

## The Pragmatics of Political Apology in Ghana's Contemporary Politics

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### Abstract

The paper discusses political apology in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic of Ghanaian contemporary politics from 2013 to 2015. It taps its data from apologetic speeches by political officials and from apologies rendered to politicians. The paper discusses the semantics and pragmatics of political apology. It examines the use of the language of apology, paying attention to expressives, commissives and persuasion, by drawing on the speech act of apology and political discourse analysis (PDA). It concludes that the obligation on the part of the offender to apologise and for the offended to accept the apology and to forgive for socio-political harmony is driven by both the social pact and the Ghanaian communalistic context.

**Keywords:** political apology, political discourse analysis, persuasion, reconciliation, culture

Political apology (referred to later as PA) has been studied by various scholars in the humanities who are interested in political discourse. PA is an interdisciplinary area studied in philosophy, political science, sociology, communications, pragmatics, linguistics, law, rhetoric, etc. (Kampf, 2009, p. 2258). While there is a vibrant literature on PAs (Murphy, 2014; Kampf, 2011; Kimoga, 2010; Reisingl, 2010; Hook, 2008), as far as we know, no work has been done on PA in contemporary Ghanaian politics. Even though there are some works on political discourse as found in Obeng (2002a, 2002b, 2000, and 1997), the focus was not on political apology. The current study on PAs is unique since it is based on mediated political discourse, influenced by Ghanaians' growing desire for openness and participation in politics. Before we deal with political apology, let us look at the general concept of apology.

## Apology

Murphy (2014) asserts that ‘apologies are tacit admission that the speaker caused offence, pain, and damage or committed some other social faux-pas which had the potential to damage the relationship between hearer and speaker’ (p. 24). Apology falls under expressive speech acts that convey what the speaker feels and it functions to stabilise social harmony. For Wardhaugh (1985), ‘apologising is an open acknowledgement that the speaker did something that s/he should not have done or did not do something that s/he should have done’ (p. 189). Agyekum (2006) posits that apology is a repair mechanism; this resonates with Meier’s notion of repair work: ‘Repair work (true to its name) functions to remedy any damage incurred to an actor’s image upon the establishment of a responsibility link between an actor and behaviour which fell below the standard expected relative to a particular reference group’ (Meier, 1995, p. 338)<sup>1</sup>

According to Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), ‘by apologising the speaker recognises the fact that a violation of a social norm has been committed and admits the fact that s/he is at least involved in its cause’ (p. 206). Offenders must acknowledge that they have violated some socio-political norms and take responsibility for the perceived negative political action(s) (Meier, 1998). In ideal situations, the offended party must accept and acknowledge the apology and be ready to forgive because an apology is incomplete until it is accepted whole-heartedly by the offended.

An apology is metaphorically considered an acknowledgement of an imbalance or disharmonious relation between speaker and addressee. Leech (1983) similarly states that ‘apology is a transaction meant to change the balance sheet relation between speaker and hearer’ (p. 125). An act of apologising is a verbal and non-verbal recognition of a breach of social ties and relationship.<sup>2</sup> Apologies are motivated by offences that are contrary to the accepted norms and values of the society. Accordingly, the nature of the apology studied in this paper is correlated with the gravity of the offence and the social settings in the Ghanaian culture. More serious breaches invoke more elaborate apologies and the need for an intervener.

## Political Apologies

Political apologies express regret for some offense of commission or omission by a political figure against the addressee and therefore acknowledge an obligatory

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<sup>1</sup> The repair work shows that the speaker is a ‘good guy’ (despite having violated a social norm) and can be relied upon in future to act predictably in accordance with the social norms of a particular reference group. (Meier, 1995, p. 388-389).

<sup>2</sup> The breach can be past, perfect, present or future, and one can apologise for a future action that can inconvenience the addressee. An apology signals that an event has already taken place or the speaker might be aware that it is about to take place.

responsibility and accountability before a general public. Most political apologies belong to the past, but a public official can apologise to citizens for future socio-economic hardships likely to result from political decisions.

Political and public apologies that show remorse and regret and the need for reconciliation have come from state leaders, presidents, individual political figures and nations. Rituals of political apology have become part and parcel of political discourse, and according to Kampf and Löwenheim (2012), some scholars have termed the past decades as the ‘age of apology’ (p. 43). Political actors have found political apology a prudent tool for easing socio-political tensions.

PAs can emanate from one state to another; Kampf and Löwenheim (2012, p. 44) cite the following national historical apologies. In 1994, Austria apologised to Israel for its part in the Holocaust, with Lithuania, Croatia, Latvia and Switzerland following suit in 1995, 1997, 1998 and 1999, respectively. Similarly, based on the Oslo accords in 1993, Israel was urged to apologise and acknowledge its responsibility for the sufferings of the Palestinians.

PAs, unlike other forms of apology, are sited in the public domain, are highly mediatised and involve politicians or prominent figures associated with politics. In this paper, we view political apologies as bi-directional in terms of the apologiser and the apologisee. If a politician is the offender (apologiser) or the offended (apologisee), we will regard it as a political apology, especially, if it is mediatised. In most cases, the demand for apology is engineered from the victim’s group that compels the politician to apologise. Most apologies are not spontaneously rendered (Harris et al, 2006, p. 719, p. 721). Sometimes, the media strongly demand the apology, and this is held on by the general public, thus compelling the politician to apologise.

