

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF AKAN DISCLAIMERS



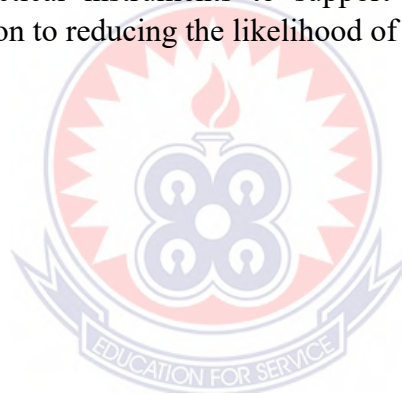
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ABSTRACT

In Akan tradition, it is culturally unacceptable to make emphatic pronunciations without recourse to face. To prevent any miscommunication, interlocutors use disclaimers as linguistic strategies to avoid being held accountable for utterances they produce. This study examined Akan disclaimers using the politeness theory and the language socialization theory. An ethnographic design by means of a qualitative approach was employed to gather data from three different Akan communities using purposive sampling technique. Through recordings of social events, roleplay, and interviews, the categories of Akan disclaimers were identified. The results revealed two categories of disclaimers, that is disclaimers used according to form (status bound, apologetic, proverbial, hedging and negation) and disclaimers with regard to placement (prospective, retrospective, successive, and distributive). Functions such as mitigating face threat, emotional regulation, politeness, clarification of intent, communicative competence, navigating taboos among others were revealed. Also, disclaimers reflect Akan socio-cultural values such as conflict resolution, cultural transmission, establishing harmonious relationships and cultural identity. The study deepens understanding of how disclaimers function as politeness strategies in Akan, enriching pragmatic and sociolinguistic theory. To conclude, this study has demonstrated how disclaimers serve as tactical instruments to support interpersonal connections and preserve social peace in addition to reducing the likelihood of offending.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights the general introduction of the entire thesis. Topics include background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, organization of the study and the summary.

1.1 Background to the study

In our daily communication, speakers use language that ensures good relationships with others to avoid embarrassment, misunderstanding, and friction (Zhang et al., 2013). This helps save one's face in communication (Rusko, 2011). To ensure effective communication, one must be communicatively competent. One way by which we can exhibit this form of competence is through the use of disclaimers or apologetic formulae (Yankah, 2012). The importance of language cannot be underestimated because it allows us to express our feelings, desires, and questions to others around us. However, these expressions need to be made with discretion in order to hammer home our message without causing any form of doubt (Asem, 2017).

Udofot (2010) asserts that knowledge of pragmatics, for instance, enables one to interpret not only the literal meaning of an utterance but also the meanings that are derived from the norms of formality and politeness that exist in the society where the language is used. It is generally recognized that speakers are constantly aware of the fact that their use of language displays not only how they perceive others but also how they want to be perceived by others (Ran et al., 2022; Verschueren, 2000). Conversational disclaimers are among the most frequent indicators that point to such awareness. Paksasuk and Toomaneejinda (2023) opine that over the past decades, considerable research has been conducted focusing on

disclaimers in a number of languages. These include Chinese (Ran, 2015; Yang, 2021), English (Fraser, 1980; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Overstreet & Yule, 2001), Dutch (van der Meij et al., 2022), Italian (Bongelli et al., 2023), Persian (Sharifian & Jamarani, 2011; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014), Turkish (Ercan, 2019) and Yuroba (Ajayi, 2022). However, studies that investigate disclaimers in Akan are virtually nonexistent. The principal motivation for this study is to examine Akan disclaimers, which, notwithstanding their significant communicative role, have not received the needed attention they deserve. Drawing on examples from collected data, the researcher presents an analysis of Akan disclaimers in a range of daily conversational contexts. In this respect, the researcher will (i) identify the categories of disclaimers in Akan, (ii) identify the functions that disclaimers in Akan fulfil and (iii) examine the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers.

Disclaimers play an important and strategic role in Akan communication. In the opinion of Overstreet and Yule (2001, p. 48), disclaimers are “a kind of alignment talk used by speakers in an effort to render potentially problematic actions meaningful and define such actions as an irrelevant basis of assessment of the speaker’s identity”. What becomes clear from the position of Overstreet and Yule is the fact that disclaimers are linguistic resources used to avoid conflict and the misrepresentation of as well as identities in communicative interactions. Tayebi and Parvaresh (2014, p. 77) suggest that two important elements of disclaimers are the notion of *identity*, and “the realization that disclaimers are a modification of only those effects which are potentially unwelcome to the *speaker*”.

Speech is fundamentally a social act of doing things with words (McGregor, 2009). Fraser (1980) is of the view that disclaimers are expressions which are principally deployed by a speaker to signal their intention to mitigate a speech act. Van Dijk (2013) posits that language as a discourse is not only a matter of information delivery, but also the practice of interests. People often convey the intended message through the effective use of language.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Asem (2017) observes that the claim to competence in a particular language is not limited to the knowledge of that language's grammar and vocabulary but extends also to the knowledge of the pragmatics of the said language. Understanding and producing speech acts correctly in a given context constitute crucial aspect of pragmatic competence (Cheng, 2016) and disclaimers in Akan language are no exception. There has been a noticeable decline in the use of the Akan language as a primary medium of communication in recent years, particularly in family and educational settings (Ansah, 2014). Many parents now prefer to speak English to their children, often under the impression that fluency in L2 equates to intellectual advancement. This shift has contributed to a gradual decline of indigenous linguistic resources, including culturally rooted pragmatic elements such as disclaimers (Donkor et al., 2024). Individuals spotted to be speaking the L1 in some Ghanaian schools are branded with all kinds of names. In some schools it is boldly written and pasted at vantage places: ***NO VERNACULAR SPEAKING*** indicating the nature of inconsistent language policy in Ghana's educational system. These inconsistencies contribute to the marginalization of indigenous languages and cultural values, leading to a growing preference for English in both formal and informal settings (Ansah, 2014). This language shift threatens cultural transmission, including pragmatic norms like disclaimers.

Disclaimers in Akan speech are not merely linguistic hedges; they are deeply embedded in the sociocultural fabric of communication. They serve important functions such as showing respect, managing face, and expressing humility or caution, all of which are central to Akan norms of interaction. However, as the Akan language gradually loses its dominant role in everyday discourse, these subtle but essential pragmatic tools risk being lost or misunderstood by younger generations who are not adequately socialized in the cultural nuances of the Akan language. This situation presents a critical challenge of weakening the

sociocultural values reflected in Akan discourse and the diminishing awareness of the pragmatic strategies that sustain polite and respectful communication. A pragmatic analysis of Akan disclaimers is, therefore, necessary to document, interpret, and preserve these communicative acts.

Despite the growing body of research in pragmatics and discourse analysis, the phenomenon of disclaimers in Akan communication remains underexplored, particularly from a pragmatic perspective. While Akan, as a major Ghanaian language, has received scholarly attention in areas such as politeness, proverbs and speech acts, disclaimers as strategic linguistic resources seem not to be theorized. This gap is significant given the frequency and functional importance of disclaimers in everyday Akan interactions. Apart from Ajayi's (2022) work on Yuroba disclaimers, existing studies on disclaimers are largely situated within Western sociological and linguistic traditions, often focusing on English or other European languages. These studies tend to conceptualize disclaimers as simple hedging face-saving devices without adequately accounting for the cultural, hierarchical, and communal values that shape their use in African languages such as Akan.

Disclaimers are metapragmatic in nature which guide interlocutors on how utterances should be understood (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). However, current research has not adequately examined how Akan speakers deploy disclaimers to anticipate misunderstanding, mitigate offense, or negotiate social identities such as age, status, and authority. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive pragmatic analysis limits the documentation and preservation of culturally grounded communicative practices in Akan. This study therefore addresses the lack of a systematic pragmatic analysis of Akan disclaimers that accounts for their forms, functions, and sociocultural values within natural discourse. Addressing this problem is essential for advancing pragmatic theory, enriching Akan linguistics, and providing culturally sensitive insights into meaning-making practices in Akan communication.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The research attempts in general terms, to carry out a pragmatic analysis of Akan disclaimers within the politeness and language socialization theory. The research is thus meant to identify the categories of Akan disclaimers, the functions of disclaimers in Akan and also find the socio-cultural values embedded in them.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The study seeks to:

1. investigate the categories of disclaimers used in Akan language.
2. explore the functions of disclaimers in Akan language.
3. examine the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers.

1.5 Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the categories of disclaimers used in Akan language?
2. What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan?
3. What are the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers?

1.6 Significance of the study

The results of this research are expected to enhance knowledge of Akan pragmatics, offering deeper insights into how disclaimers are used to navigate sensitive social interactions, maintain respect, and uphold communal harmony. By providing empirical data on the categories, functions, and contexts of Akan disclaimers, this study becomes a valuable reference point for other researchers interested in Akan discourse, African pragmatics, and politeness phenomena in general. Furthermore, the findings serve educators and intercultural communication specialists who seek to promote effective and respectful communication practices within Akan-speaking communities and beyond. This research also aims to highlight the intricate relationship between language, culture, and social norms in Akan

society, illustrating how disclaimers contribute to language socialization and the reinforcement of community values. Lastly, this study not only broadens theoretical perspectives in pragmatic studies but also offers practical implications for conflict resolution, language teaching, and fostering understanding across cultural boundaries. The documentation and analysis of Akan disclaimers therefore help preserve linguistic heritage while promoting awareness of the rich communicative strategies inherent in Akan culture.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Despite its contributions to the field of pragmatics, the study on Akan disclaimers is not without limitations. First, the study is largely qualitative and interpretive, relying heavily on recorded discourse, interviews, and role play. As such, the findings may be prejudiced by researcher bias in the interpretation of disclaimers, especially in identifying implicit or context-dependent functions. Second, the study is based on a purposive sample of Akan speakers, primarily from dialects that have achieved literary status. This literary status focus may not capture the full spectrum of dialectal, sociocultural, or situational variation present in Akan communities across the country. Another limitation lies in the reliance on audio and textual data, which may not capture the non-verbal cues such as tone, facial expressions, or gestures that often accompany and reinforce disclaimers.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

This study is delimited in scope in order to maintain analytical focus and research manageability. First, it restricts the study to specific communication domains particularly sociocultural. It does not explore disclaimers in religious, political, or legal contexts, even though these could provide additional insights into the form and function of disclaimers. Additionally, the theoretical background is delimited to Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and Language Socialization Theory (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986). These

frameworks guide the analysis of face management, power dynamics, and cultural transmission of pragmatic norms.

1.9 Organization of the study

The study is organized as follows; Chapter 1 looks at the introduction, background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, organization of the study and the summary whiles Chapter 2 present the literature review. This discusses issues raised from related literature and provided empirical evidence to highlight the significance as to establish a foundation on which the study is based. The literature is reviewed under the following strands: Ethno-linguistic description of Akan, communicative competence, the concept of pragmatics, the concept of disclaimers, the concept of Akan disclaimers, categories of disclaimers, theoretical foundations and related works on disclaimers. The theories provide a broad framework for a detailed analysis. Chapter 3 describes in detail the methodology adopted in data collection for the study. A detailed description and explanation of the research design of the study, procedures of data collection are also discussed. Chapter 4 discusses the results in line with the politeness theory and language socialization theory where the categories of Akan disclaimers thus disclaimers according to form and disclaimers according to placement are examined. Again, functions such as clarifying intentions, mitigating potential misunderstandings, expressing humility or modesty of Akan disclaimers are discussed into details, the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers such as demonstrating humility and modesty, showing respect for authority and elders and avoiding conflict are also discussed. Finally, chapter 5 summarizes the main findings from the study, and suggests recommendations for further studies.

1.10 Conclusion

Chapter one of the work set out to introduce the entire study by looking at the following subtopics: background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, delimitations of the study, and organization of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses some of the studies undertaken by researchers and scholars on pragmatics. The choices of these works are based on their relevance to the current study. The review is organized under the following headings: ethno-linguistic description of Akan, the concept of disclaimers, the concept of Akan disclaimers, the concept of pragmatics, pragmatic competence, components of pragmatic competence, communicative competence, types of disclaimers, theoretical foundation and review of related studies. Existing research that has been done on disclaimers has been conducted outside Ghana.

2.1 An ethnolinguistic description of Akan

Dakubu (1988) provides a linguistic classification of Ghanaian languages, refining earlier continental models by paying attention to internal diversity and sociolinguistic realities. She classifies Ghanaian languages mainly into Kwa, Gur, and Mande groups. The Kwa group includes Akan. Dolphyne (1988) also approaches the classification of Ghanaian languages with strong emphasis on Kwa languages, especially Akan, while situating them within the wider Niger–Congo family. Akan refers to both an ethnic group in Ghana and the language spoken by its members (Obeng, 1997). It has been claimed that the term Akan was originally used to describe just the members of the ethnic group, but in the early 1950s, the definition of the word was expanded to include the language used by this ethnic group as well (Obeng, 1997 as cited in Agyekum, 2022). Akan may be examined from two main perspectives: (a) ethnographic and (b) linguistic viewpoints. According to Agyekum (2022), Obeng was the first Ghanaian linguist to make a distinction between linguistic Akan and ethnographic Akan. The Ahanta, Aowin, Nzema, and Sefwi are ethnographic Akans who have cultural commonalities with the Akans but do not speak Akan as their first language

(Obeng, 1997). The linguistic Akans are those who speak Akan as their mother tongue. Akans constitute Ghana's biggest ethnic group. In the 2021 National Population Census, 47.5% of Ghana's population was Akan, while approximately 44% of the remaining population speaks Akan.

The Akans occupy a significant portion of southern Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in nine of Ghana's sixteen administrative regions: Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western, and Western North. The Akan-speaking populations in the Oti Region are sandwiched by the Ewe people. Akan has 13 dialects: Agona, Akyem, Akuapem, Akwamu, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Twifo, and Wassaw (Agyekum, 2020). The Akan dialects, Akuapem, Fante, and Asante, have gained literary recognition, each with a standardized written form that represents the unique characteristics of the respective dialects. Collectively, Stewart (1968) identifies these dialects to belong to the Tano language family because they extend to the east and of the Tano River (Appiah, 2008). Besides being used as a medium of instruction at the lower primary in schools, Akan is studied from the primary to secondary through to tertiary level of education. It is arguably the most widely researched and taught indigenous language. The language is also spoken in some parts of Côte d'Ivoire. Agyekum (2022) posits that some Bono speakers are found in Ivory Coast where it is referred to as Abbron.

2.2 The concept of pragmatics

Since this study is based on a pragmatic approach, it is essential to briefly review the concept of pragmatics. The term pragmatics has been traced to Morris (1938) whose concern was to outline the general shape of semiotics. He distinguished three branches of inquiry within semiotics namely syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Further development of pragmatics has been traced to scholars like Austin (1962), Katz and Fodor (1963), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975). The goals of pragmatics are to investigate i. how utterances convey

meaning, ii. the roles of context in encoding and the decoding message, iii. utterances in context and situation, iv. interlocutors' responses to message and meaning, v. the causes of wrong message encoding, and
vi. the causes of wrong message decoding. Pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language uses that is determined by the context of usage (Mey 2010). It is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. It explains aspects of meaning that cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures. Crystal (2003) defines pragmatics as the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication.

Pragmatics studies how meaning may be drawn from texts even when they appear to be incomplete or to signify something other than what is intended. Humans communicate using a variety of languages for a variety of reasons, and the norms, circumstances, and values of any specific civilization and culture influence this communication. Levinson (1983) describes pragmatics as the study of language from a functional perspective. This simply refers to context-dependent use of language. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 6) assert that ~~any~~ "any analytical approach in linguistics which involves contextual consideration belongs to that area of language study called pragmatics". Pragmatics study is primarily concerned with the link between language usage and the social and interpersonal contexts of interaction. It also investigates how listeners might understand the speaker's intended meaning by identifying what the speaker leaves unsaid. The study of pragmatics focuses on the interaction between language use and context that is, how language usage reflects elements of the external and real-world situation (Rose & Kasper, 2001). Pragmatics, as explored in this study, is characterized by the following key elements: speakers and listeners, context, meaning and social interaction in exploring the meaning of utterances.

2.2.1 Pragmatic competence

De Valoes (2014) cited in Anabila (2020), argues that human beings are unique from the rest of the animal kingdom because they are able to harness their innate ability to form lasting bonds by communicating in diverse ways through written and spoken language. Thomas (1983, p.92) defines pragmatic competence as ‘the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context’. The ability to comprehend and produce meaning as intended within a social context is a necessary component of pragmatic competence. This ability is acquired through both innate and learned capacities and develops naturally through a socialization process (Thomas, 1983). In short, Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language effectively in a social context that encompasses understanding and applying linguistic nuances, context, and social norms in communication.

2.2.2 Components of pragmatic competence

Pragmatic competence is one’s ability to utilize language effectively and appropriately in social circumstances. It is an essential component of communicative competence, encompassing both knowledge and skills linked to the social use of language. The key components of pragmatic competency are Speech Acts, Conversational Implicature, Deixis, Politeness Strategies, and Cultural Context.

2.2.2.1 Speech acts

This involves understanding how to perform various functions in communication, such as requesting, apologizing, suggesting, and asserting. Different cultures may have distinct ways of expressing these acts. According to Searle (1975), speech acts can be categorized into declaratives, interrogatives and imperatives.

2.2.2.2 Conversational implicature

Grice (1975) developed this concept. It refers to the implied meaning or understanding that goes beyond the literal interpretation of words used during conversations. Grice's Maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) guide speakers on how to imply and infer meanings in conversations (Grice, 1975).

2.2.2.3 Deixis

Williams (2019) opines that deixis is the phenomenon in human languages by which the meaning of certain referential expressions depends on aspects of their context of use. For instance, the meaning of an utterance like *meet me here a week from now* depends (at least) on who utters it, where we (speaker and addressee) are, and when now is (e.g. what day it is). While the meaning of all utterances and social action more generally is contextually dependent or “indexical,” deixis brings this feature of indexicality into the structure of the language itself

2.2.2.4 Politeness strategies

Understanding how to navigate social hierarchies and relationships through language is essential for pragmatic competence. Brown and Levinson (1987) illustrated the concept of face, which is characterized by the public self-image that a person maintains in interactions. Their theory categorizes politeness strategies into positive and negative politeness. Current studies on politeness strategies have focused on how individuals use language to manage face and navigate social hierarchies across diverse cultures and contexts. For example, Locher and Watts (2003) emphasize the relational aspect of politeness, arguing that politeness is co-constructed in interaction rather than universally fixed. Haugh and Bargiela-Chiappini (2021) explore the intercultural dimensions of politeness, showing how norms differ significantly between speech communities.

2.2.2.5 Cultural context

Hinkel (1999) identified that pragmatic competence is heavily influenced by cultural norms and practices. He continued that different cultures have varying expectations about how ideas are communicated, how much context is needed, and how direct or indirect communications should be used (Hinkel, 1999). Pragmatic competence is essential for effective communication as it encompasses knowledge of context, social norms, and language use in various situations. Developing pragmatic skills is especially crucial in our progressively global surroundings, where people encounter other people from different cultural backgrounds are prevalent. Recent research confirms that cultural context is critical to pragmatic competency. For example, Taguchi (2019) contends that language learners must master not only grammatical abilities but also culturally appropriate methods of using language. Ishihara and Cohen (2020) argue that pragmatics cannot be divorced from sociocultural knowledge, pointing out that speech acts (e.g., requests, refusals) are perceived differently across cultures. These studies underline that pragmatic competence entails understanding what is considered polite, rude, or suitable in specific cultural contexts, reflecting and broadening Hinkel's earlier findings.

2.3 Communicative competence

Agyekum (2024) posits that communicative competence is the overall knowledge needed by a competent speaker of a language. Dell Hymes in the 1970s coined a word that encompasses a wide range of social abilities that allow people to communicate meaningfully. Yule (2022, p.194) declares that communicative competence is “the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly”. This indicates that an individual’s capacity to successfully and correctly utilize language in diverse social circumstances to achieve communicative goals requires not just linguistic expertise, such as vocabulary and grammar, but also the ability to perceive and generate language in culturally acceptable manner. All the

above scholars hammer home one central point alluding that being a competent communicator is about knowing the linguistic and cultural trait of a given community.

