

Insults and Social Cohesion--A Case Study of Student Relationships at the University of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

Although some language forms have been categorised as 'insult', 'abuse' or 'invective', we accept them only as locutionary classifications, based on their propositional content. In terms of their intents and effects, it would be realised that these initial classifications may not be generally accurate after all. This is because far from causing mental and emotional pain, some of these insults would perform entirely different functions, and rather help in negotiating better human coexistence.

The present is a study of a tradition of insults which I observed and participated in during my student days at the University of Coast – a sociolinguistic tradition within which thrived the social as well as the academic life of the students. It discusses the It establishes that contrary to causing social breakdown, insults were used among students to regulate social behaviour and foster social cohesion, identity and solidarity. The study maintains also that the tradition was guided by an interpretive and social framework of mores and values with which insults were given and taken.

Generally speaking, insults or invectives are seen as linguistic, paralinguistic or symbolic communication forms which are meant to cause mental pain, embarrassment or disgrace, (Agyekum, 2004). They are non-politeness or anti-politeness forms, and they usually cause the breakdown of social cohesion. Insults can, thus, be considered a violation of the principles of politeness, (Leech, 1983). Insulting is considered one of the most serious among face-threatening acts, and according to Brown and Levinson (1978), Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) infringe on the individual or the addresser's need to maintain self esteem, and be respected.. A consideration of the pragmatics of invectives in specific communicative episodes reveals, however, that except, perhaps, for conforming to a linguistic structure or imagery, some of these verbal forms may by due recognition of their effect in context not be seen as insults. The effect of an insult or invective, and even its very identification, is a product of the various elements which are factored into the ethnography of that particular speech event, principal of which are the participant-relationship, the end, and the norms of

interpretation and interaction. (See Hymes: 1964, 1972). Structures termed 'insults' or 'invectives' have a variety of intentions and effects, from non-politeness or vulgarity to intimacy and even solidarity. For instance, in a study of joking relationships between in-laws, Radcliff-Brown (1940) observes that such a relationship, which would certainly involve the use of abuse, involves 'both attachment and separation, both social conjunction and disjunction'. But most important to us is his endorsement of the fact that the examination of the tradition of any such exchanges is indispensable in its classification and interpretation:

The scientific explanation of the institution...can only be reached by an extensive study which enables us to see it as a particular example of a widespread phenomenon of a definite class. This means that the whole social structure has to be thoroughly examined in order that the particular form and incidence of joking relationships can be understood as part of a consistent system.

The present is a discussion of the use of insults as observed among the students of the University of Cape Coast where I studied on two different occasions, 1985 – 89 and 1995 -96. It is concerned primarily about the organisation of insults, and seeks to answer the following questions among others:

- ✓ *What were the traditions that regulated the use and response to insults?*
- ✓ *What were the sources of the insults or speech - forms used as insults.*
- ✓ *What role did insults play in fostering or hampering social relationship?*
- ✓ *Of what importance were insults in the regulation of social behaviour?*

The paper is an analytical description or recollection of a tradition of insults which I observed and actively participated in during my student days. In my undergraduate years, I just participated in the tradition with a very simple understanding of the mores or traditions that governed it. In my post-graduate days later at the University of Cape Coast, my studies in Oral Literature and Folklore at the University of Ghana, Legon had opened my mind to the organised nature of the culture. I still participated but with a more investigative and analytical mind which observed the structure and organisation of these insults and how they affected social life on campus. Even still, I do participate in the insults

with the very intimate friends with whom I shared interpersonal insults during our days on campus. No interviews were conducted for this study. The analysis is based principally on the active intuition and memory of the writer of the tradition as he observed and participated in.

The paper also establishes the sociolinguistic tradition within which life, especially the academic, thrived in the university. It will be understood that the social relationships established in this tradition had its effects on the academic-oriented organisations such as group discussions and even lectures; and the observation was that the existence of such relationships of cohesion and regulations fostered the low formality, cohesion and solidarity within which students discussed their academic as well as personal worries, shared academic material such as books, notes and photocopied material, and held group discussions and material accepted mutual . Because of this connection between the social organisation as typified in the use of insults and academic relationships, the breakdown of the cohesion which fostered, especially the interpersonal insults, had its corresponding effect on academic relationships. Thus, the tradition of insults cannot be seen only as a sociolinguistic tradition. It is latently also academic.

