private FM stations. Some of the genres are folk and highlife songs, proverbs, riddles, folktales, etc

Another aspect of the use of Akan on the media especially radio is in talk shows. We argued that an Akan talk show can be considered as a new kind of Akan oral literature genre. We saw that the Akan talk shows embody performance, the use of politeness strategies, euphemisms, and the use of other taboo avoidance techniques.

The paper concentrated also on the role of oral literature and the media in Akan philosophy, environmental knowledge, etymologies of certain words in Akan, and the promotion and preservation of Akan traditions and culture.

The paper addressed the issues of oral literature and morality and the Akan family structure and responsibility. The contribution of oral literature and the media to entertainment and relaxation was also discussed. We saw the role of oral literature in adverts, political campaigns, and the carrying of educational and informative messages to the people. The paper finally considered oral literature and the media trends and deviations.

It was found out that some elements of oral literature on the media draw Akan oral literature closer to the western type of opera and movies. Suggestions for the development of Akan oral literature and the media were made. This paper has argued that with the absence of moonlight games and oral literature sessions in the communities, the media are the richest source and channel for the dissemination and preservation of oral literature among the Akan. If we continue to perform most oral literature genres on the media all the benefits of oral literature outlined in the paper will accrue.

## Appendix 1

The episode below was shown on GTV on the 30th of December, 1997 by the *Nteasee* Concert Party Group. It focuses attention on the installation of chiefs and the need for the chiefs to have customary stool wives. The episode portrayed aspects of Akan culture.



A family met to decide on the enstoolment of a new chief. They decided to enstool a younger man who had married a white lady. An Asafo group was delegated (amidst songs) to Accra to bring him down. The new chief was enstooled against his will. He messed up when swearing an oath of allegiance to his people and said: *Emi Nana Nyarko II. Ofre me na mewo adaagye a meba.* 'I Nana Nyarko II. If you call me and I have time I will turn up.'

He was corrected to say *Emi Nana Nyarko II. Wofre me osum mu, hann mu a meba* 'I Nana Nyarko II, If you call me in the rain, sunshine or in the darkness I will turn up.'

At the installation, a Kete group performed and the new chief was invited to dance. He did a funk dance instead of dancing a traditional dance. Some of the audience remarked that the dance was not cultural. 'We do not dance that way'. He was coached to dance and he finally did it right.

Meanwhile his white wife had been left alone in Accra and had refused eating. She only drank whisky. She said 'I won't eat, I am only waiting for my husband.' The queenmother told the chief about the customary rites and the need for a stool wife whom the king had to meet every Akwasidae. The white wife should also be customarily cleansed. The king was reluctant about this, but they finally brought the very old stool wife.

## Appendix 2

The excerpt below is an episode performed by the *Kristo Asafo* Concert Party on the 22nd of November, 1997. The major theme of the episode is *Ateasefo Ho hia Sene Awufo* 'The Living are more Important than the Dead'. This episode depicts the importance the Akans attach to the ancestors and funerals to the neglect of the sick and the living.

Koo Boakye fell sick and was at the verge of death and needed only fifty thousand cedis for medical purposes. His wife, Mercy, finally went to her husband's younger brother Akrobeto who was a rich business man. Akrobeto offered only ₦10,000. Mercy later sent her daughter Foriwaa to Boakye's friend Belebele. He diverted ₦40,000.00 he was to have paid to Akrobeto for Koo Boakye's medication. Akrobeto grew very furious when Belebele told him about this. He said his money had nothing to do with his brother's health. After these incidents Koo Boakye died. Akrobeto started planning towards a grandiose funeral aimed at getting higher proceeds.

During the funeral celebrations, Foriwaa came to Akrobeto to seek for a hundred thousand cedis for her examination fees but Akrobeto denied her the money. Foriwaa became very sad and sang the song entitled *Oheneba ne nea ne papa te ase.* 'The prince/princess is the one whose father is still alive.' Akrobeto took offence and drove away Foriwaa and Belebele from the scene. Foriwaa and her mother saw Apostle Kwadwo Osafo at Taifa who employed her as a secretary and catered for the widow.

Akrobeto's dream of making himself rich out of the funeral was shattered because of heavy rains on the funeral day. Out of shock he was admitted at the Taifa hospital and needed a lot of money for medication. Foriwaa who was by then working, visited him at the hospital and footed all the hospital bills.

Koo Bro summarised the whole episode and condemned his friend Akrobeto first for neglecting his brother Koo Boakye's health care and leaving him to die because of just ₦50,000 cedis. He also accused him of failing to pay for Foriwaa's exam fees. Akrobeto advised those who fail to cater for their patients at hospital but have much money to organise funerals to gain a lot of profit from them.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Akan belongs to the Kwa group of languages found in West Africa. It is the indigenous language with the largest number of speakers in Ghana. About 49.1% of the national population of Ghana are Akan (see Ghana National Census 2000). Akan has the largest percentages of both L1 and L2 speakers in Ghana.

<sup>2</sup>We expect that the exposure to aspects of oral literature in the media will influence them to admire, know and use the Akan language. It appears that when aspects of such programmes are repeated at later dates, the audience contribute better.

<sup>3</sup>The name *Kohwe* is the name of an artist in Akan drama His real name is Kofi Laing.

<sup>4</sup>The term 'reminiscential' refers to the Akan *ntam* since they reflect on the past predicaments of the society.

<sup>5</sup>These words are transliterated from English using the Akan orthography.

<sup>6</sup>According to Yankah (1997: 59) "Oral satire in contemporary Ghana goes beyond the pristine traditional discourse. Its power is enhanced by its "mediatisation" on radio, as well as its incorporation within the matrix of popular high life music which is a syncretic art forming combining Western instrumentation and indigenous rhythms and lyrics."

<sup>7</sup>NDC is abbreviation for National Democratic Congress. It was the ruling party of President Rawlings' government that ruled Ghana from 1992-2000. Many Ghanaians claim that the NDC government favoured only the cronies of the party while the masses suffered.

<sup>8</sup>There was an Asante paper called *Nkwantabisa*. The term *nkwantabisa* means 'when you come to the junction request.' This calls for the seeking of information. For a start, we could have a column on Akan oral literature in some of our current newspapers.