In Ghana, the near absence of PAs in the colonial, pre-independence and pre-4<sup>th</sup> republic eras was largely due to the relative scarcity of print and electronic media. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, PAs are now very common worldwide with Ghana being no exception. This is attributable to the vibrancy of the media and the fact that no atrocity can be hidden in the powerful communicative age. Hook (2008) affirms that,

The exhibition of brutality and immorality through television evokes mass empathy in a manner never before seen. To a point, wars are crafted in secrecy, but public opinion is written on television screens the world over by video, voice, and repetition. In my opinion, the upsurge in the offering of political apologies is also, to a degree, an offshoot of the information age attributable to the watchdog eye of moral journalism. The tragedies, injustices, and brutality of repressive regimes are brought to us daily in a way never before possible. (p. 10)

In relation to the above, Murphy (2014) describes a political apology as follows:

A political apology is any apology produced by a political actor in public, where it is likely to be scrutinised by the press and the electorate. So an apology made behind closed doors by a politician would not be classed as a political apology, but a politician repeating an apology publicly and perhaps drawing attention to the existence of a private apology makes it public. (p. 15)

Hook (2008) avers that ‘political apology is the public announcement of a remorseful acceptance of responsibility for wrongful or harmful actions by a government that led to the disadvantage or victimisation of a group of its own citizens, or attacks on the citizens of another country’ (p. 3). Seen in this light, PAs can go beyond state boundaries.

Since most PAs are publicised by journalists in the media as cases of performance, Kampf (2011) considers political apology a drama, a social drama of apology for which he offers this definition: “‘a social drama of apology’ (SDA) is an act of repair, a speech act of apology, made by a transgressor at a crucial point in the trajectory of a social or political conflict. This dramatic narrative is characterized by a public struggle, which erupts following the report of a transgression’ (p. 72). SDA is thus an apology discourse, often marked by a set pattern: calls for apologies, initial refusals to apologise, rendering of apologies and declaration of forgiveness. It also involves participants who encourage offenders to apologise and others who rather instigate refusals to apologise (Kampf, 2011, p. 73).

### **Theoretical Framework: Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Apology**

This paper is discussed under political discourse analysis (PDA) that looks at how discourses on politics are analysed and interpreted (Agyekum, 2013, p. 41; Chilton, 2004, p. 6; Blommaert, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997). Politicians worldwide use language effectively to win votes by dwelling so much on promises, apology, rhetoric and persuasion. During electioneering campaigns in Ghana, members of parliament (MPs), after justifying their past or current shortcomings (often attributing them to forces beyond their control), and apologising to their constituents for same, politely and persuasively promise to help them with future developmental projects.

PDA effectively pays attention to the language, culture and political ideology of a particular group; hence PDA is both universal and culture-specific (Agyekum, 2013, p. 42; Van Dijk, 1998, p. 3). In political apology, persuasive language reflects the philosophical, cultural, religious, social and political ideologies of the society. PDA basically focuses on political discourse, such as presidential addresses, political apology, parliamentary proceedings, electioneering campaigns, political advertisements and

slogans, political speeches as well as political talk shows on TV and radio. PDA relies on political texts and discourses by presidents, premiers, MPs and other political figures and stakeholders (Agyekum, 2013, p. 42; Obeng, 2002a, p. 83, 2002b; Reisigl: 2010; Van Dijk, 1997, p. 12, p. 14; Davies 1994).

Obeng (2000) posits that ‘the complete communicative context and text are important in determining whether a text or discourse qualifies as political discourse’ (p. p. 341). Any communicative event that has direct or indirect political function within the overall political process is a political discourse (Agyekum, 2013). In every political discourse, including political apologies, there is a *political goal*, an *action to achieve* that goal and a *process* for achieving it.

In this paper, we will notice that to be a successful political apologist, one should manipulate political language to convince the offended party to accept and indicate forgiveness. Some of the strategies used in PDA include, politeness, indirection, speech acts and persuasive and rhetorical strategies. The political apologist acts appropriately to repair specific conflicts caused and restore the social-political harmony between the two parties (Agyekum, 2013, p. 43; Obeng, 1997, p. 64; Jucker, 1997, p. 121).

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

All the items in this paper were mediated apologies on radio, TV, local media websites, Google and in local newspapers. On the whole, eight apologies were collected from newspapers and Internet sources. The sources, as well as the background information to the offence and the apologies, have all been included in the excerpts. Journal articles on political apologies in other nations were also consulted. An analysis is made based on the lexical, semantic and pragmatic features of the utterances of apology, and the comments from the media and the public. The eight excerpts were purposely selected as samples to represent political apologies. Excerpts 1-5 and 8 are from the two major parties in Ghana, namely National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP), which have dominated the political landscape since the inauguration of the Ghanaian 4<sup>th</sup> Republic in 1992. There are two other apologies (excerpts 6 and 7) that represent political apologies from non-politicians to parliamentarians. Eight were selected because of the limited space in a refereed journal, and the number of words for a single article. The period of the collection of data, 2013-2015, coincides not only with the era of heightened Ghanaian interest in participatory democracy and political discourse but also with the proliferation of social media and the ever-expanding media space.

### **The Lexico-Semantics of Apology**

Let us now consider the lexico-semantics of the expressions for political apology. Apology may be expressed explicitly by apologetic words or implicitly by certain expressions of regret, remorse or explanation of the incidence. In the data for this paper,

most of the apologisers used the explicit expressions, ‘I apologise’, or ‘I render an unqualified apology’ for the harm caused. It is also possible to heighten the apology by adding the expression ‘please forgive me’. The offender can deny the ill-motive by attaching implicit apologetic expressions, such as ‘I did not intend it.’<sup>3</sup> Apologisers sometimes justify the offence as resulting from external factors beyond their control; the explanation or the account of the situation fulfils the function of an apology.

