Akan concepts and proverbs on *abusua,* 'family'

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Abstract

The paper explores the Akan concept of family based on their cultural ideologies and proverbs. The paper adopts the framework of language ideology that looks at how a people rationalise their language and culture based on their worldview, religious beliefs and anthropological notions. The data for this paper is collected from library studies on books on Akan proverbs and other literary books. Part of the data is collected from Akan folksongs, folktales, interviews and discussions with some renowned Akan scholars. The proverbs collected are subjected to semantic, stylistic and pragmatics analysis. The paper will find out whether the proverbs that relate to family are still applicable in modern times where globalisation, westernisation, modernisation and foreign religion are taking over the Akan family system and some of the aspects of Akan culture and beliefs. This paper is a follow up of other papers I have done on the Akan concept of face, poverty, marriage and death.

Keywords: Akan family system, clan, extended family, proverbs, language ideology, folksongs

Introduction

Scholars in anthropology, sociology, social welfare, psychology and religion such as McCarthy and Edward (2011), have worked extensively on the family. However, little has been done on the interface between family and language especially among the Akans. It is upon this backdrop that this study is focusing on how Akans use language, especially proverbs, to comment on family as an important aspect of people's life. The paper will look at the Akan family system, concepts and its structure. I will discuss both the nuclear and the extended family systems and tag the extended family system with the Akan *abusuaban*, 'clan' system.

The paper further looks at the use of proverbs, which are embodiments of Akan traditional wisdom and how they are used to express the experiences and notions of the Akan clan and family systems. It further discusses the indispensability and the major role of proverbs in commenting on the Akan *abusua*, 'family'. The proverbs for analysis are semantically categorised into six. They are as follows: (1) the essence of the mother and daughters in a family, (2) marriage as an entry into a family, (3) sufferings from a bad family (4) booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt, (5) unity and diversity in the family and (6) steadfastness and identity. The paper opens the gate for further studies on the interface between language and the family, especially with the current dynamism in the family.

The Akan Family System

One of the cardinal aspects of this article is the Akan family system and we will look at *abusua* first from the clan systems and dovetail into the two major systems of inheritance, matrilineal and patrilineal. The Akan clan system is made up of eight matrilineal clans, namely *Aduana, Agona, Asakyiri, Asenneɛ, Asona, Bretuo, Ɛkoɔna* and *Ɔyokoɔ*. Members of each of these clans trace their ancestral lineage to one great grandparent irrespective of their geographical location. In view

of the strong bondage, members of the clan (family) cannot marry themselves, nor have any sexual relations; that will be incestuous. These types of family relations can be considered as the extreme notions of extended family. There is a limited extended family that will refer to members who trace their lineage to a common grandmother within a specific location; village or town who are closely knit and know themselves. In discussing the Akan kinship system, Brempong (1991) states that:

> Every Akan is born into an *abusua,* the blood family system or the clan. Each child inherits a spirit (totem) from his father but has his mother's blood. Therefore, each child is related, through blood, to his mother's brother, to his mother's sister and her [mother's sister's emphasis mine] siblings; but not to the children of his mother's brother. The word *Abusua when* **etymologized has two morphemes, abu, literally meaning broken and sua meaning to learn. Abusua in a sense therefore means part of the society which is broken or a segment of the society which can be uniquely identified. The lexeme sua 'to learn'** denotes the learning process within such an institution. This means that individuals within the *Abusua* learn to identify themselves with the group (p. 94).[1]

In the Akan matrilineal extended systems, descent and clan lines are traced through the mother's side. A woman and her sister, their children, and their daughters' children thus belong

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[1] Rattray (1941) gave the etymology of the word abusua as stated below. There lived in former times a King of Adanse who had a linguist named Abu. This Abu incurred the King's anger and was heavily fined. Now, at that time children used to inherit from their father. Abu asked his children to assist him to pay the fine imposed by the King but they refused and all went off to their mother's relatives. But Abu's sister's children rendered him assistance to pay off his debt, and Abu therefore, when he died left all his belongings to them. Other people then copied him and willed their property to their sister's children (Abu - sua, lit. copying Abu), (p. 41). (Brempong Owusu (1991) affirms that this is one of the explanations given by the Akans on matrilineal; inheritance (p. 107).

to the same descent group through consanguineous relations (see also Schwimmer, 2001). Again, Siegel (1996) indicates that one is supposed to inherit material resources from the mother's brother, the matrilineal authority figure, rather than one's father (p. 10). In the matrilineal system, there is no matriachy, where women rule, the formal authority in the group is usually held by mothers' brother(s). In this respect, one of the male elders is the _abusuapanin_, 'family head' or the family's chief administrator. Apart from this matrilineal kind of extended family system, there is a similar patriarchal extended family relation where members of one's father's family are considered as family members irrespective of their geographical relations and migration. The Akans thus have two extended family relations, namely patrilineal and matrilineal.[2]

The paper further recognises that family ties and kinship ties are not necessarily the same. Kinship ties usually rest on the recognised blood relations determined by the established social and kinship structure of a society/people. Family ties can be with other relations not necessarily determined as blood relations by the social and kinship structure of a society/people. In modern Ghana, people have what they call family friends, who could be their school mates, church members or workplace friends. These relations could be patrilateral or matrilateral depending on who is at the centre of the relations, namely the father or the mother.