The study emphasises the effect of context on the interpretation of a linguist text.

Firth's remark to this effect is noteworthy:

Logicians are apt to think of words and propositions as having 'meaning' somehow in themselves, apart from participants in contexts of situation... I suggest that words should not be entirely dissociated from the social context in which they function... (1957:226)

Earlier, Malinowski (1927) had remarked that to fail to evoke the context when analysing a linguistic text is to produce just a 'a mutilated bit of reality'. The place of context in the interpretation of speech has been the focus of pragmatics and discourse analysis over the last few decades.

The purpose of this paper is to establish that insults as used among us as students of UCC had cohesive and regulatory functions, contrary to what insults are generally held to do – to threaten others' face. It seeks in furtherance of this to corroborate the fact that the real identity or function of a linguistic item cannot be seen in its taxonomy or classification, but in the totality of the factors which culminate or manifest in the encoding and decoding of the message as well as the effect it has by its use.

It is important to observe at this stage that the use of invectives for social cohesion does not exist only at the university. In pre-adolescent and post-adolescent as well as in adulthood among people of equality and intimacy, as among friends or colleagues such as politicians and political office holders, traditional chiefs, directors of firms and government agencies, headmasters, university senior members, drivers, traders soldiers etc, different manifestations of abuse - invectives, cheeks and retorts - are used as acceptable means of social interaction. The study of the use of invectives at UCC is just a case study of the organization of abuse in one community. Though the invectives and their organisation may be different, it is envisaged that the results would be applicable to different communities where equality, fellow feeling and frivolity are characteristic.

Institutionalised as well as uninstitutionalised abuse is a remarkable part of the various ethnic groupings in the country and has received some investigative attention. Among the uninstitutionalised, Agovi (1987, 1995) has established that it comprises both the verbal and the non-verbal. He observed in his study that female urban dwellers use hairstyles and textile designs whose meanings have verbal basis to provoke confrontations. The institutionalised can be grouped into the *occasional* and the *non-occasional*. The occasional ones are those which are held as part of annual festival celebrates. Agovi (1987, 1995) has, again, researched into the use of festival insults in Adoabu Kingdom as well as the Nsee insult ceremony during the Elmina Bakatue festival drawing attention to their regulative as well as restorative functions. Similarly, Warren and Brempong (1979, 88) observe that the

insult component of the 'Apo festival of the people of Techiman, that it offers the license through insult to castigate the misdeeds done by the citizenry as well as the chiefs in the year under review. For the non-occasional, Awoonor (1975) has studied the Halo of the Ewes of Ghana. Again, the 'Ayensin' – permitted inter-communal insult among the Akans which operates between people of particular communities - has been given some attention. (Sekyi-Baidoo, 1998).

Tradition and Context

The tradition of invectives among students at UCC was not very different from those that exist between peers in other social contexts. It could therefore be seen as carry-over or a continuation and enhancement of the tradition of insults as found in the secondary schools and other second-cycle institutions. The difference lay, however, in certain perspectives that underpinned university life as a whole, and which therefore impinged on the tradition of insults. Some of these were the remarkable decrease in restriction of student life in general, the notion of equality or the decline of the concept or practice of seniority, a greater level of maturity - understanding and endurance - as exhibited by students, and a greater institutional and non-institutional sanctions against such explosive social encounters as quarrelling and fighting. These factors (and others) constitute the bedrock on which the culture of invectives among the students was founded and maintained.

Agovi (1985) notes that these traditions of institutionalised and non-institutionalised abuse are a creative tool for defining the moral priorities and sense of direction of culture. Similarly, Yankah (2002) has acknowledged the restorative and regulatory functions of the tradition of institutionalised insult among the Bron people of Takyiman. To him, 'The publicisation of social flaws through abuse is expected to lead to the reformation of wayward behaviour for the general good.' This idea is corroborated by Brempong and Warren (1979, 88) and Awoonor (1975) in their study of the Apo and Halo insults respectively. A detailed

analysis of these traditions referred to above reveals that whereas the non-institutionalised or the strictly interpersonal ones are held to be inimical to social cohesion, the institutionalised ones are permitted but in well defined cultural framework which ensures it is only a way of protesting against aberrant behaviour for the general benefit of society. These traditions differ each from that of the students of UCC where abuse, as would be seen, were generally uninstitutionalised and yet were permitted and protected within the student culture. Over and above this is the fact that unlike in the traditions discussed, insults among the students performed more varied functions in social relationships. The tradition itself can be grouped into two on the basis of the addresser/addressee relationships and the other factors of ethnography. These are the *interpersonal* and the *communal*.

