



Vituperative and Incendiary Language in Public Space a Ghanaian Social Concern



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ABSTRACT

This paper projects the phenomenon of outbursts, insults, inflammatory and foul-language use in the public space and its implications on the moral fabric of the Ghanaian society. The objective is to sensitize the public of this negative development in the hope to encourage the use of decent language in the public space. It gives a background to the use of language in society as a normative practice in all societies and the legal implications of language use in public space in modern society. Furthermore, it throws light on the theory of ethical language, focusing on four approaches that facilitate understanding and meaning of ethical sentences. The use of language in the public space has been reviewed referencing existing literature and various case studies in different locations in contemporary times as a background to the paper. Methodological issues factored purposefully sampled views of two-hundred and nineteen respondents drawn from university campuses and the general public, in Kumasi and Accra. Research design essentialized mixed methods, integrating the explorative, qualitative and interpretive tools. Views were elicited through the tool of a survey questionnaire supported by field and library data. Data display, reduction, mapping and verified conclusion served as indices of analysis. Findings include the general awareness of worsening foul language use with incendiary and vituperative undertones in the Ghanaian public space and unanimity in the call for multisectoral and synergistic effort to salvage the situation as a matter of urgency.

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INTRODUCTION

All human societies primitive, civilized, secular and religious maintain normative ethical imperatives, the essence of which is to guide and censor behaviour as a way of ensuring responsible actions and ethical conduct. Quintessentially, social ethics and etiquette become the expectation of how language is applied in inter-personal relations both in private and public, within the social space. The apparent degradation of discourse and conversation is perceived to have come about, due to the use of expletive language also described as insults, profanity, invectives, contumely or similarly.¹ Indeed, the use of inflammatory language may do a great deal of good by provoking a needed reaction that otherwise would have lacked, or a great deal of hurt, both to others and to self, according to the use one makes of the tongue.² The tongue can incite

¹ Paa Willie-Myers, "Insults in the Ghanaian Society," Ghana News, (2012): Accessed January 18, 2022, <https://newsghana.com.gh/insults-in-the-ghanaian-society/>

² Matthew Henry (Matthew Henry's Commentary. Biblesoft Inc., USA. 2006).

violent reactions as well as stereotypes and stigma with self-esteem implications for the objects of such language. Worse still, “words kill, words give life; they’re either poison or fruit – you choose.”³

The use of language has implied the right to free speech in liberal democracy since the 17th century, and religious freedom from the 20th century, particularly also, for the Jews.⁴ Free speech and freedom of religion relate to fundamental liberties and legitimate status to human self-expression.⁵ They imply that the infringement of those rights by individuals, government or official action can be guaranteed only under justification and due process.⁶

The use of language hence bifurcates along private and personal as well as public and regulatory or legal trajectories. Public speech, political rhetoric, homiletic sermons including any form of audience address situate themselves as public space activity to demand ethical guidance. The non-official address between persons at any level is as well a social interaction activity whose consequence often reverberates through the public space. Also, is social media discourse e.g., text messages, WhatsApp and similar platforms⁷ including telephony conversations that filter into the public space. The use of language on these platforms often leaves much to be desired. Hence, the theory of ethical language is applied in the attempt to tease out various perspectives and characteristics of language use in the Ghanaian public space.

Theoretical Framework

Wellman discusses the theory of ethical language by casting it into four basic theoretical approaches for the facilitation of understanding and meaning of ethical sentences. Admitting that ethical sentences are not simply defined, he attempted an explanation of sentences that express judgments of value and obligations. He notes the ambiguity of ethical sentences as either referring to sentences used in an ethical manner or critically right or wrong scenarios.⁸ It begs the question, what is an ethical sentence which as well provokes the meaning of judgments of value, and obligation? The questions implicate firstly, what properties ethical sentences have, secondly, how they differ from themselves, thirdly, how they differ from other kinds of sentences and finally, the purposes they have or serve. He describes the four theories of ethical approach in an ethical language in terms of meaning and understanding as follows:

