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AN ETHNO-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR IN AKAN DRAUGHTS GAMES

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Abstract

Humour is an important aspect of human behaviour and communication. However, it is one of the least studied phenomena in Akan linguistics. This paper, therefore, offers an ethno-pragmatic analysis of humour in the Akan draughts game called *Dame*. It focuses on the types of humour, the linguistic strategies used in creating humour and the functions of humour in the game. Data were gathered through non-participant observations of the game and semi-structured interviews. The paper shows that participants of the game generally resort to teasing in the form of jocular mockery and jocular abuse. This is done through the use of stylistic devices like metaphor, allusion, sarcasm and simile, as well as other linguistic strategies like rhetorical questions and songs. Contextual cues such as laughter and giggles are employed to signal the evocation of a humorous frame, and as such, insults and ridicule should be perceived as 'this is play'. Through the application of the Superiority Theory, we argue that participants often use insults and ridicule, which generate humour, to demoralize and spread fear in a losing contestant while boosting the confidence, competence and importance of the winning contestant. Rather than generating tension and conflict, this language use engenders bonding and strengthens group cohesion.

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1. Introduction

Humour is a universal phenomenon, which may be exhibited in various forms by various cultures. It encompasses an integral part of any culture because it forms part of the peoples' personality, cognitive and emotional processes (Agyekum 2017, Harris 2009, Palmer 1994, etc.). It is defined as the "amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization" (Romero and Cruthirds 2006: 59); Dynell (2011a), however, opines that some humorous phenomena (for instance, those showing anxiety) may not provoke laughter or amusement. From a psychological point of view, humour has been described as one of the characteristics associated with well-being (psychology today.com). Ruch (2008:19) adds that "humour research forms a solid column of positive psychology." It aids us in knowing the positive traits of individuals and design the appropriate interventions which help in understanding, evaluating and assessing their character strength. On her part, Holmes (2000) intimates that the most essential social function of humour is that it aids in creating and maintaining solidarity between members in a group, which guarantees a sense of in-group belonging. For instance, in his discussion of humour as a ritual insult in the corner of a doughnut shop in California, Murphy (2017) notes that humour in that space offers a license for the in-group members to direct verbal putdowns toward one another without any offence, and this ensures the solidarity of the group (see also, Agyekum 2010a, Attardo 1994, Fine and De Soucey 2005, O'ring 2008). These arguments make humour an important field of research in an area like games, which are also meant to create bonding, solidarity, social cohesion, etc. and ultimately contribute to well-being.

Whilst scholarly work on the linguistics of humour abounds globally (see Attardo; 1994, 2008, Dynel 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Gruner 1978, Piata 2016, Raskin 1987, 2017, Takovski 2018, etc.), not much attention has been given to it in the Ghanaian context. For instance, in Akan, the majority language of Ghana, a few scholarly works on humour have so far been identified (see Agyekum 2009, 2011, 2017; Yankah 1983). For example, in Agyekum's (2009) paper on puns, jokes and humour in Akan speech play, he argues that punning in the game functions as a face mitigating strategy (e.g., during discussions on taboo topics); but it may also be used just for humour or entertainment. He also identifies the use of insults as jokes between the Asante and the Nzema of Ghana. Like teasing generally, and jocular abuse in particular (Haugh and Bousfield 2012), such insults are not expected to be taken to heart. While Agyekum's (2009) work provides some significant insight into humour in Akan, specifically in speech play, the information on jokes and

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humour (which is similar to our study, especially jocular abuse) is scanty. For instance, there is no linguistic data to illustrate the use of jocular abuse between the Asante and the Nzema. Yet, considering the importance of humour outlined above, it is necessary that linguistic researchers give it as much attention as they have given to other linguistic routines like compliments, thanking and apology (see Agyekum; 2006, 2010b, 2015, Obeng 1999, Sekyi-Baidoo 2016). This study, therefore, extends linguistic research in Akan by investigating the nature of humour in the Akan game called *Dame* (draughts) because games create social cohesion and contribute to well-being. The paper will focus on the type(s) of humour used in the game, the linguistic strategies used to create humour, and the functions/effects of humour in the game.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an ethnolinguistic background of Akan and the focus of our research, and section 3 focuses on some scholarly works in the field of humour studies (especially conversational humour, under which this study falls) as a way of providing some context for the current study. We provide additional context in section 4, where we discuss the history of the game of *Dame* and the beliefs, norms and practices that govern it. In section 5, we discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this study; whilst section 6 gives the approach to data collection and analysis. The results are discussed in section 7, focusing on the types of humour, its linguistic manifestations and functions. The conclusion is presented in section 8.