The Interpersonal

This relationship existed between two or more people who generally consider themselves friends even before the instance of abuse. The relationship, thus, thrived on an established remarkable level of familiarity or even intimacy. The abuse, thus, came as a manifestation of one of the various things that bound them together. It was an integral aspect of their lives and it sometimes even seemed absurd when it did not manifest in their interaction. Members insulted and were insulted because they had consented to being in a relationship that permitted and encouraged this trading of insults. The dimensions of insult started, grew, dwindled or ceased on the dictates of the nature of the cohesion among members of the friendship. The direction and intensity of the friendship, thus, provided the scope within which the interpersonal insults thrive. It is affected by such attitudes as anger, pain, frustration, shyness and deference of the various members of the group at any particular time. The nature of invectives as well as the responses was all known tacitly as part of the code of relationship between addresser and addressee each of whom was somehow negatively sanctioned upon the contravention of the code. Individuals knew, for

instance, that one did not usually take insults when frustrated or in the presence of some particular people, and this must be respected if the tradition of insults was to thrive. Similarly, Labov (1972) observes in the 'playing the dozens' or 'sounding' ritual insults of the Black Americans of Harlem that the tradition of insults is basically an art recognized and evaluated for its artistry, which involves the use of couplets, conventional formulae, and syntactic forms. He indicates, however, that this art can degenerate into pain and fighting when these conventions of the game are violated.

The Communal

Here, people insulted not because they were in any interpersonal relationship but because they belonged to a social group or organization - year group, course, hall etc. It was this common identity that brought them together and constituted the basis for the occurrence of insult. Because students were not in any personal relationship invectives were not organized at the dyadic level. Abuse, here, had a communal significance, and it operated on the philosophy that the addressee (the abused) was engaged in an act which went contrary to the tenets of the society as a whole. His behaviour challenged the values of the society, and the addresser(s) reacted by virtue of their belonging to this organization in order to protect the interest the group as a whole or his own interest as a member of the group. The addressee was, for that matter, insulted in order to draw his attention to his infelicitous behaviour, show disapproval of his behaviour, and somehow to seek a verbal revenge, or to invoke the power of the communal to force him to stop subverting societal norms and values. Thus, commonly, insults have a protective (of society) and restorative (of norms) function or perception. Such activities that called for communal abuse included noise-making, use of foul language, lateness at public gathering, unapproved dressing, betrayal of general course as in strike, burning of food on stove, destruction and general misdemeanour.

These two main insult -relationships were complemented by two others, each of which can be seen as an extension of either the interpersonal or the communal. These extensions are evident both in the perception and reaction of the addresser and the addressee as well as in the ethnography of the event. It must be noted that, because of the conflicting nature of the relationship, such extensions constituted one of the main causes of conflicts in student abuse and life as a whole. For instance, ponding sessions usually apart from those done to commemorate festive occasions such as matriculation were social, but not necessarily communal. This means that the process of planning, carrying the victims, abusing, sentencing and execution of punishment was usually done by people who together with the victim shared interpersonal relationship. For one to join in this when one did not belong to the relationship was considered an affront, for one had read the communal too deeply into a context which was interpersonal.

Similarly, conflicts arose if people in interpersonal relationships carry specific interpersonal insults into communal contexts. This was considered a violation of trust or terms of friendship and interaction. This, as indicated above, was largely because the abuse might bring humiliation when it got public. Such conflicts arose also because it was not always easy to demarcate the interpersonal and the communal. This was evident especially in contexts which comprised both the non-familiar and the intimate. The reaction to invectives in such a motley congregation may be as varied as the different levels of familiarity. Thus, whereas friends would have their insults accepted, non-friends would have their insults met with rebuff. Again, one would sometimes accept insults from non-friends in a communal context but feel peeved about those from his friends which one thinks amounts to a betrayal.