First is ethical naturalism which is the theory that ethical properties are natural properties and refer to sentences that describe empirical characteristics to give an empirical description. Second is ethical institutionism which claims that properties are non-natural, meaning that some ethical sentences describe direct insights of reason to mean that some truths are knowable by reason, without necessarily needing empirical demonstration. Thus, the rightness or wrongness of certain actions may be intuitive in spite of their outcome. The third reason is emotivism which theorizes that ethical sentences are not fundamentally descriptive. Rather they express or provoke emotions. Fourth is ordinary language theory which also claims that ethical sentences have their unique meaning that cannot be reduced to other kinds of sentences.⁹ Ordinary language theory claims no empirical, non-empirical or emotive utterances, its meaning relies on the linguistic purpose for which they are used. Wellman, notes that these theories, lacking the comprehensiveness of meaning and understanding describe five basic meanings to ethical sentences through the descriptive, emotive, evaluative, directive and critical perspectives. By these, he explains fully how those perspectives enrich the theoretical understanding of ethical language.¹⁰

The Use of Language in the Public Sphere

Over the years, societies have not been free of the wrongful use of language in the public space. Culprits of

³ Proverbs 18:21, The Message Bible.

⁴ Hugh LaFollette (Ed). *The Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics*, (New York: Oxford Press, 2005). 359.

⁵ T.A. Scanlon, “Theory of Freedom of Expression,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, (1972): 204 – 26.

⁶ Joshua Cohen, “Freedom and Expression,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (3):207-263: (1993) Accessed December 24, 2021, <https://philpapers.org/rec/COHFOE>

⁷ Doris Dokua Sasu, *Leading Social Media Platforms in Ghana*, (Statista.com May, 12, 2021).

⁸ Carl Wellman, *The Language of Ethics*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 8, 25, 130, 174, 205.

⁹ Wellman, *The Language of Ethics*, 8, 25, 130.

¹⁰ Wellman, *The Language of Ethics* 174, 205.

this dastardly act have included the high and low of society. Classic examples of such acts in recent memory include President Donald Trump whose rhetoric¹¹ was said to be the cause of the invasion of the White House in 2020.¹² On the regional level, Stella Nyanzi¹³ has been famous for her insults of President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and his wife for reasons that are public. Posting insults on Facebook gives what one says a quick viral spread and global publicity with implications for victim and country, its people and so on either for the good or the wrong reasons.¹⁴ To the uncritical, Nyanzi's stature as a professor might present her behaviour to be benign. Thus, the tendency for many to replicate her behaviour on high or low-profile personalities may be heightened. The need to voice grievances about the conduct of all persons, including public servants can be done right through the application of responsible, courteous and legal framework regimes to ensure that good manners and rule of law are not compromised. Nyanzi is not alone in her use of vituperations as one from academia. A manifestation of that behaviour among the shining lights of academia is the use of raw language and profanity rather than the use of euphemisms as a sign of good culture and polish. In Ghana, the Parliamentary Majority Leader, Osei Kyei Mensa Bonsu faced a barrage of insults for proposing a non-Akan leader for his party, the New Patriotic Party in 2024.¹⁵ Name-calling and stereotyping of persons and groups on public platforms are a form of wrongful use of language in the public space. Another example is a Ghanaian Lawmaker's use of 'Mafia,' 'Sakawa Boys' (fradusters) for an ethnic group. Worse of all, the dastardly act was echoed by a former Ghanaian President.¹⁶ Such behaviours model reckless use of language in the public space by galvanizing the youth who draw inspiration from such personalities. Seeing them as mentors they fail to criticize and instead, imitate them which in the long run consolidates the wrongful behaviour of bad language used in the public space.

The role of personality influence on vituperation and invectives begs the question about personality theory. According to Oladele,¹⁷ 'personality is defined as the unique and distinctive characteristics which set a person apart from another.'¹⁸ He implies that personality is an amalgamation of outward expression of various inner conditions and processes of intelligence, attitudes, interests, and motives. Thus, personality mirrors the psycho-social, nurture, and environmental shaping of a person to explain his or her behaviour. Robbins & Judge are of the view that personality is not the make of a singular factor but a combination of nature (hereditary), nurture (environmental), and situation (social).¹⁹ This explanation provides some clarity to the vituperative, insulting and inflammatory speech behaviour of some in society. Thus, persons are a function of their background, socialization and exposure. Backgrounds are not flawless which require especially the learned to be open to personality analysis with a view to improving themselves lest they fall victim to their life-world.²⁰

The Ghanaian media has not succeeded in purging itself of the offense of throwing insults at people, using their platforms. Captain Smart (a TV host based in Ghana) and a Colorado-based Ghanaian engineering student have recently been slapped with a fine of one-million Cedis for defamation by calling Professor Frimpong Boateng, the former Minister of Environment Science and Technology greedy among

¹¹ Kate Conger and Mike Isaac, *Permanently Bans Trump, Capping Online Revolt Twitter page*, accessed Jan. 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/08/technology/twitter-trump-suspended.html>

¹² Sheila Pulham, *Inflammatory language*, accessed November Tue 8 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/blog/2005/nov/08/inflammatoryla>

¹³ Stella Nyanzi, *Facebook insults of Stella Nyanzi against Museveni and wife*, accessed March 29, 2017, https://web.facebook.com/stella.nyanzi/posts/10155061624480053?_rdc=1&_rdr

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, "The metaphysics of morals," *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 406.