2.3.1 Components of communicative competence

Ahmed and Pawar (2018) posit that, there are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical is one. Communicative competence encompasses five major components. These are: grammatical competence, which has to do with the knowledge of the rules of a language, sociolinguistic competence, which has to do with understanding social and cultural norms of a given community, discourse competence, which is about organizing language in extended sequences, strategic competence, which is about using communication strategies to overcome difficulties and interactional competence, which is the ability to engage in effective conversation.

2.3.1.1 Linguistic competence

This involves knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation of a language. It requires understanding a language's syntax, vocabulary and pronunciation. It comprises the capacity to construct grammatically acceptable phrases, employ suitable vocabulary, and appropriately enunciate words. According to Yule (2022), focusing just on grammatical competence will not equip the student with the capacity to correctly comprehend or construct expressions. The second component is sociolinguistic competence, which refers to the capacity to utilize acceptable language.

2.3.1.2 Sociolinguistic competence

This involves understanding the social norms, rules and conventions that govern language use in different contexts. It includes knowledge of appropriate language registers, politeness strategies, and cultural norms. Yule (2022) asserts that it is sociolinguistic competence that enables the learner to know when to say *Can I have some water?* versus *Give me some water!* according to the social context.

2.3.1.3 Discourse competence

This involves the ability to organize and structure language in extended speech or writing. It includes knowledge of coherence, cohesion, and rhetorical strategies to effectively convey meaning and engage in conversations or written texts.

2.3.1.4 Strategic competence

Yule (2022, p.149) avows that strategic competence is “the ability to organize a message effectively and to compensate, via strategies, for any difficulties”. This involves the ability to use communication strategies to overcome barriers to understanding or to enhance communication effectiveness. It includes the ability to repair communication breakdowns, clarify meaning, and adapt language use to achieve communicative goals.

2.3.1.5 Interactional competence

This involves the ability to engage in conversations, negotiations, or interactions with others in a socially appropriate and effective manner. It includes skills such as turn-taking, topic management, and active listening to maintain smooth and successful communication exchanges. Generally, communicative competence allows individuals to navigate complex communication situations, interact with others effectively, and convey their intended messages accurately.

2.4 Ethnography of communication

Ethnography of communication is the study of communication within the context of social and cultural practices and beliefs (Hymes, 1964). He describes the term *ethnography of communication* as the different features of an approach to understanding language from an anthropological perspective. It was originally termed as *ethnography of speaking*, however, Hymes broadened it in 1964 to include the non-vocal and non-verbal aspects of communication. According to Hymes, ethnography of communication has two primary functions. The first is to explicitly examine how language is used in various contexts in order

to identify patterns appropriate for speech activity. The second is to examine an entire community's **naturally occurring communication behavior** by using it as a framework. In addition, he offers a communication ethnography approach. He contends that studying language in isolation is impossible. It has to be examined within the broader framework of social and cultural factors. Language encompasses more than a static set of grammatical rules. In actuality, it has a certain context that takes into account the person as well as societal conventions and values.

Hymes divides speech into two components, thus; *means of speech* and *speech economy*. Means of speech is about the features that enter into styles, as well as the styles themselves, and speech economy refers to the relationship within a speech community where the people use their means of speech. Hymes also developed the SPEAKING model which analyses speech in its cultural context. The acronym SPEAKING model has eight categories and it is elaborated as follows:

S – Setting and Scene.

This refers to the actual venue where the speech or utterance is made. The setting can make it appropriate or inappropriate for one to render a particular speech.

P – Participant:

This refers to the people who take part in the speech. This can be the addresser or the hearer.

E – ends:

This refers to the purpose and the goal or outcome of the speech. For example, one may issue a disclaimer to make a request or apologize.

A – Act Sequence:

This refers to the form and order of events.

K – key:

This refers to the tone and the manner in which a speech is carried out. The speaker may be annoyed by an incidence which led to the issue of a particular disclaimer.

I – Instrumentalities:

This refers to form and style of speech or the medium of communication that is used.

N – Norms of interaction:

This refers to the social rules of speech, interaction and interpretation taking into consideration the rank or status.

G – genres:

This refers to the type of speech and its cultural contexts.

All these factors influence how disclaimers are used in Akan. The regular utterances of the people clearly reflect their rich cultural background of respect for status, age, and authority, among other things.

Ethnography of Communication (Hymes, 1974) is used as an analytical framework to complement the sociocultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers by situating them within culturally defined norms of speaking. Akan disclaimers reflect values such as respect for hierarchy and avoidance of face-threatening acts. Through context-sensitive expressions such as apologetic, status-bound, or proverbial disclaimers, speakers acknowledge social roles, age, and authority before performing potentially sensitive speech acts. These disclaimers demonstrate Akan expectations of politeness, humility, and moral responsibility in interaction. Ethnographically, their use reveals how communicative competence in Akan involves not only linguistic accuracy but also mastery of culturally sanctioned norms governing speech, social relations, and appropriate conduct within the community. It indicates how, when, where, and who is involved in the communication act and the appropriate disclaimer to issue in the course of interaction.

2.5 The concept of disclaimers

Disclaimers are metapragmatic devices employed by speakers to soften or distance themselves from potentially face-threatening acts (FTAs) in communication (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Goffman, 1971). It is pertinent to note that Hewitt and Stokes were the first to explicitly coin and define the term “disclaimer” in a sociolinguistic context. They describe disclaimers as pre-emptive verbal strategies used to manage identity threats before engaging in behavior that might be viewed as socially undesirable or discrediting. According to Overstreet and Yule (2001, p. 49), language users employ disclaimers to indicate the following:

- (i) they are well aware of the social rules and the risk they might face when they violate them;
- (ii) what they are about to perform might cause a problem;
- (iii) their interlocutor should disassociate their identity from the problematic likely-to-be action they are about to perform and thus they perform reflective thinking and imagine the negative interpretations of their action.

Therefore, disclaimers are related to the speakers themselves, other than their interlocutors. Examples of disclaimers identified by Yule and Overstreet include (2001) ‘I’m not prejudiced, but’ in ‘I’m not prejudiced, but I hate this university’ serves to prevent the speaker from the potential trouble of being characterized as a prejudiced person who has an unreasonable dislike of something. Here are some more examples (from Hewitt and Stokes, 1975, p. 4)

- (a) I really haven’t thought this through very well, but . . .
- (b) I could be wrong on my facts, but I think . . .
- (c) I’m no expert, of course, but . . .

Research studies on disclaimers have progressed in two directions: (1) Studies that have addressed disclaimers from the viewpoint of social psychology or speech communication and (2) studies that have analyzed disclaimers in terms of their pragmatic properties. In studies that have addressed disclaimers from the viewpoint of social psychology or speech communication, disclaimers are considered as examples of ‘alignment talk’, which is defined as verbal courses of action taken to prevent negative characterizations of the speaker’s social and cultural identity (Stokes and Hewitt, 1976). As examples of alignment talk, disclaimers are considered to be ‘essentially prospective explanations’ (Ragan & Hopper, 1981, p. 86) used prior to an upcoming event that can threaten to disrupt the emergent meaning (Ragan & Hopper, 1981).

In studies that have analyzed disclaimers in terms of their pragmatic properties, the focus of attention is on speech acts such as ‘judgment’ and ‘criticism’ that can convey an unwelcome effect (Fraser, 1980; Hongladarom, 2007). In some other pragmatic studies, the argument is that disclaimers operate on the assumptions of shared experience or intersubjectivity, and that they are co-constructed by interactive partners (Overstreet & Yule, 2001). As a matter of fact, the prevalent assumption underlying pragmatic studies of disclaimers is that these expressions are used to disavow in advance a negative interpretation of the speaker’s intention that might lead to his/her identity being associated with, or rather typified as, an unwanted one. Regardless of the general directions in question, disclaimers, however, seem to demonstrate a number of specific elements. More precisely, disclaimers are viewed as expressions used to avoid the speaker’s identity being typified as ‘an unthinking, irrational, or irresponsible member of society who either doesn’t know the rules, or doesn’t care about them’ (Overstreet & Yule, 2001, p. 49).

Another remarkable issue in the analysis of disclaimers is the realization that disclaimers are a modification of only those effects which are potentially unwelcome to the

‘speaker’ (see Caffi, 2013; Fraser, 1980; Hongladarom, 2007). The last crucial element is that disclaimers are expressions used to pre-define forthcoming actions. In other words, disclaimers have always been regarded as prospective moves (Hongladarom, 2007; Overstreet & Yule, 2001). The concept of disclaimers in Akan language involves linguistic expressions or strategies used by speakers to mitigate potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations in communication. Disclaimers serve as linguistic devices to signal uncertainty, politeness, or hedging in speech acts, helping to manage interpersonal relationships and convey nuanced meanings. In Akan culture, disclaimers play a significant role in social interactions, reflecting cultural norms and values related to communication. By examining the use of disclaimers in Akan language, researchers can gain insights into the pragmatics of communication, metapragmatic awareness, and sociocultural aspects of language use in the Akan community.

2.6 The concept of Akan disclaimers

In Akan society, speech is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but a moral act that reflects respect, humility, and social awareness. Disclaimers therefore function as pragmatic buffers, commonly employed before or after potentially face-threatening acts such as correction, advice, disagreement, self-praise, or sensitive requests. Expressions such as “*Mesɛ meka*” (I plead to say), and “*ɛnye boapaye*” (it is unintentional) signal the speaker’s awareness of social norms and their desire to maintain harmony. These disclaimers are deeply tied to Akan values of respect for age, authority, and communal solidarity. In interactions involving elders or socially superior persons, disclaimers help reduce power distance and prevent interpretations of rudeness or arrogance. Proverbs and idiomatic expressions often serve a similar function, allowing speakers to convey criticism or advice indirectly while preserving the listener’s dignity. Pragmatically, Akan disclaimers align with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) notion of negative politeness, as they minimize imposition and

acknowledge the interlocutor's social face. Agyekum (2003) observes that Akan interactions are guided by the principle that *good speech* promotes peace and social cohesion. Consequently, disclaimers are not optional stylistic features but essential tools for achieving communicative competence.

2.7 Types of disclaimers

Many scholars such as (Abdi, 2012; Ajayi, 2022; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Hongladarom, 2007; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014; Yang, 2021) have classified disclaimers into various types. These types include the following:

2.7.1 Prospective disclaimers

These are statements that precede the Face Threatening Act (FTA) and serve to prepare the listener for the upcoming utterance. Prospective disclaimers are linguistic expressions or statements used by speakers to anticipate, address, or prevent potential misunderstandings, conflicts, or issues in communication before they occur (Hongladarom, 2007). These disclaimers involve proactively setting expectations, clarifying intentions, or managing perceptions to avoid negative outcomes or misinterpretations in conversation. By using Prospective disclaimers, speakers can establish a clear framework, outline boundaries, or provide context to guide the understanding of listeners and prevent any unintended consequences or misconceptions. Prospective disclaimers play a preventive role in communication by helping speakers navigate sensitive topics, delicate situations, or complex discussions with transparency, clarity, and foresight. By employing Prospective disclaimers, speakers can enhance the effectiveness of their communication, promote mutual understanding, and maintain positive relationships with their interlocutors (Stoke & Hewitt, 1976).

2.7.2 Retrospective disclaimers

These are linguistic expressions or statements used by speakers after an event, interaction, or conversation to clarify, correct, or address any misunderstandings, issues, or consequences that may have arisen after a statement has been made (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). They involve reflecting on the communication that has taken place, acknowledging any potential errors, misinterpretations, or unintended outcomes, and offering explanations, apologies, or clarifications as needed. Speakers use retrospective disclaimers to demonstrate accountability, show empathy, or seek resolution for any discrepancies or problems that emerged during the interaction. Retrospective disclaimers play a crucial role in maintaining or repairing relationships, and ensuring clarity in communication by addressing any lingering concerns, doubts, or conflicts that may have arisen after the initial exchange. Speakers employ retrospective disclaimers strategies to foster trust, to promote understanding, and to enhance the quality of their interactions with others.

2.7.3 Hedged disclaimers

Hedged disclaimers are linguistic expressions or language structures used by speakers to soften or mitigate the impact of their statements, claims, or opinions in communication. These disclaimers involve using qualifiers, hedges, or mitigating phrases to indicate uncertainty, modesty, or caution in what is being asserted. Speakers use hedging to signal that their statements are not absolute, that there may be exceptions or limitations, or that their opinions are open to interpretation. Hedging disclaimers help speakers avoid sounding overly confident, dogmatic, or assertive, allowing for a more nuanced and respectful exchange of ideas in conversation (Hewitt & Stokes, 1976).

2.7.4 Negation disclaimers

In Chinese Mandarin, Yang (2021) explains that Negation disclaimers are linguistic expressions used by speakers to deny certain statements, claims, or assumptions in

communication. These disclaimers involve using negating words, phrases, or structures to indicate the opposite or absence of a particular idea, proposition, or belief. He further explains that Negation disclaimers help speakers clarify or correct assertions, or implications in discourse. Speakers sometimes use disclaimers to repudiate misconceptions, or challenge assumptions to ensure accuracy, clarity, and precision in communication. Yang (2021) identified two types of negation disclaimers. These are meta-negation disclaimers and meta-prohibition disclaimers which play a crucial role in managing expectations, correcting misunderstandings, and conveying accurate information in conversations.

According to Yang (2021), meta-negation disclaimers function as a rhetorical strategy in which speakers explicitly deny a possible interpretation or assumption that could be inferred from their forthcoming statement. These disclaimers are anticipatory in nature and are typically deployed to preserve positive face and avoid misinterpretation. They are particularly useful in contexts where the speaker's stance might be controversial, misunderstood, or potentially offensive. By stating what they are not doing, speakers subtly control how their message is received and interpreted. These disclaimers reflect high metapragmatic awareness and are common in academic, political, and interpersonal discourse. Yang (2021) identifies this form as central to mitigating potential threats to the hearer's or speaker's social image, aligning with politeness theory. In cross-cultural contexts, metanegation may be more frequent in cultures that value indirectness and social harmony. In the Chinese language, Yang (2021) points that meta-negation disclaimers follow a formulaic pattern of *bùshì + wǒ + V* (I don't intend to, but...) and function as face-threatening mitigating mechanisms when criticizing the listener. Examples include “I'm not saying he is inept, but his report had several errors.” “Don't get me wrong, I respect your opinion, but I see it differently”, and “I'm not suggesting they are to be blamed, I just think we need to review the method”.

Metaprohibition disclaimers, as defined by Yang (2021), are disclaimers in which the speaker prohibits a specific interpretation of their upcoming utterance. These disclaimers are often used in socially sensitive interactions where the speaker anticipates that their comment could be perceived as rude, critical, or morally inappropriate. By explicitly forbidding certain readings of their speech, speakers manage interpersonal risk and control the reception of their message. Meta-prohibition disclaimers serve to establish boundaries around meaning and to protect both speaker and listener from face-threatening misunderstandings. Yang (2021) emphasizes that these disclaimers are highly strategic and are common in institutional and interpersonal communication, especially where issues of politeness, power, or taboo are involved. They are crucial in safeguarding social harmony and are often framed with hedges or softeners. This, according to Yang, (2021) follows formulaic patterns of *bié + guàiwǒ + V* (don't blame me for...) and *nǐ bié + bù + ADJ* (don't feel... if...), and disclaim the speaker's negative identity when flouting the face of the hearer. Examples include –Please don't take this the wrong way, but I think your tone was a bit harsh”. –I'm not trying to insult anyone here, just giving honest feedback”, and –This is not meant to undermine your efforts, but we need to revisit the strategy”.

2.7.5 Status bound disclaimers

These are expressions or language structures that reflect the social status, power dynamics, or hierarchical relationships between interlocutors in communication (Ajayi, 2022). They are influenced by the relative positions, roles, or identities of speakers and listeners in a given context. It is also known as honorific disclaimers. These disclaimers can include linguistic devices such as formal titles, deferential expressions, or respectful gestures, that signal respect, deference, or acknowledgment of social hierarchies. By using status bound disclaimers, speakers can navigate social interactions, show proper etiquette, and demonstrate awareness of the cultural norms or expectations related to status and hierarchy.

These linguistic strategies help maintain harmony, promote mutual understanding, and establish rapport in communication within status-conscious societies or contexts.

2.7.6 Non-status bound disclaimers

Non-status-bound disclaimers according to (Ajayi, 2022) are linguistic expressions or language structures that do not directly reflect the social status, power dynamics, or hierarchical relationships between interlocutors in communication. These disclaimers are not influenced by the relative positions, roles, or identities of speakers and listeners in a given context. Non-status-bound disclaimers can include general expressions of politeness, humility, uncertainty, or apology that are not explicitly tied to social hierarchy or status differences. Non-status-bound disclaimers help speakers to convey respect, manage expectations, clarify intentions, or express humility in communication without necessarily referencing social status or power dynamics (Ajayi, 2022). These linguistic strategies are more universal and can be used in diverse social settings, regardless of the specific status or hierarchy of the participants involved. Although researches in disclaimers have focused on disclaimers in speaker's speech, it has also been applied to written forms as well. Abdi (2012) identified six different types of disclaimers in academic writing. These include the following; Overt vs. Covert disclaimers, Excluder vs. Includer disclaimers, Warning vs. Clarification disclaimers, Internal vs. External disclaimers, Antecedent vs. Subsequent disclaimers and Local vs. Global disclaimers.

2.7.7 Overt vs. covert disclaimers

Abdi (2012) avows that academic writers often disclaim indirectly by precisely outlining the scope of their works and propositions, and also acknowledging the limitations of their adventure. In contrast to overt disclaimers whereby authors clearly refer to what is disavowed, in covert disclaimers the audience is expected to deduce and construct the intended disclaimer. Occasionally, covert and overt disclaimers may co-occur. That is,

sometimes an overt disclaimer immediately follows or precedes a covert one to obviate any deduction of the function of the disclaimer by the audience.

2.7.8 Excluder vs. includer disclaimers

These disclaimers list the things that the claim or statement does not cover, therefore excluding particular readings or interpretations. In other words, excluder disclaimers describe what falls within it. They help limit the scope of a claim, reducing ambiguity and shielding the writer from overgeneralization. Includers, on the other hand, are specific about what they claim, virtually disavowing all other possible alternatives (Abdi, 2012). They assert a defined position and enhance authorial control by narrowing interpretive options, strengthening the persuasiveness and clarity of academic discourse.

2.7.9 Internal vs. external disclaimers

Internal disclaimers are employed in that they have inner references that refer to the direct developing paper. They express the writer's doubts, hesitations, or limitations about their claims. Such disclaimers help manage face and create space for alternative interpretations within the author's argument. They serve as a politeness strategy and establish a modest scholarly identity in academic discourse (Abdi, 2012). External disclaimers may refer to other studies in research articles rather than the author's own thesis. They are used to deflect blame or present opposing viewpoints by referencing external constraints or beliefs. This method allows the author to remove themselves from strong or contentious claims, preserving academic credibility and objectivity while engaging critically with current material (Abdi, 2012).

2.7.10 Antecedent vs. Subsequent disclaimers

Antecedent disclaimers are often employed in the introduction section to outline the framework, while subsequent disclaimers most often appear at the end of Results and Discussions sections to clarify the already included propositions.

2.7.11 Warning vs. clarification disclaimers

Disclaimers could be employed to serve as warnings especially when dealing with high-stake topics, or clarifications. Abdi (2012) opines that disclaimers inherently contain some warning or caution remarks. A study's results and discussion section are where warning disclaimers are most likely to occur. They discuss the study's ramifications and potential uses. However, wherever there is a suspicion of ambiguity, clarification disclaimers may be included in any area of a research article (RA). The former primarily emphasizes the results' internal and external validity, whilst the latter may fix any grammatical and argumentative errors.

2.7.12 Local vs. global disclaimers

Disclaimers may pertain to local or global matters. Local disclaimers deal with proximate referents that come either before or after them, while global disclaimers relate to one or more notions that are mentioned in any part of a research article that are stated further away. Global disclaimers, which cover a wider scope, are often included at the opening or conclusion of an (RA), while local disclaimers might exist anywhere within the document and pertain to specific concepts. Understanding these disclaimers is critical for effective communication since they can have a major impact on message perception and reception in diverse circumstances. Recognizing these categories allows speakers to effectively negotiate conversational dynamics, avoid misunderstandings, and explain their views clearly.