### **Implicit Apology, Non-Apology and Remorseless Apology**

In implicit political apology, the apologiser does not say exactly what the offence is. It is believed that mentioning the offence will evoke the psychological pain caused by the offence. Kampf (2009) identifies situations where there are non-apologies (p. 2261). These are situations where apologisers anticipate the danger and threat to their public image from the apology and therefore try to avoid explicit apology. Politicians do this without shouldering any ‘self-threatening responsibility’ (Kampf, 2009, p. 2263).

Some of the strategies used in mitigating the offence include describing the offence as an accident or a mistake, substituting the offence with the demonstrative ‘that’, as in ‘sorry about that’. Others are selecting a specific victim out of the offenders, blurring the identity of the victim, denying or avoiding responsibility, omitting the agent of the offence (Kampf, 2009, pp. 2265-2268). The central issue about implicit apology or non-apology is offenders’ insincerity to accept responsibility for their transgression. Non-apologies allow political figures to run away from accrued punishments from their transgression (Kampf, 2009, p. 2269). Nevertheless, the public in most cases accepts them as apologies since they contribute to political dialogue and foster harmony.

In discussing political apologies, Harris, et al (2006, p. 721) note that political apologies that are not explicit in terms of words undermine the acknowledgement, sincerity and validity of apology as a formal speech act. Kimoga (2010, p. 2181) aptly uses the term ‘remorseless apology’ to refer to apologies that flout the sincerity conditions and thus become pretentious. Some non-apologies manifest themselves in some of our excerpts, such as excerpt 2.

### **Structure and Strategies of Apology**

The use of apologetic devices is meant to restore equilibrium or harmony and strengthen relationships. Agyekum (2006) submits that apologetic strategies and utterances emanate from the apologiser and traverse the apologetic realm to reach the offended. The strategies, coupled with the physical scenario created, appeal to the

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<sup>3</sup> Wardhaugh (1985) lists the following apology types in English: (*I am*) *sorry! Excuse me, Pardon me, Oops! My mistake* (p. 189). Apologies could be more extensive as in *I am dreadfully sorry* and *Please accept my apologies for X*. (Harris et al, 2006, p. 722).

psychological intellect of the offended who then reacts to the apologist. The apologist normally expects a positive reaction, in the form of an outright forgiveness or a promise for forgiveness, from the offended person.

Bonvillain (1993) posits that apologies are made up of three-part sequences: (1) verbal or behavioural, which constitutes the 'object of regret', (2) an apology, and (3) the addressee's response (p. 107). Apology is made formulaic, through recourse to appropriate strategies, in order to promote a harmonious equilibrium and elicit forgiveness from the offended party. The strategies in political apology should be able to placate the offended and at the same time deflect any dangerous threat to the apologist's self-face. Kampf (2009), therefore, suggests ambiguous, evasive or equivocal speech as a possible solution and a double-edged sword to resolve such conflicts (p. 2260).

Apart from asking for forgiveness, the offender can also promise an offer of repair or a promise of forbearance. Offering political repair depends on the gravity of the offence and the harm caused. A promise of forbearance is used if the offender could have avoided the offence but did not do so, e.g. I cannot act like that again (Agyekum, 2006).

### Response to Apology

As a political convention, the language of the apology is deemed to repair the political harm caused the apologist. Nonetheless, it is in the interest of politicians to be very cautious about their actions and inactions so as to avoid frequent apologies. This is consistent with Wardhaugh's assertion that 'a person who constantly requests your forgiveness for this or that ... is likely to prove an extremely burdensome companion indeed' (1985, p. 188). Response to political apology makes the apologist see whether s/he has achieved the goal of re-establishing socio-political harmony. The offended party may accept, reject or evade the apology (Agyekum, 2006, p. 58; Holmes, 1998, p. 207). In some cases, it is very difficult to say either **yes** or **no** to an apology.

For political harmony to prevail, it is ideal for the apology to be accepted. Wardhaugh (1985) further contends that, 'to be truly effective an apology must be accepted, only then is the breach that has occurred properly repaired' (p. 189). This is couched in the English maxim 'To forgive is to forget.' If one accepts an apology, s/he must ignore the offence, *for to err is human*.

It is often deemed politically unethical for the offended to refuse to accept and forgive.<sup>4</sup> Apologies are motivated by offences that are contrary to the accepted norms and values of the society. In the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, an apologisee who declines a reasonable political apology is always entreated to forgive (Agyekum, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> The breach can be past, perfect, present or future, and one can apologise for a future action that can inconvenience the addressee. An apology signals that an event has already taken place or the speaker might be aware that it is about to take place.

Apology must be very sincere for it to be accepted. If someone is compelling or persuading the offender to apologise, then it is non-apology or a 'remorseless apology'. People who use their political power and authority to refrain from apologising for their wrongs are considered arrogant.

### **Excerpts of Political Apology in Ghanaian Contemporary Politics**

In this section, we will discuss some current PAs in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic of Ghana that appeared in the media: electronic or print. As part of the discussion, we will cite the background information to indicate what caused the offence, the political apology itself and the aftermath of the apology, especially the comments from the public.

