

# **The Sociolinguistics of Thanking in Akan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Akan cherish people who are grateful. The paper addresses the language of thanking in Akan under expressive speech acts and linguistic routines. The paper gives ethnographic situations and communicative events for thanking including, (1) thanking after child birth; (2) thanking in joyful occasions: marriage and wedding; survival from accidents, achievements, promotions, bequeathing of properties, (3) funeral activities, (4) thanking after arbitration, (5) ironical thanking (indirect thanking), and (6) thanking at the shrine. We will consider socio-cultural functions and the current state of thanking in Akan society.

*Keywords:* *thanking, linguistic routines, expressives, reciprocity, communicative competence.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper is a contribution to Akan scholarship especially ethnography of communication, pragmatics and discourse analysis. This is an addition to works like greetings, apology, requests, and promises by Agyekum 2008b, 2006, 2005, Obeng Gyasi 1999a, 1999b, and Yankah 1995. Linguistic routines refer to the sequential organisations beyond the sentence either as activities of one person or the interaction of two or more. These include gestures, paralinguistic features, topics and rituals in everyday interaction. Among the Akans, the most outstanding ones are *greetings, apology, request, gratitude/thanking*, and the *recounting of one's mission* because they are encountered daily. These are very important aspects of the Akan language that the society expects members to perform with the highest degree of communicative competence. They form part of the children's upbringing and socialisation. Every child must be conversant with these linguistic routines and those who observe them in communicative interactions are communicatively competent, or vice versa.

Communicative activities are carried on daily in a speech community and the activities involve certain linguistic items accompanied by performance. These routines fall under performatives and speech acts and are performed in relation to the socio-cultural norms and networks of the society. The linguistic routines are communally owned and predictable, and interlocutors are expected to follow certain accepted societal and cultural formulas and conventions.

Linguistic routines are universal because every language and speech community employs one form or the other during communicative encounters. However, the way they are employed and structured may differ from language

to language, but their functions may be identical since they all aim at social cohesion and peaceful co-existence.

Bonvillain (1993: 103) states that “Linguistic routines combine verbal material and social messages in patterns expressive of cultural values and sensitive to interactional context.” Each of the linguistic routines is of greater socio-cultural value to the Akan; that is why they have been able to withstand the test of time and globalisation. Each of them is patterned differently from the others, despite their similarities and functions. Linguistic routines are determined by the formality of the setting, the nature of the relationship between the participants, social variables, and their communicative goals. Linguistic routines are therefore context bound and socio-culturally oriented. To be able to combine the verbal and social messages effectively, one must know and understand the rules of ethnographic communication.

## 1.1 EXPRESSIVE SPEECH ACT

Thanking is an expressive speech act that states what the speaker feels<sup>1</sup>. Expressives are representatives and interpretations of the psychological inner state of the speaker either to himself or to the addressee. They denote the speaker’s experience by the use of statements of pleasure, pain, likes and dislikes, joy, sorrow, love or hatred (see Yule 1996: 53, Mey 1993: 165). Expressive verbs include *apologise, thank, condole, congratulate, complain, lament, protest, deplore, compliment, praise, welcome* and *greet* (Holmes 1995, Duranti (1997). Expressives are subjective and depend on the speaker and the participants. According to Mey (1993: 166), “Expressives are subject to limitations and changes according to different conceptualisations of social guilt behaviour.” An expressive speech act must presuppose an embedded true proposition to indicate that the speaker is expressing an inner feeling towards something which s/he deems to be true in the world and which s/he is sincerely giving his/her state of mind. The impact of the expressive should move from the individual to the societal level (Rosaldo 1982: 204). The verbal expressives are complemented by non-verbal communication, especially facial expressions and gestures that help the addressees to better interpret the intention of the speaker. Thanking in Akan involves the verbal, plus a handshake or sometimes a kneeling down to show appreciation.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech Act is a term introduced by Austin (1962). It is used to refer to a theory that analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of the Speaker (S) and the Addressee (A) in interpersonal communication. Duranti (1997:220) states that the perlocutionary acts consist of actions that might be beyond the conventional interpretation of an utterance and/or outside the control of the speaker.”

### 1.1.1 Social Settings for the use of Expressives in Akan

Akan is a purely communal society and there is a collective responsibility among members of group. Signs of gratitude that go to an individual are conventionally extended to his family group and compatriots. In much the same way if there is any disgrace caused by an individual, his group shares a common responsibility. Akans put premium on communal needs and do not consider the individual alone. Agyekum (2004a: 73) states therefore that “Akans share standards of “societal behaviour” that would be recognizable to the social distribution of responsibility, glory, fame and shame.”

The Akan social and hierarchical interrelationship can be based on the acronym GRAPD where we have G-gender, R- rank, A- age, P-power, and D-distance. The presence of any of these social variables during social interaction implies that face and politeness must be treated with delicacy. The variables will determine the category of people who normally use the expressives and thanking and the degree they should take.