2.8 Functions of disclaimers

Disclaimers have played major pragmatic functions in communication, especially in mitigating face-threatening acts. Hewitt and Stokes (1975) described it as linguistic mitigation device. Various scholars have examined these functions in many ways. Some of these scholars included (Ajayi, 2022; Brown & Levinson 1987; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014; Tracy, 2020). These functions which are enumerated from the existing

literature include: face saving mechanism, smooth communication, regulation of emotions, politeness marker and navigating sensitive remarks.

2.8.1 Face saving mechanism

Tayebi and Parvaresh (2014) examined the use of disclaimers in Iranian academic settings and observed that they function as tools for face-saving and for mitigation. They emphasized the role of cultural norms in shaping the frequency and type of disclaimers, highlighting how speakers use them to reduce the likelihood of offense and maintain social harmony. Disclaimers mitigate face-threatening by preemptively softening or distancing a potentially offensive or confrontational remark (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory, which highlights such strategies as essential in face-sensitive interactions.

2.8.2 Smooth communication

Again, Ajayi (2022) underscores the interpersonal function of disclaimers, noting that they help speakers maintain social order and to have smooth communication. He opined that, in traditional Yoruba settings, disclaimers function to reinforce values like humility, obedience, and communal respect, particularly when addressing elders or authority figures. This in effect helps to achieve communication ease in discourse.

2.8.3 Regulation of emotion

Disclaimers enable emotional control by allowing speakers to express difficult thoughts while maintaining composure. They reduce the impact of emotionally charged messages, reducing intensity and emotional exposure. As such, they help in projecting calmness and reasonableness (Tracy, 2020), most especially in traumatic discourse.

2.8.4 Politeness marker

Brown and Levinson (1987), by inference, view disclaimers as politeness strategies that protect the speaker's and hearer's face. Disclaimers here are seen as forms of negative

politeness markers that anticipate and mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). For instance, when a speaker says, “Forgive me when I go wrong”, they employ a disclaimer to forestall or soften potential wrong utterances and show deference to the listener.

2.8.5 Navigation of sensitive remarks

Hewitt and Stokes (1975) also analyzed disclaimers as mechanisms of self-presentation, particularly among marginalized groups. They identify types like credentialing, and hedging that function to neutralize the social risks of controversial or sensitive remarks. These disclaimers according to them do help the speaker to navigate potential sensitive remarks like taboos or unmentionables. The scholars above collectively affirm that the functions of pragmatic disclaimers are multi-dimensional which serve as face-saving strategies, tools of social alignment, expressions of politeness, and markers of cultural values.

2.9 Socio-cultural values embedded in Pragmatic disclaimers

Disclaimers reflect deep socio-cultural values that help to govern communicative acts. They embody humility, cohesion, modesty, and social harmony which are core values that sharpen interactional norms (Ajayi, 2022). These expressions help to unveil how cultural norms influence our language use, in enforcing social cohesion and moral accountability in our daily communications (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). Some socio-cultural values embedded in pragmatic disclaimers include the following: exhibition of humility, social cohesion, exhibition of modesty, and showing of communicative competence.

2.9.1 Exhibition of humility

Ajayi (2022), in his study of Yoruba metapragmatic disclaimers, argues that these expressions are reflections of hierarchical respect, age sensitivity, and communal decorum in Yoruba culture. Disclaimers such as “I am just a child speaking...” or “With due respect...” are used not merely to hedge statements but to align the speaker with cultural values of

humility, seniority recognition, and non-confrontation. These disclaimers reinforce social boundaries and ensure peaceful interaction within community structures.

2.9.2 Social cohesion

Wahyudi (2012) explored metapragmatic disclaimers in Indonesian discourse and uncover their alignment with collectivist norms, especially the emphasis on face-saving, group harmony, and deference. He observed that Indonesian speakers often preface or follow utterances with disclaimers like “Forgive me for saying this...” to soften directness. These markers indicate a strong cultural concern for not causing embarrassment, preserving interpersonal solidarity, and maintaining social cohesion.

2.9.3 Exhibition of modesty

In much the same way, Tayebi and Parvaresh (2014) examined Iranian academic discourse and highlighted the influence of religious modesty, respect for intellectual hierarchy, and sociocultural formality in the use of metapragmatic disclaimers. Iranian students, for instance, use disclaimers to avoid appearing boastful or confrontational, which reflects deep-rooted values of modesty, respect, and deference to authority. Their study revealed that disclaimers are not just rhetorical but carry ideological weight in reflecting Iran’s cultural etiquette.

2.9.4 Communicative competence

Yankah (1995), focusing on Akan oral traditions, identified the use of proverbial and disclaimers or apologetic formulae in Akan communication as reflections of social diplomacy, indirectness, and respectful speech. In Akan culture, disclaimers like “As the elders say...” or “I speak not to offend...” are used to invoke communal wisdom and defer responsibility, which supports values of communal knowledge, non-confrontation, and social hierarchy. The usage of these proverbs, idioms, and other wise sayings in the community demonstrate how communicatively competent an individual is.

2.10 Theoretical background

There are different theories that can be applied in analyzing the pragmatics of an utterance. Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce speech acts in social situations. Olawe (2022) believes any of the pragmatic theories can serve as a guideline for the analysis of language use and understanding of utterance meaning(s) in different communicative contexts. Two theories are employed in this study: Politeness Theory by Brown & Levinson (1987) and Language Socialization theory by Ochs and Schieffelin (1986). These theories were adopted because together they provide a comprehensive explanation of how Akan disclaimers function both interactionally and culturally. Politeness Theory explains the immediate pragmatic role of disclaimers in managing face, reducing imposition, and maintaining harmony during sensitive speech acts such as advice, correction, and disagreement. It helps account for how speakers strategically use disclaimers to protect both their own and the listener's social image. However, politeness alone does not fully explain why Akan speakers consistently prefer such strategies. Language Socialization Theory complements this by showing how speakers acquire these norms through cultural upbringing, communal values, and everyday interaction. It explains how children and younger speakers learn when, how, and to whom disclaimers should be used. Together, the two theories allow the study to capture both the functional use and the cultural transmission of disclaimers in Akan discourse.

2.10.1 Politeness theory

According to Meizhen and Xue (2021), politeness has been and continues to be a crucial social or interpersonal phenomenon that helps to maintain social equilibrium and friendly relations, which allows us to assume that our interlocutors are initially being cooperative. Politeness can be defined as proper social conduct, awareness of etiquette and tactful consideration for others. Grundy (2002) looks at politeness as follows:

Linguistic politeness is the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to addressees. Polite expressions are properly and appropriately carried out in social interaction so as to avoid being offensive. In linguistic politeness, the speaker tries to be as tactful and respectful as possible and to avoid face threat. (p. 46)

Politeness strategies and expressions prevent conflict and provide harmony among communicative participants and strengthen the antipersonalistic and communal (collectivist) aspect of African culture. Ide (1989) defined linguistic politeness as follows:

Linguistic politeness is the language usage associated with smooth communication realized (1) through the speaker's use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favourably by the addressee, and (2) through the speaker's choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities. (p. 225)

This perspective places a strong premium on fitting in with societal standards and becoming socially acceptable. The African face notion is more in line with Goffman's theory of the face. According to Goffman's sociological theory of the face, the face is a socially borrowed public asset rather than a private one. According to Agyekum (2024), the African face idea and the expressions that go along with it are founded on social and community demands. The origin of theoretical interest in politeness is often attributed to Paul Grice's paper *'Logic and Conversation'* (Grice, 1975) that marks the beginning of the study of linguistic politeness within the framework of Anglo-American pragmatics, which was itself then emerging from the area of philosophy of language (Eelen, 1999). This impulse is said to have had the form of a remark suggesting the maxim "be polite" as one of the other maxims "aesthetic, social or moral in character" that might be necessary to arrive at pragmatic

meaning, apart from those operating under the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975, p.49). Furthermore, Grice's paper is believed to have directly influenced the early works on politeness by (Leech, 2003; Fraser and Nolen, 1981; Lakoff, 1973)

2.10.1.1 Geoffrey Leech's Politeness theory

Leech (2003) introduced two systems of rhetoric for conversation: textual and interpersonal. Textual rhetoric consists of the following principles:

The Processibility Principle,

The Clarity Principle,

The Economy Principle, and

The Expressivity Principle.

Interpersonal rhetoric consists of the following set of principles:

The Politeness Principle (PP),

The Irony Principle, and

The Cooperative Principle (i.e. Grice's CP).

The purpose of the Politeness Principle, according to Leech (2003) is to establish and maintain feelings of belonging and unity within a group. The PP regulates the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place' Leech (2003, p.82). There are six maxims within the PP: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The first and second maxims form a pair, as do the third and the fourth. These maxims operate on a range of scales which determine the type of politeness required within a discourse: cost-benefit, optionality, indirectness, authority, and social distance. Cost-benefit scales are related to how threatening an act is perceived to be within a culture. Optionality scale is concerned with the degree of choice the speaker gives the hearer. Indirectness is related to the amount of inferential effort a hearer must put in to determine the force of the utterance. Authority is

relevant to the social power difference between Speaker and Hearer. Social distance echoes the social variable ‘distance’ between the interlocutors in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory.

Moreover, Leech introduced two types of politeness: negative and positive. Negative politeness refers to the minimization of the impoliteness of impolite illocutions, and positive politeness refers to the maximization of the politeness of polite illocutions. In addition, Leech distinguished between semantics and pragmatics: semantics is abstract, formal, and categorical. Pragmatics; on the other hand, elucidates non-categorically, in terms of maxims and principles and tendencies, the use of the grammar for communication’ Leech (2014, p.124). On the same note, he identified two forms of politeness scales--semantic (originally termed absolute politeness) and pragmatic (originally termed relative politeness). The semantic politeness scale registers degrees of politeness in terms of the lexicogrammatical form and semantic interpretation of the utterance’ Leech (2014, p.88). For example,

1. Close the window.
2. Can you close the window?
3. Could you possibly close the window?

From the above, example 2 is more polite than example 1 and less polite than example 3. Example 3 is the most polite form here because it offers a greater range of optionality to the hearer. Leech (2003) stresses that the more a request offers choice to hearer, the more polite it is. He has been criticized for maintaining that some speech acts are inherently polite (e.g. congratulating and praising) or impolite (e.g. criticizing and blaming). Fraser objects saying that, ‘sentences are not ipso facto polite, nor are languages more or less polite. It is only speakers who are polite’ (Fraser 1990, p. 233). Another criticism was directed at Leech’s model being unable to capture the notion of impoliteness.

2.10.1.2 Richard Watts' Politeness theory

Apart from drawing attention to some of the inadequacies of previous approaches to politeness, Richard Watts' 2003 book *Politeness* makes a useful contribution by stressing the importance of distinguishing between what it calls politeness1 – the non-specialist participant's perceptions of what is or is not polite; and politeness2 – an abstract, metalinguistic term used by researchers. Watts believes that it is politeness1 that should be the subject of linguistic investigation. Arguably, this is also implicitly present in Brown and Levinson's work. Watts further emphasizes how important it is to take into account the fact that politeness is not something easily defined, but it can be different things to different people, and interlocutors 'struggle over politeness1'. He acknowledges that cooperative behavior and showing consideration for others are universal, and is of the opinion that 'the theoretical second-order terms *politic behaviour* and *politeness* can serve to refer universally to such social behavior' (Watts, 2003, p. 30). However, native speakers' ideas about politeness will vary and they will disagree over what is or is not polite. In a very post-modern way, stress is laid on the fact that politeness is a relative and constantly contested notion (relative to situation, speakers, context), although general agreement about what is (im)polite is still expected.

Watts blames Brown and Levinson for abstracting away from politeness and turning politeness into a universal, timeless, static concept which does not take into account the dynamics of human interaction. For him, Brown and Levinson's model 'makes society to be static and unchangeable and this does not account for why individuals agree or disagree on what is and what is not (im)polite language' (Watts (2003, p.160). Watts' model rests on two major concepts:

1) 'Politic behavior' denotes the expected and conventionalized norms of behaviour in a particular situation.

2) 'Linguistic politeness' which is defined as "any linguistic behavior which goes beyond the bounds of politeness behaviour" (Watts (2003, p. 161), emphasizing that it is open to dispute.

As such, some of the utterances classified as polite in other models would not be given such an interpretation by Watts; rather, they would be considered just expected politeness behavior, which for him is not the same as politeness. Unlike Brown and Levinson's model, no linguistic expressions are considered inherently polite here and politeness is negotiable. Quite understandably, apart from the past experiences of the speakers, there are no hard and fast rules telling us what is or is not polite; so this model is 'an intersubjective, historically determined' one (Watts 2003, p. 166). It is less abstract, idealized and therefore less imprecise, and thus manages to take us closer to describing real human interaction.

2.10.1.3 Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's Politeness theory (1987)

Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson's theory in *Politeness: Some universals of language usage*, originally published in 1978 and revised in 1987 is the theory labelled as "the best articulated politeness theory to date" (Kasper (2004, p.376). This theory was developed within linguistically oriented anthropology and derives its basic notions from the ideas of the American sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of *face*. Goffman and Newill (1967, p.5) defined face as "The positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". Goffman maintained that the notion of 'face' (one's social image) is the basis on which the behaviors of participants in any social interaction are structured and regulated. Participants are often oriented towards what others think of them during the course of social interaction; e.g. if events establish a face that is better than what one might have expected, one is likely to 'feel good'. If one's ordinary expectations are not fulfilled, one is likely to 'feel bad'. Moreover, people also have feelings toward the face sustained for other participants.

Thus, in order to ‘save face’, either the face of Speaker or Hearer, people usually perform *face-work*, which are forms of habitual and standardized practices, learnt by participants through socialization (the life-long process of inheriting one’s society skills, social norms and customs), and are consistent with face. Goffman addressed the cultural diversity of face and observed that every person, subculture, and society seems to have its own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices. Hence, an act which is considered face-threatening in one culture and needs the application of face-saving practices from the part of the speaker might not be considered as such in another culture. For example, among the Arabic and the Saudi communities, it is customary to arrive at least five to ten minutes late to a home to which one has been invited. However, in Western cultures, arriving late at a program will be a serious face threatening act which requires the utilization of face-saving practices from the speaker’s part. Again, among the Akans, one cannot greet an elderly person or a chief while having a cap on. One can also not use the left hand to greet. These acts will incur an FTA should it happen.

Goffman’s notion of face and its cultural diversity was intriguing to Brown and Levinson, who considered the notion of saving face as the essence of politeness and equated face-saving practices with politeness strategies. In other words, Brown and Levinson affirmed that politeness phenomena are instances of face-work, which means that ultimately, concerns about one’s face and the face of others is the primary justification for all instances of politeness. Like Goffman, Brown and Levinson theorized that the notion of face, which they define as *„the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”* Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) is vulnerable; thus, must be continually monitored by interactants during social interaction. They claimed that individuals have two types of face: positive and negative. Positive face was defined as: *‘the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others,’* and negative face as: *‘the want of every competent adult member that*

his actions be unimpeded by others' (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). They further contended that face was the foundation for both positive and negative politeness: positive politeness is focused on preserving the positive face of a person, such as their desire to be liked, admired, and related to positively, and negative politeness is focused on preserving the negative face of a person, such as their desire for freedom of action and non-imposition, whether it is the speaker's or the hearer's.

Positive face/positive politeness

Positive face is the desire for someone to be liked, appreciated, validated, and positively associated to, according to Brown and Levinson (1987). Keeping a happy face entail presenting a happy picture of oneself to the outside world. Our goal, when we appeal to someone's positive face, is to boost their self-confidence and make them feel good about who they are. We may, for instance, remark on someone's attire, congratulate them on their accomplishments, or concur with their viewpoint. We steer clear of arguments, insults, and critiques when we want to keep someone's good face intact. Let's look at ways of appealing to someone's positive face.

Akan

W'atar yi da mu soronko _Your dress is exceptionally beautiful'

Here, the speaker makes the listener feel good about themselves by complimenting them and confirming their choice of clothes.

—This piece of work is really fantastic. Well done!'

Here the speaker is congratulating the listener on their work and recognizing their achievements.

The speaker can also protect his/her positive face. We do this by concealing actions that may be damaging to our self-image. In the world of Sociology, this is referred to as '**saving**

face'. Saving face is a strategy for avoiding humiliation or embarrassment, maintaining dignity or preserving one's reputation.

Negative face/negative politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) define negative face as an individual's desire *not* to have their basic rights and freedoms impeded by others. Whereas positive face involves a desire to be connected to others, negative face desires autonomy (a person's ability to act on their own interests). Brown and Levinson assert that, when we appeal to a person's negative face, we want to make them feel like they have not been taken advantage of. An example is: "I know it's a real pain, and I hope you don't mind, but could you please print these off for me"? Here, the speaker has appealed to the listener's negative face by using what Brown and Levinson call Negative Politeness. The speaker has used negative politeness strategies, like hedging and indirectness, to avoid feelings of imposition on the listener. Imposition is a situation in which someone expects another person to do something that they do not want to do or that is not convenient. This easily results in face threatening acts.

Face threatening acts (FTAs)

Brown and Levinson further maintained that interlocutors often strive to save face when they are confronted with a face threatening act (FTA). FTAs are acts that run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker' Brown and Levinson (1987, p.70). FTAs may threaten four types of face, the speaker's positive face (e.g. apologies, confessions, acceptance of compliments), the speaker's negative face (e.g. excuses, expression of thanks, acceptance of offers), the addressee's positive face (e.g. criticism, ridicule, disagreement), and the addressee's negative face (e.g. orders, requests, advice). A face-threatening act is when communication can damage a person's sense of face or affect the needs and desires of someone's positive or negative face. Face-threatening acts can be **verbal** (using words or language), **paraverbal** (conveyed in the characteristics of speech such as tone or inflexion),

or **non-verbal** (facial expressions or body language). According to Brown and Levinson, face-threatening acts may threaten either the speaker's or the listener's face (either positive or negative).

2.10.1.4 Differences on politeness theories by different scholars

Leech (2003) concentrates on manners principles that are generally applicable to dialogue exchanges. Watts highlights how social environment and power relationships influence how people behave politely. Brown and Levinson (1987) focus on face-threatening behaviors and face-needs management techniques. While Watts (2003) stresses that politeness practices are socially and culturally contextual, Brown and Levinson argue for universals in politeness methods that apply to all cultures. Although methodologically, Leech's approach nevertheless recognizes that etiquette varies depending on the situation. Brown and Levinson establish a theoretical framework based on face requirements, Watts critiques universal politeness rules and emphasizes the variety caused by social variables, and Leech provides a series of conversational maxims to promote courteous behavior. Each theory makes a distinct contribution to our knowledge of politeness, reflecting different features of how language works to govern social relationships and interactions.

2.10.1.5 Politeness strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that when face-threatening acts are unavoidable, individuals can employ four primary strategies to minimise the threat to the listener's face. These strategies are usually used to avoid embarrassing someone or making them feel uncomfortable. These strategies include Positive politeness, Negative politeness, Bald On-record, and Off-record (indirect) and illustrated diagrammatically as follows:

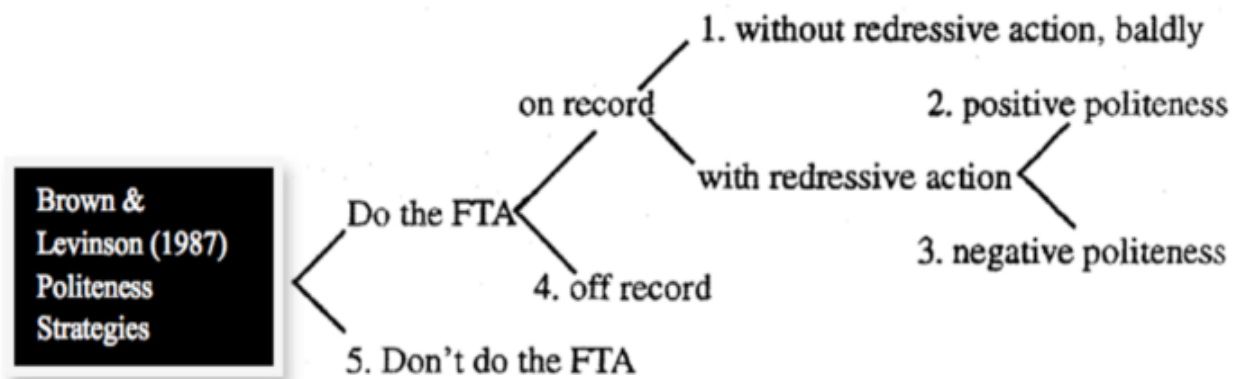


Figure 2.10.1.6. Brown and Levinson's Politeness strategies (1987)

Positive politeness

Positive politeness strategies aim to reduce the threat to the listener's positive face. Positive politeness strategies include: finding common grounds; juxtaposing criticism with compliments; telling jokes; and using statements of friendship. These strategies make the listener feel good about themselves and avoid conflict or offence by emphasizing friendliness and politeness.