#### **Excerpt 1: President Mahama Apologised to Okyeman**

**Posted by: Mark Fordhumon: Ghanaweb.com 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2015**

##### ***Background to the Offence***

The Ghanaian president spoke; 'Excuse me to say, *Akyem Abuakwa has turned into the headquarters of galamsey in Ghana*. I came here by air and if you see how the land is being destroyed, it saddens me'.

In response, the Okyehene said, 'The minerals are owned by government. Galamsey is illegal, and if we are being accused that Kyebi is the headquarters; then one is at a loss as to who made Kyebi galamsey headquarters. Mr. Mahama, please wake up and stop the illegal mining in the country before it gets out of hand.'

**Apology:** President Mahama therefore apologised to the Okyeman Council over the issue of galamsey, adding:

I regret what I said; I know it has worried you the chiefs a lot. Please, forgive me; maybe because I am not an Akan, and did not know how to speak without using apologetic expressions, that is why I said that. I did not know that I had offended you. I know it has seriously worried you the chiefs. I came to Kyebi here by a helicopter, and it was because of what I saw from the aerial view, that is why I said that.

**Analysis:** The president admits that his speech was inappropriate and asks for forgiveness. He said *I regret, forgive me, I did not know that I had offended you. I am apologizing for my harsh words*. The statement 'I didn't know that I had offended you', is a remorseless apology. In this case, the apology is not genuine because he president himself did not accept that what he had said was offensive.



**Excerpt 2: President Renders Apology to Mrs. Theodosia Okoh**  
**By Jerry Tsatro Mordy: Myjoyonline,<sup>5</sup> Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> July 2013**

**Background:** The mayor of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), Dr Alfred Okoh Vanderpuije, announced that the AMA had renamed the national hockey pitch in honour of the late President Mills. The pitch already bore the name of Mrs Theodosia Okoh, a hockey administrator and designer of the national flag. The decision of the AMA to rename the hockey pitch attracted various reactions and criticisms from people on media platforms. President Mahama described the renaming of the national hockey pitch after the late President John Evan Atta Mills as very unfortunate, and apologised to Mrs Theodosia Okoh for the act.

**Apology:** The president apologised as follows:

I wish as President to express our regret as a nation to our grandmother, Mrs. Theodosia Okoh, for any emotional trauma she might have suffered as a result of the confusion created by the renaming of the National Hockey Pitch. President Mills was a modest man in all respects and he himself would not have accepted the renaming of the hockey pitch after him if he was alive. The pitch still remains the Theodosia Okoh Hockey Pitch.

In response to the apparent unilateral decision of the mayor and the assembly, the then Chief of Staff, Mr. Prosper Douglas Bani, on behalf of President Mahama, directed Mr. Vanderpuije to reverse the decision to change the name of the hockey pitch. Even though the president was not the offender himself, it was politically prudent as the leader of his government to take the responsibility to apologise and give weight to the apology. This could be considered as a **vicarious** or **intervening** political apology; an apology rendered by a third party on behalf of the offended party.

Reacting to the name change, Mrs Okoh, the nonagenarian, said the decision by the AMA was very painful because it had been taken without consulting her. When the Presidency reverted the name of the hockey pitch to her name, Mrs. Okoh said on TV3 on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013 ‘I was overwhelmed. Call a tool a tool and not a thing for digging. Good work is done by good people whom God has chosen.’

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<sup>5</sup> Myjoyonline is owned by the Multimedia Group Company of Ghana. As the online version of Joy 99.7 FM, it focuses on news (local and international), politics, business, sports, entertainment and technology.

### Excerpt 3: Murtala Mohammed Apologises

Source: [www. Myjoyonline.com](http://www.Myjoyonline.com), Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

**Background:** The Deputy Minister, Mr. Murtala Mohammed threatened on a local FM station, Diamond FM that he would expose any member of parliament (MP) who wanted to unseat him by conniving with a woman to take nude pictures of a cabinet minister. He alleged that his detractors had gone to the extent of bribing chiefs and opinion leaders in the Northern Region of Ghana with ‘filthy, ill-gotten money.’ He added:

It is pathetic, absolutely pathetic: it’s unethical, it’s so funny, it’s so stupid, it’s so silly, it’s nasty, it’s un-Islamic for people in the same party to be sitting down, and their intention is about how they can get someone out of Parliament.

**Apology:** Deputy Trade and Industry Minister, Mr. Murtala Mohammed, has rendered an ‘**unqualified apology**’ for his explosive outburst which has received widespread condemnation. Below is Murtala’s apology letter:

Please accept this letter as a formal apology for my comments on Diamond FM a couple of days ago. I wish to acknowledge that I could have handled the matter better rather than an outburst, which was as a result of deep pain occasioned by events over the years.

I wish to render my unqualified apology to His Excellency the President. I wish also to render same to the NDC party and government, the good people of Ghana, the chiefs and religious leaders of Dagbong, as well as the Chiefs and people of the Nanton Constituency whose interest I have sworn to defend.

**Analysis:** Murtala uses the expression ‘unqualified apology’ and admits that *he could have handled the matter better*; this shows sincerity. The apology is addressed not only to the president but also to the government, the party, chiefs and all Ghanaians. This shows how he considers the gravity of the offence. In the Ghanaian context, an offence against individuals moves beyond them to cover all those related to them. In the same vein, an apology becomes a social issue even though it is directed at an individual.