2. An ethnolinguistic background of Akan

Akan refers to the language as well as its native speakers. The Akans are comprised of Bono, Fante, Asante, Akuapem, Assin, Twifo, Akyem, Kwahu, Sehwi, Awowin, Ahanta and Nzema, and they occupy the greater part of southern Ghana (Buah 1998; Agyekum 2011; 2018). They are found in 9 out of the 16 regions in Ghana: Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono East, Bono North, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western and Western North. Akans celebrate some prominent festivals like Akwɛsidɛɛ, Odwira, Ohum, Ahobaa, Akwambɔ and have staple foods like ampesie, fufu, etsew, etc. Although the *Dame* game is not played by only Akans, they dominate since they form the majority of the nation's population, as noted below. *Dame* has recently been added to the national sporting games in Ghana.

Linguistically, Akan belongs to the Kwa group of languages (Agyekum 2010a, Dolphyne 1988, 2006). It is estimated that about 47.5% of Ghana's population use it as their mother tongue (Ghana Statistical Service 2012) while about two-thirds of the population use it as a lingua franca (Agyekum 2017; GSS 2012). This makes Akan the

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major language in Ghana, although it is not officially recognized as a national language. It has about 13 major dialects i.e., Agona, Akuapem, Akyem, Akwamu, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Twifo and Wassaw (Agyekum 2018). Three (Asante, Akuapem, Fante) out of these dialects, namely Asante, Akuapem, Fante, have been codified and are used in schools (Diabah and Amfo 2015). The language is, therefore, used in several domains of communication (e.g., media, advertisement, education, entertainment, market, etc.) in the country. With such extensive use of the language, it is expected that data on humour will abound since humour can somehow be considered as one of the daily linguistic routines.

3. Humour research and cohesion in social groups /games

This paper falls under conversational humour. Dynel (2011a: 4) defines it as "humour relevantly interwoven into conversations, both spoken and written, whether private, institutional or mediated". It is one of the most important categories of humour, as it appears frequently in the (pragma)linguistics of humour research (see edited collections by Coates 2007; Dynel 2011a; Dynel 2009b; Holmes and Marra 2002; Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017). Ofori et al (this volume) note that for a conversation to be considered as humorous, a play frame or humorous frame (cf. Bateson 1953) needs to be activated. This is done through signals or contextual cues such as laughter, giggles, the use of a smiling voice, change in tone of voice, among others.

Although conversational humour includes types such as witticism, retort, banter, self-denigrating humour, putdown etc., we pay particular attention to teasing – which encompasses jocular mockery and jocular abuse (see Dynel 2009a; Haugh 2010; and Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017) – since it is directly linked to how humour is enacted in the Akan draughts game. Teasing is believed to combine elements of both (ostensible) provocation and (ostensible) playfulness (Haugh 2014). Although it carries some ostensible aggression or face-threat, this is not perceived as genuine.[1] It rather functions as solidarity-building (see Bateson, 1972; Coates 2007, Crawford 2003; Dynel, 2011b; Sinkeviciute, 2013). According to Haugh (2014:76), "teasing as mocking/ridiculing can be accomplished within a jocular or non-serious frame". In other words, jocular mockery is defined as teasing that is accomplished through mocking or ridiculing a conversation participant or a third party within a humorous frame (also see Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). As Haugh

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[1] However, teasing can sometimes slip into being interpreted as annoying or provoking, especially by the target (Haugh 2014).

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(2014: 72) further notes, using a humorous or play frame is important for humour appreciation since the ordinary meaning of mocking entails a "figurative cutting down or diminishment of the target". This, in a way, forces the target to treat it as 'just play' and thus not to be taken (too) seriously (see Haugh 2014; Goddard 2009; Norrick 1993). Jocular mockery, like other types of humour, is jointly achieved by the speaker and the hearer, who may maintain the play frame through laughter, (partial) repetition of the mocking remark, elaborating or countering the mockery (Haugh 2010: 2108).

Jocular abuse is also defined as "a specific form of insulting where the speaker casts the target into an undesirable category or as having undesirable attributes using a conventionally offensive expression within a non-serious or jocular frame" (Haugh and Bousfield 2012: 1108). It is believed to have its roots in the concept of "ritual abuse, which serves solidarity building in certain communities of practice (Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017: 2). Like jocular mockery, and teasing generally, the use of the humorous frame requires participants to treat such abuses as 'just play'. For instance, draughts in Akan has an informal setting where participants have a 'license' to use certain verbal expressions which, outside of the context, would have been considered offensive (Agyekum 2010a, Yankah 1983). Agyekum (2010a), for example, adds that in Akan, there are instances where expressions which are regarded as offensive (insults and verbal atomic weapons) are not considered as such. However, these are considered as verbal games used just for teasing one another. They function as social management, and occur in games like *dame* (draught), *oware*, etc.

Humour in any communicative event can affect an individual's emotions and cognitive capacities either positively or negatively (see Agyekum 2017, Gruner 1978). Wilson (1979) also notes that ridicule which is seen as the basic component of humour has the tendency to be more personal, which is usually directed at an individual, rather than at a group. In Akan for example, there is a type of invective game played by peers known as *aborɔme,* which is directed at individuals but may have vicarious references to their parents. This game shares some similarities with the social practice, i.e., ritual humour (insult), documented by Labov (1973) in 'the Dozens' which is performed in the inner city by young male adults. In *aborɔme,* young males dig or search one another for the correct answers to some riddles; these are insults meant for the addressee. Here, the game will continue when the addressee is able to find the right answer and he also poses a riddle to the opponent (see also Agyekum 2010a, Ofori 2019, Yankah 1983). Such ridicule-packed games, like in *Dame*, are intended to create bonding and social cohesion.