"Hey mate, can I borrow a fiver?" - Using friendly language.

"I love your shoes, and your hair looks great. I'm not sure about that top, though..." - Juxtaposing a criticism with compliments.

"Oh, you played this word wrong. Don't worry, I spell things wrong all the time!" - Finding a common ground.

The positives of this strategy, according to Brown and Levinson, include: an increased sense of solidarity between the speaker and the listener; decreased social distance. Akan disclaimers maintain positive face by showing respect, empathy, and inclusivity.

Negative politeness

Negative politeness strategies are aimed at the listener's negative face and are meant to avoid any imposition on the listener. We use negative politeness strategies when we

presume that our speech will impose on the listener in some way and wish to avoid feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment. Such strategies include hedging (a word or phrase that makes a statement less forceful or assertive), minimizing the imposition, apologizing, being indirect, and using questions rather than commands.

"I don't think you know where the toilets are, do you?" - Being indirect and hedging.

–Could you print this off for me? It's only a few pages and won't take long!" -

Minimizing the imposition.

"I'm so sorry, but could you help me?" - Being apologetic

Akan disclaimers protect the speaker's and hearer's negative face by avoiding direct confrontation and preserving autonomy

Bald on-record

The Bald on-record strategy does not attempt to limit the threat to the listener's face. We usually use this strategy when there is a sense of urgency, if we know the listener well, or if there is a low risk of threat to the listener's face. When we use this strategy, we get straight to the point and do not use any additional language to help soften our message.

"Watch out!" - Sense of urgency.

"Your headlights are on!" - In the interest of the listener.

"Eat up!" - This command would likely be face-threatening if the speaker and listener did not know each other. However, if the speaker and listener know each other well, this would be deemed acceptable.

The positives of this strategy include: getting recognition for being honest; avoiding confusion by not using unnecessary language; and putting public pressure on the listener when needed.

Off-record

Brown and Levinson (1987) final politeness strategy is the off-record or indirect strategy. This strategy involves some serious indirectness; the speaker typically avoids saying the potentially face-threatening act altogether. Instead, the speakers' intentions are implied, and it is up to the listener to interpret them. In this situation, the speaker can get credit for not imposing on the listener, and the listener is given a chance to present themselves as helpful or generous. However, this strategy relies heavily on pragmatics to convey the intended meaning.

Speaker: *"Is there a free chair over there?"*

Listener: *"Yes, here you go."* (They give the speaker a chair).

Speaker: *"I have a headache."*

Listener *–Oh dear. Here, take some of my painkillers."*

In both situations, the speaker never actually asks for anything and therefore the imposition on the listener is reduced. The positives of this strategy include: getting credit for being tactful and avoiding responsibility for a potentially face-threatening act. Akan disclaimers use indirectness, hedging, and implicature to avoid directness and potential conflict and these fall under off-record.

2.10.1.7 Sociological variables

Brown and Levinson (1987) list three sociological variables which determine the degree of politeness to use. These variables are:

1. The social distance between speaker and listener;
2. The relative power difference between the speaker and listener;
3. The level of the seriousness of the potential face threat;

Generally speaking, degrees of politeness can vary in the following three situations:

- The greater the social distance between the speaker and the listener, the more politeness is expected.
- The greater the listener's perceived relative power over the speaker, the more politeness is recommended.
- The greater the imposition on the listener, the higher level of politeness is required.

2.10.1.8 Criticism of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Studies suggest that the phenomenon of politeness is a worthwhile area of research in linguistic pragmatics, and clearly considered politeness phenomenon from a Gricean and speech-act theoretic point of view, giving priority to the speaker's intention, and abstracting away from the actual speaker to model persons that have individual rationality and face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 2003). One recurrent assumption that these theories have is that different cultures are homogeneous, and that they agree on what politeness is as a notion, which leads to universalizing politeness, its rules and principles. This universality claim led to their models and theories being applied in numerous empirical studies, which have not always confirmed the claims of their theories. Consequently, researchers have found that some of the features and strategies described in Brown and Levinson (1987) theory do not apply in some cultures, particularly those which are collectivistic (group-dominant) rather than individualistic (self-dominant), such as the Polish (Ogiermann, 2009; Wierzbicka, 1985), and the Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988).

Politeness theory has been accused of being ethnocentric in its approach as it fails to recognize that politeness can vary around the world. Brown and Levinson based their own definition of politeness on Goffman's (1967) concept of face. A major criticism of the face-saving model is that it invokes a Western-centric bias and it has been suggested that different cultural backgrounds may lead to different productions of the level of politeness (Chang, 2008). Eelen (2001), also argues that the theory is too universalistic, overly theoretical, and

fail to account for the social and cultural diversity of politeness phenomena. Despite these criticisms however, Brown and Levinson's theory remains a very useful analytical framework for speech act studies concerned with understanding and comparing politeness phenomena for which no alternative has been offered so far' Ogiermann, (2009, p. 210).

2.10.1.9 Politeness in Akan

Ofori's (2016) work on Politeness in Akan examines how speakers use language to maintain harmony, respect, and social balance in interaction. The study shows that politeness in Akan is deeply rooted in cultural values such as respect for age, social hierarchy, and communal solidarity. Linguistic strategies like honorifics, greetings, indirectness, hedges, and disclaimers are used to manage face and avoid conflict. Ofori argues that Akan politeness goes beyond individual choice and reflects shared social norms learned through socialization. The work highlights how effective communication in Akan depends on sensitivity to context, status, and relational expectations. According to Asem (2017), it is possible that people will have divergent opinions on which acts are courteous and which are not. As a result, what is deemed courteous in one cultural setting may not be considered so in another. Interlocutors use politeness approaches to make both parties relaxed and comfortable, which may be a common sentiment shared by individuals all over the globe. It is used to show concern for others and to reduce dangers to one's self-esteem in a certain social setting.

Among the Akans, children are taught by their parents to greet their elders and even their age-mates, to say *meda wo ase* 'Thank you' when they receive a gift from someone else, say *kafra* or *kose* 'sorry' when they injure someone, prefix their sentences with *mepa wo kyew/mepaakyew*, 'please' and keep their hands behind them when speaking to an elderly person. Children are taught the aforementioned etiquettes in order to preserve their own and their interlocutors' face when communicating. Yankah (1999) found that in the Akan, using apologetic formulae such as *mesere me ka* 'I plead to say' and *sebe* 'sorry' is a type of

politeness. These are used to warn interlocutors of an upcoming perceptible or actual profanity, verbal taboo, or proverb, as well as to avoid giving the idea that a speaker is being overly offensive or misusing the language.

2.11.1 Language Socialization theory (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986)

The second theory for the analysis of this study is the Language Socialization Theory by Ochs & Schieffelin (1986). Language socialization is a theoretical and methodological paradigm that originated in the discipline of anthropology, with the goal of addressing the relationship between culture and language learning. Scholars of language socialization use methods from ethnography, field linguistics, and sociolinguistics to document and analyze patterns of language use in communities. Language socialization theory examines how individuals learn language through social interactions within their cultural contexts (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986). This theory posits that language acquisition is not merely the result of cognitive development but is deeply embedded in social practices and interactions. It involves not only learning vocabulary and grammar but also understanding the social norms, values, and cultural practices associated with language use.

In the 1980s, anthropologists developed the paradigm of language socialization in response to a lack of attention to the diversity of languages and cultures represented within the study of first-language acquisition. To focus language learning research on cultural and linguistic diversity, language socialization examines how people use language in daily interactions, as well as the long-standing beliefs and attitudes about language and culture that influence how languages are structured and used. Language socialization emphasizes that humans build social identities, cultural practices, and senses of belonging as they learn and use languages. While language socialization originated in the study of young children's first-language acquisition, it has since expanded to examine broader contexts of language learning. Guided by the understanding that the structures of real-time interactions and social

institutions mutually create one another, language socialization scholars have examined how our social roles in families, schools, and professions shape our language use across the lifespan. Since the 1990s, language socialization research has taken particular interest in the relationship between language and power, drawing from theories of language ideologies or taken-for-granted beliefs about languages and their speakers to address topics related to multilingualism, including code-mixing, second-language learning, heritage-language learning, and language shift and revitalization. Language socialization, as an area of study, represents an orientation to language and literacy development in particular communities and settings that is informed by anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics and education.

The core theoretical premise of language socialization is that language is learned through interactions with others who are more proficient in the language and its cultural practices and who provide novices explicit and (or) implicit mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language, and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identities of community members. Major early intellectual forces in the development of this theoretical focus from anthropology, sociology, and linguistics (Bernstein, 1962; Ervin-Tripp, 2012; Halliday, 1980, 2003; Hymes, 1964; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) examined language development (socialization) in terms of (a) learning language, (b) learning through language, and (c) learning about language.

2.11.2 Language Socialization theory by Patricia Duff

Language Socialization theory, as detailed by Patricia Duff, explores how individuals acquire language skills and cultural norms through social interactions. This theory emphasizes the significance of context, community, and social practices in learning a language, highlighting that language acquisition is not merely a cognitive process but also a social one. Duff (2007) opines that Language learning occurs within specific social contexts which shape the way learners engage with language. These include the cultural practices,

interpersonal relationships, and institutional frameworks present within a community. She asserts that social interactions form the core of language socialization. Through dialogues, discussions, and communal activities, individuals receive feedback, negotiate meanings, and develop their linguistic competencies. Language learning is intricately linked to cultural practices and norms. Understanding these components is essential as they provide the context in which language is used and understood. Duff posits that Language socialization theory acknowledges the presence of multiple languages and dialects within communities, considering how these variations impact the socialization process. She avows that language socialization frameworks can be employed to understand the processes through which children learn languages in various settings, whether in formal educational contexts or informal social environments. Language socialization theory provides essential insights into how language acquisition is interconnected with social, cultural, and contextual factors.

2.11.3 Heath's Theory of language Socialization

Heath (1983) research underscores the importance of considering the cultural context in language socialization processes. She highlights how language learning is shaped by cultural practices, values, and beliefs within specific communities. Moreover, Heath's work emphasizes the diversity of language socialization experiences across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts, challenging monolithic view of language acquisition. Heath's concept of *communicative practice* has been influential in language socialization theory. She argues that language learning occurs through participation in social groups where members share common interests, goals, and ways of using language. Within these communities of practice, individuals do acquire language skills and cultural knowledge through observation, imitation, and active engagement in communicative activities.

In her current work Heath (2017) extends her foundational ideas on language socialization to adolescent learning communities. She argues that language socialization is

not confined to early childhood but continues throughout life, especially in adolescence, where peer groups, digital media, and community-based programs shape linguistic and cultural norms. Heath emphasizes that adolescents are socialized through participation in shared activities, including sports, arts, and digital interactions, where language use is tied to identity formation and group membership. She highlights that these settings provide distinct linguistic practices that may differ from school norms but are equally valid and rich in communicative functions. Heath critiques formal education for often neglecting the informal yet powerful contexts in which youth develop language competence. By observing how adolescents learn the “language of participation,” roles, and responsibilities in out-of-school settings, Heath underscores the need for educational systems to recognize and integrate these forms of language use. Her work supports a sociocultural view of language development, asserting that learning is context-driven and socially constructed.

2.11.4 Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) Theory of language Socialization

Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) opine that Language Socialization hinges on the potential of embodied communication to engage novices in apprehending and realizing familiar and novel ways of thinking, feeling, and acting with others across the life span. Language socialization presupposes that community members desire and expect children and other novices to display appropriate forms of sociality and competence. Language becomes instrumental in effectuating these ends through symbolic and performative capacities that mediate human experience. Language socialization is rarely overt; instead, it depends on the inexperienced learner's capacity to deduce meanings from regular indexical correlations between spoken forms and relationships, institutions, emotions, and mental models. The analysis of linguistic "input" in early language socialization research focused on how ideologies related to children's communicative skills were embedded in language. Simplified speech is most common in communities where infants are often positioned as partners in

moralistic talks. Figure 2.11.5. presents a vibrant and structured view of Language Socialization theory as proposed by Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) showing how individuals are socialized through language use in homes, schools, and communities. This process helps them acquire communicative competence and understand cultural norms, ultimately leading to the formation of cultural identity and social membership.

Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) assert that one tenet of the language socialization paradigm is that the social, emotional, and intellectual trajectories of children and other novices are complexly structured by webs of social and economic institutions, public and domestic systems of control, practices, identities, settings, beliefs, meanings, and other forces.

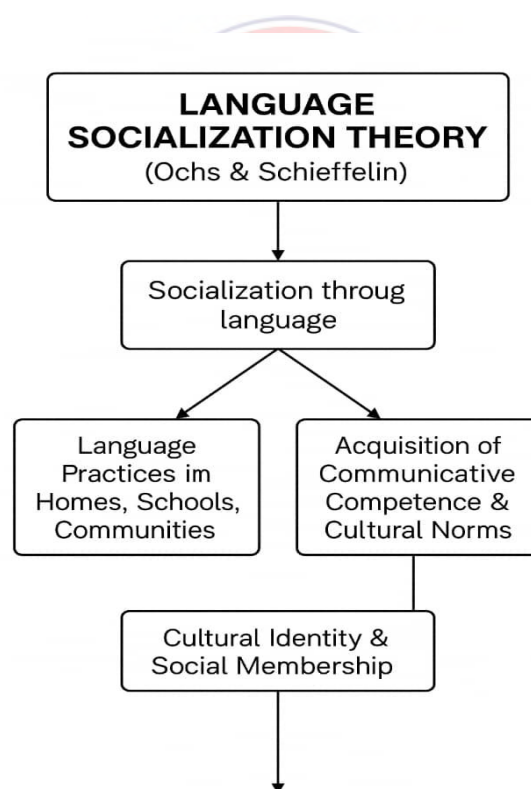


Figure 2.11.5 Language Socialization theory (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1986)

The inverse is also the case, in that immature members are agentic in the shaping of their development and have the capacity to resist and transform facets of the social order into which they are socialized (Goodwin & Kyratzis 2014). That is, language socialization is

inherently bidirectional, despite the obvious asymmetries in power and knowledge, and therein lies the seeds of intergenerational, historical continuity, and change within social groups (Pontecorvo et al. 2001). Given the emphasis on language usage, culture, socialization, and socio-historical difficulties among other things, the principles of the language socialization theory are unquestionably quite important to research on disclaimers. Akan Disclaimers capture a great deal of the people's social, cultural, and historical lives. The desire and expectation of community members for children and other novices to exhibit suitable kinds of sociality and competence is a prerequisite for language socialization. Language socialization theories explore how individuals acquire language and cultural norms through social interactions.

2.11.6 Differences among the theories

Duff's work emphasizes the role of language socialization in multilingual and multicultural settings. She explores how language learning occurs through participation in various social contexts and how it affects identity and community membership. She takes a sociocultural approach, looking at how language learning and use are intertwined with social practices and identity formation. She examines both formal and informal learning environments, including the impact of social networks and community interactions. Heath's research, particularly her study "Ways with Words", investigates how different communities socialize children into language and literacy practices. She contrasts the practices in different socio-cultural settings, such as between middle-class and working-class communities. Her approach is ethnographic and comparative, examining how different cultural contexts influence language use and literacy development. She highlights the role of community and family practices in shaping children's language skills and educational outcomes.

Ochs and Schieffelin's (1986) work is foundational in the field of language socialization. They are known for their studies on how children acquire language and cultural

norms through everyday interactions within their families and communities. Their approach is often detailed and ethnographic, focusing on how socialization practices vary across cultures and affect language development. They introduce concepts like “language socialization” as a process that involves learning, not just language, but also social norms and cultural values. In summary, while all three scholars focus on the intersection of language and socialization, Duff (2010) emphasizes multilingual and multicultural contexts, Ochs and Schieffelin (1986) provide foundational ethnographic insights into language acquisition and cultural norms, and Heath explores community-specific language and literacy practices.

2.11.7 Criticism of the Language Socialization theory

Language socialization theory has been influential, but it has also faced various criticisms. Here are some key critiques. Thorne and Lantolf (2006) argue that language socialization theory overly emphasizes the role of interaction and social contexts at the expense of individual cognitive processes and internal mechanisms. Their work on *Sociocultural Theory and Genesis of Second Language Development* critique the theory for not adequately considering individual cognitive development and the internalization of language learning beyond social interactions. Woolard (1998) argues that, language socialization theory often underestimates the role of power dynamics and inequalities in language learning processes, particularly in relation to class, race, and gender.

Heller (2007) critiques language socialization for not adequately addressing how cultural practices and language norms are subject to change and negotiation over time. She opines that the theory is sometimes seen as presenting a static view of culture, not accounting for the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural practices and language use. Collins (2009) raised concern that generalizations made within language socialization theory may not apply universally across different cultural or socio-economic contexts, leading to a lack of specificity in understanding diverse socialization practices. These critiques highlight the need

for a more nuanced and multidimensional approach to understanding language socialization, incorporating individual cognitive aspects, power dynamics, cultural fluidity, and context-specific variations.

2.12 Related studies

Several concepts have been explored in the Akan language, principally from the perspectives of sociolinguistics, cultural studies and pragmatics. Some of the notable phenomena in this regard include apologies, greetings, politeness, proverbs, and verbal indirection, among others. Since this particular study also comes within the purview of sociocultural pragmatics, it is important to comment on some of the studies that have dealt with these phenomena both in Akan and other languages. Agyekum (2022) examined ethnopragmatics and communicative competence in Akan. In his paper, Agyekum examines Akan communicative competence in terms of participants, speech community, speech events, and genre, as well as how these variables are used in Akan interactional ecologies. Selected axioms, such as proverbs, were discussed, as well as Akan ethnopragmatics and communicative competence in contemporary Ghana (Akan), with a focus on the social factors that have contributed to the decline in the use of such axioms. With society continually evolving, Agyekum speculates on how the change may affect what is historically perceived as the *proper* or *correct* ways of communicating and recommends ways to keep such modes of communication considered appropriate. The research contends that the essence of communicative competence, ethnopragmatics, and sociopragmatics is founded on the face-to-face aspect of Akan traditional communication.

Another work by Agyekum (2021), is conducted on a study on *Impoliteness: The Ghanaian Perspective*. The research focused on Ghanaians' traditional perceptions of impoliteness in light of Watts' (2003) concept of first-order impoliteness. According to the study, impoliteness is more than just the antithesis of politeness; it is the presentation of non-

cooperation, disapproval, and mutual hostility through specific communication behaviors that signify contempt. Interrupting people, using invectives, and using hostile nonverbal forms of communication (NVCs) are examples of communicative behaviors. The practice of unfriendly communicative behaviors destabilizes interpersonal relationships and demonstrates that a speaker is communicatively inadequate or incompetent.

The study also proposed the “*pardonability scale of impoliteness*”. He opines those invectives are the most offensive and least pardonable kind of impolite communication among Ghanaians. According to this scale, using unpleasant nonverbal cues is the least offensive and most forgiven form. Also, it was observed that not all speech occurrences are directly associated with the degree of offensiveness or pardonability indicated in the scale’s order of arrangement. Agyekum (2008) again investigated the pragmatics of Akan greetings. The paper focused on greetings as one of the most common language interactional routines among Ghana's Akans. It then went on to discuss the functions, contexts, and primary types of Akan greeting. The paper emphasized the purposes of greetings, such as the formation of social relationships, commitment to one another in social interactions, and the demonstration of individual communicative skills. The essay was analyzed within the context of anthropological linguistics' ethnography of communication, politeness, and speech act theory.

Akan pre-eventive apologies or apologetic signals were studied by Sekyi-Baidoo (2016). This study looked into the pre- and post-eventive apologies of Akan people. He examined the elementary differences between pre-eventive and post-eventive apologies and tried to place each of them within the general framework of politeness. Once more, the study examined the pragmalingual and felicitous circumstances or sociopragmatic rules that control the appropriate use of pre-eventive apologies. The study found that although post-eventive apologies are considered to be very important in determining one’s politeness and communicative competence, pre-eventive apologies are highly valued by the Akans as a

politeness strategy because, in contrast to post-eventive apologies, they prevent or avoid rather than repair harm to rapport and politeness.