**Excerpt 4: Sammy Awuku: I apologise unreservedly for my comments**

**Source: Citifmonline,<sup>6</sup> 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

**Background:** During the proceedings of the 2012 election petition case at the Supreme Court of Ghana in 2013, the Supreme Court issued a final warning to the media and party representatives, stressing that it would not hesitate to punish anyone found culpable of ‘twisting’ and ‘spinning’ information in relation to the court proceedings.

While contributing to a political debate, Mr. Sammy Awuku, the then Deputy Director of Communication of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), described the Supreme Court’s warning to the media and party representatives in the 2012 election petition as ‘hypocritical and selective.’ He noted that the nine-member panel led by Justice Atuguba was ‘choosy’ in citing a report by *Daily Guide* (a newspaper sympathetic to the NPP) that some boxes containing pink sheets in his custody had been retrieved. According to Awuku, the court *could have issued a general warning* without necessarily mentioning a specific newspaper or person. He added that when the orders from the court did not cover some comments made by his political opponents, then it could not avoid being seen as selective. These statements were considered offensive and disrespectful to the Supreme Court. Awuku was therefore summoned before the Supreme Court to defend his statements.

**Apology:** When Sammy Awuku appeared before the court, he apologised as follows:

My Lords, I offer an unconditional apology and withdraw the comments and the choice of words used which might *embarrass the court or embarrass your Lordships* on that said program yesterday. On that program, tempers flared up; it was a political program and my colleagues on the other side of the political divide made a comment that infuriated me. That was no justification to have followed suit and to have embarrassed the court. Upon sober reflection, I withdraw those comments and statements unreservedly, and my Lords, if I get to that platform next week Tuesday, I will make sure I use the opportunity to offer the same apology.

**Analysis:** Mr. Awuku admitted that what he did was prejudicial to the reputation of the Supreme Court. He offered an unconditional apology and unreservedly withdrew the injurious statements. This is in consonance with Ghanaian apology which is a social responsibility on the part of the offender. The apology fits into the sincerity conditions of

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<sup>6</sup> Citifmonline is the online version of Citi 97.3 FM in Accra.

the speech act theory and shows remorse. He realised his mistake and sincerely admitted his offence, stressing that the context of the acrimonious political debate *was not a justification to have embarrassed the court.*

He showed remorse by saying that he had *soberly reflected on what he had done and therefore wanted to withdraw the statements unreservedly.* He further committed himself to be of good behaviour, assuring the court ‘I will make sure that I take that opportunity to offer the same apology’ on that same media platform. The commitment is pragmatically very important where the spatial deixical point for the offence is considered another optimum deixical point for an unconditional apology and an unreserved withdrawal. We see that the social obligation makes him render the apology twice so that his cherished audience on radio will hear the apology. Such a performance is in accordance with the social responsibility of apologies in Ghanaian culture, and also with the Akan proverb, *Baabi a yekyekyere aboa no Eho ara na yegyae no.* (lit.) ‘Wherever the animal was tied to a tree, it is the same place where it is untied.’ Its earlier warning and the gravity of the offence notwithstanding, the Supreme Court felt obliged to pardon him.

**Excerpt 5. K.T. Hammond Apologises for Wednesday’s Outburst, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2013 (By Winnifred P. Ndamse (Source: citifmonline))**

**Background:** Hon. K.T. Hammond, Member of Parliament for Adansi Asokwa, on Wednesday December 4<sup>th</sup> 2013 verbally assaulted the Majority Leader, Dr. Ben Kumbour, while addressing the issue of corruption among politicians in the country. According to Dr. Ben Kumbour, ‘corruption is seen as the disease of the political elite of this country.’ He said this had been confirmed by the “drill ship and Woyome placards” on the floor of Parliament. The Speaker of Parliament, Edward Doe Adjaho, explained that the placards were displayed by both the Minority and the Majority, therefore could not be targeted at any particular side of the House. K.T. Hammond disagreed with the assertion and this resulted in an exchange of words on the floor of Parliament.

**Apology:** In an interview with **Citi FM’s** parliamentary correspondent, Richard Dela Sky, Mr. Hammond **remorsefully** said although the issue of the drill ship was a very sensitive issue to him because it had been linked to corruption, his outburst was still not of the *‘best behaviour’*:

I want to use your platform to express my unqualified apology to the good people of Ghana. I am sorry and I apologise to all of them (Members of Parliament) and indeed to my very good friend, the Speaker. I am really sorry for the behaviour put up since that could in one way or the other, affect

the people around me, as well as those who have helped me come this far... to really sully the brand the way I have contrived in my own way to do, I think this calls for some sort of apology to those who have created the brand.

K. T. Hammond also described the Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Doe Adjaho as someone who had always supported him and deserved his 'unqualified apology.' He further apologised to the Majority Leader, Dr Ben Kumbour.

**Analysis:** Like most of the political apologies in this paper, Mr. K. T. Hammond used the expressions, 'unqualified apology', 'I am sorry', 'I apologize', 'I am really sorry for the behaviour', and 'some sort of apology'. He regretted his behaviour and accepted that it was not the best. His apology was widely cast to cover all Ghanaians, all MPs, his constituents, the speaker of parliament and the colleague MP, he had offended. As a Ghanaian who knows the Ghanaian culture, he sees apology as community-based and thereby extended it to all Ghanaians.

### **Apologies from Non-Politicians to Politicians**

In this section, we will discuss political apologies where the apologisers are non-politicians but the offended are politicians. I cite here apologies directed to the Ghanaian parliament. One is from a university professor and the others are from a media person (a disc joker, DJ), and a youth wing of a political party.