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O'ring (2008) states that humour plays a significant role in anthropology and folklore because they are embedded in some social, religious and oral literature genres such as songs, tales, jokes, proverbs, etc. He further explicated that these humorous expressions (joking relationships) are observed, recorded, interpreted and documented in the context of the socio-cultural life of a group of people which aids in forging a mutual sociocultural relationship between them. In her discussion of the manifestations and functions of humour in business meetings between New Zealand and Japan, Murata (2014) also notes the significance of context in humour appreciation. She argues that "workplace humour is context-bound and often cannot easily be understood by non-group members" (Murata, 2014:2). Such workplace humour is relevant as it creates and reinforces good workplace relations (see also Schnurr 2005, Westwood and Rhodes 2007, etc.). On his part, Jewell (2005) explains that humour helps in building our cognitive and social life because it helps us to decipher different varied complex concepts in our environment based on our experiences. Agyekum (2017) also states that humour is one of the pragmatic and rhetoric strategies used by Akan herbal drug sellers and advertisers to persuade their would-be buyers by using certain humourous expressions which touch on their emotions and cognition. This also shows how people identify with their customers and create social bonds through humour. As noted above, this study also offers a platform for creating social cohesion and bonding because what would have been considered offensive under normal circumstances, rather creates amusement.

4. Superiority theory and the game of draught

One key theory that has underpinned humour studies for decades is the superiority theory. According to Janes and Olson (2010), the superiority theory dates back to the early Greek Philosophers Plato and Aristotle. In the view of Plato and Aristotle, people see the weakness of others as humorous, hence "laughter is an expression of derision or malice directed at the less fortunate" (see Ferguson and Ford 2008:288). In other words, the superiority theory suggests that humour is an indication of a feeling of self-importance or superiority over other people or over one's own former position (Cooper 2008: 1096). Hobbes (1968), who is considered as the 'father' of modern humour theory and the first researcher to provide a precise description of this theory, postulated that amusement and laughter are the outcomes of how glorious we feel when we compare ourselves favourably with the less fortunate (see Janes and Olson 2010: 48). He further indicates that humans are constantly in competition with each other, hence searching for the weaknesses of the

other. As a result, the higher the dignity of the victim, the higher the subsequent amusement.

Harris (2009:7) indicates that Superiority theory functions better in political humour because a political opponent can easily laugh at another political party-member. This is similar to our current context, where someone who is winning the game may make fun of his opponent in order to demoralize him to his advantage. To Janes and Olson (2010:48), "the concept of *schadenfreude* (delight in the misery of others) captures the essence of this superiority dynamic—[since] it sometimes makes us feel good to see other people fail". They further add that when we enjoy the misery of others, we may turn out to be more aware of the fact that others may similarly enjoy our misery.

The superiority theory is not all-encompassing when it comes to humour studies (other classic theories of humour include incongruity theory and relief theory – see Ofori 2019 for some reviews and Ofori et al, this volume). For example, laughter is not only expressed by comparing ourselves to the less fortunate, neither is it always in relation to 'celebrating' someone's strength and another's weaknesses. An example can be cited of a Ghanaian comedian, Bob Okala, whose dressing alone can generate a lot of laughter. We, however, find the superiority theory useful in explaining how humour is mostly manifested in this study as ridiculing/teasing, with the aim of mocking a loser or demoralizing the target so that his opponent may gain an advantage and consequently win the game.

Like many board games, draughts is considered a game of the mind, which requires careful calculations and strategies to win (see, for example, Donkoh et al 2019). One of the ways through which someone can be disoriented and eventually lose is when he is ridiculed or mocked (either by his opponent or by the spectators of the game), especially if he appears not to be doing well already. In other words, teasing/ridiculing someone in a disadvantageous position has the ability to influence how they play the game, which can lead them to sink further into their misfortune (see also Jussim 1986; Jussim 2001). The types of humour employed by participants in this study (jocular mockery and jocular abuse) suggest the speaker's self-importance or superiority to the target and are, thus, in line with the tenets of the superiority theory outlined above.

5. Draughts: History, norms, and beliefs

The generic name given to numerous board games is draughts, where an opponent's pieces can be won by just 'jumping' over (see Figure 1 for how the game is played). Draughts, (the name of the game in British English and other English-speaking countries), is also

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known as checkers in American English. It is called *Dame* in Akan, which is believed to have been borrowed from the French word *Jeu De Dames* or simply *Dames* [http://idf64.org/a-history-of-draughts/]. This literally means lady or queen. The *dame* is believed to have begun as an Alquerque or Quirkat which shares a strong similitude with modern-day draughts. In the olden days, the game was usually played by the elderly men after they have returned from their farms and other traditional workplaces in Akan communities (Kwame Addai personal communication, December 24, 2018). However, in modern times, *dame* in the Akan community is played by people of all ages.