Employing the Relevance theory, Owu-Ewie (2019) investigated the advisory role of proverbs in Akan (Fante). The study sought to explore the role of proverbs as a counselling tool in marriage contraction among the Akans, and to examine the pragmatic relevance and impact of Akan proverbs in the context of advising marriage couples. The study showed that, in the final stages of the Akan traditional marriage process, speakers are free to give a range of advice to the couple as they are “enrolling” them on the cherished path of marriage. Regarding this, the optional speakers used a variety of Akan proverbs to emphasize themes like cooperation, patience, diligence, faithfulness, excessive friendship, paying attention to advice, modeling good behavior, respect for one another, respect for in-laws and prohibitions against violence.

Alabi (2022) looked at *Discursive Constructions of Selected Yorùbá Speech Acts: Apologies, Refusals, and Sympathies*. This study examined: (a) how and why the speech acts of apologies, refusals and expressions of sympathy/empathy are undertaken in Yorùbá interactions; (b) what strategies speakers employ in responding to such speech acts and whether participants were successful in their use of the strategies. Three types of apologies were identified: complex, explicit and multiple explicit. Secondary interjections were found in the three types of apologies, whereas primary interjections were used more in multiple explicit apologies. Refusals identified included direct, indirect, and complex. Two subcategories of direct refusals, performative refusals and non-performative, were identified. Apart from the speech act of greetings, the researcher observed that expressions of gratitude are employed to a higher degree than other speech acts. Greetings and gratitude expressions generally occur in situations to maintain relationships. For instance, greeting an older person

presents an individual as being responsible. Gratitude as well shows that an individual values another individual.

Using the face theory and politeness principles, Jingwei (2013) investigated the useful roles that hedges play in politeness. The study discovered that various kinds of hedges contribute to keeping communication civil. Additionally, it demonstrated how inappropriate usage of hedges results in pragmatic failure and a breakdown in courtesy. Per the findings, hedges are the most prevalent elements of fuzzy language and are important for upholding civility in conversation. In order to preserve and modify the connection between speakers and hearers and to ensure seamless communication, hedges can make communication euphemistic, mild, courteous, and adaptable. Wahyudi (2012) examined metapragmatic disclaimer as a power strategy of self-legitimation and other-de-legitimation in Netanyahu's UNGA speech. Using Critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study looked at how politicians use disclaimers in exonerating themselves from issues and craftily passing blame unto others. This was done with specific reference to Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister's speech. The research pinpointed the disclaimers that Netanyahu made during his 2011 UNGA speech on peace. The text's microstructure—syntax, semantics, vocabulary, and rhetoric—was also examined. These elements were used in conjunction with disclaimers to strengthen the investigation of ideological activity. As a result, the political rhetoric of legitimation spreads its dominance of power by taking the form of disclaimers.

Yang (2021) worked on *disclaimer as a metapragmatic device in Chinese: A corpus-based study*. The paper investigated the use of disclaimers in interpersonal interactions from a metapragmatic perspective through a corpus-based study. Two types of disclaimers were discussed. These were meta-negation disclaimer and meta-prohibition disclaimer. The meta-negation disclaimers follow formulaic pattern of *bùshì + wǒ + V* (I don't mean to, but...), and serve as face-threatening mitigation devices when criticizing the hearer. The meta-prohibition

disclaimers follow formulaic patterns of *bié + guàiwǒ + V* (don't blame me for...) and *nǐ bié + bù + ADJ* (don't feel... if...), and disclaim the speaker's negative identity when flouting the face of the hearer. Both meta-negation disclaimers and meta-prohibition disclaimers are related to an aspect of Chinese culture called *lǐ* (politeness) that stresses attentiveness to others and avoidance of conflict and confrontation. This is similar to what Yankah (1995) referred to as apologetic formulae.

Regarding disclaimers that are found in academic writing, Abdi's (2012) work on pragmatics titled *Smoothing the rough edges: Towards a typology of disclaimers in research articles* brought to light how academic writers use disclaimers to ward off any undesirable statement. He argues that in academic prose, writers also take advantage of disclaimers to remove any probable infelicities that could occur as a result of their research or language choices in an attempt to promote the precision and persuasive power of their text. The paper also identified and discussed six different types of disclaimers employed by academic writers in RAs. These included overt vs. covert disclaimers, excluders vs. includers disclaimers, internal vs. external disclaimers, antecedent vs. subsequent disclaimers, warning vs. clarification disclaimers, and local vs. global disclaimers.

Ajayi (2022) conducted research on Yoruba discursive interactions using metapragmatic disclaimers. The purpose of the study was to determine the forms and contextual uses of Yoruba metapragmatic disclaimers. Extracted text from a corpus of Yoruba conversations that spontaneously occurred in various communication scenarios made up the data. The analytical tool was a modified version of Mey's pragmatic actions theory. Based on the people's shared cultural knowledge (SCK), two types of disclaimers in Yoruba were identified: status-bound and non-status-bound. Beyond helping the user(s) create and recreate a positive persona, it was discovered that disclaimers functioned as face-management tools in the Yoruba language and culture.

Contrary to the long-held view by some scholars that disclaimers are prospective explanations used prior to potentially problematic actions (e.g. Caffi, 2007; Overstreet & Yule, 2001; Stokes & Hewitt, 1976), Tayebi and Parvaresh (2014) examined Persian language to demonstrate that disclaimers can also be retrospective. More precisely, the study attempted to see how the Persian language enables the speaker to disclaim an unwanted interpretation, extrapolate the formulaic disclaimer patterns that tend to recur in Persian, and to explain the range of functions fulfilled by these expressions. The 20-hour corpus of daily conversations revealed some cases of retrospective disclaimers which were explicable in terms of recognition criteria such as: (a) the presence of a potentially problematic action, (b) the identity typification which needed to be disavowed, and (c) the very act of saying or doing something. Besides, the analysis of both retrospective and prospective disclaimers revealed certain pragmatic functions. In this respect, it was found that in Persian the three most frequent functions fulfilled by both prospective and retrospective disclaimers are ‘explicating negative interpretation’, ‘showing tentativeness’ and ‘showing modesty’, respectively.

Ajayi’s (2022) and Tayebi and Parvaresh’s (2014) works are quite appealing, fascinating and contribute significantly to the field of pragmatic disclaimers. The pragmatic perspective from which the authors analyzed their data partly connects the present study and brings the two into some sort of resemblance. However, the current study focuses on Akan language and uses politeness theory and Language socialization theory in its analysis. The above review provides some evidence that, across languages and cultures, studies on disclaimers, and for that matter those undertaken from pragmatics perspective are enormous. However, Akan seems to be given little attention in this regard. From the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there is no known study that has looked at disclaimers in Akan and

this has motivated the researcher to delve into it to provide a solid foundation for future researchers.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter set out to review scholarly works on disclaimers to help clarify the core objectives of the study. Issues discussed in the chapter include: Ethno-linguistic description of Akan, the concept of disclaimers, the concept of pragmatics, pragmatic competence, components of pragmatic competence, communicative competence, ethnography of communication production. The chapter also discussed types of disclaimers as identified by some scholars such as Abdi, Ajayi, Caffi, Hongladarom, Tayebi and Parveresh and others. Further, the chapter discussed politeness theory and language socialization theory which is the theory adopted for the study. Lastly, the chapter presented some reviewed literature on disclaimers by renowned scholars to help put the study into proper perspective.

The literature reviewed in this research has revealed that disclaimers are crucial communicative strategies which are used across cultures to manage face, preserve politeness, and navigate delicate social interactions. By drawing on foundational theories such as Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory (1987) and Ochs & Schieffelin Language Socialization theory (1986), it is obvious that disclaimers serve numerous pragmatic functions that are deeply embedded in socio-cultural norms and linguistic conventions. Scholars (e.g. Ajayi, 2022; Frasor, 1980; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014) emphasize that disclaimers are context-sensitive devices which serves both speaker-protective and hearer-sensitive functions across speech communities. While the above literature has examined disclaimers in languages such as English, Persian, Yoruba, and Chinese, there is limited scholarly attention on Akan, an indigenous African language that can not to be overlooked. This has created a gap in the understanding of how disclaimers are classified and used within Akan socio-cultural settings. Akan, as a rich and expressive language, is known for its use of

indirectness, proverbs, and idioms, making it a fertile ground for exploring how pragmatic disclaimers function within its discourse.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is about how the data for the current study were collected and processed for the analysis. These include: the research approach, research design, research site, population, sample and sampling technique, instruments, ethical considerations, data collection, validity, data analysis, data reliability and conclusion.

3.1 Research approach

Burke and Christensen (2014) identified three research approaches, namely: qualitative, quantitative and mixed method. The current study is about the use of disclaimers in our daily conversation and therefore purely qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as a model that transpires in a natural setting where the researcher can develop details from the high involvement in the actual experiences of people. It is a social phenomenon investigated from the participant's viewpoint that leads to the discovery of the researcher. Dörnyei (2015) opines that the focal point of qualitative research is to describe, understand, and clarify a human experience. Therefore, this study sets out to describe, understand, and clarify the categories of Akan disclaimers, their sociocultural values and their functions. This in effect means it focusses on a careful and detailed description of the social event and practices to fathom how participants view and experience their world.

3.2 Research design

Centallas (2016, p. 17) opines that "research design is a critical component of any research project. The way we carry out a research project has important consequences for the validity of our findings". Research design is concerned with the overall plan that the researcher uses to collect data to answer the research questions outlined and the specific

technique to examine the data. To Creswell (2018), a research design spans plans and procedure involving making from broad assumption to detailed methods of collecting and analyzing data. To him, based on the research problem being addressed, research design provides the glue that holds the study together. He further indicates that a design is used to structure the research problem. The research design employed for this study is ethnographic research design. Ethnographic research aims to develop a broad or holistic understanding of a culture (an “ethnos”) and is most closely associated with the field of Anthropology, although it is sometimes also used in other disciplines (most notably sociology).

The goal of ethnographic research is to understand the behaviors (including language habits) of people living in a certain society by seeing them in their natural environments, usually during routine daily activities. Creswell and Creswell (2018) observe that to understand the patterns of a culture-sharing group, the ethnographer typically spends considerable time in the field interviewing, observing, and gathering documents about the group to understand their culture-sharing behaviors, beliefs, and language. It is in this light that the researcher resorted to this design to have much insight into the various types of disclaimers used in the daily conversation of the Akan. This is to say, the ethnographic research design paved way for the researcher to have personal interaction with native Akans who had knowledge about the phenomenon being explored.

3.3 Research site

Since this study is situated within the Akan ethnolinguistic landscape of Ghana, the researcher zoned the Akan communities into three major dialectal and cultural blocs: Fante Zone, Asante Zone, and Akuapem Zone. The zoning informed the purposive selection of three distinct communities, each representing one of these subgroups: Gomoa Eshiem (Fante Zone), Akropong (Akuapem Zone) and Adansi Praso (Asante Zone).

The site for the study was selected based on four major criteria. First, was to locate a place that fell within one of the regions of Ghana noted to be dominated by Akan speakers. This is because Akan is spoken in almost all the regions of Ghana but not all the regions are noted as home to the Akan people. Second, was to locate a place that is indigenous in nature. This is because speakers in these areas are presumed to speak the unadulterated form of the Akan language due to their geographical locations (Asem, 2017). Third was to find one dialect that represent one of the three Akan dialects that has achieved literary status. Asem (2017) opines that several dialects which are mutually intelligible make up the Akan language. However, just a few of these dialects have been developed and are taught in schools. Lastly, these sites were chosen as result of easy accessibility to data.

3.3.1 Fante zone

The Fante-speaking communities as zoned by the researcher included Mfantseman, Abura, Ajumako, Gomoa, Agona. Major towns include Cape Coast, Elmina, Mankesim, Agona-Swedru, Ajumako. Gomoa Eshiem, located in the Gomoa West District of the Central Region of Ghana, serves as the focal point for the Fante dialect. It was selected to represent the Fante dialectal zone. The community has a traditional authority system and demonstrates indigenous cultural norms. Its inclusion is justified by the fact that the inhabitant speak unadulterated form of the Fante language and also has a strong sociocultural background which helps to unearth research of this kind. The inhabitants are predominantly farmers and traders. They celebrate the Akwambo festival.

3.3.2 Akuapem zone

The Akuapem Zone is found in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It is made up of Akans and Guans. Some of its major towns are Akropong, Aburi, Larteh, Mamfe, Adukrom, Adawso, Mampong. The researcher chose Akropong as a site for this study because it is one of the towns that speak Akuapim Twi and not Guan. It is also the capital of the Akuapem

North district in Ghana. It is the traditional seat of the Akuapem people. Their major occupation is Agriculture. Akropong is embedded with unique traditional etiquette, making it a strategic site for investigating metapragmatic behavior. Their major festival is Odwira.

3.3.3 Asante zone

The Asante zone constitutes the largest Akan group with a centralized political system under the Asantehene. They include Kumasi Metropolis, Adansi, Kwawu, Bekwai, and Mampong. It is culturally rich in traditions like chieftaincy, ancestral reverence, and festivals (e.g., Adaye). Their oral tradition is strongly preserved through proverbs, drum language, and storytelling. Some of the major towns include Kumasi, Mampong, Obuasi, Ejisu, Konongo, Fosu, Praso and Duayawankwanta. Asante Twi is widely understood across Ghana and is used as a linguistic standard in schools and media. Adansi Praso was selected as the representative site for the Asante dialectal zone. Located in the Ashanti Region, Adansi Praso reflects the cultural values of the Asante, a centralized Akan group with rich traditions, strong chieftaincy structures, and a robust oral heritage.

In sum, the selected sites (Gomoa Eshiem, Akropong and Adansi Praso) reflect a strategic site of the Akan ethnolinguistic field, allowing the study to explore context-dependent language use and the influence of socialization practices across dialect zones. Each site offers a distinct sociocultural lens through which pragmatic phenomena such as disclaimers, compliments, and facework are enacted, providing a robust ethnographic base for this study. Lastly, the researcher believes that these areas offer rich pragmatic context (market, traditional and domestic settings) where language can be observed.

3.4 Population

Native speakers of Akan (Fante, Akuapem and Twi) made up the population for this study. Kusi (2012) defines population as a group of people or individuals with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested. Mutungwa and Orodho (2014) also

posit that population refers to the group of people who the researcher uses to get results for his or her study. The Akans predominantly speak Central Tano languages and are located in the southern regions of Ghana. They are the largest ethnic group in Ghana and primarily located in the southern and central regions of Ghana, encompassing areas like the Western, Central, Ashanti, Eastern, and Brong Ahafo regions, as well as some northern part of the Volta region. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana's total population was 30,832,019. Of this, the Akan ethnic group constituted 45.7% of the population, adding up to approximately 14,099,000 individuals.

3.5 Sample and sampling technique

The sample, according to Arikunto (2010), is the representative of the population under study. Asiamah et al. (2017) note that the sample population is determined using a selection criterion to select individuals of the general population who can, at best, share experiences and thoughts under the most convenient conditions. They further indicate that the reason for researchers selecting members of the target population is to reach candidates who can describe their experiences to address the research goal. For the reasons above, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is more appropriate for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to sample participants who are more knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2018)

A total of 25 participants were purposively sampled to participate in this study. These included 13 males and 12 females. This measure was supported by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2008), who explained that in purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought. The researcher used the purposive sampling technique in order to get participants who are socioculturally endowed in the Akan language. Again, it was also to make use of people who are communicatively competent in the Akan

language who do not speak any form of adulterated Akan in the community where they live especially in the face of global influences and the phenomenon of language contact.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Bryman (2004) opines that ethical consideration is part of the research work and cannot be avoided. Ethics are integral to the conduct of research (Guillemin & Gillan 2004), and this made it necessary for some ethical procedures to be followed for protection of all who participated in this research work. To ensure this, formal and non-formal permission was sought from the various research site where the study was conducted. There were only a few cases where permission was not sought due to the spontaneous nature of the event. The researcher also applied the appropriate methods of data collections, analyses and reporting to avoid any form of intellectual dishonesty. Literature that was used in this study was duly acknowledged. Bailey et al. (2011) identified some ethical consideration for a proper research work. These included:

Informed consent - where individuals should be provided with sufficient information about the research work and make voluntary decision to take part in the research.

Self-determination - where individuals have the right to determine their participation in the research including the right to pull out as and when they so wish

Minimizing harm -where researchers are urged not to do anything that is likely to course harm to participants.

Anonymity- where researchers are to protect the identity of the research participants before, during and after the research work.

Confidentiality- where researchers are to make sure all data records are kept confidential at all times.

In view of this, all participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity in the information they gave during the research process. The field notes and audio recordings made

at various social events such as funerals, naming ceremonies, durbar, and festivals and community engagement were done freely and with the cooperation of the persons concerned.

3.7 Data collection

The data for this study were collected over a period of six months across three Akan-speaking communities in the Central, Eastern, and Ashanti regions of Ghana. A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed, allowing the researcher to gather authentic and context-rich data on the use of disclaimers in real-life communication. The researcher immersed himself in the daily activities of the selected communities, attending social events such as funerals, naming ceremonies, festivals and many others. The researcher also had the opportunity to observe arbitrations, market interactions, and family conversations. A non-obtrusive role was maintained to ensure natural language use. The aim was to identify how speakers use disclaimers in their daily conversations. Notes were taken on the setting, participants, relationships between interlocutors, speech events, and the communicative intent behind the disclaimers. Whenever possible, verbatim expressions were noted down, especially when audio recording was not feasible.

Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 participants who possess Akan sociocultural inclination. Participants were purposively selected based on their fluency, profound knowledge in Akan culture and their active participation in social discourse. Interviews were conducted with the help of an interview guide in Akan and translated into English. The researcher explained the questions thoroughly to the participants and encouraged them to give real-life examples and elaborate on the cultural and interpersonal motivations behind using disclaimers. The interviews were conducted for the researcher to have proper perspectives on the things he observed. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent from participants.

Role plays were conducted by first briefing participants on a familiar communicative scenario. Participants were encouraged to use their natural speech styles. The scenes were audio-recorded. After each session, a brief reflection was held to allow participants to comment on their language choices and behavior during the role play. Consequently, all interviews, role play and some observed interactions were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants were informed about the purpose and confidentiality of the recordings. The recordings captured verbal content, tone, hesitation, pauses, and emphatic stress, which are essential in pragmatic analysis. Where recording was not possible, the researcher took detailed notes immediately after the event. Transcriptions were done verbatim in Akan and subsequently translated into English for coding and interpretation.

3.8 Research instruments

According to Arikunto (2010, p. 203), “research instruments are tools used to gather data in order to make the work easier and obtain valid results”. Considering the ethnographic nature of this study, the researcher used three main instruments in collecting data. These tools are recording, interview, and role play.

3.8.1 Recording of events

Tracy (2020) avers that recording plays a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy, reliability, and richness of data collected during the research process. The researcher recorded interactions that contained disclaimers from different social events including marriage ceremonies, funerals, community engagement, durbars and many more. The researcher recorded the proceedings with a phone. Again, all the interviews done with respect to sociocultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers and functions were recorded to help for easy analysis. Similarly, role play conducted was also audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. Recordings of interviews, social events, role play provided accuracy and thoroughness by preserving the data for later examination. This, according to Merriam and

Tisdell, (2016) facilitates comprehensive data analysis and guarantees data integrity throughout time. The recording also helped the researcher to revisit the data on multiple occasions to conduct in-depth analysis and identify subtle themes that may have been missed.

3.8.2 Interview

An interview is a dialogue between two or more persons in which the interviewer asks questions to extract facts or information from the interviewee. Interviews are appropriate because they allow the researcher to probe the opinions expressed by respondents further (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Through an interview guide, the researcher was able to obtain some valuable data for the study. Two forms of interviews were used in the source of data. These were semi-structured and structured interviews. The researcher's aim of using interview in this study was that interviews are especially good at producing data which deal with topics in-depth and in detail. Interviews need only simple equipment and build on the conversational skills that the researcher already has. The researcher obtained valuable insight based on the depth of the information gathered. Interview is the most frequently used data collection strategy to acquire insights on social phenomena (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). Also, respondents have the opportunity to explore and expand their ideas and explain their views as related to the various questions. In all, the use of interview helped the researcher to unearth the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers and also understand why speakers chose to use disclaimers in their speech. The conversational nature of the interviews helped the researcher to establish trust, encouraging participants to be open and candid with their responses. Again, the interview also helped the researcher to situate responses within the participant's cultural and social contexts, contributing to a holistic understanding of the research topic. The use of the interview guide ensured a structured and flexible approach in gathering rich qualitative data for the study. It also captured the pragmatic functions and socio-cultural values embedded in the use of Akan disclaimers.