¹⁵ Mynewsgh.com. *I've received unprintable insults over my non-Akan comment – Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu laments*, accessed April 8'2021, <https://www.mobile.ghanaweb.com>

¹⁶ Classfmonline. *Angry Akufo-Addo slams Isaac Adongo's 'Akyem Mafia', 'Sakawa Boys' tag amplified by Mahama on Facebook*, accessed September 4, 2020. <https://www.classfmonline.com/news/politics/Angry-Akufo-Addo-slams-Isaac-Adongo-s-Akyem-Mafia-Sakawa-Boys-tag-amplified-by-Mahama-on-Facebook-17677>

¹⁷ J.O. Oladele *Fundamentals of Educational Psychology, 5th ed.*, (Shomolu: Johns-Lad Publishers Ltd, 2004).

¹⁸ Eysenck, Sybil B. G., O. White, and Hans James, Eysenck. "Personality and Mental Illness, (1976): *PubMed*. Accessed November5, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1976.39.3.1011>

¹⁹ Stephen P. Robbins, and Timothy, A. Judge, *Organizational Behavior* (Prentice-Hall Inc., 2009).

²⁰ Edmund Husserl. *Crisis of the European World* (1936), accessed August 19th, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com>

other reputation damaging comments.²¹ Using the WhatsApp medium, the culprits indulged in insults and defamation against a public servant which was determined by a court as a defamatory case. Such behaviour of a media person, to seemingly carry out his job highlights the nuanced nature of public insults, vituperations, and the use of foul language in the public space. The shades of insult usage displayed in the variants of carrying out a professional duty, ‘telling it as it is, putting out the facts, expressing the right to free speech, I am not afraid of anybody, and so on,’ confirm a culture of insults by the media in the social space.

The usage of social media by bloggers and social commentators to throw insults is becoming more rampant in recent times by resident and expatriate Ghanaians. Kevin Taylor is noted for vituperation and insults of the ruling Akufo-Addo government and public figures including the Assin Central Member of Parliament (MP), Mr. Kennedy Agyapong among others. In a post captioned, “Kevin Taylor descends on Ken Agyapong in dirty ‘war of words,’”²² one sees the sort of words that were thrown at an MP. Ken Agyapong also is a notorious culprit and also a victim of insults on media platforms. In one of his usual vituperations, he used words that were uncomplimentary of a judge and eventually retracted his words in a televised and written apology to the Chief Justice (CJ), Judges and Magistrates of the Republic of Ghana.²³ Kevin Taylor and Ken Agyapong seem to share common personality traits. They are maverick and passionate which are indications of high adrenalin states and lack of emotional control in their public address. Twene Jonas²⁴ and Oheneba Media²⁵ are Ghanaian expatriates who have become notorious for the vociferous insults of chiefs and public officeholders. They seem to be angry at the failure, ineptitude, corruption and irresponsibility of the victims of their insults. The two, are motivated by the notion that insults are a potent means to jolt the brain out of inertia. Their language border on incivility as it applies to African normative ethics of respect, and decent behaviour. Decency and civility in this context are opposed to the colonial understanding of those terms that weaponized indigenous people and their culture as was applied in India by colonialists.²⁶

In parliamentary sessions in Ghana just like many places across the globe, vituperations and insults have been observed. A rather pathetic exchange between Kennedy Agyapong and Muntaka Mubarak, both sitting MPs in 2021, caught the attention of the public in a viral video due to the extent of vituperative insults of their exchanges on the floor of parliament.²⁷

The pulpit has not acquitted itself of vituperation and insults which seem to be a practice from antiquity. Pulpit insults when they are directed at behaviour and not personalities and entities seem benign because they hardly stir reactions. It is repulsive when it is personality targeted as was observed of Prophet

²¹ Mohammed Awal. *Captain Smart in Trouble as Professor Frimpong Boateng wins GHC 1 million Defamatory Suit Against Him*, accessed May 26’2021

<https://yen.com.gh/187460-captain-smart-trouble-professor-frimpong-boateng-wins-ghc1million-defamatory-suit-him.html>

²² Ghanaweb.com *Kevin Taylor descends on Ken Agyapong in dirty ‘war of words*, accessed September 16’ 2019.