We can strike a distinction between a complimentary filiation extended family system that is based on marriage (affinal) and the kinship extended family system that involves

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[2] The terms matrilineal and patrilineal systems refer to the ways in which descent and inheritance are traced. In a matrilineal system, descent, a person's family identity, inheritance, and leadership positions are determined and traced through their mother's lineage. However, in a patrilineal system, these are determined by the father's lineage. From a strictly anthropological point of view, we also have matrilateral and patrilateral systems that refer to the social connections and obligations within a family. In a matrilateral system, relatives of significant social importance, are formed through the mother's side of the family. In a patrilateral system, the emphasis is rather on the father's side. These distinctions may shape familial relationships, inheritance patterns, and social organization within different cultures and societies. While linear kin are counted "downward" by descent through the kinship system (father-son-grandson), lateral kin are kinfolk "to the side"; it could refer to siblings and affinals.

blood relations and, therefore, constitutes the consanguineous relations in the Akan. In the complimentary marriage system, the Akans have a proverb that states:

> *Sɛ worepɛ abusua bi mu awura na sɛ wonnya kwan a, na woware firi mu.*
> 'If you want to enter into a family and you are not getting the access then you marry from that family.'

This proverb indicates that marriage gives one an automatic entry into another family, outside his clan and matrilineal family. Family relationship can thus be affinal or consanguinal. Yang (2010) states that "In Chinese, there are two kinds of relatives. One is blood relatives which indicate relatives with blood relations. The other is 'adfinis', which refers to relatives formed by marriage. Terms addressing relatives on the father's side are therefore, different from those used to address relatives on the mother's side" (p. 739). This system is similar to the Akan system and confirms the view that culturally, there are certain similarities between Asian, Polynesian, Carribean and African cultures.

There is the modern nuclear family that involves the father, mother and the children. According to Nukunuya (2003), such a conjugal or nuclear family is called monogamous family and a couple without children does not constitute a family (p. 49). Another type of family is the polygamous nuclear family involving the man, his wives and children. Nukunya (2003) explains that the extended family system can be classified into two types. One of them is a residential group comprising a series of close relatives built around either patrilineal or matrilineal lines. The second refers to social arrangements in which an individual has extensive reciprocal duties and obligations outside his immediate (nuclear) family. In Akan, the latter system is based on the clan systems as noted above.

In most African cultures, including Ghana and specifically among the Akan, members of the same family will normally

want to stay closer to each other and even have their worksites closer to family members. This is manifested in the villages where family members are usually found in one part of the village. When cocoa farming started, many Akans who travelled to other places to buy land for cocoa productions usually went in family groups. The same phenomenon occurs when family members want to buy plots in the cities for residential building. Family and ethnic members are found within the same suburbs of Accra, Kumasi or Takoradi.[3] Nukunya, therefore. avers that:

> In the Anlo-Ewe society where virilocal residence is emphasised, men build their houses close to those of their fathers and other agnates and the maxim that a man is not fully a master of his own house while his father lives, ensures that the authority pattern associated with extended family residential system is maintained (Nukunya, 2003, p. 50).

The extended family system therefore entrusts power in the adults and parents irrespective of the qualification and social status of the sons or daughters.

The extended family system comes with various forms of responsibilities from both the elders and the young. These include social, economic, political, religious, cultural, educational, child nurturing and sanitation responsibilities. Whether members of an extended family live in the same household, village and town or live in distant geographical locations, they try as much as possible to keep track of their kin and show love, care and absolute commitment and responsibility to them anywhere they meet. This is highly manifested during the death of a family member when people travel across regions to partake in the funeral. Undoubtedly, no matter the distance, people of the same extended family trace their descent system through one great grandparent (see Siegel, 1996). Siegel (1996) states the

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[3] In Kumasi, the capital of the Asante region of Ghana, there are suburbs like Anloga (Ewes), Accra Town (Gas), Fante New Town (Fantes) and Mosi Zongo (Mossis). These areas are inhabited by the ethnic groups.

following about the family:

> In theory, every individual is born into a conceptually immortal descent group that includes the living, the dead (ancestors), and the yet unborn…. A lineage or clan transcends the lifetimes of its individual members and controls property rights to such things as land and herds, leadership positions, and spiritual powers. As each lineage or clan is a giant extended family, its members must marry outside their own descent group (p. 7).

We will thus find in the discussion that, it is these responsibilities and the functions of the family that generate the proverbs.

The Akan people[4]

The word 'Akan' refers to the people as well as their language. Akans are considered from (a) ethnographic and (b) linguistic perspectives. The ethnographic Akans encompass the native Akans plus the Ahantas, Aowins, Nzemas, and Sefwis, who share cultural similarities with the native Akans but have their respective languages, and speak Akan as L2. The linguistic Akans are those who speak the Akan language as their L1 and are the largest ethnic group in Ghana (Obeng, 1987). In the 2021 national population census, 47.5% of the Ghanaian population was Akan, and about 44% of non-Akans use Akan as a lingua franca (see Agyekum, 2023).

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[4] There is a proto-Akan language common to all the 13 linguistic Akan ethnic groups. Linguistic evidence suggests that the Akan-speaking people likely originated somewhere from Old-Ghana to the present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast. Over time, as the Akan people migrated southwards and westwards and settled in different areas, their language evolved into the various Akan dialects spoken today, especially Twi, Fante, and Akuapem. Dolphyne (2006) states that "The name Akan is also used to refer to the people who live in most of the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. They speak languages /dialects which include Baule, Anyi (Aowin), Sehwi (Sanvil) Nzema, Ahanta, Fante, Akuapem, Asante, Brong, Wassaw, etc The ethnographic non-Akan L1 groups speak their respective languages which have traits of the proto-Akan language under the Tano language family. These languages/dialects are all closely related, and have a number of vocabulary in common" (p. xi-xii). In Ghana, the non-Akan L1 shares common geographical boundaries with the Akan and are potentially bilingual; they speak Akan as L2 in addition to their respective L1. This is the premises for Akan L1 versus non-Akan L1 forms.