In discussing the social settings, relations and hierarchy among Akans with special reference to chieftaincy Kallinen (2004: 10) mentioned that the Akan social setting is very complex but there is some level of unity within diversity. People are related according to the principle of kinship (matrilineal or patrilineal) and descent and there exists a huge network of relations based on clanship and friendship, marriage and politics. Within this network there are status and hierarchy that affect social events and social behaviour. This type of networking will have some influence on the topic of thanksgiving

If people are supposed to be polite and fail to do so they bring about disgrace. In Agyekum (2004: 86) I discussed the Akan notion of disgrace as follows. It is made up of the expression *X gu Y anim ase* ‘to disgrace someone’ The interlineal translation is as follows:

X	<i>gu</i>	Y	<i>anim</i>	<i>ase</i>
X	cast	Y’s	face	down/under’
X	disgraces	Y		

Conceptually, the face forms part of the organs of the body that are at the upper part of the body. Cognitively, things placed at higher levels can easily be seen, they are obvious and given the proper recognition and importance while those placed at lower levels have less recognition. To lower somebody’s face to a ground level and under the surface is to disgrace or lower his/her dignity. From the expression *X gu Y anim ase* ‘to disgrace someone’, we derive the nominal *animguaseε* ‘shame, shame-face’, disgrace. Kallinen (2004: 98–99) also supports the shared responsibility when it comes to disgrace among the Akan and therefore states that

“When a person commits an offence he/she not only brings disgrace upon himself but also upon his/her community... and the disgrace caused by the living members is seen to extend to all of these levels. Since disgrace is shared by all, it is also in everyone’s interest to do everything possible to avoid it. So, whatever discontents or frictions there might be inside the community, it is crucial not to let them turn into public matters thus making the whole community exposed to the ridicule and judgment of others. (Kallinen (2004: 98–99)

All the above indicate that any hitch that occurs in the communicative event of thanksgiving by an individual that brings about disgrace affects him, his group and even his ancestors, and these are the cultural and normative logic behind the principle of collective responsibility among Akans.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

The data was collected from recordings of communicative encounters from the Akan community. I attended funerals, family gatherings, thanksgiving services in churches, and paid a visit to the Kwaku Firi shrine at Anwoase. I observed these encounters where thanksgiving was the primary communicative event and recorded the proceedings on tape recorder, and later transcribed and translated them into English. After each encounter, I interviewed the people involved about the language use and the significance of thanking in the encounter. In the analysis of the text I cite examples from real communicative encounters and consider the ethno-pragmatics and the sociocultural concepts about thanking. In each excerpt, I paid attention to the words, expressions, honorifics, proverbs and expressives. I have provided the original texts and their English translations. My experience and intuition as an Akan native speaker and scholar in Akan help in the analysis.

I also did some library research on aspects of social relations and status hierarchy among the Asantes. I therefore consulted some anthropological books on the Akans especially, the Asantes. The library research included my own works on the sociocultural concept on face, Fortes’ (1969) work on the Asantes and Kallinen’s work on the Asantes. In all these, I paid attention to networks of relations, social responsibility and the notion of shared responsibility.

## 2. THANKING

Thanking is a particular, culturally defined form of expression of gratitude that Akans attach great importance to. Thanks are rituals employed in communicative encounters as conversational closers to encounters or meetings, such as the normal expressions, *thanks for coming*, and *thanks for listening* (see

Tannen 1995: 54). In such cases, thanks may be used not as reciprocal for what one has done for the speaker but as a conversational ritual. Thanking is an institutional act performed in accordance with the societal, organisational and institutional demands of the Akans. The indigenous education and acculturation emphasise the essence of gratitude and appreciation for services and gifts.

Once a gift is accepted or services are rendered, the recipient must as a rule thank the donor or service provider, irrespective of its nature and the magnitude. The next day, one has to ask friend(s) to accompany him/her to thank the benefactor. Some period after that, the recipient may thank the donor by saying *eda no meda wo ase*, ‘thank you for the other day.’ Sarpong (1974: 67) states that, “the recipient of a gift may have to thank the giver more than twice for one and the same gift, and may have to make the good gesture of the donor known in public. He may have to ask other people to accompany him to render thanks.” Refusal to do this indicates that the beneficiary is not appreciative and well educated in the Akan culture and is looked on with scorn. To refuse gifts without any tangible reason is a clear manifestation of enmity between the participants.

Gifts and services followed by thanks are signs of deep and affectionate relationship especially when they are between peers. Gifts and services may also reflect the issues of status and hierarchical relationships. Normally, people of the lower ranks render services to their lords and masters, especially chiefs, and receive gifts and thanks in addition. When they receive thanks in cash or kind they should also reciprocate by thanking their lords either personally or accompanied by relatives. The reverse is possible where a master can ask his representatives to go and thank a subordinate on his behalf. In all these, the common denominator is that of love and appreciation and communicative competence in the Akan language.

An Akan maxim states that *ɔkanni kye ade a, ɔgye aseda* ‘if an Akan makes a present he takes thanks.’ This is a crisp rendition of the necessity in acknowledging beneficence. To Ackah (1988: 55), “Failure to render thanks would mean, in the estimation of the giver, that the one who received the gift is an ungrateful wretch, and may result in the giver deciding never to make another present to that person.” A similar view is shared by Sarpong (1974: 76) that:

“Every gift or service calls for a favourable reciprocal action from the recipient because accompanying it is the giver’s personality. In many instances, to refuse a gift amounts to a declaration of open enmity, and to neglect to show gratitude is no less offensive.” Sarpong (1974: 76)