**Excerpt 6: Prof. Dodoo Apologises to Parliament – (By Mark-Anthony Vinorkor)**  
**PARLIAMENT HOUSE: Source: *Daily Graphic* <sup>7</sup> No.19819, Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2015, p.16**

**Background:** Parliament in June 2015 expressed concern over a suspended Ebola vaccine trial in the Volta Region and said enough consultation had not been done to allay the fears of the people. The MP for Ho West, Mr. Emmanuel K. Bedzra, asked whether the vaccine had been tried on mice and chimpanzees, while others said the trial could be an unwitting attempt to 'import' the disease into the country. Prof. Dodoo, of the School of Medicine and Dentistry of the University of Ghana, in a sharp reaction to the comments made by the MPs, described them as ignorant, and if they did not know what they were saying, they better shut up. Parliament took a serious view of his statement and said it reduced the image of the House in the eyes of the public. Parliament consequently, charged him

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<sup>7</sup> *Daily Graphic* is a state-owned newspaper published in Accra. It was established in 1950 by Cecil King of the London Daily Mirror Group. It is the oldest and most widely circulated newspaper in Ghana.

with contempt of parliament and invited him before the Privileges Committee of the House to answer the charges.

**Apology:** Professor Alex Dodoo apologised to the Privileges Committee of Parliament for describing the MPs as *being ignorant* and asking them *to shut up*. His lawyer, Mr. Yoni Kulendi, who rendered the apology on the contempt charges said: 'I have the instructions of Prof. Dodoo to put on record his unconditional, irrevocable apology to this House'.

Mr. Kulendi said Prof. Dodoo held Parliament in the highest esteem, and could not disrespect and insult the House. Mr. Kulendi submitted that,

It is not even compatible with Prof. Dodoo's status, character, enlightenment and even the kind of work he does. It is unfortunate for him to say something which is a direct affront or demeaning to this House and, therefore, whether correctly or incorrectly, he takes the slightest view that his comments were an affront to the dignity of this House.

He described Prof. Dodoo as a 'drug and vaccine safety vigilante' and suggested that as it happens often when speaking, Prof. might have, in the heat of the debate and discourse on the Ebola vaccine trial, 'overrun the runway' without realizing he had done so. The lawyer further stated, 'The professor takes ashes and sackcloth and says that he could not have meant to disrespect the House, let alone this august institution.' He added that since speech was fluid, Prof. Dodoo could have been a victim of the speech of the tongue.

**Analysis:** Prof. Dodoo's sincere apology is captured by expressions such as *unconditional, irrevocable apology to this House* and *could have been a victim of the speech of the tongue*. The expression *unconditional and irrevocable apology* implies that he is showing sincere remorse. The expressions *take ashes and sackcloth*, and *he could not have meant to disrespect the House* mean behaving in a way to depict that one is deeply sorry for the harm caused. *Being a victim of free speech* means that in oral speech one can easily make mistakes, and this can happen to anybody. This indicates that it was unintentional to offend the parliamentarians. Another expression, *overrun the runway without realising he had done so*, denotes that the issue at stake might have compelled him to do something out of the normal. The apology is heightened by saying Professor Dodoo has great respect for the House and cannot insult them. All these strategies were deployed to persuade Parliament to accept the apology.

## Excerpt 7: Blakk Rasta Apologises

**Background of the Case:** A publication in the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2015 edition of the *Daily Searchlight* newspaper states that Ahmed, known in showbiz as Blakk Rasta, has stated that 80% of MPs smoked ‘wee’ (marijuana). This sought to impugn the integrity of MPs and the republic of Ghana. He was summoned to appear before the Privileges Committee of Parliament to purge himself of his contemptuous statement. His first appearance at Parliament depicted that he was not rendering a sincere apology. Earlier, some MPs indicated that the artiste be punished because he had only sounded apologetic after the Privileges Committee had played back his comments on tape to his hearing. Kimoga (2010) refers to such an apology as ‘remorseless apology’.

### **Apology: 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015 edition of *Daily Graphic***

On his first appearance before Parliament, Blakk Rasta’s counsel appealed for his client and said ‘*On behalf of my client, we unreservedly, apologise for it... It’s a very important house and he knows the importance of Parliament. Blakk Rasta describes it as ‘an unfortunate’ remark.*’ He added:

Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry for what I said, I apologise to this House. As I was seated in the Public Gallery, I was *crying in my stomach* (grieving in my heart) for wasting everybody’s time, especially members of this august House. I would like to apologise...it is those unfortunate remarks which come when you are on heat..., If I were to receive a slap each from MPs for the contemptuous statement, I would willingly do so.

**Comments:** Blakk Rasta was invited again to Parliament because in Ghanaian culture what is considered a complete and sincere apology is where the apologiser shows unambiguous remorse. To show remorse during his second appearance, he metaphorically said *he was crying in his stomach*, the remarks were ‘unfortunate’, and realising his guilt, he was ready to receive slaps from each of the parliamentarians.

The two narrations in excerpts 6 and 7 show that Ghanaians respect the dignity of Parliament as an institution. It was thus a moral duty for Prof. Doodoo and Blakk Rasta to render unqualified apologies, even though both were experts in their respective fields.