3.8.3 Role-play

A role-play is a technique in which research participants, usually within a group setting, are asked to act out a role and thereby open up some process, or relationship, to a discussion by the group. So, for example, two respondents might act out a doctor-patient consultation regarding a certain complaint, or an encounter between a parent and child over a particular issue. Role-play needs careful introduction and sensitive handling, since many people are reluctant to perform this kind of task. Handled well, it can prove amusing and enjoyable for participants, proving highly instructive in the process. In this work, the researcher used role-play to gather data where it was not possible to get data from the natural settings in the study. In all, role-play serves as a versatile qualitative instrument that enables researchers to explore complex phenomena, social interactions and individual experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of human behavior and cognition. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) note that role-play is a dynamic technique that offers insights into decision-making, behavior, and emotional reactions. Some scholars like Golato (2015) argues that role-play cannot be considered real since the respondents create interactions from pretense contexts. However, Grando (2016) is of the view that researchers who embark on role-play in data gathering are able to monitor the research situations.

3.9 Validity

Validity of a study is paramount to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study findings as consistent. Joppe (2000) observes that validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. It is seen as a property of the conclusions, interpretations or inferences that we draw from the assessments, instruments and procedures (Lynch, 2003). In ensuring the validity of this study, the researcher adhered to key principles of qualitative ethnographic research such as credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Credibility was

established through prolonged engagement with native Akan speakers and immersion in naturalistic communication contexts. Data were collected across various social settings. Triangulation was applied using multiple data sources such as observations, interviews, and role play which allowed for a nuanced interpretation of disclaimers in Akan discourse. Lastly, transferability was enabled through rich and thick descriptions of discourse events, cultural norms, and communicative intentions, which allowed readers to assess the relevance of findings to similar pragmatic contexts.

3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis is used to bring order, structure and meaning to the data collected. The recorded data from the various social encounters together with the interview and role-play for this study were transcribed and thematized for the analysis. The data collected for this study were analyzed using the Language Socialization Theory (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The analysis was done in line with the three research questions for the study. The categories of Akan disclaimers were found. These include placement disclaimers and disclaimers according to form which were themed for discussion. Next, the functions of Akan disclaimers were analyzed and finally sociocultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers were examined. The recorded data from the various interactive situations were transcribed for content and thematic analysis.

3.10.1 Transcription

Matheson (2007) points out that transcribing data provides a unique opportunity for researchers to critique their own work and potentially improve upon their interviewing technique. Transcribing data allows researchers to get closer and more familiar with the data. The researcher sought the expert opinion of well experienced Akan lecturers to ensure accuracy of the transcription. Transcribing data does not simply mean reproducing accurate transcripts, but communicating the inner voice of research participants naturally and credibly

(Hammersley, 2010). A code in qualitative inquiry according to Salda a (2021, p. 3) –is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data”. He goes on to state that the data may include interview transcripts, participant observation, field notes, drawings, artifacts, photographs, video, Internet sites, e-mail correspondence, literature, and so on.

3.10.2 Content analysis

Content analysis is any procedure for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages in texts (Stemler, 2000). Through content analysis the researcher was able to enumerate, and analyze occurrences of specific disclaimers embedded in Akan language. In Pragmatics and other related fields of linguistics, content analysis is considered a scholarly methodology in which texts are subjected to scrutiny and studied for their meaning. In the analysis of the text, the researcher considered the ethno-pragmatics and socio-cultural concepts with respect to disclaimers.

3.10.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a popular method in qualitative research for detecting, evaluating, and interpreting patterns or themes in data. It is adaptable to a variety of research questions and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke 2006). Kusi (2012) cited in Anabila (2020) opines that thematic analysis is an analytical strategy which requires the researcher to organize or prepare data, immerse himself or herself in and transcribe the data, generate themes, code the data, and describe them. These codes are organized into larger themes that highlight major patterns in the dataset. The themes were refined and verified for coherence, consistency, and relevance to the research question. Nowell et al. (2017) argue that thematic analysis provides a thorough and nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and

viewpoints. A thematic coding system was done to ascertain the categories of disclaimers found in the data. This is seen below:

Thematic Coding System for Disclaimers according to form

1 Status bound disclaimer: SBD

Description: It is used to express regard or esteem toward an entity worthy of respect, most especially a person of superior social standing. (chiefs, pastors, elders, title holders etc.)

2. Apologetic Disclaimer: AD

Description: It indicates an utterance that expresses regret or acknowledges fault. (Sorry, I didn't do that intentionally)

3. Proverbial Disclaimer: PrD

Description: It incorporates a proverb or common saying to convey a message (e.g., "As the saying goes, 'You can't please everyone.'").

4. Hedging Disclaimer: HD

Description: Indicates uncertainty or caution, avoiding definitive statements (eg. It may rain)

5. Negation Disclaimer: ND

Description: Utilized when a disclaimer explicitly denies responsibility, affiliation, or applicability.

Thematic Coding System for Placement Disclaimers:

1. Prospective Disclaimers: PD

Description: It indicates that the disclaimer is issued before an event.

2. Retrospective Disclaimer: RD

Description: It signifies that the disclaimer addresses something after the event.

3. Successive Disclaimer: SD

Description: It represents disclaimers issued in sequence, often building on prior ones.

4. Distributive Disclaimer: DD

Description: It highlights disclaimers distributed across contexts or locations.

Next, the socio-cultural values embedded in the use of Akan disclaimers and the functions of disclaimers in the Akan language were also examined.

3.11 Reliability

Data reliability is the consistency, stability, and dependability of data gathering methods and instruments employed in a research investigation. It ensures that repeated measurements under identical conditions provide consistent results, hence, increasing the reliability and accuracy of study conclusions (Heale & Twycross, 2015). Reliability is essential for replicating studies and confirming outcomes over time. Data reliability not only ensures the correctness and integrity of research findings, but it also improves replicability and generalizability. It promotes sound and informed decisions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher performed the inter-rater reliability test by using the Percentage Agreement (PA) formula to find the data reliability. PA has been widely used in the context of qualitative research. The method of calculating percentage agreement has its roots in the broader work on inter-rater reliability, which has been explored by several researchers over the years. In calculating the reliability of the data, the researcher gave 30% of the transcribed data to 3 native Akan scholars; two teachers and a chief's linguist. They were asked to identify the various items of disclaimers in the transcription according to the objectives. Tables 3.11.1 and 3.11.2 provide a summary of the exercise:

Table 3.11.1. Inter rater reliability test for research objective 1

Rater	Disclaimer Items identified	Total disclaimer items	Correctly placed
First Rater	21	25	Yes
Second Rater	19	25	Yes
Third Rater	23	25	Yes
Total	63	75	-
Percentage Agreement ((PA)	PA=63/75 *100		84%

$$\text{Percentage Agreement} = \frac{\text{Number of Agreement}}{\text{Total number of items}} * 100$$

$$\text{Percentage Agreement} = \frac{63}{75} * 100 = 84\%$$

This indicates that the raters agreed on 84% of the time. This is seen in Table 3.11.1 above

Table 3.11.2. Inter rater reliability test for research objectives 2 and 3

Rater	Items identified	Total items	Correctly placed
First Rater	16	20	Yes
Second Rater	18	20	Yes
Third Rater	18	20	Yes
Total	54	60	-
Percentage Agreement (PA)	PA=54/60 *100		90%

The corpus was validated by six Akan scholars who are well versed in the socio-cultural knowledge of the Akan language. All the experts consulted agreed that about 87% of the various pragmatic disclaimers captured in this study were true examples of pragmatic disclaimers in the Akan language.

3.12 Conclusion

The researcher has considered his research design to explain the research process, the methodology, how the study is directed, and the various approaches to follow in analyzing the data collected. The methodological principle that underpins this enquiry has been presented here. Specifically, the research approach, research design, research site, population,

sample and sampling technique, instruments, and data collection. Other areas discussed in this chapter are validity, data analysis, data reliability, and ethical considerations. The next chapter discusses the findings of the data analysis.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis and interpretation of data collated throughout the research. The study set out to identify the categories of disclaimers found in Akan communication, the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers and the functions of disclaimers. The various research instruments used in this study (interview, roleplay and recording) were examined using content and thematic analysis. Section one of the chapter considers the categories of disclaimers found in Akan communication. These include disclaimers by form (Status bound disclaimers, Apologetic disclaimers, Proverbial disclaimers, Hedging disclaimers and Negation disclaimers) and Placement disclaimers (Prospective disclaimers, Retrospective disclaimers, successive disclaimers, and distributive disclaimers). The section two discusses the functions of disclaimers in Akan communication which include: clarifying intentions, mitigating potential misunderstandings, building rapport, expressing humility or modesty, managing face-saving and building of communicative competence. The final section looks at the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers. These include demonstrating humility and modesty, showing respect for authority and elders, avoiding conflict or confrontation, and establishing harmonious relationships.

4.1 Categories of Akan Disclaimers

Disclaimers, as pragmatic devices, serve critical communicative functions in everyday discourse. In Akan, disclaimers are employed strategically to manage face-threatening acts, mitigate imposition, and project social tactfulness. Drawing on empirical data collected through ethnographic observation and discourse analysis, the study categorizes disclaimers in Akan into two broad categories based on their structural and contextual features: disclaimers

according to form and disclaimers according to placement. Disclaimers according to form refer to the linguistic structures and stylistic devices used to express disclaiming intent. These categories include status bound disclaimers which address people by their rightful titles usually towards people of higher social status; apologetic disclaimers, which foreground regret or humility; proverbial disclaimers, which embed disclaiming intent within culturally salient proverbs; idiomatic disclaimers, which utilize conventional expressions to soften statements; negation disclaimers, which pre-emptively deny intent or association; and hedging disclaimers, which express uncertainty or reduce assertiveness.

Placement disclaimers, on the other hand, consider the temporal and sequential positioning of the disclaiming act in relation to the main utterance or event. These include prospective disclaimers, issued before a potentially face-threatening act; retrospective disclaimers, offered after the act has occurred; successive disclaimers, which involve multiple disclaimers used in a sequence to intensify mitigation; and distributive disclaimers, which are dispersed throughout an interaction to maintain a consistently cautious or deferential tone. This dual categorization offers a nuanced framework for understanding the pragmatic functions of disclaimers in Akan discourse and highlights the interplay between linguistic form, cultural norms, and communicative intent.

4.1.1 Disclaimers according to form

These are disclaimers which are issued based on the function they play in the discourse. Five major types were identified in the data. These were: Status bound disclaimers, Apologetic Disclaimers, Proverbial Disclaimers, Hedging Disclaimers and Negation Disclaimers.

4.1.1.1 Status bound disclaimers

Status bound disclaimers are linguistic formulae that are used prototypically to express regard or esteem toward an entity worthy of respect, most typically a person of

superior social standing (Ajayi, 2022). They mitigate the social risks associated with addressing individuals of higher social rank, power, or age. These disclaimers are contextually embedded in hierarchical social structures and are particularly relevant in societies like the Akan, where respect for elders, chiefs, teachers, and superiors are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric. The use of status-bound disclaimers serves as a politeness strategy that both acknowledges the interlocutor's elevated status and preempts potential face-threatening acts. In the Akan society, these disclaimers are common during durbars, public meetings, classroom settings, and formal rituals. Failure to use such disclaimers may result in the speaker being perceived as disrespectful or impolite, and may cause relational damage.

Moreover, status-bound disclaimers also serve as a tool for language socialization, teaching younger individuals or lower-status members how to appropriately navigate social hierarchies through language. They reinforce cultural values such as respect, humility, and proper conduct. Children, for example, are socialized into using these disclaimers when speaking to adults or elders, thereby perpetuating the community's norms of respectful interaction. Status-bound disclaimers are a crucial pragmatic resource in hierarchical societies. They allow speakers to express themselves while upholding sociocultural expectations of respect and politeness. Their usage reflects an intricate balance between individual expression and communal values, making them an essential component of polite discourse in status-conscious communities like the Akan. Some common status bound disclaimers found in the data include the following:

Extract 1 (Fante)

Context [Seeking permission to greet at a funeral of an elderly man at Gomoa Eshiem]

L : Nana na ne mpanyimfo, hen nuanom a wofi Sunyani baa kyere de se kwan da ho a nkye wobesre na woebekyia kakra.

„**Chief and elders**, our brothers from Sunyani say with your kind permission they would like to come and greet. (They line up to greet the chiefs and elders, family of the deceased and all other people present at the funeral).‘

The phrase **Nana na ne mpanyimfo** (Chief and elders) is a clear example of a status-bound disclaimer. These disclaimers are used when speakers are addressing individuals or groups of higher social, political, or institutional rank, and they function to show deference, acknowledge power dynamics, and avoid face-threatening acts. Here, the speaker acknowledges the traditional authority of the chiefs and elders before introducing the intent of another group. The phrase –with your kind permission” is not only a polite request but also a disclaimer that serves to mitigate any possible offense that might arise from approaching authority figures without due protocol. It shows that the visitors recognize the status and role of the chiefs and elders as gatekeepers of communal order and respect. Furthermore, by framing the act of greeting as conditional upon the chiefs’ approval, the disclaimer maintains hierarchical decorum and emphasizes the value placed on respect and humility in Akan social interaction. This type of disclaimer reflects the embedded cultural norms of politeness and reinforces social cohesion by affirming the roles and boundaries within the community’s status structure.

Extract 2 (Asante Twi)

Context [Appellation to Asantehene- Role play]

Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu

King Osei Tutu

ɔhempon a nyansa ahye wo ma

A King full of Wisdom

W’ahennie firi akyirikyiri kɔsi benkyenee

Whose kingship moves far and near

W‘anim ne w‘akyi obiara nni ho

No one is compared to you

Obi nyaa saa bi a anka anka ɔpɛ

Others wish they were like you

ɔsei Tutu e, memmɔ wo din nwe/weɛ

ɔsei Tutu e, I do not call you without your title

Dokua nana a woho bɔn atuduro

Dokua’s grandson who smells of gunpowder

W‘atikɔ te sɛ obi anim

Your occiput is like someone’s face

Nana kasa, kasa, na wo man ayɛ aso retie wo

King, speak, speak, for subject are listening to you’

Extract 2 is one of the appellations usually issued by praise singers before the Asante King speaks in public. This appellation is meant to praise the King about his great wisdom and the power he wields and usually contains status bound disclaimers. In many African cultures, titles and honorifics are important for showing respect, rank, and social hierarchy. In the Akan context, the title *Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu* is representative of such status bound disclaimer, referring to an important historical and cultural person in the Ashanti kingdom. The title –*Otumfoɔ*” represents respect for Osei Tutu’s historical significance as the Ashanti Empire’s unifying figure. Addressing the King *Otumfoɔ* in this manner acknowledges his higher social rank and demonstrates the praise singer’s understanding of societal hierarchy. Asem (2017) opines that people of high rank and power are addressed with caution in order not to threaten their face. They are addressed by the right titles, address terms, and honorifics which match up to their status and rank. Sometimes, an individual who fails to appropriately address a chief or a queen for example can be compelled to pay a fine. By distance, reference

is made to the amount of social distance between speaker and hearer. That is, either the targeted hearer is a close friend or a distant colleague.

Communicating using status bound disclaimers reduces the likelihood of face-threatening behavior. The praise singer addressing the Asantehene with his title *Otumfoɔ* represents his high rank and is less likely to offend and more likely to be perceived as polite and respectful. In the Akan culture, employing the status bound disclaimer *Otumfoɔ* to address the Asante King allows the praise singer to be identified with cultural values and strengthens his identification as a member of the community. This demonstrates a shared grasp of the cultural knowledge of the praise singer. The use of such a disclaimer as an address form teaches younger members of the community the value of respect, social roles, and their historical context. This reinforces the cultural idea that particular titles can only be used in specified settings.

Elders and community leaders model the use of status bound disclaimers, training the next generation in successful communication techniques that follow culturally acceptable standards. This role modeling is an essential part of language socialization. The collective usage of such address system promotes a sense of belonging and unity within the community. Individuals who acknowledge personalities such as Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu affirm their shared history and cultural identity which is critical in a collectivist culture like the Akan. The employment of status bound disclaimer titles such as “Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu” shows the functional interplay between politeness and linguistic socialization in the Akan context. It also evokes respect, upholds social hierarchies, and acts as a conduit for cultural identity transmission. Understanding the meanings of such status bound disclaimers helps to deepen consciousness of the societal values and norms.

4.1.1.2 Apologetic disclaimers

Apologetic disclaimers are expressions or words used by speakers to convey sorrow, remorse, or sympathy for any possible misconceptions, errors, or transgressions that may result from any communication. It is borne out of apology. Bergman (1993, p. 82) defines an apology as “a compensatory action to an offense in the doing of which S was casually involved and which is costly to H”. The cost can be in terms of losing face or even a severe misunderstanding. It is clear that different cultures have different degrees in perceiving how costly such an offense is, and therefore how necessary an apology is. Bergman (1993) avers that an action that is considered very serious in one culture, may not require an apology at all in another culture. Also, the severity of such a face threatening act seems to be in a direct relationship with the type of apology chosen to defend face. According to Trosborg (1987), the different individual factors involved in considering an act as face-threatening act are determined by one’s social and cultural patterns and by the behavioral norms of one’s culture. This leads to the assumption that not only do speakers of different languages perceive the necessity of an apology differently, but also use different ways of apologizing. Some apologetic disclaimers found in the data include the following: **Mesrɛ meka** ‘I plead on your indulgence’, **Sɛbe anidiemu** ‘sory respectfully’, **Merennyɛ dɛm bio da** ‘I will never do that again’. Let us consider Extract 3 from a market scene:

Extract 3 (Fante)

Context [Seeking forgiveness as a result of bumping into someone at a market]

P1: [P1 bumps into P2 accidentally]

P1: **Mesrɛ wo fakɛ me m^oafom, mannyɛ da**, nna merepɛ ntsem.

‘Please forgive me I am at fault, it was unintentional, I was in hurry’

P2: M^oatse, mma ɔnnhaw wo.

‘I’ve heard it, don’t worry’

PI: Nyame nhyira wo

==God bless you'

Extract 3 is a conversation between two people in a market. P1 bumps into P2 accidentally. P1 quickly apologizes for having been the one who is at fault. The use of *Mesrɛ wo fakɛ me*, 'Please forgive me', in P1's utterance shows how apologetic she is for her unfortunate action. In order not to be accused, P1 uses the disclaimer **mannhyɛ da (it was unintentional)** to exonerate herself from the action. Culturally, one is expected to be responsible for their actions or inactions, so P1 demonstrates a cultural competence by seeing the need to apologize in order to bring harmony which is also a sign of politeness in the Akan culture. It is obvious that without this disclaimer, there was going to be a misunderstanding between these interlocutors, but the timely intervention of the display of language competence mitigates the conflict.

Extract 4 (Fante)

Context [request to get a place to pass at a durbar at Gomoa-Eshiem]

P 1: Iyi dze m^ɛnyi nnsa wo Ohembaa, mepa wo kyɛw ibotum atwe w'egua yi ako nkyɛn kakra ama me?

==I don't mean to cause any discomfort Queen, could you please shift your chair a little for me to pass by?'

P2: M'atse. ==

Alright [she shifts her chair for P1 to pass by]

P1: Nyame nhyira wo, Ohembaa.

==God bless you, Queen' [P1 passes by and smiles to her]

P2: Yoo m'atse, Nyame nhyira wo nso

==Alright, God bless you as well.

In extract 4, P1 went for a durbar. While at the programme he had to move out for an important issue. Realizing there was no space for him to pass by, he quickly sought permission from the person sitting behind him to shift her chair for him to pass and which she gladly did. Since P1 was making a request which could eventually be a face threatening act to P2, he quickly resort to an apologetic disclaimer „**Iyidze m^onyi nnsa wo**“ ‚I don’t mean to cause discomfort‘ to show that he is well endowed with the socio-cultural knowledge of the Akan language.