The Akan are found predominantly in central and southern Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in 9 out of the 16 regions in Ghana, namely Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western and Western North Regions. The Akan speaking communities in the Oti region are surrounded by the Gbe language communities of Ewe, Guan and Gur. The Akan language has 13 dialects, namely Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Fante, Denkyira, Kwawu, Twifo and Wassaw. Some Bono speakers are found in Cote d'Ivoire. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level in Ghana. (Agyekum, 2023, 2016, p. 165).

Literature review and Language Ideology

Ideologies are shared and predictable beliefs and ideas of a people that are noted to be real and implicit in their everyday life situations within a period of time (see Agyekum, 2016, 2011, 2010). In ideological studies, meaning is socially constructed and to understand people's behaviour in social interaction, it is better to know their socio-cultural, environmental, political and historical background. The lack of this accounts for the misunderstandings in intercultural communication. Hall (2005) stipulates that "ideologies are mental frameworks —the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 26). A society's ideological concept on any aspect of their life make them see the concept as socially-owned, inner-perspective shared phenomenon, unchangeable, inevitable, indispensable, real and natural, and that is why they will always justify and rationalise its existence. Makus (1990) states that:

> Ideological representation cannot be explained by the inclinations of individuals, nor can the motive of trickery be necessarily assigned to it. Ideological

formulations remain largely unconscious to both their speaker and their receivers. Consequently, although rhetors may choose what they will say, ideological theory maintains that these choices are determined within the common sense of the culture (p. 500).

The above indicates that culture, society and the environment have absolute power on the individual as far as ideology is concerned. In the society, ideologies operate as part of the systems of linguistic practices (Makus 1990, p. 503). Let us now look at language ideology.

Silverstein (1998) posits that "Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (p. 123). This is in line with Rumsey (1990), who posits that "linguistic ideologies are shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world" (p. 346). To this effect, the beliefs and systems in a people's culture and language that they rationalize, are shared and predictable during their application and execution. Language use and its interpretation are based on the linguistic and cultural ideology of the group. Speakers of a language must be aware of the structure and nature of their language, so as to justify its usage and how it affects their social and rational behaviour.

Verschueren (1999) opines that "language ideologies are habitual ways of thinking and speaking about language and language use which are rarely challenged within a given community" (p.198). The awareness of one's language ideology and how the language is appropriately used in language and cultural contexts affect thinking, speaking and communicative competence.

Irvine (1989) postulates that "Language ideologies are the cultural systems of ideas about social and linguistic relationship, together with their loading of moral and political interests" (p.

255). Language ideologies are therefore embodied in the people's culture and their language and behaviour in different situations. Language ideology effectively coordinates between languages, culture, politics, psychological behaviour and sociocultural world (Agyekum, 2016, 2010). Kroskrity (2006) avers that "language ideologies are beliefs, or feelings about language as used in their social worlds" (p. 498). In all the notions of language ideology above, we can infer that language ideology provides a sociocultural understanding and interpretation of the political, cultural, economic, law and religious processes that are justifiable by the language community. Again, language ideology affects people's way of life and their local beliefs about language and culture.

Language ideology further links language to social identity, social class and ranks, status and indeixicality, gender, aesthetics, morality, epistemology, and operations of socio-economic institutions (see Agyekum, (2016; 2010), Kroskrity, (2001, p. 413) and Silverstein, (1998 p. 126). In discussing language ideologies from the standpoint of law, Haviland (2003) opines that "linguistic ideology are ideas about language and its place in social arrangements or its use and usability for social and political ends, of which the concept of "language rights" must surely be a part and a product" (p. 764) Language ideology also discusses language policies in multilingual societies as to which language to be used in education, politics and judicial systems and why.

Irvine and Gal (2000) posit that "linguistic ideologies refer to the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (p. 35). In this view, Participants in the linguistic environment and their performances play a crucial role in language ideology. Language ideology marks people's status, identities, their communicative practices in terms of varieties of languages they choose based on their positions in the society (see Van Dijk, 1998; Fairclough (1989, p. 2).

It is upon the multiple functions of language ideology that I am adopting it as the framework to analyse proverbs on Akan family to indicate that Akans are able to justify the existence of such proverbs on family as an important socio-cultural institution.

Methodology

The methodology employed for this paper was basically library studies and interviews under the qualitative methods. The interviewees were four renowned M. Phil Akan scholars of the University of Ghana, University of Education Winneba and University of Cape Coast.

A greater proportion of the data was collected from library studies using the Balme, African Studies, Linguistics and Sociology libraries all at the University of Ghana, Legon. I further picked some data from books on Akan proverbs, especially Adu Gyamfi (1999), Akrofi (1958), Appiah et al. (2000), Bannerman (1974), Ofei-Ayisi (1966), and Rattray (1941). I also collected some of the proverbs on family from Akan written literature books including fiction (Adi 1973: *Brako)*, drama (Amoako 1976: *Etire nni Safoa*) and poetry (Adi 1979: *Mewɔ Bi Ka*). Furthermore, I tapped some of the proverbs from Akan oral literature materials such as recorded folksongs, proverbs, folktales and dirges (Agyekum 2017, p. 29).