Generally, some norms govern the appropriate use of language in any communicative or speech event, including the game of *dame*. One of such norms is on who is permitted to participate in this game. Traditionally, chiefs are not allowed to play this game in Akan because of its nature. For example, it is a game which is full of insults and invectives due to the lift of the ban on social insult in that context. Therefore, because Chiefs are revered and held in high esteem, they are not supposed to partake in the game since anybody can insult them and bring their highly respected status and office into disrepute. Another interesting feature of this game is that women are not permitted to engage in it because the game is full of insults. Again, since women in the past were supposed to be working at home after coming from the farm, they could not join the men to play.

In recent times, the game has become a full-time job for some people, and there is a global association called International Draughts Federation (IDF) where people/contestants meet annually to compete in the *dame* game.

Figure 1: A sample picture of participants playing draughts (Asante, Bekwai 24/12/2018, The picture was taken with the permission of the participants)

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6. Data and data collection procedures

Data for this study were sourced from non-participant observations of the game, as part of a bigger study by the first author. In all, a total of thirty games were observed between December 2018 and January 2019. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get a better understanding of certain behaviours and practices of participants. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted for selected opinion leaders to get the background information about the history of the game, norms and practices. Overall, a total of twenty interviews were conducted.

In order to get the appropriate data for the study, we combined both convenience and purposive sampling techniques in selecting the games and participants for the study (see Cresswell 1998, Owu-Ewie 2012). These techniques helped to get data depending on whether there is a game, and whether or not the participants agreed for us to observe and audio-record them. The data were audio-recorded (with the permission of the participants) and later transcribed and translated from Akan into English. The analysis was done by listening to the audio recordings and reading through the transcript several times for emerging themes, which were grouped under various headings. The texts were subjected to semantic and pragmatic analysis. The findings are discussed in the sections that follow.

7. Data analysis and discussion

This paper set out to do an ethno-pragmatic analysis of humour in the Akan game called *Dame* (draughts). The results are discussed according to the types of humour, stylistic devices and other linguistic strategies employed in creating humour, and the functions of humour in the game.

7.1 Types of humour

Humour in the Akan draughts game generally appeared in the form of teasing (ridicule). As noted in section 3, although teasing generally carries ostensible aggression or face-threat, this must not be interpreted as genuine. Teasing in this study manifests itself through subtypes such as jocular mockery and jocular abuse (see section 3; see Dynel 2009; Haugh 2010; Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017).

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7.1.1   *Jocular mockery*

As stated by Fine and De Soucey (2005:1) every social group creates a joking culture i.e. a set of humorous references which are known to members of the group alone to which they can refer overtime. In the draughts games in Akan, this joking culture is observed through a jocular mockery frame. This is illustrated in excerpts 1 and 2 below.

Excerpt 1: A game between Mr. Ernest and Charles -Asante, Bekwai-02/01/2019.
[Background: Although Mr. Ernest had won most of his pieces, it was obvious Charles was struggling to win any of his opponents' pieces].

1.	Mr. Ernest:	'I don't like my legs, don't come who!'
2.	ɔyerepa (Good wife)	I don't like my legs, don't come who! [The audience burst into laughter]
3.	Mr. Ernest	*Woyi a, na mede agu so.* 'If you win then I will drop mine on it!
4.	Charles	*ɛnneɛ ma yɛnnyae toɔ ɛɛ?* Then, how about we stop playing?'

Excerpt 2: A game between Gyimah and Adiyea- Asante, Bekwai-24/12/2018.
[Background: Gyimah had won most of his opponents' (Adiyea) pieces. Adiyea could not understand why Kwame wanted to thwart his efforts to cause his defeat].

1.	Adiyea	*Hmm, aba yi reyɛ apae.* This game is almost a draw.
2.	Gyimah	*Adɛn? wayɛ mmerɛ anaa?* Why? Are you weak?
3.	Kwame	*Lae wɔ mu!* There is a lie in it!
4.	Adiyea	*Kwame hwɛ yie!* [They laughed] Kwame be careful

In excerpt 1 above, Mr Ernest used *I don't like my legs, don't come who*!, a humourous reference known to the group which they use to ridicule a participant, when he realized that his opponent was losing the game. Since humour is jointly constructed by conversation participants, *ɔyerepa* (Goodwife), an observer, also repeated it to reinforce the ridicule. This created a lot of laughter among the audience and strengthened group cohesion. This strategy supports Haugh's claim that a humorous frame can be maintained by participants, through a repetition of the mocking remark. As was explained by ɔyerepa later through an interview, it was obvious that Charles could not decipher the tricks used by Mr Ernest, hence, the use of that expression. The use of that expression literally means he (Charles) is 'defective' in his leg, hence it cannot take him anywhere. Metaphorically, this suggests that he is not good at playing the game, let alone win it. We see the application of the superiority theory here. Thus, he places himself above his opponent and sees his loss as a defect. Like the audience, Charles' plays along and sustains the humorous frame as he jokingly accepts defeat in turn 4 (*ɛnneɛ ma yɛnnyae toɔ ɛɛ?*).