Sometimes abusers mistakenly roped people into the interpersonal, who did not actually want to be. This was usually based on a wrong premise which was itself based on factors which generally promoted intimacy, such as same course same hall, room etc

common experiences, common ethnicity, age group. People might share all these factors but not have the will to enter such friendship. They therefore see an insult based on these as a wrong use of the interpersonal.

Similar to this is the overgeneralization of the concentric of friendship, which could meet with the following rebuff: 'My friend's friends may not necessarily be my friends too'. In this situation, an attempt by the addresser to extend the interpersonal relationship with a friend to this friend's friend has been rebuffed. This was normally because the addressee perceived a remarkable difference or incompatibility between himself and his friend's friend.

It is difficult to use geographical context or the nature of invectives to differentiate between the interpersonal and the communal. The difference (where easily demarcated) is evident in the general consideration of the context of performance and situation which includes the past experience or the established relationship between the abuser and the abused, rather than in the verbal structure of the invectives.

Inter - Communal Insults

One manifestation of communal insults, which deserves separate mention, is when students organised themselves into groups to insult or trade insults. I refer to this as *inter-communal* insults. Each of the abusing and the abused groups was organised on the basis of some form of identity - usually as members of a floor, block or hall. Insults, here, were sometimes based on an immediate or remote idea of superiority. For instance, members of Casely-Hayford Hall felt superior to those of Oguaa because Oguaa had double -decker beds which were usually used then in second cycle boarding schools. Casely-Hayford Hall had no bunk-beds. Again, here, groups could be verbally assaulted for some improvident behaviour of the group in general or some of its members. For example, the Atlantic Hall-Week programme of 1988 announcing: **Atlantic Memorial Lectures** received a lot of insult from the Oguaa and Casely-Hayford Halls because they copied the Casely-Hayford

programme title **Casely-Hayford Memorial Lectures** rather blindly - forgetting that whereas, 'Mr. Casely-Hayford', the one after whom the hall was named was dead and therefore qualified for a *memorial*, the Atlantic Ocean was not dead or could not die and therefore the use of 'memorial' was 'senseless'.

Inter-communal insults could be spontaneous or planned. Abuse could be organised spontaneously, for instance, if members of a floor made noise or poured water on those beneath them. Again, in a procession of halls, any other hall passed or encountered would be subjected to abuse. Organised abuse usually occurred between halls. In 1985, for instance, Casely-Hayford Hall organised a brass band dancing procession to Oguaa to vituperate and pounce on them because they (Oguaa halls) used double-decker beds as has been reported above. Trading of insults here arose when members of the abused hall decided to avenge the abuse.

In its liveliest form, organised abuse was supported by music and dancing, and could also involve pouncing, and they were considered effective channels for releasing tension. Again, the hall is generally the butt of the insults. However, the very vocal or the extroverted, the popular or famous, and those noted for some truancy could also be targeted in such insults. With these, inter-communal abuse generally lasted longer than the interpersonal or other communal forms.

Communal abuse manifested also in two other ways which would, however, not be discussed in this essay because they have little bearing on social relationship. Both manifestations were organised. The first occurred as part of student demonstrations against administrative or government decisions and activities which they found outrageous or the detrimental to their peace and prosperity. The demonstrations were called 'aluta'. The invectives were spoken and sometimes sung. The second type is identified with the 'Profane Choir'. The profane choir tradition the University of Cape Coast was first associated with the Casely-Hayford Hall in the 1970s, since the 1980's however, the Casely-Hayford Hall Choir

had folded up and the music taken over by the Atlantic Hall. In addition to singing characteristic profane and vulgar language and imagery, the choir also sang invectives against outrageous behaviour - by government, administration, other Halls and individuals. One identifiable aspect of its invectives was that in keeping with the general orientation of the group, they were characteristically very vulgar as compared to the invectives in interpersonal insults and even those used in other communal invectives.