I crosschecked the aphorisms, symbolisms and imagery in the proverbs with a fellow renowned Akan retired lecturer at the University of Ghana (the late, Mr. Apenteng Sackey) who gave his comments. I also contacted Mr. Bosie Amponsah, and the late Opanin Alwasi Donkor, two retired broadcasters and Akan scholars in Kumasi and Accra respectively. I further consulted Agya Koo Nimo, an Akan folklorist and ethnomusicologist. These are renowned and fluent speakers in Akan who read and write the language very well. In the section on analysis, the proverbs are subjected to stylistic analysis with special attention to the semantic and pragmatic notions, imagery, metaphor,

irony, repetition, parallelism and symbolisms. I adopted this same methodology in Agyekum (2017 and 2016, p165) on the concept of *ohia,* 'poverty' *in* Konadu's song.

Akan proverbs

In my previous works on proverbs, I explained the notions and concept of proverbs among the Akans. Since this paper is a continuation of the research on proverbs that relate to specific cultural concepts, I will adopt the same style of explaining the notions and concepts of the proverbs on family (Agyekum 2017, 2016 and 2012).

Definition and functions of proverbs

Proverbs are terse sayings that embody general truths or principles and ways of life. The general truths are based on the people's past experiences, philosophy, socio-cultural concepts and the environment (Agyekum, 2012, p.11). We will see how the Akans consider the usefulness of proverbs and witty sayings in describing the family in this paper. In Akan, the average Akan speaker has some conscious folk knowledge system about the value of proverbs as a class of linguistic expressions that depict or express the Akan philosophy and experiences about family. Most of the proverbs discussed in section 5 depict the Akan folk knowledge about proverbs.

Scholars of linguistic and oral literature like Agyekum (2005), Finnegan (2012), Okpewho (1992) and Yankah (1989) have researched extensively into proverbs. Proverbs are embodiments of traditional wisdom based on the experiences and socio-cultural life of our elders (see Agyekum (2005:9). In fact, in Akan indigenous communication, the use of proverbs is the acknowledged mark of one's communicative competence and oratory in the Akan language. Speakers' ability to use appropriate proverbs in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts depicts how competent and well versed they are in the language This is manifested especially in local arbitration (Agyekum,

2012, Yankah, 1989). For instance, in Agyekum (2016) and (2005), the oral artist Alex Konadu uses a series of proverbs to depict his competence in the Akan language. The crafty ways by which the proverbs are aesthetically interwoven to promote the song's communicative functions, also identify the artist's creativity.

Agyekum (2005) further posits that "In the Akan context, there are adages such as *ɛbɛ ne kasa mu abohemmaa,* 'the proverb is the most precious stone of speech', *ɛtwa asɛm tia,* 'it curtails matters', *ɛnka asɛm ho a, ɛnwie dɛ yɛ,* 'without it, a speech does not acquire its sweetness'" (p. 10). The indigenous Akan perceives the proverb as an indispensable and aesthetic device that is vital in speech, and as the salt of a language, without which the real taste of the "language dish" is not felt. This is similar to Achebe (1962) who indicates that in the Igbo culture, during conversations, "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (p. 6). Similarly, Olantuji (1984) records that "The Fon of Benin as well as the Yoruba of Nigeria describe proverbs as the horses of speech" (p. 170). In all these examples, proverbs drive and propel the smooth running of conversations and speeches, and these mark the indispensability of proverbs in Akan discourse.

Proverbs are used as verbal strategies to calm or contain conflict situations especially in face-to-face communication in Akan (Agyekum 2010, Yankah 1991; 1989). An Akan speaker who is well versed in the culture and knows the background of his/her interactants uses the proper thematic proverbs as we find in this paper.

In discussing the use of African proverbs and the construction of masculinity and femininity, Hussein (2005) looked at how scholars of African literary arts worked hard and placed proverbs at a very higher level of communication (p. 61). Some of the scholars mentioned are Finnegan (2012), Oluwole (1997) and Ssetuba (2002). Let us briefly look at their assertions on proverbs. Ssetuba (2002) opines that in Africa "The

proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life" p, 1). Hussein (2005) adds his voice to the indispensability of proverbs and how they are highly linked with philosophy and thought. He refers to (Oluwole, 1997) who records that some Africans posit that "proverbs are the analytic tools of thought, when thought is lost; it is proverbs that are used to search for it" (p, 100). Let us consider what Finnegan (2012) records about African proverbs by stating that "In many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs" (p. 380). Let us finally look at what Mommoh (2000) says about African proverbs from a philosophical point of view; he avers that:

> For anything to be known it has to be put into proverbs and for anything to be deknown it has to be removed from proverbs. Proverbs represent the last authority on the communal or public aspect of a people's beliefs or philosophy on any concept or issue. In short and in summary, for the traditional African, to be is to be in proverbs and not to be is not to be in proverbs (p. 362).

The proverbs on Akan family reflect the Akan philosophy, experiences and interactions in the family and their sociocultural importance. It is therefore crucial for Akan speakers to understand, appreciate and be able to use Akan proverbs appropriately in contexts.