**Excerpt 8: Apology to His Excellency President John Agyekum Kufuor by ‘Uniting the NPP’ Group, Source: modernghana .com April 21<sup>st</sup> 2015**

A concerned youth group of the NPP writes an apology to the former president, J. A. Kufuor, as follows:

Dear Sir,

We are the ‘UNITING THE NPP’ and our sole aim as a group is to uphold and protect the sacred and solemn UNITY for victory 2016 and beyond. We wish to respectfully and humbly bring to your attention an expression of an **unqualified apology**. We apologise on behalf of the NPP fraternity to your noble, excellent and distinguished self after having come to realise a WICKED, BIZARRE, COOKED and SMOKED LIE against you sometime back in 2008. What happened was married with a baseless MALICIOUS MISPERCEPTION, ERRONEOUS IMPRESSION and an ARRANT HATRED that some members made it possible for ‘Newly’ NPP members and existing participants to hold it on you.

The group further explained the need for the apology as follows: ‘

The aim for this humble but vital action is to address a calculated, deliberate, malicious, unfortunate and disdainful tape recording by a hired hungry-looking whore of a ghost full of verbal and reckless abuse on Your Noble Self. The humiliation of the ex-president became topical on almost all media programmes the week before. There were unfortunate verbal assaults from ingrates, Kennedy Agyapong, Bugri Naabu, etc.

We agree that this apology has been long overdue, but it is still relevant; it is better LATE than NEVER. We, the UNITING THE NPP are knowledgeable, wise and God-fearing enough to understand that Your Excellency has a family who are also traumatised by some of these unfounded and wicked lies. We strongly believe that Your Excellency is a Noble and an ascetic Christian and you have a Big Forgiving heart to FORGIVE us our Trespasses as we forgive those who made it possible for unbeknownst NPP members to have such baselessly hating figment against You.

**Analysis:** The youth stressed that the insults were unwarranted. This is done through the use of strong expressions like WICKED, BIZARRE, COOKED and SMOKED LIE,



baselessly MALICIOUS MISPERCEPTION, ERRONEOUS IMPRESSION and an ARRANT HATRED on you. The negative aspect of the offence is also depicted by expressions like calculated, deliberate, malicious, unfortunate and disdainful tape recording by a hired hungry- looking whore of a Ghost full of verbal and reckless abuse against you. Others are: unfounded and wicked lies; having baselessly hating figment against you.

To persuade the former president to accept the apology, as Ghanaian culture demands, the group couched its apology with honorifics such as your noble, excellent and distinguished self, Your Excellency as a Noble and an ascetic Christian have a Big Forgiving heart to FORGIVE us our Trespasses. They finally described the apology as ‘unqualified’, and this means that they sincerely accept the mess and offence created by the hired hungry-looking whore of a Ghost full of verbal and reckless abuse.

The apology ended with a biblical allusion to the virtue of forgiveness from the Lord’s Prayer. This is meant to persuade the former president to accept the response and forgive the offenders, for their party to grow. In terms of structure, this is an indirect, mediated and non-guilt apology. This is yet another example of vicarious political apology as the apologisers are not the offenders, did not post the lies, and yet are apologising for the interest, love and peace in their party. Further, this political apology conforms to Ghanaian culture that puts premium on politeness, age, rank and power.

### **Functions of Political Apology**

Let us now turn our attention to the role of political apologies. This will reflect not only the general functions of apologies but also the specificities of Ghanaian culture and perceptions about apology. The basic function of all apologies in social interaction is to negotiate, maintain and sustain social solidarity and ties between the participants. In looking at the values of political apology, Hook (2008) argues that ‘political apology is the most important doorway in the process towards settling differences, because at least while people are talking they might not be killing each another’ (p. 10). This is a powerful statement towards reconciliation, image restoration and renewal of a politician’s moral status so as to relate to other political figures and the entire society (Kampf, 2009, p. 2259).

Taft (2000) views apology from a moral point of view and opines that ‘Apology is a common social means of reconciling the offender with the offended... Apology is regarded as a moral act because it acknowledges the existence of right and wrong and confirms that a norm of right behaviour has been broken’ (p. 1142). This is manifested in excerpt 5 when K. T. Hammond admitted that what he did was absolutely wrong.

Political apology is a non-violent way of settling scores and bringing about peace in the polity or among nations. Kimoga (2010) asserts that ‘In political discourse, apology is not necessarily a moral action but a tool used to politically appease and to settle some

situations that may threaten power' (p. 2187). In excerpt 2, for instance, President Mahama wanted to bring about peace between the government and Mrs. Okoh and the entire society, and also to calm down the tension attendant upon the infamous decision taken by AMA. In effect, to maintain political power, politicians should be humble to apologise for their actions and inactions as well as those of their groups.

In Ghanaian parlance, it is better to jaw-jaw, than to engage in war-war, to wit it is better to talk than to fight. Luke (1997) connects political apology to the power of the word whereby public demands for an apology from politicians compel them to apologise so that they will enjoy their status quo, be reconsidered as politicians and continue to wield political power (p. 366). Political apologies establish and reinstate the rapport between the individual politicians, and further extend the apology to the apologisee's political camp and sometimes to the entire society. An example is in excerpt 3, where Mr. Murtala Mohammed extended the apology to the government, his party, chiefs and all Ghanaians. Some political apologies may be statutory; especially apologies for crimes against the state and they are employed to avoid calamities befalling a group or state (Agyekum, 2006).