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Kevin-Taylor-descends-on-Ken-Agyapong-in-dirty-war-of-words-781439>

²³ Evans Ansong. *Kennedy Agyapong ‘begs’ judge for calling him stupid; pleads for forgiveness*, accessed September 10, 2020.

<https://www.pulse.com.gh/news/local/kennedy-agyapong-begs-judge-for-calling-him-stupid-pleads-for-forgiveness/pryzq5k>

²⁴ Twene Jonas T.V – YouTube accessed September 10, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0oxLMG4JGQvWY72h6hm4-g>

²⁵ Rockson Adofo. *Nananom must arrest Oheneba Media for insulting Asantehene to his face*, accessed May 26, 2021,

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Nananom-must-arrest-Oheneba-Media-for-insulting-Asantehene-to-his-face-1271416>. All these cannot be found in the bibliography.

²⁶ We acknowledge that the term incivility is not without its history of harm. The concept of “incivility” is inherently a colonial one, and norms for what constitutes “civil” behavior are often dictated by those in power. This is how we end up with the “civilizing” of Indigenous peoples that included erasing Indigenous culture, displacing and murdering Indigenous populations, and kidnapping Indigenous children for Indian residential schools. Dominant civility norms are also how we have modern free speech protections for those who practice hate speech, and invocations of “civility” towards those who protest that hate speech... we use the term “incivility” throughout this article, but recognize its shortcomings (Lilia M. Cortina, Hershcovis, Sandy, and & Clancy, Kathryn B. H., “A Theory of Biobehavioral Response to Workplace Incivility,” *Journal of Management* Vol. XX No. X, Month XXXX 1–26 DOI: 10.1177/0149206321989798, 2021).

²⁷ GhanaWeb TV Video, *Woye aboa-ba, gyimi gyimii – Muntaka insults Ken Agyapong in ...* uploaded on Jan 30, 2919.

<https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Wo-y3-aboa-ba-gyimi-gyimiii-Muntaka-insults-Ken-Agyapong-in-parliament-719408>

Badu Kobi in his insult of President Akufo-Addo on the intention to tax commercial entities of churches.²⁸ The expression of language in any capacity and sphere ought to be guided by the ethics of appropriateness, professionalism, legitimacy and legality. Each nuanced expression of public insult exposes the attitude and passion of the culprit. According to Kaiser, attitude is an individual's cluster of beliefs oriented toward specific stimuli.²⁹ This means that the inspiration and the trigger to speak whether on a private or a public matter with language use implications is a function of attitude. In terms of attitude the individual's socialization, personality and education are brought into focus. Meaning "a sensible desire that has become a lasting inclination,"³⁰ passion involves the reflection and cognition of the actor who has an objective in mind or a mission to fulfil. Passion exposes the understanding, commitment, and intention either to achieve a positive outcome for social good or for selfish, parochial interest to satisfy ill-will elements of society. The passion and attitude dimensions mirror the perspectives of language as discussed by Wellman in his theory of ethical language that as well depicts the characteristics of public speech.

The Constitutionality of Freedom of Speech

In Ghana as elsewhere, the 4th Republican Constitution proclaims that "all persons shall have the right to (a) freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media."³¹ Such freedom boosts the democratic credential of a nation and its statehood. The New Patriotic Party Constitution endorses and promotes free speech and expression with the aim "to foster and maintain freedom of the media, and open dissemination and interchange of ideas, subject only to the laws of libel and the legitimate claims for national security."³² This impresses the idea that political parties in Ghana, at least, are aware of the principle of freedom of speech in modern society. Of this freedom, a caveat sustains for the purpose of guidance that this freedom is to be exercised with a high sense of responsibility.³³ In essence, the freedom to self-expression is not absolute and comes with reasonable limitations in the interest of public order and civility.