The word for ungratefulness in Akan is *bonniaye*; it is made up of *aboa a ɔnni aye* (lit.) ‘the animal that has no gratefulness’, it shows that an individual is uncultured. One of the Akan proverbs that foregrounds the essentials of gratitude is *se obi hwe wo ma wo se fifiri a, wo nso wohwe no ma ne dee tutu*. ‘If someone takes care of you, during your teething period you should as well take

care of him when he is losing his teeth.’ This is the reciprocity contract where parents cater for their wards, and when they grow they also cater for their old parents. Any Akan who violates such traditional law of reciprocity is looked on with scorn as a mean, uncouth and ungrateful person. The reciprocity of gifts and services also goes on between the living and the dead ancestors, deities, other supernatural beings and God. Let us look at the excerpt below:

### **Excerpt 1**

**Background:** Ante Maggie is a business woman and a regular contributor to radio discussions. She has developed the habit of sending Christmas presents to radio presenters and social commentators every Christmas and during the celebrations of their birthdays. She complained to me about the ungratefulness of most of the recipients as follows:

*ɔpanin, wo nipa no asan aka ne ho bio. Afe yi nso, mekɔmaa no ɛmo ne anwa nanso kranana. Bio Owura KA nso metee se wawo nta no, metɔɔ “pampers” papa pa ara ne nneema ahorɔɔ kɔmaa no nanso ɔno nso budii. Dee mehunu ne se wɔn nyinaa nni nteteɛpa ne efi nyansa. Afe duru so bio a, megye m’ahome. Se mene obiara nsanee kɔntraagyɛ. Aden na nnipa ye bonniaye saa?*

‘Opanin, your friend has misbehaved again. This year too I sent him some rice, cooking oil and others but I have not heard of him. Again, I sent some pampers and other assorted goods to KA when I heard that he had given birth to twins, and he also kept mute over it. What I have observed is that all of them have not got good upbringing and traditional wisdom and education. Come next year, I will just relax; after all I have not signed any contract with them. How can people be so ungrateful?’

The opening statement by the speaker implies that the recipient has been constantly ungrateful. Ante Maggie’s disappointment is a general feeling for most Akans about the ungratefulness of the current generation of Akans. The expressions *budii* and *kranana* both mean absolute quietness and she implies that the two people have kept mute over the gifts without thanking her.

## **3. THE LANGUAGE OF THANKING**

There are various expressions of thanking including;

- *meda wo ase*, ‘I thank you,’
- *w’aseda ni*, ‘here are your thanks’,
- *mema wo amo*’ (lit.) ‘I give you well done/ I congratulate you’,
- *waku me*, ‘you have killed me’,
- *mema wo adware*, ‘I give you a bath’.
- *mewu a, didi*, ‘when I die eat’

The Akans will normally attach the expression *Onyame nhyira wo*, ‘may God bless you’, *Onyame nhye wo ananmu*, ‘may God replenish whatever you have offered to me’ to any of the above expressions. Akans religiously take such expressions in good faith and reciprocate by saying *me nso meda wo ase pa ara*, ‘I also thank you very much.’ Each of these expressions of thanking has deeper pragmatic and socio-philosophical meanings in Akan. The prototypical expression *meda wo ase*, ‘I thank you,’ is made up of;

<i>Me</i>	<i>da</i>	<i>wo</i>	<i>ase</i>
I	lie	you	under/below.

It means that I, the recipient, lie below you, the beneficiary; the Akans think that when somebody gives you something or does something for you, that person is elevated higher in the social status and the benefactor is lowered and humbled.

In the above, the notion of thanking presupposes the existence of hierarchies and power relations between the donor and the recipient. This notion is truly reflected in situations where the persons involved are not of the same rank/status. The lower rank member really recognises the higher rank and says s/he is below him. In peer group relations the recipient is metaphorically saying that even though we are of the same rank and status let me for the sake of your benevolence elevate you some steps higher than myself. Each of the assertions above supports the expressions *meda wo ase*. ‘I lie under you.’ Your beneficiary can thus control or manipulate you and you cannot complain because you are below him in status either perpetually or momentarily.

The proverb *obi ye wo papa a, na waha wo*, ‘if somebody does something good for you, then s/he has worried you’ is an apt description of this situation. If the gift or services is so great, the intensifiers *pa ara* or *papapapa*, ‘very much’, *pui/bebree*, ‘a lot’ is added to get *meda wo ase pa ara/pui/bebree*. In the expression *w’aseda ni*, ‘here are your thanks’, thanking is conceptualised as something concrete that the recipient is handing to the beneficiary. In the expression *mema wo amo*. ‘I give you well done/congratulations’; the recipient is so appreciative and thus congratulates the benefactor.

The expression *waku me*, ironically implies that the speaker is overwhelmed by the gift or services and no amount of words could describe it except to say that the benefactor has killed him; and the socio-philosophical implication is that, when he dies, he is going to rest fully in the ancestral world and leave this living world that is full of problems.

The type of thanks depends on the services or offers; if one offers you food, you say *mema wo adware*, (lit) I give you a bath’, which implies (lit.) ‘I thank you for making me bath’. In the olden days, on the death of a person, the Akans fasted and refrained from their staple food for seven days. When they broke their fast, they used the expression *yeredware*, to imply that we are cleansing all the woes and evils associated with the death of our family member. They shaved their hair, wore white clothing, slaughtered white sheep and ate good meals to

signify the end of the funeral and sorrow. When one offers you food, he has made you break your fasting.

