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The Ghana Journal of Linguistics is published by the Linguistics Association of Ghana, P.O. Box LG 61, Legon, Accra, Ghana.
GJL Email: gjl@laghana.org | GJL Website: <https://gjl.laghana.org>
LAG Email: info@laghana.org | LAG Website: <https://www.laghana.org>

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ISSN 2026-6596

GHANA JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS

Volume 12 Number 2

2023

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The *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* is published by the Linguistics Association of Ghana.

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ISSN 2026-6596

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INTRODUCTION

The papers in this *GJL* special issue stem from presentations given at the 4th School of Languages Conference (SOLCON IV) held at the University of Ghana from 3rd to 5th November, 2021. The theme for the conference was “Literary, Linguistic and Cultural Studies in a time of Crisis”. The purpose of the conference was to bring together researchers, specialists and enthusiasts of language study and literature in general to exchange evidence-based insights on current issues in language, literary and cultural studies, and to ask probing questions on pertinent matters in these fields. The conference took place virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time of heightened awareness of the indispensability of human interaction – mediated via language – to the well-being and advancement of society and the maintenance of culture. Several papers, including the keynote address, engaged this theme from various perspectives. In addition, there were many other papers which spanned the gamut of disciplines in language and literature, examining issues in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, sociolinguistics, African literature, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, discourse analysis, language teaching and learning, among others.

The six papers selected for this issue represent the diversity of the research presented at SOLCON IV. They are from the disciplines of literature (Lare, Mpotsiah), sociolinguistics (Boakye, Akpanglo-Nartey and Amuzu), phonology (Ofori), morphosyntax (Nindow) and language learning and teaching (Owusu). Lare directly engages the conference theme in a paper that examines two literary works by the eminent African authors, *Chinua Achebe* and *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. He investigates how these two works, born out of crises (the latter being the COVID-19 pandemic) mould the authors’ psyche and change their perspectives and goals. He draws parallels between the crisis of war and that of loss and disease to show how these authors and society draw on lessons learnt during adversity to improve their affective health and to reinvent themselves for the better. Mpotsiah’s paper addresses the question of language use in written African literature. His engagement with enduring debates between relativists and universalists on the language of African Literature is with a view to underscore the impasse between the two viewpoints, and their deviation from the essence of African written literature. The paper proposes that rather, a premium must be placed on the projection of African cultural values and experiences in African written literature in spite of the language of communication.

Boakye, Akpanglo-Nartey and Amuzu interrogate the accuracy of the term “free variation” for describing the distribution of the sounds [r], [l] and [d] in intervocalic position and [r] and [l] in second consonant position of CCV syllable structures in three Akan words. They find that some dialectal and social variables correlate with the propensity to use particular variants: [d] is favoured more by speakers of the Asante dialect, and young, educated female speakers of both the Asante and Fante dialects showed a higher tendency of using [r] over [l]. In his phonological study of place names in Akan, Ofori sets out to investigate the rules and constraints which govern the resolution of vowel sequences at stem-stem boundaries in partative place-names. Guided by rule-based and constraint-based phonology, Ofori

found that functional, phonetic and phonological markedness were significant factors in determining outputs for partative place names and that there was a preference for the maintenance of marked units over unmarked units and unpredictable units over predictable units.

Nindow's work examines the morphosyntax of proverbial names in Dagbani. He identifies three types of proverbial names: single morpheme names, double morpheme names and names that constitute phrases and sentences. He argues that the form of these proverbial names is mediated by syntactic, morphological and phonological considerations. His work demonstrates the importance of understanding the interface between morphology, syntax, and phonology. For his part, Owusu presents findings from Ghanaian language teachers regarding virtual teaching and learning (VTL) during the COVID-19 crisis when face-to-face teaching was suspended. The study, which employs a mixed methods approach, surveys 10 language teachers from Sunyani Technical University and presents the challenges they faced, their preferences for learning platforms and learning models. It further makes recommendations for the formulation of VTL policy and pedagogy to cater for crisis situations and beyond.

All the papers in this issue contribute to our understanding of language and its relationship to culture, society and the human condition. They make new discoveries on which future scholarship could build on in the quest to fully harness the power of language and literature in advancing society. We hope you will find them as insightful and engaging as we did.

Joanna Boampong
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