Free speech impinges on broadcast media as a mass media tool, making media houses or journalists, broadcasters and users of their mediums often culpable to infractions. This observation makes imperative continuous reforms to maintain professional standards. For a sustained culture of media reforms, one may take a cue from the establishment of The Payne Fund in America which took interest in educational potential radio in 1927. This kind of intervention on the auspices of an independent fund proposes a concept that should be embraced in Ghana to provide empowerment for the purpose of enhancement of free speech in the media.³⁴ This will go a long way to augment limited governmental and external funding for capacity building of media personnel.

²⁸ Jeffrey Mensah, *One Prophet Bado Kobi Insults Akufo-Addo Over Plan To Tax Churches*, accessed August 17, 2018, <https://yen.com.gh/114495-prophet-badu-kobi-insults-akufo-addo-plan-tax-churches.html>

²⁹ Susan. B. Kaiser. *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context* (New York: Fairchild, 1997).

³⁰ Kant, *The metaphysics of morals*, 406.

³¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, accessed June 20, 2021, <http://rhody.crc.uri.edu/gfa/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2018/04/Ghanas-Constitution-of-1992.pdf>

³² NPP, "Constitution of the New Patriotic" (article 2,19). Accessed August 13, 2021, <https://www.codeghana.org/assets/downloadables/npp-constitution.pdf>

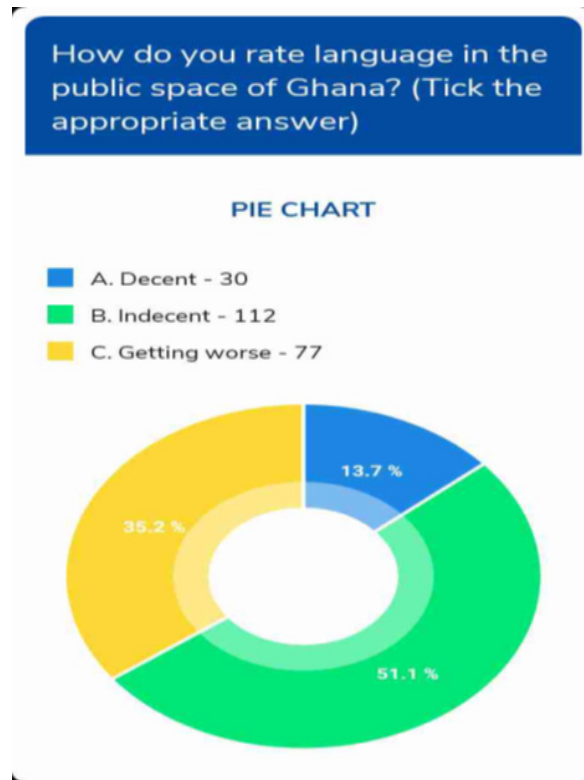
³³ However, freedom of speech must be exercised within the context of civility, mutual respect, decorum, and with the mind-set of creating intellectual ferment, producing ideas to promote progress and development. Freedom of speech, and of expression, are significant when they lead to the promotion of intellectual debate and discussions centred on how to make our country better, and relevant among the comity of nations. Freedom of speech, though can be critical, should not promote insulting and abusive languages; neither should it promote hate, and acts that can lead to instability in a nation or society. The content of our speech defines us, and tells society whom we are, and our character. That is why before we speak; we have to think, think deeply, and ensure that what we say or write contributes positively to the health of the nation (Kingsley Nyarko, "Freedom of Speech in Ghana; The Role of the NPP Tradition: Speech at TESCON KNUST Special Program," (Article 2, NPP Constitution, January 04, 2017), accessed October 11, 2021, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/807329/freedom-of-speech-in-ghana-the-role-of-the-npp.html>).

³⁴ Robert, W. McChesney, *Telecommunications Mass Media and Democracy*. (New York: Oxford University Press), Press,1993): 38 – 41.

Field Report

The reporting of data has been done in phases. First, is the quantitative data which elicited two views on how language is used in the public space either in face-to-face or interactive discourse and on social media. Subsequently, the qualitative data elicited views about commonly used abusive words, professional offenders of abusive language use, and further comments.