One of the major tools of political apology is to assist political figures to confront the past wrongs squarely and adopt achievable strategies towards political and national reconciliation for peace and national development. (See excerpt 1 by President Mahama and 5 by Hon. K.T. Hammond). Political apologies bridge the social and political distance in relationship, resolve conflicts and bring about social harmony among the people; they also restore and renew the public trust reposed in politicians. Robinson (2004, p. 292) submits that 'Apologising is an essential component of the maintenance of social harmony because it communicates awareness and acceptance of moral responsibility for offensive behavior' (See also Harris et al, 2006, p. 733; Holmes 1998, 1990). Political apologies have some levels of social morality and social contract that bind the apologisee to repair the socio-political conflict caused for the common good. Politicians offer apologies to the people, who voted them into power, to continue enjoying their goodwill and support.

A political apology indicates that the speaker wants to draw closer to the addressee(s). Politicians who apologise are well respected while a refusal to apologise can cost politicians their career. Hook (2008) records that 'In the USA, President Clinton was never slow to apologise once a wrong had been clearly identified; Bill Clinton's empathetic readiness to adopt the perspective of the underdog is considered to be one of his outstanding strengths as a world leader' (p. 8). All the eight excerpts in this study indicate that the apologisees were indebted to the apologisees, and they needed to settle their metaphorical debts through political apologies.

Apologies pay attention to the 'face needs' of the addressee. Holmes (1990, p. 195) thus refers to apology as 'face supportive act' (FSA). This is the reverse of 'face

threatening acts' (FTA). Scholars like Edmondson and House (1981) contend that an apology is a 'hearer-supportive device' (HSD) intended to attend to the face wants of the hearer. It serves to remedy any damage to the hearer by the face-threatening act which necessitated the apology (Murphy, 2014, 24; Holmes, 1990; Goffman, 1971). All the eight political apologies aimed at redressing the face threats caused to the offended; speakers needed to apologise to save and support their faces, bearing in mind the values and dictates of Ghanaian culture.

For his part, Meier (1998) sees apology as a *speaker-supportive act* (S-SA) and posits that the maintenance of the speaker's self-image is the major motivation behind apology (p. 221). This assertion is based on Goffman's (1971, p. 110 ff.) idea that an apology is an act by which the speaker splits herself into two: (1) the bad half which caused the offence, and (2) the good half, which recognises the offence and seeks to remedy it. The apology brings this good half to the fore and is thus *speaker-supportive*, since it repairs the negative feelings held by the hearer towards the speaker. A third neutral position held by Holmes (1990) is that apology attends to the *face wants of both parties*.

Apologising is potentially a face-threatening act for the speaker, whereas it is face-saving act for the addressee. Apologies become particularly face-threatening and face-damaging to the apologiser if the apology is rejected by apologisees who see the apologiser as somebody not worth hearing and spending their time on. Murphy (2014), however, sees contrastive face-threatening and damage on the part of the offended because the speaker places the hearer under an obligation to respond, thereby constraining the apologisees' freedom to do as they please (p. 25).

It appears that since Ghana operates a communalistic society where socio-cultural networking is very pervasive, there is a cultural obligation for the politically offended individual or group to accept an apology. That is why in excerpt 2, for instance, Mrs. Theodosia Okoh said she was overwhelmed by the president's apology. Our discussions have pointed out that a typical political apology reflects the Ghanaian notion of apology based on their culture. There is the phenomenon of 'intervening apology' where a third person can intervene and apologise on behalf of the one who had committed the offence. We saw this in excerpt 2 where President Mahama apologised on behalf of the AMA, and in excerpt 8, where the leaders of the youth group, 'UNITING THE NPP', rendered an apology to the former Ghanaian president, J.A Kufour, on behalf of those who had insulted him. Both cases exemplify the strong relation between culture and communicative practices.

## Conclusion

Apology is one of the important speech acts of our daily interaction because as human beings there is always a commission or omission of an act that is unfavourable to

others and therefore offends other people (Agyekum, 2006; Holmes, 1995, p. 155). Political apologies (PAs) are pragmatic repair mechanisms meant to restore and harmonise socio-political relationship and equilibrium between interlocutors in political discourse. Political apology is a speech act that seeks to address an interactant's face needs and intended to remedy an offence for which the political apologiser directly or indirectly takes responsibility. Most political apologies are manifestations of the politicians' face-loss. The strategies used in PAs consist of expression of regret, admission of the offence, assumption of the responsibility, minimising the offence or responsibility, offering reparation, restitution, compensation and committing oneself not to repeat such unacceptable political acts.

We looked at the parameters of apology and identified the Apologiser (offender) and the Apologisee (the offended). What links them is the persuasive powerful language of political apology. A political apology may be simple or complex depending on the social parameters of the interlocutors and the gravity of the offence and how it has been publicised in the media, as well as the public's outcry for an apology. Various lexical and semantic forms are used in expressing apology such as; '*please*', '*I beg your pardon*' and '*forgive me*', '*I apologise*.' In our data, the most frequent was '*I apologise*'.

It is ideal for political apologies to be accepted. A response to a political apology indicates to the apologiser whether s/he has succeeded in re-establishing the socio-political equilibrium that existed before the apology. An offended person may accept, acknowledge, reject, or fail to respond to an apology. Political apologies have become so dramatic and rampant that some scholars refer to this century as the 'age of apology'. The language for political apology should conform to the sincerity conditions of the speech act theory and show some remorse so as to warrant acceptance. An apology devoid of sincerity can be classified as non-apology or remorseless.

In this paper, we have established that political apologies in Ghana conform to Ghanaian socio-cultural concepts and values as well as the social responsibilities of the parties involved. PA is part of the socio-cultural and socio-political norms which politicians and citizens of a particular society are supposed to know and respond to appropriately to bring about socio-political harmony.

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