Discussions
Semantic categorization of proverbs that relate to the family

The proverbs for analysis are semantically categorised into proverbs that express or communicate the Akan philosophy and experiences such as, situations or states about the Akan

family. The proverbs were on: (1) the essence of the mother and daughters in a family, (2) marriage as an entry into a family, (3) sufferings from a bad family, (4) booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt, (5) unity and diversity in the family and (6) steadfastness, unity and identity in family. Some of the proverbs listed in this section are taken from Appiah and Appiah (2000: 243-246) and they will be indicated accordingly.

The essence of the mother and daughters in the family

Some proverbs capture the role of mothers and female children in the Akan family systems. Some of these are found in folksongs. Examples include:

1. *Wo ni/na wu a, na w'abusua asa*.
   'The death of your mother marks the end of your family.'

This proverb was used by one renowned highlife composer, Master Bob Akwaboa. The proverb implies that in Akan, the family is seen as a big unit with segments that relate very well, but there is none that can treat you fairly like your mother. Based on the matrilineal concept of inheritance, as soon as your mother dies, you are doomed. Your father could still be alive but he is not a member of your Akan family. It becomes worse if you have a polygamous father; your step mother may rather maltreat you.

2. *Yɛde mma mmaa na ɛkyekyere abusua*
   'A family is well established using daughters.' The core pillar of the family is thus the mother, that is why in every family, they expect the women to give birth, and childbirth should crucially include daughters. They are the ones who will give birth to sustain the matrilineal family. The sons will grow up and give birth and populate their wives' families since in Akan marriages, the children belong to the wives. It was based on this

notion that in the olden days, barrenness was considered a taboo and was a target for insult. This explains why women lamented when they gave birth to only males. It was alleged that it was a strong sign to mark the end of the family in future. Again, Akans ask *woahunu akokɔnini a ne mma di n'akyiri da*? 'Have you ever seen a cockerel that is followed by chickens?' This is a rhetorical proverb used by the Akan to establish a natural phenomenon. It means that it is the hen that hatches chickens and, as such, chickens know their mothers better and therefore follow them (the hen), instead of following the cockerel. The same phenomenon accounted for the notion of *badudwan*, 'tenth born ram'. When a woman gave birth to a tenth-born child, it was obligatory on the part of her brother to offer a ram to her husband in appreciation of populating their family for them. These days because of family planning and the economic situations, this ritual is no more or scarcely practised.

Marriage as an entry into a family

There are certain proverbs that look at the interface between family and marriage.

3. *Worepɛ abusua bi mu akɔ a, na woware mu.*

'It is only when you want to join a family that you marry from it.' (Agyekum, 2012)

This confirms the fact that marriage stretches beyond the two partners, and the moment you marry from another family, you become an automatic member of that extended family. This notion is echoed by Nukunya (2003) that "When a couple is joined in marriage, their respective lineages and families automatically become affinal relatives while the children of the union are kin to all those above. It is the institution through which kinship ties are both established and extended" (p. 41). The affiliation continues even after the death of one of the couples or both;

the children remain as the agents of continuity of the bondage between the two families. [5]

In the olden days, family members and relations had such a big say in marriage that they could even break marriages. Again, the families had the power to sustain the marriage even when a couple wanted to break up. This is reflected in proverb 4.

4. *Abusua awareε sεe abusua, ɔyε wo bɔne a, wontumi nka.*
  'Family marriage destroys the family, when s/he offends you, you cannot complain.'

Abusuawareε, 'family marriage' can be cross-cousin marriage, and the two families would not like to see any form of divorce. The marriage can be on rocks, but the two families will ask the couple to carry on, with the hope that it could be mended. Meanwhile, cross-cousin marriage had the advantage of cementing the bondage between the two families.

Proverbs on the sufferings from a bad family
There are a series of proverbs that comment on the suffering one encounters in a bad and non-progressive family. The proverbs under this category were captured from Akan folksongs. A highlife composer, CST Amankwaa, composed a song with the title *M'abusua yi,* 'this family of mine' and gave a vivid account of his bad family where nothing goes on well with the members. The proverb on family from the song is:

5. *Wotɔ abusua nsansono mu a, woyε biribiara a εnyε yie.*
  'If you fall into an "itching plant" family, nothing goes on well with you.'

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[5] We noted earlier on that kinship ties usually rest on the recognised blood relations and established social and kinship structure. Families' ties can be with other relations not necessarily by blood relations or social and kinship structure of a society (ibid section 1.1).

The family is conceptualised as a farm full of itching plants with some bristles that touch a person's skin and bring irritation that causes people to scratch themselves (negative connotations). The Akan expression, *abusua nsansono,* 'an itching family' indicates some family conflicts. It depicts that when you are from such a family, there are always standing blocks and impediments that will obstruct you to move and concentrate on fruitful ventures. The time available is spent on the "metaphorical scratching of your body" that will block you to move forward into action in the farm. The late S. K. Oppong also had a song with the proverbial title *Abusua Bɔne.*[6]

6. *Abusua bɔne mu yɛ tena,*	'It is difficult living in a bad family.'
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie,	'Whether this life will be better.'
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛnyɛ yie a	'Whether life will not be better.'
Ɔbra yi sɛ ɛbɛyɛ yie a	Whether this life will be better.'
Ene wo ara.	'It will depend on you the individual.'

There is Nnwonkorɔ song that goes like this:

7. *Ɛkɔm de me o, maame*	'I am hungry my mother.'
Ɛkɔm de me o, Awo	'I am hungry my mother.'
Abusua bɔne ama ɛkɔm de me,	'A bad family has caused my hunger.'