Presentation of Quantitative Data



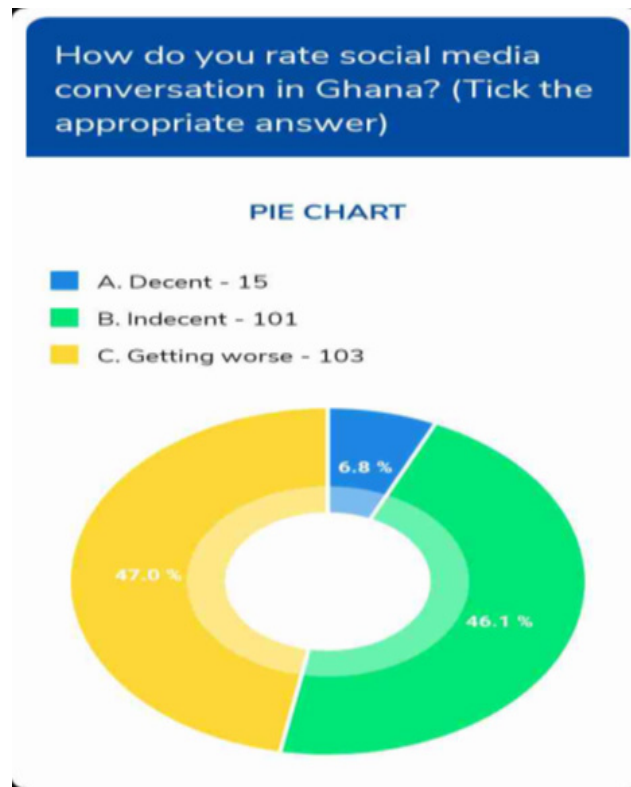
Analyses of Data, Question 1

The quantitative data is an emphatic indication of the dipping of decent language in the Ghanaian social space. The data paints a picture of a free fall of decent language in the social space. The figures in the tables vividly indicate a low level of decent language. This is against the 51.14 percent indecent language use among 219 respondents. More than 51% of 219 respondents confirm indecent language as dominating the social space of Ghana. With more than a quarter (1/4 of) respondents, indicating that language use is getting worse, it is a statement of the consciousness of the worsening public language situation of the country.

How do you rate social media conversation in Ghana? (Tick the appropriate answer)

Results

Options	%	Count
A. Decent	6.85	15
B. Indecent	46.12	101
C. Getting worse	47.03	103



Analyses of Data, Question 2

Question 2 has elicited a downward trend in decent language usage on social media, indicating far less than a quarter rating of decent language on social media. Over 46% and 47% ratings are respectively recorded for indecent and worsening social media language. Since social media is predominantly used by the elite and middle classes, it is an indication of language usage gone awry, not only among the low income and illiterate persons but economically viable and literate persons in the Ghanaian society. Thus, the dipping of decent language has crystalized as an across-board activity without regard to class and status in Ghanaian society.

Presentation of Qualitative Data

The qualitative data elicited the words silly, thief, incompetent, animal and blockhead as the five most commonly abusive words, or phrases used on radio, newspapers, social media e.g., WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, text messages, Tiktok etc., and in private conversations.

Again, the data elicited politics, the media profession, clergy, performing arts and the driving profession as the five professions from which the most abusive, foul language and vituperative insult offenders are produced.

Analyses of Qualitative Data, Question 3

The most commonly used abusive words exposed nuanced application or consolidation of multiple insulting words. Silly, means foolish, stupid, idiot, senseless, nonsense, and unwise. Akan vernacular versions namely 'kwasia,' 'gyimmi'³⁵ and 'nantwie' are used. 'Kwasia,' 'gyimii' are the same as 'nantwie' as reference to the docile nature of the cow, which in spite of its size and strength, yields to be slaughtered by men.

The word silly and its nuanced or consolidated usage ranked as the most common abusive word in the public space in Ghana. It is used by all to describe persons who are not up to the task. It is often used in the media landscape, the pulpit and in any situation where people have not performed their duties to the satisfaction of their superiors and the populace or have taken decisions that are detrimental to the good of society.

³⁵ Rachel Thompson, "Common Akan Insults on GhanaWeb: A Semantic Analysis of Kwasea, Aboa and Gyimii," *Abstract*, accessed January 18, 2022, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-32-9975-7_6

The word thief is applied to mean greedy, corrupt, and extortionist to also mean a state looter, one who dips the hands into the public purse. In the public arena, the use of “thief” is associated with politicians and public servants who manage public funds.³⁶ The word ranked as the second most common abusive word in the public space.

Being incompetent is applied to mean useless, good for nothing, and inexperienced, square peg in a round hole”, and also not ready for office. This word became popular in the political arena during the reign of John Mahama as President and was propounded mainly by the New Patriotic Party. It was originally directed at their opponents, the National Democratic Congress (NDC).³⁷ The insult has since been adopted by the general public to shame the non-performance of the ruling party and its public officers. This ranked as the third most common abusive word in the public space.