In excerpt 2, Gyimah teased Adiyea in turn 2 when he asked him whether he was weak. To maintain the humorous frame, Kwame, an observer, used one of the group's joking reference terms (*lae wɔ mu* "there is lie in it"), confirmed by ɔyerepa, to give a clue to Gyimah. Adiyea was not happy because he lost the previous game and this could make him lose again. His comment *Kwame hwɛ yie* 'Kwame be careful' brought laughter, thereby reinforcing the humourous frame.

Other instances of jocular mockery (not based on known reference) are illustrated in excerpts 3 and 4 below.

Excerpt 3. Game between ɔsɔfo and Charles-Asante, Bekwai- 02/01/2019
[Background: Charles was initially leading in the game. He was however tricked by his opponent, and he began to gradually lose.]

1. Charles   *Woboa! boa! boa!*
            'You are lying!'

2. ɔyerepa (Good wife)   *Hɛɛ, ooo, daabi, daabi, in fact, wode sɛn? Sɔfo woayɛ adeɛ pa ara! Watricke Charles papapapa.*
            'Hɛɛ, oh, no! no! in fact, what is your name? Sɔfo you have really done well! You have tricked Charles very well.'

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3. Charles   *ɛyɛ asɛm oo*
                                    'Is something oo'

From the excerpt above, we see a manifestation of humour in Akan through ridiculing. An observer, ɔyerepa, asked the rhetorical question *wode sɛn*? 'what is your name?', with the intention of deriding Charles who was losing the game. Later in an interview, ɔyerepa noted:

> *Mehunuu sɛ na ɔayɛ mmerɛ, enti na ɛma mekaa saa no.*
> *Sɛ wohunuu sɛ ɛhɔ aguo?*
> 'I saw that he was weakened, that is why I said so.
> But you saw that his side was empty?' (ɔyerepa)

This suggests that ɔyerepa asked that questions just to mock Charles because he could not decode his opponent's ruses. This was also meant to disorient him and divert his attention for his opponent to win the match easily. This supports the claim by superiority theorists that people see the weakness of others as humorous (Janes and Olson 2010). Indeed, as Ferguson and Ford (2008:288) note, laughter or making fun of someone is "an expression of derision or malice directed at the less fortunate". On the other hand, ɔyerepa's comments serve as a booster for ɔsɔfo, the winning contestant.

In turn 3, Charles sustains the humorous frame activated by ɔyerepa by accepting defeat. He sees the complete turn of events in favor of ɔsɔfo as a problem that indeed deserves ridicule. This aligns with the assumption in humour research that humour is a joint enterprise between a speaker and a hearer.

Excerpt 4. A game between Osei Kwabena and Gyimah-Asante, Bekwai-02/01/2019.
[Background: Gyimah was not scoring any of his opponent's cards even though it was clear that he could easily score some and win and win the game]

1. ɔyerepa (Good wife)   *Aba yi koraa wontumi nni bi*
                                 'You can't even score any of these cards.'

2. Osei Kwabena   *Yɛnkɔ afuom nanso yɛbɛdidi!*
                                Yɛnkɔ afuom nanso yɛbɛdidi!
                                'We won't go to the farm but we will eat!'
                                We won't go to the farm but we will eat!'

3. ɔyerepa (Good wife)   *ɛyɛ a, to nnwom pa!* [He giggled]
                                       'It is better to sing good songs'

As can be seen in the excerpt 4 above, Osei Kwabena makes an allusion to the concept of farming (*yɛnkɔ afuom nanso yɛbɛdidi*! 'we won't go to the farm but we will eat!) to mock his opponent when he realized that he was going to win the game easily because his opponent was weak. In Akan traditional settings, farming is one of the major occupations and sources of food. It is, therefore, ironic to say he will still eat without going to the farm. This is because it was very difficult for anyone to eat without going to the farm in the olden days. Generally speaking, this is equated with the ability to feed and take care of one's needs although the person may not be working. This ridicule, therefore, presupposes that he can still win easily even if he does not put in any effort, thereby creating a sense of self-competence or self-actualisation.

From the examples cited so far, we see how humour is created to demoralize a losing contestant and to show the winner's superiority or control over the game. Laughing at the misfortune of the losing contestant makes the winners feel better. These are in line with the claims by the superiority theorists that humour is an indication of a feeling of self-importance or superiority over the other people (Cooper, 2008). Like Janes and Olson (2010) note, they feel glorious when they compare themselves favourably with the less fortunate.

7.1.2 Jocular Abuse

As stated earlier in section 3, insults in the game are not considered as offensive as they would have been under normal circumstances. Rather, they are considered as humorous, and this functions as a tool of social management, facilitating in-group interaction and strengthening in-group bonding (Agyekum 2010a, Attardo 1994). Excerpts of jocular abuse are discussed in 5 and 6 below.