The Nature of Invectives

The preceding part of the study has concentrated on the organization or the tradition of invectives. In this part, we seek to examine the invectives themselves by looking at such considerations as the language and the imagery or source. Invectives manifested usually in the three most popular languages spoken on the campus: Akan, English and Pidgin English. Of these however, a great number were in Akan (particularly, the Twi dialect) followed by Pidgin. The choice of these linguistic codes may be ascribed to the fact that they are used more frequently in instances of familiarity and intimacy. In addition, Akan was usually used instead of the other Ghanaian languages as a result of its population and influence among the population of the country as a whole. The choice of these linguistic codes could be ascribed to the fact that they were used more frequently in instances of familiarity and intimacy. The choice of Akan was, again, in keeping with the fact that it is the most widely-spoken language in the country. According to Yankah (1990) it is spoken by over 52% as first language, and by an additional 20% as second language.

Associated with the language choice is what I call the *traditionalization of invectives*. By this practice, insults are sometimes formed alongside the structure of existing expressions. Insults coming out of this practice are traditionalised because they take after existing structures. At the same time, they are different because their details are so worked out as to reflect the focus of the invective or tease. Traditionalisation also affects the bite of insults and makes them more frivolous. They induce humour because people can associate

the new expression to the existing one. There is however incongruity because they know the situation of the original expression and the current invectives are incompatible, and this incongruity induces humour and the interpretation of frivolity. For instance, when the semester programme was introduced in 1987 and the Physical Education course a year earlier, the invectives 'Semester Babies' and 'B Jump' were introduced. This was patterned after the names of colt football teams - 'Hearts Babies', 'Kotoko Babies' - which were regarded as curtain-raiser, non-standard or immature. Also, the tease 'B. Jump' was formed out of the existing names of degree courses, *B. Ed* (Bachelor of Education) *B. Sec* (Bachelor of Secretaryship) and *B. Comm.* (Bachelor of Commerce) and also the already-existing use of *Jumpology* as a tease for Physical Education as an academic discipline.

One aspect worth considering in the nature of invectives is neutrality. Used over some time in a particular linguistic culture, insults sometimes seemed to be divested of their incisiveness. For instance, the Akan invectives 'Mmoade' (beastly behaviour) 'Nkwaseade' (Foolishness/Stupidity) and 'Kwasea' (Fool) were used with little of the blow and pain usually associated with them in their use outside the university tradition and other such traditions of abuse. The face-threatening potency of invectives thus come to be associated with their form, rather than the original meaning it has in the language as illustrated above. Since translation invests a sense with a new form, it also has the tendency of reclothing an insult and renewing its sting. Thus, 'Kwasea' when translated into English as 'stupid person' or 'numskull' was considered more incisive, and was seen as a real attempt to cause mental emotional pain, or to really threaten the face of the addresser. Unlike 'numskull' and 'stupid person', however, 'fool' as a translated form of 'kwasea' seems also to have been neutralised as a result of constant use in the invective culture of the university. Associated with this difference is also the fact that the word is very simple and everyday, and does not have the syntactic complexity of 'stupid person' and the pedantic quality of 'numskull' which could be the source of their seriousness as invectives. Translated forms of Akan insults, thus, were

not usually used in interpersonal abuse or other insults of social cohesion.

At this juncture, we would attempt a classification of the invectives.

a) *Common Everyday Insults*

Common everyday invectives which evaluate the wisdom or prudence of behaviour are used among students at the University of Cape Coast. Paramount of these were 'Kwasea' (fool), 'Aboa' (beast), 'Nkwaseade' (foolishness) 'Mmoade' (bestly behaviour) in Akan; 'fool' (English) ; and code-mixed forms such as 'Kwasea-boy'.

Phonological and syntactic processes were used in order to neutralise their stinging effect, and to enhance the capacity of the insults is fostering social cohesion. Phonologically, the first syllable of 'Kwasea' was sometimes elipted leaving just the '-sea'. Again, any of the phonemes left could be invariably prolonged. Similarly, in 'Aboa' the first vowel /o/ was rendered more open and higher and dilated in order to differentiate it from the normal incisive invective. Syntactically, 'Kwasea' was used as a modifier as in 'Kwasea Boy', where 'boy' is the head-noun. In normal use in Akan, 'kwasea' is a noun, except in such uses as 'Kwasea Barima' (Fool of a man) which seems to be the syntactic basis for the adjectival use of 'kwasea-boy' in student abuse. However, the addition of 'boy' (an English word) to the Akan adjective produces a situation of code mixing which contributed to neutralising the effect of the abuse term. Also, 'fool' as an invective was generally rendered in Pidgin where it becomes a copulative noun – expressing the copulative as well as the complement function as in *You fool* (You are a fool). It could also be modified by Ghanaian Pidgin adverbs such as 'well-well' (very much) or by Ghanaian Language words borrowed into the vocabulary of Ghanaian Pidgin such as 'waa' (Ga), 'paa'/'papa' (Akan). When rendered in Standard English, it was usually seen as a calculated attempt to inflict verbal punishment.