In the case of the expression *mewu a, didi*, 'when I die eat', it is used when the gift or service is tremendous and above expectation. To exempt somebody from fasting is a good relief and is conceptualised as a thanking to reciprocate the gift or services rendered by the donor.

#### 4. ETHNOGRAPHIC SITUATIONS FOR THE RENDERING OF FORMAL THANKING

Even though thanking is performed regularly to express one's appreciations, there are formalised institutionalised thanking forms for certain socio-cultural communicative events among the Akan. This section discusses, (1) thanking after child birth; (2) marriage and wedding; (3) funeral activities; (4) thanksgiving service after accidents, achievements, promotions; (5) when husbands bequeath properties to their wives and children; (6) thanking at the shrine, and (7) thanking after arbitration.

##### 4.1 THANKING AFTER GIVING BIRTH

Three months after delivery, the nursing mother, her child, friends and relatives wear white cloth and ornaments to church and offer some money to the church and render thanks to the Almighty God, and prayers are offered. This is an excerpt by a nursing mother.

###### **Excerpt 2**

**Setting:** Agbogba Bethesda Methodist Church

**Participants:** Madam Patricia Ampaabeng Kyeremeh, Rev. E. K. Baiden and the Congregation.

**Date:** 26<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2008

She then narrates her thanksgiving as follows.

*Anuanom a moahyia ha wɔ Kristo Yesu mu, monnya me na menna Yehowa ase na ɔye na n'adɔɛ wɔ ho daa. Abosome nkron akwantuo nye adewa. Amane, ɔhaw ne ayareyareɛ pii wɔ mu, nanso ɔbɔadeɛ no adaworoma woayi me sɔnn afiri mu. Ebinom kɔ awoɔ a, wɔmma, ebinom nso ba a, wɔn mma nka wɔn ho. Me deɛ Onyame ne me adi no yie pa ara, ama mawo afa me ho afa me ba. Meda ɔsɔfo, asɔremma, me klaase ne adɔfo nyinaa ase sɛ mokaee me mpaebɔ mu. Mewoee yi nso, adɔɛ a moaye me ne nsra a mobesraa me no, sɔ m'ani yie. Anuanom, mede*

*Onyame da mo nyinaa ase. Mesre asɔfo se monto Christian Asɔre  
Nnwom 7 mma me.*

Fellow colleagues assembled here in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, please join hands with me to thank the Lord for his good and his mercies abound. Nine months journey is not a mean task. It is full of sufferings, problems and sicknesses but by the grace of God he has delivered me safely from childbirth. Some go into labouring and do not survive; others survive but lose their children. In my case God has been so kind to me and both of us are healthy. I thank the reverend minister, the congregation, my class and all lovers for always remembering me in their prayers. Since I gave birth you have presented assorted gifts to us and you have frequently visited us; we really appreciate that. Brethren and sisters, I thank all of you in the name of the Almighty. I plead with the reverend minister for the congregation to sing MHB 7 for me.

The Reverend minister conducted a thanksgiving service for the woman and her child. He read some Psalms that centred on thanksgiving and later baptised the child. After the church service, the mother and her entourage moved from house to house, thanking all the people for their prayers and later invited the congregation to a party.

In the African traditional religion where some children were claimed to have been sourced from deities, the mother goes to the shrine to offer cash, fowls, sheep and drinks to the deity and render thanks especially when she was previously considered infertile or when the family had experienced constant child mortality.

## 4.2 THANKING IN JOYFUL OCCASIONS

When individuals are experiencing joyful moments as a result of higher achievements, wedding, promotions, winning elections or surviving fatal accidents, they thank God and all those who had contributed to their success or survival. One of the joyful occasions that demand thanking is where wives and children render public and formal thanks to husbands for bequeathing properties to them. They do this at a family gathering for the public to bear witness. In the Akan society, this formality serves as a traditional “will” so that on the death of the father, nobody can overturn his decision.

**Excerpt 3**

**Participants:** Yaa Agyeiwaa (wife), her children, family and Mr Kofi Mensa (husband) and the entire Asona family of Assisiriwa in the Ashanti region of Ghana

**Venue:** Assisiriwa

**Date:** 15<sup>th</sup> October 2008

The woman said as follows.

*Abusuapanin, abusuafɔɔ, adɔfɔɔ ne ɔmanfɔɔ a moahyia mu ha, abusua kyeame w'adaworoma wobetie na ato abusuapanin se, se yegyina ha a, na eye anigyee nko ara na ahye yen ma. Megyina me ne me mma anan mu de aseda a enni kabea rema me kunu Okumpa, Daasebre, Daaseensa, Bentwereboɔ a ne ho bɔn atuduro, Kofi Mama ase wɔ adee a waye ama me ne me mma. Mmarima bi wɔ hɔ a amin ne atirimuɔden aye wɔn yaree, wodi wɔn akyiri a, ɔbreguo dee wofa no kwa. Me kunu Kofi Mensa anye saa, ɔno dee ehye n'anom koraa a, ɔbeyi ama wo. Me ne me mma dii n'akyi kɔyee kokoofuo wɔ Sankɔre. Onyame atɔ ne nhyirabɔsuo agu so ama kooko no aba. Watwa bi ama me, watwa bi nso sei ara hu ama ne mma. Efie mmienu a wasi no Kumase nso ɔde baako ama yen, yen kurom ha nso Onyame adom wamma me amfere wɔ me mfefɔɔ mu; wasi dan kama ama yen.*