An animal³⁸ is a beast and its intelligence cannot be compared to that of humans. It is often used by Ghanaians to abuse persons who exhibit moral depravity and low mentality. Its Akan vernacular translation is ‘aboa,’ ‘nantwie,’ ‘odwane,’. Another term is ‘aboozige’ which is street language (typically used in Kumasi) to describe an animal. It ranks the fourth most common abusive in the public space.

Blockhead is also used to refer to an ignorant and idle person. It also means being lazy and lacking in curiosity and depth. This term is of common usage among media personnel. It is the fifth most common abusive word in the public space.³⁹

Analyses of Qualitative Data, Question 4

The five professions which use foul and abusive language in the public space of Ghana share a common professional practice of public interaction either in a small or large group setting. To a large extent, their infractions are committed in public – on media platforms or before crowds. Impulsiveness and vituperative expressions mark their discourse and interactions. Politics is adjudged as the most offending profession followed by the media, clergy, performing arts and those who drive especially public transport.

Analyses of Qualitative Data, Question 5

Further comments on the research topic highlighted a number of concerns, as responsible for the state of language use in the public space; westernization, loose media culture, growing indiscipline, and breakdown of the traditional (social) order. The latter invokes nostalgia of the adherence to the traditional notion of being one another’s keeper, more especially safeguarding the behaviour of children which is now virtually absent. The disregard of cultural values has been blamed for the dipping of proper language use in the social order. Thus, the manner of socialization, a function of parenting and community responsibility has declined considerably over the years.

The misuse of words, an indication of improper usage, or misunderstanding of English words was also cited as a reason for the abuse of words. The educational system should be structured in a manner that schools pay more attention to the teaching of the English and other local languages. When students understand the concept of language appropriately, they are better equipped to use cordial language instead of abusive/foul words.

The vernacularization of the English language in the public space is something to watch. The concerns, as raised, resonated obvious remedies namely education in civil language, accelerating traditional

³⁶ Joel Savage, “Greed, Selfishness, Jealousy And Hate In Akufo Addo’s Government Will Collapse Ghana,” *Modern Ghana* (2020), accessed <https://www.modernghana.com/news/983827/greed-selfishness-jealousy-and-hate-in-akufo.html>

³⁷ Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, “NDC so incompetent they can’t even fake ‘bribery’ video – Abdul-Hamid,” *Class FM* (2020), accessed January 14, 2022, <https://www.classfonline.com/news/politics/NDC-so-incompetent-they-can-t-even-fake-bribery-video-Abdul-Hamid-20855>

³⁸ Adams Buabeng, ‘Democracy and Politics of Insults In Ghana: The Media Factor,’ *MA Thesis*, Istanbul Commerce University (2018). accessed January 14, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/37960885/DEMOCRACY_AND_POLITICS_OF_INSULTS_IN_GHANA_THE_MEDIA_FACTOR

³⁹ Paul Adom Otchere, “Paul Adom Otchere defends Hawa Koomson, calls her critics blockheads,” *General News* (2021), accessed DECEMBER 8, 2021 <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Paul-Adom-Otchere-defends-Hawa-Koomson-calls-her-critics-blockheads-1184080>

upbringing in homes, and communitarian sensitivities. Relevant institutions including the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), Non-Governmental Organizations and religious groups, the judiciary, professional organizations, and the Ministry of Education are called upon to collaborate in addressing the problem as a public outcry.

CONCLUSION

There is a general acknowledgement of the worsening use of foul language with incendiary and vituperative undertones in the Ghanaian public space. As a public concern the study revealed that the breakdown of social norms, and failure of public institutions to ensure the preservation of proper norms and values have led Ghana to this current state. The failure was also blamed on the family system which has regressed from family responsibility of proper parenting and traditional education which teaches etiquette, norms and morals. The role of religious and non-governmental bodies in ensuring moral upbringing, civil behaviour and a good sense of community was also highlighted. The call to get an all-hands-on-deck approach, to tackle the problem has a multifaceted and synergistic approach as a way forward. The free fall of language in the public space demands urgent and decisive action for a turnaround. Also, the proliferating use of local languages especially the Akan dialect in insults due to its ubiquity calls for a concerted effort to discourage the use of abusive language and encourage the decorous use of the language to maintain its decent usage in the public space. It is civil and a sign of good culture to use language properly, whether one's own or borrowed.

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