'Stupid' occurred only in reported insults as in *'E be stupid paa'* (He is very stupid) with the third person, and not with the first, which would be rather more serious and face-

threatening. Sometimes, it was even used as an adverbial of intensity to show extremity, which could be commendatory rather than condemnatory as in:

'E blow de paper stupid.
(He scored the marks in an amazing way/He got a very high grade.)

Another way in which everyday insults were neutralised was the use of absurd or meaningless intensification or exaggeration. The absurdity associated with the intensification depicts the frivolity or playfulness with which the insults were uttered. For instance, in the Akan insult

W'agyimi aa, wontumi nne. (You are so stupid you cannot defecate)

the absurdity or senselessness is in the fact that there is no identifiable connection between stupidity and the ability to defecation, which is considered a natural biological instinct, and this underlies its frivolity, painlessness as well as the solidarity potency.

Status Invectives

Status and hall invectives as discussed below could be seen also as teases. Evidently, it was not always practicable to differentiate between the invective and the tease because they are both verbal or non-verbal forms which have the common aim to inflict some psychological pain. Again they both came out of a feeling of superiority or incongruity - that the addressee was better in the respect under consideration than those he abused or teased. We, thus, teased or insulted others because their action, state or being was incongruous to common expectations or values, or was considered not 'standard'. Generally, this consideration was seriously considered baseless, and this is what underlay the frivolity of the invectives formed on this intent. For instance, it was baseless for a History student to think that his subject was better than Greek and Roman Civilisation (GRC), when he as well as the student of GRC would earn university degrees, and generally end up in the classroom as teachers.

Status invectives were usually based on somehow less-recognised or less-respected courses and years. For instance, in the 1980s subjects such as Greek and Roman civilization (Classics) and History were regarded as outmoded and of no significance for the modern life. The abbreviated form of Greek and Roman Civilization GRAECO (also an adjective of Greek as in *Graeco-Roman*) was used to tease or insult those who took that subject as well as for the reading-oriented courses or sections of courses. Similarly, the introduction of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) course in Physical Education attracted much tease. The demeaning nickname given to the course even outside the University was used to taunt the course as well as its students. 'Jumpology' (Physical Education) even outside the University was frivolously seen as a course which required the use of physical instead of psychological resources, and was therefore playfully held in low esteem.

Sometimes status invectives were based on programmes instead of subject areas. The programmes which became the butt of invectives were the *Diploma in Laboratory Technicianship* course and the *semester programme*. The tease on Laboratory Technicianship (Lab. Tech) was based on the fact that it was the only non-degree course at the University whose students were in their youth. It was therefore held to be 'inferior'. Lab. Tech students were teased with the name 'Labtech' signifying the non-standard nature of their course, though we knew that most of them got more gainful employments than those in the degree programmes. Another 'non-standard' course was Diploma in Advanced Study of Education (DASE) which was an undergraduate diploma course for specialist teachers. However, this was not used as a tease because the students were generally quite mature in age, between mid-forties and mid-fifties, and would not be part of this tradition of insults. Lab. Tech students were generally young, and this made it easier to rope them into the tradition of invectives.

Again, the introduction of the semester programme also met similar tease. It was considered overburdening, shallow and outrageously ineffective. 'Semester Babies' was

therefore used to tease or insult the first year groups of the semester programme at the cumulative trimester system was being phased out between (1987 - 1990).

At the secondary schools especially, 'Form I' was associated with the homoes who were regarded immature, stupid, ignorant etc. It was therefore used to tease first-year students who were referred to 'Form One' or 'Form Oneni' (Form One Student) at the university. The use of 'form one' was, thus, a status invective associated with year group of the affected students. The frivolity of this insult was based on the fact that every student was or had been a first year, and did not find it ignoble then. Again, sometimes some first years joined in insulting other first year students with this invective.