*Nananom enne megyina ha a, mekura me nsam buroninsa pantu, dɔkɔdɔkɔ, odwampa a ɔtua dua ne kente a yeato ne din "Okunini" yi se mede reda me kunu ase. Mpanin se se wodɔ afuo na Onyame an hunu mu a, afuo no renye yie. Bio nso asansa fa adee a, ɔde kyere. Me kunu Barimayena nnye weinom nyinaa mfa mma ne kra. Nanaom m'ano asi.*

'Family head, family members, colleagues and the crowd here assembled; family spokesperson, please listen so that it will get to the family-head that as we stand here we are filled with joy and gratitude. I stand here on my own behalf and on behalf of my children to express an unlimited appreciation and gratitude to my husband, The Good Husband, The magnanimous one, the Ever-kind, The Warrior whose appearance gives a smell of gunpowder, Kofi the Dignitary, for what he has done for us. Some men are full of deceit, wickedness and bullying, if you work with them you will toil in vain. My husband, Kofi Mensa, did not do that, as for him, even if the food is already in his mouth, he will send it back to you. I and my children were with him at Sankore to cultivate cocoa. God has showered his blessings of dew unto the farm and we are now harvesting a lot of cocoa. He has allotted part of the farm to me and a sizeable part to his children. He has bequeathed one of his two houses in

Kumase to us; in addition he has built one beautiful house for us in this village and now we have not been despised among our fellows.

Nananom, if I stand in front of you today, I have in my hand, two bottles of foreign liquor, assorted soft drinks, a big ram, and a kente cloth with the name “The Hero” as my items of appreciation. According to the elders, if you weed a farm and God cannot see it, you will not harvest anything; again, if the hawk snatches anything, it shows it to the public. My husband, the Extraordinary-Husband, should receive these items and use them to comfort his soul. I am done.’

In the above narration, the woman uses a lot of honorifics to express her respect for her husband and raised him higher above other men. She explained why it was prudent to perform the thanks in public and supported it with the proverb about how the hawk displays the things it snatches.

In current times, the joyful thanks include promotion in job, academic achievements, celebration of anniversaries, winning elections, football tournament. It could be an individual, a group or at the national level. For example, Ghana as a nation organised a “national thanksgiving service” at the Independence Square in January 2009 to thank the Almighty God and all Ghanaians for going through successful general elections in December 2008. Presidential candidates who win general elections also organise regional tours to thank the electorate for voting for them.<sup>2</sup>

### 4.3 THANKING IN FUNERALS

During the entire period for a funeral there is a lot of thanking during donations of drinks and cash, funeral church thanksgiving service on Sundays, travelling to

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<sup>2</sup> The example below is e-mail letter from Volta Hall of the University of Ghana expressing gratitude.

From: Elizier Ameyaw-Buronyah" <eaburonyah@ug.edu.gh

Topic: THANKSGIVING SERVICE VOLTA HALL PRAISE

To ugstaff@uglists.ug.edu.gh

Hello,

To round-off Volta Hall’s 50th Anniversary Celebrations, the Hall is organising a praise and thanksgiving service as follows:

Date: Sunday, December 13, 2009

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Venue: Volta Hall

Attire: Volta Hall 50th Anniversary Cloth

Alumnae, fellows, students, friends and well wishers of the hall are cordially invited to the service.

Have a good day.

Elizier

The above e-mail is very common in Ghanaian context and it shows that thanking and showing of appreciation is deeply rooted in Ghanaians.

places where mourners have come from to thank them and thanksgiving announcement on radio TV and in the newspapers. As part of Akan cultural system, donors at funerals are thanked for attending the funeral and consoling the bereaved family, and presenting drinks, food items or cash donations called **nsawa** (see Agyekum 2008a on the language of nsawa). The women in the bereaved family are tasked to track the benefactors and donors to thank them by shaking their hands. Formerly, after the funeral on Saturdays and Sundays, the females of the bereaved family woke up on Monday at dawn around 5 am and beat some gongon, and shouted as follows.

**Excerpt 4a**

<i>ɔmanfoɔ a mobaa ayie yi e,</i>	‘Folk who attended this funeral.’
<i>Yeda mo ase oo.</i>	‘We thank you.’
<i>Mo a mobɔɔ nsawa yi e.</i>	‘Those who gave donations’
<i>Yeda mo ase oo.</i>	‘We thank you.’
<i>Yeda mo ase oo. Yeda mo ase oo.</i>	‘We thank you very much.’

Apart from the above, the bereaved family travelled to the places of the mourners to thank them formally for attending the funeral; and that marks the end of the entire funeral.