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[6] The title *Abusua Bɔne* is a truncated form of the proverb *Abusua b ne mu yE tena,* 'it is difficult living in a bad family. J. A. Adofo has a song with the same title *Abusua b ne mu yE tena na* where he recounts what happens in an Asona clan where things are not going on very well, there are constant deaths.

Na ɛkɔm de me	'And I am hungry.'
Abusua bɔne ama ɛkɔm de me	'A bad family has caused my hunger.'
Na ebi redidi na ebi rebua da.	'Some are eating while others are suffering.'

Items 6 and 7 lament about having a bad family. In 6, you have to struggle in life since there is nobody to help you, and all will depend on you the individual. In 7, the oral artist remarks that there is injustice and unfairness in a bad family; while some enjoy life and are well fed, others suffer and starve.

Proverbs on booty, enjoyment and abhorrence of debt

There are certain proverbs that indicate that Akan family members would wish that they could benefit from the rich relative instead of assisting him/her. The proverbs talk about the family members' unwillingness to pay debts. Others want to share the booty and properties in the family, and leave some people out, and the family head wants to be "filled up" and always enjoy life. The following proverbs allude to such sentiments.

8a. *Abusua pɛ adeɛ kyiri ka.*
   'The family wants booty but hates debt.'

One of the prevalent situations in Akan (and generally, Ghanaian families) is that when you are rich and prosperous, members will flock around you. However, when you are indebted, they will all run away from you because they loathe indebtedness. A similar proverb is;

8b. *Abusua pɛ dɛ kyiri ka.*
   'The family likes enjoyment but loathes indebtedness.'

8c. *Abusua kyiri ka.*
   'The matriclan abhors debts.'

   When a matriclan is engulfed in debts, members display a high sense of apathy but when there is booty all of them want to get their shares. Other similar proverbs are:

9. *Ɛka pae abusua mu.*
   'Debt splits the family.'

10. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, na abusua ne wo ka.*
    'If you are rich, the family will love you'

11. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, abusua anhu wo a, wɔmmɔ pɔw*
    'If you are rich, the family does not take any firm decision until you have been consulted.'

12. *(Sɛ) wowɔ sika a, abusua anhu wo a, wɔnkasa.*
    'If you are rich, the family does not speak until you have been consulted.'

13. *(Sɛ) wonni sika a, abusua kɔ agyina a, yɛnhwehwɛ wo.*
    'If you do not have money, the family ignores you when they go into counsel.'

   Proverbs 10-13 are syntactically marked by conditional clauses with the split conjunction *(Sɛ)…a.* The first part is optional while the second part *…a,* is obligatory. The conditional clauses indicate that X will occur if there is the presence of Y (Agyekum, 2016).
   Agyekum (2017) records a song *Sika Frɛ Bogya* by Slim Young composed in 2014, where the artiste compared richness with poverty. He further stated that the power attached to money makes the rich powerful enough to control the entire family, while the poor in the family is not consulted at all as found in the above proverbs (p. 43).

The proverbs above are captured in one of the songs by J. A. Adofo, a Ghanaian highlife artiste. Both artistes link richness to family's preference, and the power of money. They confirm the notion that the family will want to enjoy the riches and booty from you as a wealthy member of the family, but will run away when you are indebted— they will actually despise you. The general principle is that the family will congregate around you when you have money but when you are indebted, they will disparage and disown you. Other proverbs employ irony as can be observed in proverb 14, which indicates that the love people have for a person assuages when s/he dies.

14. *Abusua dɔ funu.*
   'A matriclan loves/cherishes the corpse.'
   (Adu Gyamfi 1999 p.12)

Among the Akans, the family will do all they can to organise a befitting funeral for their dead relatives even if it demands borrowing from outside. When a person dies, that is the period all members of the family from far and near visit home. In that case, the death of a family member is a home calling. The question normally asked is why people fail to cater for the living, especially the poor, the sick and the needy, but readily treat corpses nicely and organise lavish funerals. The answer is found in the Akans' belief in life after death and the ancestral world as a carbon copy of the living world. A befitting burial and funeral will smoothly usher the deceased into the ancestral world. Other proverbs refer to greed among family members.

15. *Abusua monkyɛ nni na menkɔwe aboɔ.*
   'The family should share the booty and I should chew stone.'

In all families, there are cheats and greedy people. The family likes to share the booty without thinking about the needy. They prefer to take all and leave the vulnerable nothing. The

vulnerable person can thus quote proverb 15 above to indicate that they can take all and let him metaphorically chew stones (starve). On the contrary, whilst the needy are starving, the family head is always enjoying as in proverb 16 below.

16. *Abusuapanin mpere kɔm.*
 'The family head does not groan from hunger.'

The family head may get enough to satisfy himself. Among the Akans, the *abusuapanin*, 'family head' is the custodian of the family property including the land, gold and other aspects of wealth. He will therefore have enough to eat and hence will never cry of hunger. Traditionally, he could command any family member to send food items to his house but times have changed. Other proverbs that focus on the greediness of families and the fact that they want to enjoy and run away from debts, include:

17. *Abusua kyɛ di wie a, na ato agorɔ.*
 'If the matriclan finishes sharing all the booty they can play with you.'

Proverb 17 implies that when the family has squandered the estate and the property, they become friendly again. During the sharing, they cleverly strategise to eliminate other members who are remote from the owner of the property. It is when there is nothing left that they try to re-establish the unity in the family. A parallel proverb is:

18. *Abusua kyɛ ka, na wɔnkyɛ adedie.*
 'The matriclan shares a funeral debt but they do not share an inheritance.'