Hopkins and Strambi (2005) argue that in making a request, using an interrogative form is better than a bare imperative, since it is considered more polite and less angry. This is similar in the Akan context as seen in Excerpt 4, and that is why P1 uses an interrogation in making the request in asking for a favor as in *ibotum atwe w’egua yi akɔ nkyen kakra ama me?* ‘_Could you please shift your chair a little for me to pass by?’ after the disclaimer **m^onyi nnsa wo** ‘_I don’t mean to cause discomfort’. The use of this technique in making a request indicates that P1 is a competent communicator and well-versed in the Akan culture. Again, P1 thanks P2 as a way of showing gratitude or appreciation. Thanking in Akan is considered as a ritual employed at the end of certain communicative encounters. Ackah (1988) posits that Akans regard one who refuses to render thanks after benefiting from a favor as an ungrateful being.

Another instance of the use of apologetic disclaimers is illustrated in Extract 5:

Extract 5 (Asante Twi)

Context [Apology for wrongful pronunciation of names at festival grounds at

Adansi Praso]

MC ...**wei deɛ mesrɛ meka**, edin no bi wɔ hɔ a ne bɔ ye duru krakra , enti sɛ meɔ na
mammɔ no yie a momfa nkyɛ me.

‘I plead to say, to mean ‘respectfully’, some of the names are a bit difficult to pronounce, therefore, **when I mention it wrongly, kindly forgive me.**”

There was a grand durbar held, which attracted people from all walks of life. As the MC was introducing the dignitaries, he struggled to mention some of the names correctly, so he quickly issued an apologetic disclaimer so that those whose names were not correctly mentioned will not be offended. In this extract, two apologetic disclaimers were realized: *wei deɛ mesrɛ meka* ‘I plead to say’ and *mammɔ ne yie a momfa nkyɛ me* ‘forgive me when I mispronounce it’.

The use of these two apologetic disclaimers is meant to ward off any face-threatening act which might have occurred as a result of wrongful pronunciation of the names of some of the dignitaries. This could be considered offensive to the name bearer and incompetence on the part of the MC. Again, Akan as a tonal language distinguishes meaning in change of tone. This could cause a blunder if not adhered to. Nevertheless, the disclaimer stands in the gap to mitigate all problems that are likely to arise after the name mentioning process or when the event is over. Once the MC had already disclaimed, there is no way anyone was going to hold him to account for the error he might have committed. This undoubtedly indicates how competent the MC is when it comes to Akan communication.

Extract 6 (Asante Twi)

Context [community engagement with a herbalist at Adansi-Praso]

...Ɛyɛ aduro tatahwe a ɛboa ma nkwanmoa a ɛko tia nyarewa no ho yɛ den. Ɛhaw kakra a mewɔ no ne sɛ meɔ ne din wɔ yɛn kasa mu, nanso twa ara na ɛtwa sɛ meɔ. Mesrɛ me nanom, me nuammaanom ne me mmammaanom a mowɔ ha sɛ wɔmfa nkyɛ me sɛ merebeɔ din no. *Sebe sebe mpre aduasa, m’ano si sumina so*, ahaban a mereka ho asem yi Akanfoɔ frɛ no **aberewakatawotwɛ**.

...It is a very powerful medicine which boosts the immune system. The only challenge I have is how to mention its local name, but all the same, I have to mention it. I will therefore plead with my mothers, sisters and daughters present to please forgive me as I mention it. **Sorry a multiple times, my mouth is at the incinerator;** the plant I am talking about is known in the Akan language as **Abrewakatawotwɛ (Old lady cover your vagina)** known in English as **Leaf of life**.

In this extract, a local herbalist came to sell his medicine and decided to reveal a powerful medicinal plant to the people in the community. He however, had a challenge mentioning the name of the plant in the local language as it had to do with mentioning of a private part of a female which is a taboo in Akan culture. Agyekum (2010) on Akan Verbal Taboo opines that speakers use euphemisms, proverbs, and disclaimers to avoid offense and maintain politeness and social harmony. The herbalist therefore resorted to apologetic disclaimers ***Sɛbe sɛbe mprɛ aduasa, m'ano si sumina so***, „*sorry a multiple times, my mouth is at the incinerator*”.

Since it is a taboo to mention the private part of the male or female counterpart in public, it becomes a serious offence and a face-threatening act when it is mentioned without the use of a disclaimer. It is considered unmentionable in the Akan culture. Therefore, anyone who mentions the private part in public is considered socio-culturally deficient and therefore a stranger in his own environment (Agyekum, 2010). The use of the apologetic disclaimer **Sɛbe sɛbe mprɛ aduasa**, (sorry a multiple times) **m'ano si sumina so** (my mouth is at the incinerator) before going ahead to mention the name of the plant in Akan as **abrewakatawotwɛ** (old lady, cover your vagina) indicates that the local medical practitioner is indeed endowed with the socio-cultural knowledge of the Akan culture. The disclaimers issued sought to mitigate any face threat that might have occurred when the name of the plant was mentioned. These disclaimers are considered politeness markers as well in the language

as they stand in the gap of avoiding face-threatening situations on one hand and on the other hand, serve as a disclaiming marker as they come as a result of an interlocutor explaining him/herself in a situation that will cause face-threatening

4.1.1.3 Proverbial disclaimers

Proverbs in Akan serve many communication functions; among such functions are disclaimers. Proverbial disclaimers are expressions or phrases that incorporate proverbial wisdom, sayings, or adages to convey meanings, insights, or advice in communication. Proverbial disclaimers are borne out of proverbs. Proverbs are indispensable in African communication. They are tied to the philosophy, experience and cognitive abilities of people (Agyekum, 2011). Among the Akans of Ghana, proverbs permeate any communication process. Their use makes a conversation very highly regarded. A proverb is a communication tool used to describe and express social, cultural, natural and other events or practices (Odebunmi, 2008). It is rare to communicate effectively in the African context without using proverbs, especially if the speaker is dealing with issues that border on the values, norms, institutions and on the whole gamut of the people's experience. One's ability to use proverbs appropriately in speech indicates one's communicative competence (Agyekum, 2011). This implies that the use of appropriate proverbs strengthens and supports significant traditional values or beliefs. Among the Akans, any elaborate social activity is characterized by the profound use of proverbs.

Proverbial disclaimers use the cultural or traditional wisdom encapsulated in proverbs to emphasize key messages, lessons, or values in acts. By incorporating proverbial disclaimers into their communication, speakers can add depth, richness, or resonance to their messages, drawing on shared cultural knowledge, beliefs, or experiences. It is mostly prefixed by the phrase **Mpanyini se „The elders say“**. Obeng (1996) opines that, the opening

formula “The elders say...” is a disclaimer of performance. Examples of proverbial disclaimers found in the data include the following:

1. Mpanyin se, “se woba gya ne nan gu wosre so a yepena na yentwa” [Akuapem]
The elders say, “if your child defecate on your lab its cleaned but not cut off”
2. Mpanyin de, “dua kor gye ehun a, obu” [Fante]
The elders say, “if one tree stands in the way of the wind it breaks”
3. Mpanin se “se woankasa wo tiri ho a, woyi wo ayibone. [Twi]
“Our elders say, if you do not talk about how you are shaved, you will be given a nasty shaving”

Extract 7 (Akuapem Twi)

Context: [community engagement with road safety commission]

Edi kan yebesre se, se wofo kaa na drɔbani no ye adeɛ biara a ebɛtumi de bɔne aba a ebi ne mmirikatente, se ɔresan kaa foforo ho wo beaɛɛ a enni se ɔsan ne ho, se ɔrefa nnipa anaa nneɛma ama aboro kaa no ahoɔden so a, **sebe**, bue w’ano na ka na ankɔfa asem bɔne biara ammma. **“Mpanin se, se woankasa wo tiri ho a, woyi wo ayibone”**.

In the first place, we will plead that if you pick a car and the driver does anything that can cause harm like excessive speed, wrongful overtaking, overloading, sorry to say you should have the courage to say it so that it does not result in calamity. “Our elders say, if you do not talk about how you are shaved, you will be given a nasty shaving” (We must have the courage and the boldness to voice out our grievances when the need be).

This idiomatic disclaimer, **Mpanin se, “se woankasa wo tiri ho a, woyi wo ayibone”** in this excerpt, is considered a proverbial disclaimer. This is because in the context, the officer, avoiding a blunt statement to the community members, decides to communicate in a

manner in which he may not offend the audience or threaten their face. Alternatively, the officer could have used a blunt statement, such as “if you do not keep the driver on his toes, you will die” as a bald-on record politeness strategy. The latter is culturally, unaccepted especially in the context where there is no relationship between the addresser and the addressee and this can pose a lot of communication difficulties. By the use of this disclaimer, the officer is being polite and showing communicative competence. In a nutshell, the utterance means that he is riding on the wisdom of the elderly in the society. Another proverbial disclaimer is found in Extract 8 as follows:

Extract 8 (Akuapem Twi)

Context [Family mediation – Role play]

FH : Ebusuafo, nokwasem ne sɛ, Kofi yɛ abofra bɔne de naaso yɛto no twene a ennye yie efisɛ ɔka ebusua no ho. **–Mpanyin se, sɛ woba gya ne nan gu wosrɛ so a yɛpepa na yenntwa”.**

Family, the truth of the matter is that though Kofi is a recalcitrant child, we cannot neglect him because he is part of the family. Our elders say “when your child defecates on your laps, it is cleaned but not cut off...”

The extract is recorded in a family dispute resolution session. In the course of the resolution, the family head pleads on behalf of the one who is guilty. He uses the proverb **–Mpanyin se, sɛ woba gya ne nan gu wosrɛ so a yɛpepa na yenntwa...”**. The phrase that precedes the proverb **–Mpanyin se”** serves as a disclaimer in that he does not own the utterance, and the wisdom in it as a whole. On the other hand, imposing on the family to accept the guilty one is impolite and likely to threaten the face of his addressees; hence, the use of the proverb is a politeness strategy to impose his thoughts on the other family members. This, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is a negative politeness. Again the acceptance of the head of the family’s plea by the other family members also indicates

politeness in that in the Akan culture one cannot be disrespectful towards the elderly. This indicates that the members of the family are deeply rooted in the Akan culture. They therefore accord the family head the respect he ought to be given and finally allows sleeping dogs lie.

Extract 9 (Fante)

Context [Advice at marriage ceremony at Gomoa Eshiem]

O.S 3: Ɔye me enyigye de nde Nyame eyi wohokafo ama wo. Mesre mma ebusua no nsa nnsi famu. **–Mpanyin de, obaa ko awar a, anye ne na ko**”. Ntsi ndzepa biara wo na dze akyerɛ wo no fa ye edwuma.

I am happy that today God has given you your life partner. Do not let the family’s hand go to the ground (do not disappoint the family.) The elders say, **if a girl (woman) goes to marriage, she goes with her mother** so any good thing your mother has taught you put it into practice’

In a culture where it is believed that a woman’s attitude in marriage is the training she gets from her mother, a woman’s attitude towards the husband is a credit or discredit to her mother. In a marriage ceremony, Optional Speaker 3 issues an advice to the couple; **–Mpanyin de, basia ko awar a, anye ne na ko**”. This advice was specifically directed at the bride and it is to counsel her to exhibit a good character since she is seen as a reflection of her mother in the marriage. Hence, the proverb *Mpanyin de*, “*obaa ko awar a, anye ne na ko*” since these words are not solely the representation of the advisors’ thought, the woman will not be offended but rather take the good counsel in the figurative language and exhibit good character for the sustenance of her marriage. In the Akan culture, using proverbs means competence in both the language and its culture. It is therefore seen as saying of the elderly because wisdom is expected to come from them. As a result of this, it is a face-threatening act for a younger person to use proverbs before the elderly. The phrase Mpanyin se, or *Mpanyin*

dε“which proceeds the proverbs, gives credit to the elderly and a show of their wisdom. It is therefore very important at all times to use this phrase because one’s audience may be a mixture of both elderly and young people in order not to be seen as disrespectful.

4.1.1.4 Hedging disclaimers

One way of avoiding communication breakdowns also comes in the use of hedging. By this, one escapes the responsibility of being held accountable for utterances that may cause inconvenience. Hedges are therefore discussed as disclaimers in the Akan language. Hedging disclaimers are borne out of hedging. The term hedging was introduced by Lakoff (1973) in describing words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy. As Hyland (1988) elaborates, hedging has subsequently been applied to the linguistic devices used to qualify a speaker’s confidence in the truth of a proposition, the kind of caveats like *I think, perhaps, might, and maybe* which we routinely add to our statement to avoid commitment to categorical assertions.

Disclaimers share a functional similarity with hedges in that both are specifically employed to promote politeness and reduce threats (Brown & Levinson, 1987) or to contribute to precision (Salager-Meyer, 1994), thereby enhancing the quality of communication. As indicated in Chapter 2, hedging disclaimers are linguistic expressions or language structures used by speakers to soften or mitigate the impact of their statements, claims, or opinions in communication. Hedging disclaimers help speakers avoid sounding overly confident, dogmatic, or assertive, allowing for a more nuanced and respectful exchange of ideas in conversation. Let us consider the following examples:

1. **Ebia osu bεto**

It may rain

2. **Sεsεε ɔnam kwan so reba.**

He might be on his way by now

4. **Bɛkadɛ mekasaa reyɛ adɔsɔ**

It seems I am being overtly verbose

Extract 10 (Fante)

Context [Community engagement with opinion leaders about issues of insecurity at Gomoa Eshiem]

P1: Migyedzi dɛ yɛdze ndɛ nkitsahodzi no besi ha. Anaa obi wɔ asem fofor bi ka bio?

I think we will end our discussion now, or has someone anything to say?'

P2:(Raises his hand to make a contribution after three previous contributions)

Enuanom nye adɔfo **bɛkadɛ mekasaa reyɛ adɔsɔ** naaso ne yeiyɛ mu ntsi mo mfa nkyɛ me.

Brethren and love ones **its seem I am overtly expressive** but its all for a good cause therefore forgive me'.

All: Ma wano nkɔ onua, yɛretsie wo.

Proceed brother, we are listening to you...'

Opinion leaders meet to examine community insecurity problems. This style of gathering is more akin to a democratic atmosphere, in which participants are free to voice their opinions on specific matters offered for debate. P2 raises his hand to speak as the gathering nears its conclusion. However, he realizes that he had made a couple of remarks earlier in this specific meeting and thus may be perceived as an individual who is overly expressive, thereby threatening the face of some individuals in the gathering present, especially when the meeting is soon to close. He resorts to the pragmatic hedging disclaimer **bɛka dɛ mekasaa reyɛ adɔsɔ** „It seems I am overtly being expressive“. This projects him as one who can demonstrate cultural competence by swiftly using the disclaimer to ward off the likely negative face of the individuals present, and gives him the go ahead to continue without complaining. Thus, although it is a free and democratic setting, he (P2) understands

that using his ‘right’ to speak at the forum moderately, especially in this very situational context, could project him as one that is immoderate and domineering. He therefore deploys the disclaimer to project his positive face, establishing the fact that although he is allowed to speak as many times as possible in the gathering, he would not use the freedom thoughtlessly by talking when he does not see the need to do so. The response from all other participants in the interaction also orientates to the positive face projected by the speaker. This shows that he is allowed and permitted to make a contribution yet again. Another hedging disclaimer is found in Extract 11:

Extract 11 (Akuapem Twi)

Context [Caution at a durbar ground at Akropong at a fund-raising ceremony]

MC: Ebusuafo, mesre se yebeye yen neema ntentem efise mehwe nea wimu aye yi a
ebia osu betɔ.

Brethren, I will plead that we fasten things up because when I observe the
nature of the weather, **it may rain**“

In this extract, the speaker cautions the audience about the need do things hurriedly to escape an impending rain using the hedging disclaimer *ebia osu betɔ*, ‘It may rain’. This disclaimer is issued at a durbar ground where the weather condition seemed not favorable and it was possible it could rain. Most often, durbars are held at an open ground, especially school fields or any open place in the community. This therefore puts such programs at the mercy of the weather. When such programs are held, the weather pattern is of great concern to the organizers as the nature of the weather could disrupt the programme. In this extract, a durbar is held at Akropong by the chiefs and people in commemoration of the Odwira festival. The MC, realizing some form of delay, uses a disclaimer with respect to the weather pattern about the need to hurry and desist from delay at the program. The use of this disclaimer is to

exonerate the MC from being blamed when it finally does not rain as he is not being emphatic.

4.1.1.5 Negation disclaimers

Negation disclaimers are linguistic expressions used by Akan speakers to deny certain statements, claims, or assumptions in communication. These disclaimers involve using negated words, phrases, or structures to indicate the opposite or absence of a particular idea, proposition, or belief. Negation disclaimers help speakers clarify or correct assertions, or implications in discourse. By using negation disclaimers, speakers can signal or refute misconceptions, or challenge assumptions to ensure accuracy, clarity, and precision in communication. Negation disclaimers play a crucial role in managing expectations, correcting misunderstandings.

Extract 12 is one of the negation disclaimers found in the data:

Extract 12 (Fante)

Context [Buying of fish from Gomoa Eshiem market]

Buyer : Na adwen yi ye ahen?

How much is the catfish

Seller : Oye GHc40

It's GHc40

Buyer: Eii! nebo ye dzen papa.

Ei ! it's very expensive

Seller: Oye nokwar naaso **ɔnnye hɛn a, ɔye Simpafɔ na.**

It is true but **it is not our fault but the Winneba people**

Buyer: Mesre tsew mo do kakra.

I beg you reduce the price for me a little

Seller: Hmm, awo fa GHc35 bra na fa.

‘Hmm, you bring GHc35 and take it’

Buyer: Meda wo ase.

‘Thank you’.

In this extract, someone comes to buy fish from a fish seller at the market and complains about the high cost of the fish. The seller acknowledges the exorbitant cost of the fish but quickly shifts blame on those she bought the fish from. By employing the negation disclaimer, *ɔnnɛ hɛn a, ɔyɛ Simpafo no a* ‘it is not our fault, it is the Simpa people’, the fish seller socializes the buyer to a shared concept of accountability and blame. It is pertinent to note that *ɔnnɛ hɛn a (it’s not our fault)* as seen in the above extract qualifies as a negation disclaimer because it indicates a statement of denial. The seller redirects criticism away from herself and places it on other members being the sellers from Simpa (Winneba) that she buys her fish from. From the perspective of the politeness theory, this statement functions as a face-saving strategy. The phrase serves to protect the seller’s face by attempting to mitigate feelings of guilt or responsibility. By denying responsibility, the fish seller relieves the buyer of any obligation to place blame while simultaneously striving to preserve a positive social identity. In the strand of utterances, disclaimers are positioned strategically with certain effects. The next discussion will be based on placement of disclaimers.

4.1.2 Disclaimers according to placement

These are the types of disclaimers which are issued based on the position they find themselves during interaction or communication. Four major types of placement disclaimers were identified in the data. These were prospective disclaimers, retrospective disclaimers, successive disclaimers and distributive disclaimers.

4.1.2.1 Prospective disclaimers

Prospective disclaimers are linguistic expressions or statements used by speakers to anticipate, address, or prevent potential misunderstandings, conflicts, or issues in communication before they occur (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). Hewitt and Stokes (1975) call it pre-disclaimers. They opine that these kinds of disclaimers usually set to clarify intentions, or manage perceptions to avoid negative outcomes or misinterpretations in conversation. By using prospective disclaimers, speakers can establish a clear framework, outline boundaries, or provide context to guide the understanding of listeners and prevent any unintended consequences or misconceptions. By employing prospective disclaimers, speakers can enhance the effectiveness of their communication, promote mutual understanding, and maintain positive relationships with their interlocutors. Some examples of prospective disclaimers in the data are shown as follows:

Extract 13 (Akuapem Twi)

Context: [caution against chaos at a funeral at Akropong]

MC: Mesre meka se obiara betotow ne nneema yiye na basabasa biara amma ha efise ayi yi ye aberempɔnyi a yeato nsa afre Omanpanyin abadiakyiri a seseɛ ɔnam kwan so reba.

I plead to say we all comport ourselves to avoid any confusion as this is a prominent funeral for which the vice president of the country has been invited and I believe he might be on his way here by now.