These days, the media is taking some of the roles of thanking that were previously done in a face-to-face medium. In contemporary times, the bereaved family often announce their thanking on the local radio and TV stations that have wider coverage or publish it in newspapers. Below are excerpts culled from page 66 of the Daily Graphic Newspaper published on Thursday the 26<sup>th</sup> of November 2009. The entire page is captioned *Classifieds and Funeral announcements*. The thanking announcement normally goes like this:

**Excerpt 4b**

**1. Thanks for Sympathy**

OPAAPANIN CHRISTIANA TENKORANG FREMPONG (a.k.a. Krobea Asantewaa Otaado) Children, Grandchildren, the In-Laws and the entire Bretuo Families of Asante Juaben and Kwawu Twenedurase wish to express their gratitude and appreciation to all those who helped in diverse ways during the death and funeral of their beloved mother, sister and friend at Danteng Kwawu and in Accra. *May the good Lord richly bless you all Amen*

**2. Thanks for Sympathy**

The Entire family, Friends and Loved Ones of the late Kenneth Brett WOOD (Retired Supervising Chief Editor of the Ghana Agency) wish to express their

thanks and appreciation to all those who by prayers, active support and show of sympathy mourned with them in their recent bereavement. God Bless You.

The above are regular announcements in our dailies, especially The Daily Graphic Newspaper and it has become part of Ghanaian culture and a very important channel for showing appreciation. Let us consider a funeral thanking in excerpt 5 below.

### **Excerpt 5**

*Abusuapanin Fosu ne Asona abusua a wɔwɔ Kokofu Edwinase, mma, mmanananom, ne okunafoɔ ne Methodist Asɔre a ɛwɔ Kokofu Edwinase se wɔda ɔmanfoɔ ne adɔfo a mobegyaa wɔn maa wɔpɛɛ wɔn dehyee Inspector Mensa korabea san yɛɛ n'ayie kamakama wɔ Edwinase Memeneda a ɛtwaa mu no no. Abusuafoɔ se biribiara a mohwereee no wɔ saa ayie yi ase no Onyankopɔn no ara nhye mo ananmu. Wɔse wɔda mo ase amu, wɔda mo ase Ahenewa.*

The Family Head and the entire Asona family of Kokofu Edwinase, children and grandchildren, the widow and the Methodist Congregation of Edwinase renders their sincere appreciation to all the mourners and friends who mourned with them on the burial and funeral of their beloved Inspector Mensah. You contributed to his befitting burial and grand funeral at Kokofu Edwinase last Saturday. According to the family, may the Almighty replenish in multiples whatever you lost during the funeral. They say they thank you Amu, they thank you Ahenewa.

## **4.4 THANKING AFTER ARBITRATION**

After the settlement of disputes at the local arbitration especially at the chief's palace, the two parties render their formal appreciation to the chief and his elders for using their time and energy. They pay *aseda sika*, 'thanks-offering money', which goes to the jury for conducting proper investigation into the matter and giving the verdict (see Rattray 1954: 208). According to Rattray, in arbitration, especially cases that relate to the Great oath, the life of the innocent is spared, even though in one sense he has won the case, he has to pay what is virtually a fine, *aseda*, as a thank-offering for "being given his life". In recent times, the guilty in Akan traditional arbitration are not killed, but the payment of a fine by the innocent still occurs.

The Great oath is a verbal taboo item that should not be mentioned in vain or trivialised since it refers to a distasteful event among the Asante royal or within the state in times past. This oath is however allowed to be used during arbitration to assert the truth in what is testified. Disputants therefore owe the state for reminding them of the psychological pain. It is, therefore, prudent for

the innocent to thank the jury for allowing him to use the Great oath to prove his innocence. Again, the oath binds the jury to show the highest level of justice that guides them to adjudicate fairly without prejudice and for that, the innocent should thank the jury (see details of oaths in Agyekum 2004b).

The *ɔkyeame*, ‘the chief’s spokesperson’ is authorised to inform both the guilty and innocent to come forward and the chief will then say *ɔkyeame bɔ wɔn aseda*, ‘quote to them their thanking’. Okyeame will then say as in excerpt 6”

### **Excerpt 6**

*Mommɛda abadwafoɔ ase, afei A wodi bem enti tua sika X ne nsa, B wo nso wodi fo tua sika Y, nsa, ne odwan.*

‘You should come and thank the jury, after that you A, you are innocent, so pay a cash amount of X and drinks; B, you are guilty, so pay an amount of Y, a drink and other things.’

The fine imposed on B, the guilty, is always heavier than A, the innocent. Each of the parties will come closer to the *ɔkyeame*, bow down and say as we have in excerpt 7 below:

### **Excerpt 7**

**Background:** Madam Afia who was found innocent after an arbitration at the Asisiriwa palace on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2009 said as follows:

*Nana Kyeame wowɔ hɔ, mesre wo anidie, ma no nto Nana ne ne mpanimfoɔ se meda mo ase Oburu se yede asem yi baa ha moatie no asopa mu na moankyea mo aso anni asem no na mode yie atoa yie. Yeda mo ase a, ensa, mepa mo kyew monkurakura yen saa ara mma asomdwoe mmra ɔman yi mu. Akokɔnini di kan bɔn na adeɛ kye a, na yen na yereda mo ase no.*

‘Nana Kyeame, are you there? I humbly plead with you to hear so that the chief and his elders will hear that I thank you very much Oburu that when we brought this case to the palace you have listened attentively to it with good ears devoid of prejudice and you have set things right. Our thanking is endless: please treat us nicely in this same manner for peace to prevail in our community. When the cock crows for the first time and the next day breaks, then it is we who are thanking you once more.’

Their thanking is alluded to the justice, fairness and peace in the community. They mention the period for the thanking as the first crow to indicate that it is considered the top priority and should precede any other activity for that day.