Excerpt 5. A game between Osei Kwabena and Gyimah- Asante, Bekwai, 02/01/2019.
[Background: Osei Kwabena had noticed that his opponent, Gyimah, was not on top of the game, so he resorted to singing and insults to confuse him more.]

1. Osei Kwabena   **…***Woresu koraa na mereyɛ no more oo*
                                  Osei anya adeɛ a ɛfo,

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Twa bi di wɔ hɔ nom a, wose worekɔtɔ ayi…
W'ano sɛ nwa, w'anim nso huhuuhu!
 [audience burst into laughter]
'…Even when you cry, I will be doing it more oo
Osei has gotten a cheap fellow, If, there is an easy way out,
then you are saying you are going to buy something…
Your mouth is like a snail, and your face is ugly too!'

2. Gyimah   *Wo deɛ w'ano yɛ ya oo!* [he giggles]
                       'as for you, you are full of insults!'

3. Nana Amanseɛ: *Wo dame toɔ nyɛ fɛ koraa Osei!*
                       'Your style of playing the draughts is not nice at all Osei!'

Through the use of a simile *w'ano sɛ nwa,* 'your mouth is like a snail' Osei Kwabena insults Gyimah in turn 1. This generated laughter among the audience, thus enhancing group cohesion rather than creating tension. Osei Kwabena also made use of allusion by quoting a line (*woresu koraa na mereyɛ no more oo* '…Even when you cry, I will be doing it more oo') from the lyrics of Ernest Nana Acheampong's (formerly of Lumba Brothers) song titled *Na anka ɛbɛyɛ dɛn na ayɛ wo ya* (how else will it pain you?). This offered him the opportunity to further ridicule his opponent. By combining these with another insult (*w'anim nso huhuuhu!* 'and your face is ugly too!'), his main aim was to demoralize Gyimah psychologically and emotionally so he could gain an advantage over him and win the game. It is worth noting that such insults could have generated tension and possible rebuttals if it had occurred outside a jocular frame, which was jointly constructed and maintained by all participants through either laughter (see turn 1) or giggles (see turn 2).

Excerpt 6: Game between Osei Kwabena and Mr. Ernest- Asante, Bekwai-24/12/2018)
[Although this was a match between Osei Kwabena and Mr. Ernest, Boateng who had earlier lost a game to Adiyea, so he was leaving the venue. Osei Kwabena enquired about it and he insulted him.]

1. Osei Kwabena   *ɔnyɛ adeɛ nti aba no ɔne wo reto a, na ɔrewia mu. Na*
                       Boateng wasɔre?..

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'Because he does not know how to play very well, he cheats when he is playing with you. So, Boateng, are you going?'

2. Boateng   *Firi me so kɔ!* [the audience burst into laughter]
                    'Go away!'

In this extract, we see a combination of insult and ridicule. First, we see an instance of ridicule in Osei Kwabena's rhetorical question '*na Boateng wasɔre?*' It was obvious that Boateng was leaving because he had lost a game. This question was, therefore, meant to foreground the defeat of Boateng and the claim that he is not good. As already indicated, humour appreciation is a joint enterprise between the speaker and the hearer (see section 3), Boateng interpreted the ridicule as such and retorted with an insult (jocular abuse) *firi me so kɔ* 'go away' (this is similar to what Ofori et al describe in their paper in this volume as another type of humour called 'retorts'). This made the situation even more humorous, as shown in how the audience maintained the humorous frame through their laughter in turn 2. Boateng's insult is not taken as an offence in the context of the game because there is a lift of the social ban on insults. This is supported by Adiyea's point below from a follow-up interview:

> … *yɛyɛ ma no dɛ… dame no toɔ no ɛyɛ agodie na ɛma yɛtoɔ. Enti sɛ wote sɛ ayi bi reba mu a na ɛnyɛ atɛnnidie biara ɛyɛ ayi biara. ɛyɛ agodie na yɛredie, na yɛreka nsɛm sereɛ bi… Obi bɛka nsɛm a ɛsereɛ...*
> '…We do that to make it fun… it is just a game. If you hear something unpleasant, it should not be taken seriously. It is just for the fun of the game. Some will say some funny things…' (Mr. Adiyea)

Although Boateng is younger than Osei Kwabena, and per the Akan socio-cultural norms, it is highly inappropriate for a younger person to insult an elderly person, his insult was not considered as disrespectful in this context. Rather it was considered humorous; hence it attracted laughter from the audience. The discussion here supports arguments in the literature on humour, that context plays a critical role in humour appreciation (see Fine 1983, Ross 1998, Wu 2013).