The last form of status-inevictives to be discussed had to do with the age of the abused. These were the unusually young or the unusually old who were referred to as 'Adole' (shortened form of 'Adolescent') and 'Old Man' or 'Old Lady' or 'Maame' respectively. Whereas 'Adole' was used to mean 'immature', 'Old Man' or 'Old Lady' was used to indicate 'outmoded behaviour'.

Hall Inevictives

The halls had invectives directed against each other's negative idiosyncrasies. Oguaa Hall was, for instance, accused of having too many non-sixth form students or mature students, who were normally older, and were playfully considered to be too dull and unfashionable. It was, thus, called 'Old Men's hall' and the inmates were 'Nkokora' (Old men). Again, in the hall itself, Blocks F and G were referred to as 'Monkey' by members of the other blocks or halls because they were the first in the University to use double-decker beds which were called 'Monkey beds'. Now that all the halls have 'monkey beds, the tease has apparently ceased. Again, the Atlantic Hall was also referred to as the 'Fishermen's Hall' and the inmates were called 'Fishermen' because the Atlantic Ocean after which the Hall was named was associated with fishing.

Private Parts

Male students used names of private parts to insult as in first-language childhood practice. Like the everyday ones, these insults did not have much derogatory or vulgar implications for both the addresser and the addressee. Interestingly, the male sexual organ, featured in both interpersonal and communal invectives whilst the female sexual organ occurred generally in communal invectives alone. Again, even with the male organ, the scrotum ('hwoa' or 'balls') was more frequently used than the penis itself. It is interesting to observe also that Standard English forms of the private parts were not used in these invectives. The invectives were usually in Akan, Pidgin, Broken English and slang expressions which were general to all linguistic groupings in the country. Invectives in this category include:

Wo twe:

Wo hwoa / your balls

Wo kote tenten/your long P. (abbreviation of penis)

Your langalanga (slang of penis.)

To use the SE name 'testicles' instead of 'balls' or 'hwoa', or 'vagina' instead of 'twe' or 'nyass' suggested seriousness, and thereby deflated the frivolity and playfulness associated with the non-SE terms. Consequently, their use suggested a high sense of vulgarity and non-acceptability. Insults involving the use of private parts were also systematically neutralised. The process generally involves phonological, grammatical and code-switching techniques. A case in point is the rendition of 'twe'. Instead of /twe/ with its rounded affricate, abusers render the affricate rather as an ordinary consonantal sequence, rendering /t/ and /w/ separately. The rendition here is that of a non-Akan or one who is imperfect of the language and pronounces the word exactly as it is written. Similarly, the rounded palato-alveolar fricative /ɰw/in /ɰwoa/ (hwoa – testicles) was desibilised and rendered as a rounded

breathed fricative giving the funny pronunciation /h^ooa/.

Curses

It is interesting to note that the most serious aspects of student life, the examination in its various manifestations, were rather used to imprecate. Apparently this was seen as a way of diffusing the tension associated with the culture of examinations. Before the inception of the semester system University of Cape Coast and University of Ghana had very unsparing examination conditions and practices. In the 1980s it had relaxed a bit at Legon. At UCC, however, each end-of-year exam throughout the four years was easily capable of spelling doom, which included repetition and even withdrawal. The final year students could be denied their degree or be given PASS as a class, UCC then having no THIRD CLASS. The PASS was a detestable class because it spelt the end of one's hope for higher education or a decent employment outside the classroom. Insults, here, were generally communal and some of them were:

FUE befa wo (The First University Exams will overcome you.)

Wobenya Pass (You will get Pass.)

Where certain courses or lecturers are noted for their difficulty, they were also used to imprecate:

'Lecturer X' ('Lecturer X' will get hold of you.)

Afro studs befa wo. (Afro Studs will overcome you. You will fail the African Studies paper.)

Measurement no beye butubutu. (Measurement will be fearful.)

Wobekɔ akɔ to Lecturer X (You will go and meet Lecturer X.).