## 4.5 AKAN IRONICAL THANKS

Among the Akan, certain forms of thanking expressions are very ironical, and if one does something very wrong against the other, one of the expressions used is:

*Wo, meda wo ase paa.* ‘You, thank you very much.’

*Wo, Mo! Mo! Mo! Mo!* ‘You, well done! You, well done! You! well done!’

These expressions mean thank you very much in putting me into such a state of affairs. It could be some false allegations against the speaker or that the addressee has failed to fulfil a promise, has stolen the speaker’s property or money, or has acted wrongly against him. Let us consider the encounter below.

### Excerpt 8

**Participants:** Abenaa (50years+) and Afi (30years +) buyer

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> June 2009

**Venue:** Maratha market Accra

**Background:** Afi, a 30-year-old woman, who retails maize, collected ten bags of maize from Abenaa a 50-year-old maize dealer and promised to sell them within one week and bring the money and the empty sacks. She failed to show up for about three months, and anytime Abenaa went to Afi’s house or to the market she did not meet Afi. Abenaa later on heard that she had moved into another market, such that she could not be traced. Fortunately, Abenaa found her and this is what ensued between them:<sup>3</sup>

Abenaa: *Awuraa maakye.* ‘Good Morning Lady’

Afi: *Yaa ena.* ‘Good Morning Mother.’

Abenaa: *Wo maame ne hwan? Wo! meda wo ase, meda wo ase pa ara, Onyame nhyira wo. Ka hyen koduru, mma esum nto wo kwan mu da biara da. Woahyia aboa nne, okyena wobehyia nnipa. Saa na onipa tee? Woama mahunu me kwasea. Yede saa di wo a, ebeye wo de? Mo mo woaye adee pa ara. Wobɔ mmɔden yie wɔ dwirim mu, meda wo ase papapa; mo woaye adee.*

‘Who is your mother? You! thank you, thank you very much. May God bless you. Walk in the light till the end of your journey and do not let darkness befall you. “You have met an animal today, tomorrow you will meet a human being.” You have let me realise my folly. Would you feel fine if you are treated this way. Congratulations, you have done well. You are a very good fraudster, thank you very much, you have done well, congratulations.’

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<sup>3</sup> I was at the scene at the Maratha Market on another research; so I took the advantage to record the interaction between them and later transcribed and translated it.

In this encounter, Abenaa is so angry with Afi and instead of raising insults on her, she used ironical indirect thanks; when Abenaa said “may God bless you”, she meant you deserve a curse for your wrong-doing. Abenaa continued her indirect verbal duel by congratulating Afi for defrauding her. By saying you have let me realise my folly, implies that I trusted you very well and if I had known that this was your behaviour, I wouldn’t have given my maize to you on credit basis. Since people are congratulated for good deeds, Abenaa’s utterance of appreciation for Afi’s action is ironical, and Afi became dumbfounded and could not talk.

To Mey (1993: 141) thanking such as the one above is an imposition; it is a thanking that puts responsibility and blame on the addressee. There is no iota of thanking here, but blaming and there is insincerity in the performance of the performative verb because the physical form portrays the opposite of the intention of the speaker. The utterance is a thanking, but the pragmatic implication is rather a curse and the adjacency pair of thanks and acceptance is absent. Mey (1993: 141) therefore states that “often we may have to disregard the surface form of the verb when trying to determine what kind of speech act we are confronted with.” This is peculiar with expressions of indirection and metaphor that are types of indirect speech acts.

Considering the above, it seems apt to state that the performativeness of speech act verbs depends on the sincerity of the speaker and it includes linguistic routines like greetings, requests, apology and promises. It implies that speech acts can be used in ways that have nothing or not much, to do with what they really stand for.

#### 4.6 THANKING AT THE SHRINE

When a deity does something tremendous for an individual, a family or a community, they have to go to the shrine and thank the deity and the traditional priest. There are two types of thanking. It could be a genuine one where the deity has protected the individual, helped him to prosper in life, had healed him, or performed some miracles for him. It could also be what I refer to as “minatory thanking”. For instance, if the deity kills a victim and thus causes pain to the family, the bereaved family would still render thanks to the deity for killing their family member for fear that the deity will continue to kill more people. This happens when the victim is a witch or has committed grievous crimes that would have had ripple effects on the entire family. The family thanks the deity for removing such a villain, and the family is not allowed to perform a grand funeral for the dead. The thanking at such an occasion could be as in excerpt 9.

**Excerpt 9**

**Participants:** Kwaku Firi Traditional Priest, his religious assistants, his kyeame, and the family of the victim who has died.

**Venue:** Kwaku Firi Shrine in Awoase near Wenchi in the Brong Ahafo Region.

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> June 2009

*Nana Kwaku Firi, yɛda wo ase pa ara sɛ woayi asomasi X afiri asaase yi so ama mmusuo a anka ebeba me, abusua anaa kuro yi so afiri hɔ. Yesre wo sɛ mmusuo biara a anka ebeba yɛn so no, yi firi hɔ ma yɛn. Nana mo ne yɔ, mo ɔpeafo, mo ne toɔ, Okumanim, Ayeboafo, eye ampa sɛ deɛ ɔnim toɔ na yɛma no gyina kyenenoo so. Yereda wo ase yi nso na yeresre agye foforɔ, bɔ yɛn ho ban firi abayifoɔ ne sunsumbɔne ahorɔɔ nyinaa ho. Ma yɛn mfuo nso nye yie. Sɛ afe sɛ ennɛ na bɔne biara nkaa yɛn a, yeboa wo odwan.*

‘Nana Kwaku Firi, we thank you very much for wiping X from the earth and driving away the woes and evils that were going to besiege this family and our township. We plead with you to drive away any future woes. Nana, well done, congratulations, well shot, “the Killer of Men, The Helper”, it is really true that the marksman is the one that is placed on the footprints of animals. As we thank and congratulate you, we are pleading for more, protect us from all witches, wizards and evil spirits. Let our farms flourish. If by a year this time nothing evil has befallen on us, we promise to offer you a ram.’