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7.2 Figurative expressions and other linguistic strategies

On the linguistics of humour, we found certain figurative expressions as the key channels through which humour in the Akan draughts game is created. Agyekum (2013: 183) opines that "a figure of speech is basically a sort of comparison based on association, and their meanings must be inferred from larger cognitive, cultural or environmental context". Examples of figurative expressions used to create humour in the game are sarcasm, simile, metaphor (excerpt 4), irony (excerpts 4 and 7), and allusion (excerpt 5). Other linguistic strategies used include rhetorical questions (excerpts 2, 3, 6 and 8) and songs (excerpts 4, 5 and 9). Sarcasm and simile are discussed in detail below, but we have also referenced the other figurative expressions in other places, as already noted.

7.3.1 Sarcasm

Agyekum (2013:257) posits that "sarcasm is a form of verbal irony in which the speaker who seems to be praising rather hides behind the screen and sends a bitter expression of strong and personal disapproval to the addressee". It entails the use of ironic remarks which can hurt the feelings of other people. Usually, the speaker hides behind praising words to ridicule the addressee to hurt his/her emotions. The following excerpts from the data illustrate this further:

Excerpt 7: A game between Adiyea and Asante- Asante, Bekwai- 25/12/2018.
[Background: Asante is known to be a good player but, in this match, things were not going in his favour.]

1.	Adiyea	*Aba no ayɛ dɛɛdɛɛdɛ, anka sɛsɛɛ Asante aho me kwakwa de agu ne nsa fɛɛfɛ no so*! [He giggled]
		'The match is becoming so interesting, by now Asante might have scored me easily and placed the cards on his beautiful hands!
2.	Asante	Hmmm
3.	Adiyea	*Kɔ! kɔ! kɔ! kɔ*

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'Go! Go! Go! Go!'

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4. ɔyerepa (Goodwife)   *Akoa no ayɛ sakaa!*
                          Haha! Haha!

    'He is being weakened! Haha! Haha!'

From the above, Adiyea concealed his intention of mocking his opponent (Asante) through the use of the expression *ne nsa fɛɛfɛ no so!* 'his beautiful hands'. Although he knew the game was not going in his favour – and as such, his hands could not be described metaphorically as beautiful. This was done via giggling to indicate that a humorous frame had been evoked. ɔyerepa's comment in turn 4 emphasized the ridicule that Asante was certainly in a difficult position, and his laughter reinforced the humour. We can interpret *aho me kwakwa* by Adiyea metaphorically, to mean that his opponent (Asante) could have won his *akorɔma* 'masterpiece' easily without any hindrance, but he could not do that because he was losing the game.

7.3.2 Simile

Another important figurative expression identified in the game is simile. This is a figure of resemblance used to show the similarity between two things through the use of connectives such as *like, as, than*, etc. The use of simile in this game to create humour is exemplified in excerpt 7 (see excerpt 5 for another example):

Excerpt 8: A game between Papa Wee and Bɛɛko- Asante, Bekwai- 31/12/2018.
[Background: Papa Wee started the game with energy, boasting how he could win hands down, but getting to the end he lost.]

1. Ɔsɔfo   *Apae! Apae!*
                 'It is a draw! It is a draw!'

2. Akwadaa   *Wayɛ dinn?*
                 'Are you quiet?'

3. Owusu   *Hwan na wayɛ dinn?*
                 'Who is quiet?'

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4.	Akwadaa	*Me nana*
		'My grandfather'

5.	Owusu:	*Wo nana no, ɔne deɛ ɔwɔ hene*?
		'Who is your grandfather?'
6.	Akwadaa	*Deɛ ɔhyɛ white no*
		'The one who is in the white'

7.	ɔyerepa (Goodwife)	*Ayi, Papa Wee? ɛnneɛ ne ho rekyere no enti kɔka kyerɛ wo maame* [The audience burst into laughter]
		'Who? Papa Wee? He is suffering so go and inform your mother.'

8.	Papa Wee	*Me? Me ho yɛ den sɛ atekuleta tae!*
		'I? I am strong like the articulator tyre.'

Papa Wee started the above game with a lot of vigour and boasted about how he would win it effortlessly. Towards the end, however, he started struggling so he suddenly became quiet. He was, therefore, mocked in turns 2 and 7 in the above excerpt. That is, his grandchild's rhetorical question to him (*wayɛ dinn?* 'are you quiet') was meant to tease him. ɔyerepa's comment in turn 7 (*Ayi? Papa Wee? ɛnneɛ ne ho rekyere no enti kɔka kyerɛ wo maame* 'who? Papa Wee? He is suffering so go and inform your mother') reinforced the ridicule. This brought laughter to the audience.

In turn 8, however, Papa Wee challenged the claim that he was losing through the use of a simile (*me ho yɛ den sɛ atekuleta tae* 'I am strong **like** the articulator tyre') to show that he was still strong and hopeful to win the game no matter the circumstances. The comparison between his strength and that of an articulator tyre (the tyre must be strong enough to carry the heavy weight of the body of the vehicle and its contents) may be considered ironic, which makes the situation even more humourous. This argument is made against the background that even a child could interpret Papa Wee's silence to mean he was in danger. We can also say that his behaviour is utterly incongruous to the reality of the game at that time, hence making it humourous.