Appiah and Appiah (2000) explain that all the members of the family share the funeral debt to defray all the costs and expenditures; but it is the individual members who inherit (p. 244). The inheritance is by family gates so if you are not a core

member of the gate you will never inherit. During the time for inheritance, they would use historical narratives to kick out all those who are not members of the inner circles of the family. However, in contemporary times the inheritor of the property takes greater chunk of the funeral debt.

Unity and diversity in the family

The Akan family is always an extended family with a lot of members, yet people truly consider siblings as the closest. In view of that, if you are an outsider, you may think that there is a strong and inextricable bond between the family members, but the reality is that there are in-groups. This is reflected in the following proverb.

19. *Deɛ ɔwoo mmaa mmienu na ɔde abusua paeɛ baeɛ.*
    'She who gave birth to two daughters is the one who
     brought the split in family.'

It is assumed that if the two daughters give birth, their children would be closer as siblings more than as cousins. Other proverbs on unity and diversity are:

20. *Abusua yɛ dɔm, na wo na ba ne wo nua.*
    'A family is a group, but your mother's child is your sibling. (see Ofei-Ayisi 1966, 73, Appiah and Appiah 2000, Proverb 1262).

In times of hardships, you have to fall on your siblings but not on cousins or the entire remote family members. This confirms the Akan notion of *mogya mu yɛ duru,* (lit.) blood is thicker (than water). Ofei-Ayisi (1966) commented on this using proverb 21 below.

21. *Abusua de emu nnipa dɔɔso nanso sɛ ahokyere to wo a, wo
     na ba ankasa na ɔbɛboa wo.*
    'As for a family it is made up of a lot of people, but in times of hardships, it is your mother's child that will help you.'

This implies that despite the close-knit system of family found in Akan, we still rely on siblings for assistance. The real "in-groups" in the family is captured by the following:

22. *Abusua te sɛ kwaeɛ, wogyina akyire a, ɛbɔ mu koro.*
    Wopini ho a, na wohunu sɛ dua koro biara wɔ ne siberɛ.
   'The matriclan is like a forest, if you are standing afar, it forms a canopy and a single unit, but if you draw closer you will see that each tree has its position (Appiah and Appiah, 2000, Proverb 1259).

23. *Abusua te sɛ nhwiren ɛgugu akuoakuo.*
    'The family is like flowers; it blossoms in clusters (see Brempong 1991, 95).

 A similar proverb is:

24. *Abusua hwedeɛ gu nkuruwa na me nko ara me deɛ na*
    ogya da mu.
   'The grass of the matriclan grows in groups, mine alone is burning. (Appiah and Appiah Proverb 1252).

        The above parallel proverbs highlight the Akan family system and how the inner members conceptualise it differently from outsiders. One proverb that emphasises the recognition of family members and the close relationship in the family is the concept of *ayiaseka,* 'funeral debt'. On the death of a family member, all family members pay part of the debt from the funeral to show their responsibilities as real family members. People outside the family rather donate cash (*bɔ nsawa*) or other materials to support the family.

25. *(Sɛ) abusua dɔ wo a, na wɔkyɛ ka a, wɔma wo tua bi.*
        'If the matriclan loves you and they have a debt, they let you pay part of it.'

The above proverb therefore indicates that the family will contact you to pay *ayiaseka,* when they think that you are a core responsible member of the family. In view of these, non-native members of the family, including tenants, migrants and affinal relatives prefer to pay *ayiaseka* rather than to donate to depict that they are strong affiliates.

Steadfastness, unity and identity in family

There are certain proverbs that portray that despite the individualism and set groups in the family, the family is still considered as a unified and fortified group. This is indicated by the following proverbs:

26. *Abusua dua wɔntwa.*
    'The family tree is not cut'.

The implication is that one cannot disparage his/her origin. No matter how bad and mischievous your family is, it will forever remain your family. This is supported by similar parallel proverbs as follows:

27. *(Sɛ) w'abusua nyɛ a, wo deɛ ara ne no.*
    'If your family is not good that is all that you have.'

28. *(Sɛ) w'abusua nyɛ a, wonto ntwene.*
    'If your family is not good, you do not throw it away.'

29. *Abusua nyɛ asafo na yɛabɔ agyae.*
    'A family is not an *asafo*, 'musical group' that you join and leave at any time.'[7]

These proverbs imply that the moment you are born into a family, you remain in it till death and even after death when you become an ancestor. You cannot despise the family but

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[7] Asafo is a war musical group that you can join and decide to opt out anytime because of lack of interest, deceit, or imposition.

rather, you would have to work hard to improve on the status of the family instead of running away because the family is bad. Appiah and Appiah (2000) state categorically that "Your family is your family, good or bad" (p. 246).

30. *Abusua twene yɛde afafa na ayere, nanso yɛde dadeɛ*
     nkonta bɔ a, ɛnsuane.
   'The matriclan drum is covered with spider's web; and yet
    when it is beaten with iron sticks, it does not break.'
   (See Appiah and Appiah 2000, Proverb 1261).

        Proverb 30 is ironical in nature. Naturally, Akan drums are covered with very strong animal hides and no matter how hard we play them with wooden fork sticks they will not get torn. Contrarily, in proverb 30, the family drums are covered with spiders' webs that are very thin and soft and ironically beaten with iron sticks. However, no matter how hard they are beaten, they are not torn off. This metaphor depicts how strong family ties and networks can be even when they seem to be weak from the outsiders' viewpoint.