In the above excerpt, there is “persuasive thanking”, full of euphemisms such as *woayi asomasi X afiri asaase yi so*, ‘you have wiped X from the earth’, which implies that you have killed the person. There is a request denoted by the verb *sre*, ‘to beg’ directed at the deity for it to drive away all evils. There are also honorifics like *Okumanim*, “the Killer of Men” and *Ayeboafo*, ‘The Helper’. The deity is considered a warrior with the powers to kill other men; he is also a benevolent one, hence the title *Ayeboafo*, ‘The Helper.’

## 5. THE SOCIOCULTURAL ROLE OF THANKING

The importance of thanks and appreciation is well captured by Nketia’s (1975: 40) poems entitled *Aseda* ‘thanks’, the first stanza reads:

*Wopɛ adeɛ gye a, sua ayeyie.*                      ‘If you like receiving gifts learn appreciation

*Na fa ɔdɔ dane ɔdɔ akyi.*                      ‘And reciprocate love for love.’

*obi ye wo aye na anye wo fe a,* 'If somebody presents you a gift and  
you don't appreciate.'  
*enye ayeyedee no- n'asem na wompe.* 'It is not the gift that you do not like,  
but the person.'

In the above, the gift is equated to the person's appreciation; it implies that he is reciprocating the love expressed by the donor. The third and fourth lines *obi ye wo aye na anye wo fe a, enye ayeyedee no; n'asem. wompe*, 'if somebody presents you a gift and you don't appreciate, it is not the gift that you dislike but the person', hammer the essence of thanks and the danger of ungratefulness. There are also Akan expressions like, *ɔbayifoɔ ba na n'ani nsɔ adee*, 'it is the son of the witch that is not appreciative'; and *wonim gye a, sua aseda*, 'if you know how to accept gifts and services; you should learn how to express thanking'. All the above indicate that thanking is a social aspect of Akan culture and politeness that must be inculcated into the youth. Ritualised and institutionalised thanks are predictable in Akan culture and that is why, when people fail to render that, it brings annoyance. To the Akans, thanks is the reciprocal linking line between giving and receiving; and it is a symbol of love.

The above maxims highlight the Akan social-cultural values of thanking. The ability to say thank you in any form is a mark of communicative competence among the Akans. It also depicts how polite one is and brings a bond of social cohesion and solidarity among the benefactor and the beneficiary. Such a ritual of thanking is based on the mutuality between the two. It also shows that the recipient recognises both the gifts or services and the personality of the donor ( see Sarpong 1974: 67, Ackah 1988: 55). It is because of these that even couples have to thank each other when gifts are presented, the same cultural reciprocity occurs between children and their parents. Failure to thank a benefactor is a face threat to him.

Thanking also normally marks the closing of events in most communicative encounters such as meetings and invitations to weddings, public debates, lectures, seminars and workshops. After each of these communicative events, the speaker will say "*thanks for listening and/or thanks for coming*". No wonder that in current times in Ghana, there is an item labelled "Vote of Thanks" on the agenda for any organised programme and some people are designated to express gratitude to God, the participants and the organisers of the programme.

Thanking is also used as a seal and final identification that publicises formal encounters, like funerals, bequeathing of properties, weddings and arbitrations.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed thanking under expressive speech acts that state what the speaker feels. When somebody thanks another, the verbal expression and the non-verbal communication are representatives and interpretations of the psychological inner state of affairs of the speaker, either to himself or to the addressee. We have outlined that thanking is one of the most important linguistic routines and etiquette among the Akans that form part of children's socialisation and enculturation. It marks one's appreciation for gifts and services and the recognition of the personality who offered the gift or services. The paper has identified that thanking depicts one's communicative competence, respect for others and mastery of Akan social values and norms. It is based on the mutual recognition that the recipient raises the image of the donor higher, even if for a temporary state.

The paper discussed seven important ethnographic situations where thanking is institutionalised, apart from the informal routine thanking that goes on daily. We saw that there is thanking that falls under indirect speech act where the linguistic form of the discourse is a thanking but the intention of the speaker is to blame the addressee. It is unfortunate most of the youth avoid the Akan ethnosemantics of the expressions of thanking and rather replace it with the English expression "thank you".

Despite the numerous sociolinguistic roles of thanking, many Akan adults bemoan over the current state where the youth disregard the importance of *aseda* and refuse to render thanks for gifts and services. Some children consider gifts and services from their parents as obligatory and therefore there is no need for thanks. We as a people should try to inculcate such important cultural aspects of sociolinguistics and pragmatics into our youth, especially through civic and moral education and researches like this one.

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