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7.3 The function/effects of humour in Dame games

Research has shown that humour can affect individuals in various ways, including their emotions and cognition (see Agyekum 2017, Gruner 1997, Obadare 2009, Van Ramshort 2019). Discussing the affective and emotional aspects of humour in the voyages of immigrants of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras descent, Van Ramshort (2019) states that migrants use humour to make light of their plight. For instance, when challenged by immigration officials on the Mexico-US border they poke fun, amidst smiling and laughter (emotive), on their illegality and means of transport to show how vulnerable they are.

Similarly, we see the emotive function of humour in this study, as various expressions are used to generate some laughter, thereby facilitating in-group interaction and strengthening in-group bonding or cohesion. This aligns with arguments in the literature on humour research, which describe the general function of teasing in terms of its solidarity-building (Bateson, 1972; Dynel, 2011b; Sinkeviciute, 2013; Coates 2007; Crawford, 2003). On the other hand, a more general function of humour (teasing as mockery/ridicule) in the dame game is the cognitive effect. Participants often create humour through ridicule to demoralize an opponent or a third party (especially one who may be losing the game), while providing confidence to the one who may be winning. This aligns with the claim by superiority theorists that humour is an indication of a feeling of self-importance or superiority over other people (Cooper 2008). Furthermore, amusement and laughter are the outcomes of how glorious we feel when we compare ourselves favourably with the less fortunate (see Janes and Olson 2010). Thus, people constantly look for the weakness of their competitors so they can have an upper hand over them. Asiedu, one of the participants, sums up these arguments in the following interview extract:

> Whether what we speculate is true or not we just want to prevent the person from thinking straight which will affect his thinking. (…) Draughts is about cognition, so you have to say something to divert the attention and focus of your opponent hence, doing everything possible so that he thinks of something else that is emotional. At that moment your mind will be processing on how best you can win. Some people cannot take pressure or tension, that is the more you are talking or saying something your opponent cannot think right, he is therefore distracted, thereby, losing the game'. (Kwame Asiedu).

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Another instance of how humour affects the cognition and emotion of participants in draughts is indicated in excerpt 9 below.

Excerpt 9: A game between Osei Kwabena and Mr. Ernest- 02/01/2019, Yemon Ghana Limited -Asante Bekwai

[Background: As was typical of Osei Kwabena, he saw that his opponent, Charles, was losing so he re-strategized through chanting to confuse his opponent.]

1. ɔyerepa (Good wife) *Aba yi pa ara deɛ, sɛ aba yi apae*
    'As for this game, it is a draw.'

2. Mr Ernest: *Wei ɛmpae*!
    'It will never be a draw!'

3. Charles: *Na sɛ wei kyerɛ ara na morekyerɛ mu!*
    'But you are just giving a clue!'

4. Adiyea: *Mr Ernest deɛ wode reba yi deɛ wo dame toɔ nyɛ fɛ.*
    'Mr Ernest what you are doing is not fair, your style is not nice.'

5. Osei Kwabena: *Osei dame toɔ yɛ ateetee,*
    Osei dame toɔ yɛ ateetee,
    Osei nim dame to, ɔnim to
    Osei nim dame to, ɔnim to
    Wo ara na wo baeɛ, wo ara bɛba! [He sang it via giggling]
    'Osei makes you suffer in his game,
    Osei makes you suffer in his game,
    Osei knows how to play draft, he knows how to play
    Osei knows how to play draft, he knows how to play the draughts
    You came on your own, you will come!'

6. Adiyea: *Osei pa ara deɛ!* [He laughed]
    'As for you Osei!'

The humour generated by Osei's song to ridicule Mr. Ernest served as a source of motivation to boost his confidence. He noted in a follow-up interview that, when he sings or chants, it gives him energy and it motivates him to win the game, which he won anyway. For instance, the expression *Osei nim dame to*, *ɔnim to* 'Osei knows how to play draughts, he knows how to play' served as a source of encouragement to him and gave him the energy to win the game. On the other hand, this ridicule was a distraction to his opponent. He also added that he intentionally used O*sei dame toɔ yɛ ateetee,* 'Osei makes you suffer in his game' to spread fear in his opponent. These diverted his opponent's attention from making an appropriate mental calculation that could help him win the game.

8. Conclusion

The paper focused on the use of humour in one of the Akan games, typically played by men, called *dame*. Through the use of the superiority theory, this paper has shown that participants often use insults and ridicule, which generate humour, to demoralize a losing contestant while boosting the confidence, competence and importance of the winning contestant. Rather than generating tension and conflict, this language use engenders bonding and strengthens group cohesion. This is because participants understand the context of the game as one in which the social ban on insults and ridicule is lifted, so they are not expected to take such language use to heart but rather see it as a means of generating amusement for their own benefit. This is important if we look at the use of humour in the game also from a psychological point of view, where humour has been described as one of the characteristics of well-being. From the perspective of pragmatics, we see humour in the game as an aspect of indirection where offensive expressions rather connote entertainment, and divisive utterances rather bring about in-group identity and social cohesion.

Acknowledgement

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