        The proverbs above emphasise the strong knit between family members. There could be quarrels, animosity and litigation among members yet there should be a mode of restitution, and the family ties will never break for members to split. There is a similar proverb that comments on the elasticity of the family and how it is inextricably interwoven despite the difficult situations on the ground (Appiah and Appiah 2000 Proverb 1263).

31. *Abusua ayɛ nkɔnsɔnnkɔnsɔn: nkwa mu a, ɛtoa mu; owuo*
     mu a, ɛtoa mu.
   "The matriclan is like a chain: in life they are joined, in
    death they are joined.'

        The Akan matrilineal extended family is comparable to a chain where the elements are all connected to each other. It is very complex, and the people are connected irrespective of their

geographical location and whether dead or alive; this is even extended to those unborn.

32. *Abusua nkyɛre afa kɔ.*
    'It takes no time for the family to rally to one side.'
     (See Adu Gyamfi 1999:12).

One can see family members having some in-fighting but when a third party wants to harm them, they will regroup and unite. The family will usually stand united against an outsider. This notion is captured by a popular Akan proverb that states:

33. *(Sɛ) tia ne tia nka a, ɛnkyerɛ sɛ baabifo mmɛfa nkɔdi.*
    'No matter how antagonising people from the two outskirts of a town are, it does not warrant an outsider to come for their booty.' [8]

34. *(Sɛ) wo busuani ne abebeɛ a, anka worenka sɛ ɔmfa ne to ntena akonnwa so.*
    'If your relative were to be a small water snail, you would not ask it to sit on a stool.' (Appiah and Appiah, proverb 1267).

The *abebeɛ*, 'small water snail' has not got buttocks but rather a long tail, thus it cannot sit down, but if you want to punish or ridicule it, you will force it to sit on a seat. No kinsman will do that to punish a fellow family member. This suggests the sympathy family members have for each other, but an outsider will punish the *abebeɛ* irrespective of the hardships it will go through; in other words, outsiders may not show sympathy for others.

35. *(Sɛ) wo busuani (biribi) ne abobɔnnua a, anka wobɛtɔ akuma ama no, ɛfiri sɛ nea ɔreyɛ no yɛ owuo adwuma.*
    (See Agyekum, 2005, p.7 proverb 16).[9]

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[8] In this proverb, the two outskirts of the town represent two opposing members of the extended family who despite their differences, may unite to defend their family and their family properties. 9 The word *biribi*, 'something' is extended to mean somebody and further conceptualised as a family member as found in the two parallel proverbs (35 and 36).

'If you were a relative of *abobɔnnua* 'the woodpecker', you
would surely buy it an axe for it, because its task is risky
and leads to death.'

36. *Wo biribi (busuani) ne ɔdamfoɔ a, anka worensere no
koraa.*
'If you were the madman's relative you would not mock at
him'.

Agyekum (2005) avers that the above proverbs are
allusions to those who molest the needy and do not sympathise
with them (p. 13). The poor person's sufferings are reasons for
jubilation to unsympathetic people. There is a similar proverb
that states:

37. *Obiara mpɛ ba kwasea awoɔ nanso ɔpɛ n'agodie,*
'Nobody likes to give birth to a moron but will enjoy
playing with him/her.'

The other interpretations of the proverbs are that when you
are related to somebody as a family, you will not deliberately
embarrass him/her. The children of a mad person still regard
him/her as their parent.

Conclusion
The paper has discussed the Akan concept of the family
through proverbs. We analysed how proverbs display the
linguistic ideology of the Akans and their worldview about the
family. The proverbs were categorised into semantic domains
that depict the nature and the sociocultural concepts of the Akan
family. The proverbs expressed: *the essence of the mother and
daughters in a family, family and marriage, family and internal
marriage, the booty, enjoyment and loathing of indebtedness,
unity and diversity of the family, and steadfastness, unity and
identity in the family.*

We also examined the Akan extended family system. We have seen that the Akans have the matrilineal system hence most of the proverbs are based on the clan system, and family members are the children of a mother and her sisters and brothers. They exclude all members from one's father's family. The core pillar is thus the mother; that is why in every family they expect the woman to give birth, and childbirth should include having daughters for the sustainability of the family.

The current paper has emphasised the Akan clan system and how it is tied to the extended family system. It further touched on family and marriage and what wives normally expect from marriage and why they will usually focus on having a girl child instead of only boys. We further emphasised that another area where the family system and relationship become very strong and family members become cordial and helpful is during death, bereavement and funerals.

The current study reveals the complexities of the Akan matrilineal family system via their proverbs. With the introduction of the nuclear family system due to urbanisation, economic hardships, globalisation, westernisation, contemporary jobs, foreign religion and western education, the extended family system is breaking down. The dynamism in culture affects language usage including the use of proverbs. The implication is that some of the proverbs discussed in this paper are losing their importance, and the current generation may not use them.

It is possible that based on cultural and linguistic dynamism, some new proverbs may emerge to relate to the nuclear family, however, the current research did not encounter such new proverbs. Indeed, some members of the current generation may not support some of the proverbs discussed in this paper since the proverbs do not reflect the current realities of life. Future research could examine the composition of the Ghanaian family and its associated lexicon, idioms and proverbs in contemporary times.

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