Insult and Social Interaction

As indicated at the introductory part of this write-up, insults used among students during my student days and even among ourselves as alumni could not easily be seen as constituting-verbal assault, or causing social breakdown or threatening one's face. Insults

performed many functions which, more often than not created, maintained and directed social relationships. Again as said earlier on, university regulations and conventions ostensibly aware of the extent to which insults and response to insults could go, had severe punishment for fighting and verbal abuse, and many forms of social sanctions for both the initiator and the one who responded harshly to invectives. This did not mean that reaction to unendurable invectives and the resulting breakdown of social relationships did not occur. They did, but were checked in their frequency and intensity by the knowledge of these regulations and conventions. One remarkable result was that insults in their form and organization were presented in a way as to prevent the occurrence of social breakdown.

Communal invectives could be seen as a way of expressing disapproval of behaviour or action which was not acceptable to the values of the community as a whole. It was therefore used quite successfully to negotiate social behaviour. Invectives could be taken to be frivolous, yet one could not easily play down their effect on and the deviant. They brought the population against him and forced him except in instances of open defiance to regulate his behaviour. For instance, people who opened their sound systems full blast were abused till they turned the volume down. Again, vulgar speech was sanctioned, through playfully, with such comments as 'Go and Paste' 'Profane' and 'Village Boy'/'Kuraseni'. In such instances, the victim was pushed to the wall, for he could not stand the variety of invectives barraged at him alone - some of which could be personally embarrassing. Again, he could not match the insult by way of volume. He was, thus, brought face-to-face with the censorship of the community knowing also that further defiance would increase the censorship.

In many instances also, invectives were a way of showing solidarity between a group of abusers, and between the abuser and the abused. In interpersonal invectives, insults were cohesive and were therefore accepted and even encouraged. Insults helped in such instances to establish the cohesion and identity of people and differentiated them from others where

necessary. Among such friends, insults featured in phatic communion as address forms or greetings. Friends would even suspect dissatisfaction, anger or pain if they did not trade some insults upon meeting. For these, insults depicted social cohesion. It showed the level of informality or intimacy among friends when deference and politeness were replaced by acceptable invectives which had little or no face-threatening potency.

In communal abuse, there existed some solidarity between the abusers who identified themselves with a common victim and attack. The solidarity was reinforced by the fact that the abuse was planned or initiated by one and supported by others. In these, they developed or enhanced interpersonal relationship. At public gatherings, friends even sometimes planned beforehand to sit at one place so that their invectives could go in unison. Here, communal abuse was used to reinforce interpersonal solidarity.

Again, people in interpersonal relationships used invectives in communal contexts to show their solidarity with the abused. Such insults are normally those that were used in interpersonal insults in which the abused was normally involved. They were normally chanted in public to tell the addressee that his friends were around and would offer him the needed support. When he identified this, he usually responded with a friendly smile or chanted back.

Closely associated with the use of invectives for solidarity is the fact that they were also used to negotiate social relationships. This occurred in two ways: first, it occurred from **H** to **L** relationships in terms of age or year group to depict the fact that in spite of the known differentiation, the H was ready to relate to very informally or frivolously with the L. When it came from an L to the H person, it was normally considered impolite. The H to L invective, thus, acted as a bridge between people otherwise formal relationships. It is interesting to note that the invective did not here function to downgrade the addressee. It was a systematic way in which the addresser lowered himself to the status of the addressee, or alternatively, a way by which the addresser elevated the addressee to his own status in

order to negotiate an intimate frivolous relationship.

Also, invectives used outside the community -hall or campus – had an identity function. They indicated that both addresser and addressee were mates at the university or hall. The invectives involved here were usually those which were known and widely used in the hall or in the university. It is a way through which the addresser introduces himself an acquaintance to the addressee. Recurrent insults included:

- Hey Kwasea Boy!

- Your balls!

As indicated above, such uses of invectives to negotiate for a further intimate relationship was based on the common background of the addresser and addressee and their past relationship in which the invectives were used as a symbol of identity and cohesion. Now after completion, to greet or address a former mate with insults if he failed to recognised already you, is to show your identity, as though to say, 'We were at the university together'.

We have tried in this essay to establish that in spite of their being identified structurally or by way of linguistic taxonomy as insults, the real function of these exchanges as used in the tradition was to establish a deep, intimate and informal relationship in which social cohesion, the regulation of social behaviour and social identity were negotiated and established. The essay has emphasised also that these uses of the insults were possible because of the existence of tradition which governed the choice of addressee, language, insult and well as the context of interaction.

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