The above occurred at a funeral ground at where there was chaos by some family members at Akropong. The MC tries to calm tempers at the scene. The occasion was to be graced by the Vice-President and so the MC wanted the environment to be friendly before his arrival. On the other hand, the MC is not certain of the arrival of the Vice-President and so in order not to

be held responsible for his utterance, he uses a disclaimer –*ɛɛɛɛ*” (might) to give an assurance of the coming of the expected dignitary thus the Vice President.

Extract 14 (Asante Twi)

Context [visiting of washroom at a funeral at Adansi Praso]

MC: Sɛbe anidie mu, sɛ obi wɔ ha na ɔpɛ sɛ ɔyɛ ne ho yie a, yɛde abɛɛfo agyananbea asisi agoprama no anaafɔɔ hɔ. Wobetumi akɔyɛ wo ho yie. Meda mo ase.

Sorry, respectfully, if anyone here wants to visit the white house, we have placed mobile toilet facilities at the far end of the park. You can go and make yourself comfortable. Thank you.’

From Extracts 13 and 14, it is seen that the expressions **Mesrɛ meka** „sorry to say” and **Sɛbe anidie mu** „respectfully” are all disclaimers which are used prior to the main statements. This is corroborated by scholars such as (Caffi, 2007; Hongladarom, 2007; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975)

4.1.2.2 Retrospective disclaimers

Retrospective disclaimers are linguistic expressions or statements used by speakers after an event, interaction, or conversation to clarify, correct, or address any misunderstandings, issues, or consequences that may have arisen after a statement has been made (Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). These disclaimers involve reflecting on the communication that has taken place, acknowledge any potential errors, misinterpretations, or unintended outcomes, and offering explanations, apologies, or clarifications as needed. By using retrospective disclaimers, speakers can demonstrate accountability, show empathy, or seek resolution for any discrepancies or problems that emerged during the interaction. By employing retrospective disclaimers, speakers can foster trust, promote understanding, and enhance the quality of their interaction with others. An example is seen in Extract 15 from the types of disclaimers as follows:

Extract 15 (Asante Twi)

Context [Apology for wrongful pronunciation of names at a festival grounds]

MC: ... edin no bi wɔ hɔ a na ne bɔ aye duru krakra , **enti dee annkɔ yie no**

momfa nkyɛ me.

... some of the names were a bit difficult to pronounce, **so those that didn't go will , kindly forgive me**.

The retrospective disclaimer in the extract is used to soften the social impact of a potential face threat, which in Akan culture can be seen as disrespectful as names carry deep identity and ancestral value. The MC uses this disclaimer to show humility, respect, and awareness of cultural norms. This aligns with core Akan values of respect and communal sensitivity in communication.

4.1.2.3 Successive disclaimers

These are disclaimers which come in close sequence in an interaction. These can either be prospective or retrospective disclaimers. That is to say, two or more disclaimers may follow one another in a discourse. For example, two different disclaimers are realized in Extract 16:

Extract 16 (Fante)

Context [bumping into someone at Gomoa Eshiem market]

P1: **Mesrɛ wo fakye me m^oafom, mannyɛ da, nna merepe ntsem.**

...Please forgive me I am at fault, it was unintentional, I was in hurry'

P2: M'atse, mma onnhaw wo.

...I've heard it, don't worry'

PI: Nyame nhyira wo, meda wo ase.

...God bless you, thank you'

The disclaimers found in close succession are:

Mesrɛ wo fakɛ me m^oabɔm (Please forgive me I am at fault) and **mannhyɛ da** (It was unintentional)

These are meant to confirm how remorseful P1 is. This indicates that P1 is well-versed in the sociocultural knowledge of Akan. Agyekum (2003) opines that showing politeness and being apologetic indicate that one is communicatively competent. Another example is found in Extract 17:

Extract 17 (Asante Twi)

Context [community engagement with herbalist at Adansi Praso]

...*Sebe sebe mpre aduasa, m'ano si sumina so*, ahaban a mereka ho asem yi Akanfoofre no aberewakatawotwe.

_.*Sorry a multiple times, my mouth is at the incinerator* the plant I am talking about is known in the Akan language as Abrewakatawotwe (Old lady cover your vagina) known in English as Leaf of life.'

In this excerpt, *Sebe sebe mpre aduasa* „Sorry a multiple times“ is sharply followed by *m'ano si sumina so* „my mouth is at the incinerator“. The use of these successive disclaimers indicates the sensitive nature or the difficulty the speaker finds himself in mentioning the local name of the plant which falls under the unmentionables in Akan culture that is likely to incur the negative face of the people present.

4.1.2.4 Distributive disclaimers

These are the types of disclaimers which are found in an utterance widely apart in a discourse. They are interspersed in utterances. Examples of such disclaimers are found in Extract 18.

Extract 18 (Twi)

Context [news about the death of the deputy finance minister]

Sɛbe, abusuafoɔ **mennkae mo yaw**, enkyeree biara na **ɔsoafoɔ abadiakyire a ɔhwɛ sikasɛm** so **kaa nkyene guiɛ**. Wei akɔfa nkyinoahyew pii aba.

„Sorry to say, family **I do not remind you of your pain**, it was just recently that **the deputy minister of finance** kicked the bucket. His death has brought a lot of controversy.’

From the extract, three different forms of disclaimers are realized: **Sɛbe** „sorry to say“ which is an apologetic disclaimer, **Menkae mo yaw** I do not remind you of your pain‘ a negation disclaimer, and finally, **ɔsoafoɔ abadiakyire a ɔhwɛ sikasɛm so** deputy minister of finance‘ which is a status bound disclaimer. It is important to note that these disclaimers are interspersed in the given utterances to soften the subject of death being mentioned.

4.1.3 Summary

This section has established two major categories of Akan disclaimers. These include disclaimers by form thus Status bound disclaimers, Apologetic disclaimers, Proverbial disclaimers, Hedging disclaimers, and Negation disclaimers. Placement disclaimers were also analyzed which included Prospective disclaimers, Retrospective disclaimers, Successive disclaimers, and Distributive disclaimers. In the next section, the functions of disclaimers in Akan are presented.

4.2 Functions of disclaimers in Akan culture

From the data gathered through interviews, disclaimers perform numerous functions in Akan culture. Some of these functions are: mitigating face threat, emotional regulation, navigating taboos or the unmentionables, sociolinguistic etiquette, maintaining social cohesion, clarification of intent, educational role, and for smooth communication.

4.2.1 Mitigating face threat

In Akan culture, the use of disclaimers is a crucial strategy for mitigating face threats during communication. This is seen by interview respondents (IR) 3 and 4 as follows:

Interview 1 (Twi)

Context [A structured interview with 35 years old Akan (Twi) teacher]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan Communication?

IR3: Eboa ma wɔmfafa obi anim ntwitwiri fam

It helps to mitigate face threat

Interview 2 (Akuapem)

Context [Interview with 40 years old Akan scholar (lecturer)]

R: Den dwuma na nsantiresem anaa sebetow di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan communication?

IR4: Emma wɔmfafa obi anim ntwitwiri fam

It helps to avoid face threat

Akan disclaimers serve to soften the impact of potentially face-threatening statements, helping to navigate social interactions delicately. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness theory provides a foundational understanding of how individuals manage face in communication. By integrating insights from Politeness theory and Language Socialization theory, we can better understand how cultural norms shape the use of language in maintaining respect and harmony. This understanding highlights the critical role of disclaimers in fostering effective and respectful interactions within the Akan community. An instance of this is seen in Extract 19:

Extract 19 (Twi)

Context [Apology for wrongful pronunciation of names at festival grounds]

MC... **sɛbe anidiemu**, edin no bi wɔ hɔ a ne bɔ yɛ duru krakra, enti sɛ meɔ na mammɔ no yie a momfa nkyɛ me.

...I plead to say, to mean respectfully, some of the names are a bit difficult to pronounce, therefore, when I mention it wrongly, kindly forgive me.'

The disclaimer statement serves as a classic example of mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs). It softens the potential threat to the hearer's positive face thus the desire to be respected and recognized, by acknowledging the speaker's limitation in pronunciation. The use of the disclaimer **sɛbe anidiemu** respectfully prefaces the utterance with deference, aligning with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy of negative politeness, which shows respect for the hearer's autonomy. Again the phrase *sɛ mammɔ ne yie a momfa nkyɛ me* kindly forgive me if I mispronounce it functions as an apologetic disclaimer, mitigating the social consequences of a possible error. In general, this expression helps maintain interpersonal harmony, humility, and respect in face-sensitive interactions.

The Language Socialization Theory posits that communication practices are learned within cultural contexts and that these practices reflect broader societal values. In Akan culture, individuals are socialized to use language in ways that uphold respect and mitigate face threats. Individuals learn to navigate sensitive subjects through observation and interaction, internalizing the importance of disclaimers in maintaining relationships. As individuals mature, they continue to apply these learned strategies, recognizing the significance of disclaimers in navigating sensitive issues to avoid face threat. This is similar to what Ajayi, 2022 discovered in Yuroba disclaimers.

4.2.2 Emotional regulation

Disclaimers act as buffers before potentially distressing information or criticism, which helps control emotions. This strategy makes sure that conversations are courteous and measured.

Let us consider the following interview responses:

Interview 3 (Twi)

Context [A structured interview with a 35years old Akan (Twi) teacher]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are functions of disclaimers in Akan communication

IR3: Eboa ma yetumi hye yen ho so.

It helps to regulate our emotions

Interview 4 (Fante)

Context [Interview with a Fante teacher who is also a chief linguist]

R: Ebenadze ntsi na Mfantsefo rekasa a wɔdze nsantsirsem dzi dwuma?

Why do Fantes use disclaimers in their communication?

IR5: Oboa ma obi tum hye noho do.

It helps us to control our emotions

By framing statements in a non-confrontational manner, individuals can express themselves while adhering to the cultural norms of respect and emotional restraint. By employing disclaimers, speakers can soften potentially harsh statements or requests, thereby helping to regulate both their own emotions and those of their listeners. Let us consider **Extract 19** about news on gory accident reported by Angel TV 12:00 News:

Extract 20 (Twi)

Context [News about fatal accident on Angel TV]

Ahwɛfoɔ, nkra a ɛfiri yen amanebɔfoɔ hɔ kyere sɛ, **sɛbe**, Akwanhyiawuo bi asi wɔ Winneba ne Mankesim Kwantempɔn no so wɔ ekuro a yɛfrɛ no sɛ Gomoa-Assin. Nkra no kyere sɛ nnipa mmienu na wɔn **aka nkyene agu**, ɛna emu nsia nso wɔ Apam ayaresabea regye ayarehwɛ. **Yɛbɛsrɛ ahwɛfoɔ sɛ mfonin no bi a wɔrebɛhwɛ no, sɛbe, ani yɛ nyan krakra.**

Viewers, information received from our correspondent indicate that, there has been a fatal accident on the Winneba- Mankesim road in a town called Gomoa Assin. So far two people have reportedly kick the bucket [sorry to say] while six people have sustained various forms of injury and are receiving treatment at Apam hospital. **We will plead with our viewers that some of the pictures they are about to watch [sorry to say] are quite disturbing”.**

The news serves as a tool for emotional regulation by using linguistic strategies that cushion the psychological impact of distressing news. Phrases like **sɛbe** –sorry to say” act as verbal buffers, acknowledging the emotional weight of the information while preparing the audience to receive it with reduced shock.

This brings into line with Akan communicative norms, where empathy and sensitivity are crucial in addressing issues such as death or injury. The idiomatic disclaimer **aka nkyene agu** –kick the bucket” further softens the harsh reality, allowing listeners to process the news more gradually. Additionally, the cautionary statement about disturbing images helps regulate viewers' emotional responses by offering a psychological warning. Together, these elements show how language is used to manage and modulate public emotional engagement.

The Language Socialization theory posits that communication practices are learned within specific cultural contexts, influencing how individuals manage emotions during

interactions. In Akan culture, individuals are socialized to be aware of emotional expressions and the appropriate use of disclaimers. Through observation and interaction, people learn to navigate sensitive subjects while preserving harmony and respect. The use of disclaimers in Akan culture emphasizes emotional intelligence as it teaches individuals to recognize and regulate their own emotions, as well as those of others. Disclaimers reflect a learned ability to approach conversations delicately. It also helps soften the emotional impact of statements, allowing for smoother interactions. This approach can prevent conflicts and misunderstandings, particularly in sensitive discussions (Sarpong, 2018). By regulating emotions through disclaimers, speakers can foster a more positive communicative environment. This aligns with the Akan cultural emphasis on community and interpersonal harmony (Osei, 2010). Disclaimers provide a framework for expressing difficult emotions while maintaining respect for others. This enables speakers to address issues without escalating tensions.

4.2.3 Politeness and respect

In Akan culture, politeness and respect are paramount. Disclaimers help speakers navigate social interactions by showing deference to others, especially elders or people of higher status. They soften the impact of direct statements and ensure that communication is respectful and considerate. Let us consider the following interview responses:

Interview 5 (Twi)

Context [Interview with a 62years linguist about the general knowledge of Akan disclaimers]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wo Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan communication?

IR1: Ekyere obuo ne anidie,

It shows politeness and respect

Interview 6 (Twi)

Context [A structured interview with a 35years old Akan (Twi) teacher]

IR3: Ede nidie ne obuo ba yen kasa ho

It shows politeness and respect in our discourse

When speaking to superiors or elders in particular, it is customary to employ apologetic disclaimers such as *mesre meka* (*I plead to say*), *ennyɛ me boapayɔ* (*It is unintentional*), *Se mefom a mo mfa nkyɛ me* (*forgive when I go wrong*) to demonstrate civility and respect. By doing this, the community's respect for hierarchies is preserved. Disclaimers in Akan communication serve as mechanisms to express politeness and respect, enabling speakers to navigate complex social interactions without offending others. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory posits that individuals employ various strategies to manage face, which refers to a person's self-esteem and social identity. By using disclaimers, Akan speakers demonstrate their respect for the listener's face, creating a context for smoother interactions. For example, when discussing sensitive topics, an Akan speaker might preface their remarks with, I hope this doesn't upset you' effectively acknowledging the potential for offence while preserving the listener's dignity (Amfo, 2016). This dual approach reflects a nuanced understanding of social dynamics and the importance of maintaining respect. Language Socialization Theory posits that communication practices are learned and reinforced within cultural contexts. In Akan society, individuals are socialised to prioritise respect and politeness from an early age. This socialization process instils an awareness of the cultural values surrounding respect and politeness, shaping how individuals communicate throughout their lives.

Disclaimers facilitate more effective communication by allowing speakers to express their thoughts without alienating listeners. This approach helps create an environment where dialogue can flourish (Sarpong, 2018). The use of disclaimers reflects and reinforces Akan

cultural values of respect and politeness. These values are deeply ingrained through language socialization, guiding individuals in their interpersonal interactions (Osei, 2010). By employing disclaimers, speakers can reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings or conflicts, thereby maintaining social harmony. This aligns with the broader cultural emphasis on community and cooperation within Akan society.

Politeness and respect, as functions of Akan disclaimers, play a vital role in facilitating effective communication. By integrating insights from Politeness Theory and Language Socialization Theory, it becomes clear how cultural practices shape communication strategies. Understanding these dynamics highlights the significance of cultural context in fostering respectful and harmonious interactions. An example is found in excerpt below, where a delegation from Sunyani respectfully seeks permission to greet the chiefs and elders at Gomoa-Eshiem present at a funeral.

Extract 21 (Fante)

Context [Seeking permission to greet at a funeral at Gomoa Eshiem]

L : Nana na ne mpanyimfo, hen nuanom a wofi Sunyani baa kyere de se kwan da ho a wɔbesre na woabekyia kakra.

Chief and his elders, our brothers from Sunyani say with **your kind permission** they would like to come and greet. (They line up to greet the chiefs and elders, family of the deceased and all other people present at the funeral).

The above extract shows strong elements of politeness and respect grounded in sociocultural norms. By addressing the chief and elders first, the speaker acknowledges hierarchical authority, a key aspect of respect in many African societies, including the Akan tradition. The phrase ‘with your kind permission’ serves as a deferential politeness marker, showing that the speaker seeks approval before any action is taken. This aligns with Brown

and Levinson's negative politeness strategy, where the speaker avoids imposing. The usage of the status bound disclaimer upholds communal harmony, reinforces traditional authority, and emphasizes the speaker's awareness of social protocol and honorific decorum.

4.2.4 Navigating taboos or the unmentionables

Disclaimers are frequently used to discuss topics that are forbidden obliquely. This makes it possible to address sensitive topics without going against societal standards. Navigating taboos through disclaimers is a critical function of Akan communication, facilitating respectful and effective interactions. Let us consider the following interview responses:

Interview 7 (Twi)

Context [Interview with 62 years linguist about the general knowledge of Akan disclaimers]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan language?

IR3: Eboa ma yenya mmusuo anaa akyiwadeɛ kasa ho nimdeɛ.

It helps to navigate taboos or the unmentionables

Interview 8 (Akuapem)

Context [Interview with a 40 year old Akan scholar (lecturer)]

R: Den dwuma na nsantiresem anaa sebetow di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan language?

IR4: Eboa ma yenya mmusuo kasa ho nimdeɛ.

It helps to navigate the unmentionables

By integrating principles from both Politeness theory and Language Socialization theory, it becomes clear how cultural context shapes communication practices. Understanding these dynamics not only enriches our knowledge of Akan discourse but also highlights the

universal importance of politeness and respect in social interactions. Children learn through observation and interaction how to employ disclaimers effectively to navigate conversations, especially when addressing elders or discussing taboo subjects (Duranti, 2004). This is seen in Extract 22 on advice during a marriage ceremony:

Extract 22 (Akuapem)

Context [Advice to married couple at Akropong]

OS1 : Sɛ Nyame aye adom ma w'aka mo abɔmu sɛ okunu ne ɔyere yi, mɛsrɛ se **mo mmfa moho nkame mohomoho** wɔ mpa agoro mu...

As God has been gracious to put the two of you together as husband and wife, I will plead that **you do not deny each other of bed play** (to mean do not deny each other of sex)

It is pertinent to note that mentioning the issue of sex in the full glare of the public is frowned upon and, therefore, considered a taboo. The advisor consequently cleverly uses an idiomatic disclaimer to counsel the couple when it came to the issue of sex. This was to make it possible for her to navigate the subject of sex, which is considered taboo in public. The use of the idiomatic disclaimer shows politeness and also exhibit high sociocultural knowledge in the Akan culture.

4.2.5 Sociolinguistic etiquette

Sociolinguistic etiquette, particularly in the context of the Akan culture, can be examined through the lenses of politeness theory and language socialization theory. Politeness theory, as articulated by scholars like Brown and Levinson (1987) posits that communication aims to maintain social harmony by mitigating face threats in interactions. Let us consider the interview responds beneath:

Interview 9 (Twi)

Context [A structured interview with a 35years old Akan (Twi) teacher]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan language?

IR3: Eboa ma yenya kasa ho nimdee

It helps to attain sociolinguistic etiquette

Interview 10 (Fante)

Context [Interview with a Fante teacher who is also a chief linguist]

R: Ebenadze ntsi na Akanfo rekasa a wɔdze nsantsirseɛ dzi dwuma?

Why do Akans use disclaimers in their communication?

IR5: Okyerɛ kasa ho ntsetsee pa

It teaches sociolinguistic etiquette.

In the Akan culture, politeness is often realized through linguistic strategies that reflect respect and social hierarchies. The Akan language incorporates various forms of address that reflect the speaker's relationship to the listener, their social status, and respect.

The use of indirect speech acts may also be a reflection of politeness norms. Instead of making a direct request, an Akan speaker might suggest an action in a manner that allows the listener to decline without losing face. Through socialization processes, individuals in Akan culture learn the significance of politeness from a young age. They acquire not only linguistic forms but also the contextual appropriateness of various expressions of politeness, informed by their observations of family and community interactions. In many African cultures, including those of the Akan, the socialization process is heavily influenced by age hierarchies. Younger individuals are taught to speak respectfully to elders, incorporating culturally designated forms of address and conversational norms that reflect this hierarchy.

Extract 6 demonstrates the use of multiple disclaimers to mitigate the potential threat that the regular mentioning of the medicine in the local language might have caused. This indicates that the speaker is well endowed in Akan social etiquette. How individuals utilize disclaimers and other forms of politeness serve as markers of belonging within the Akan community.

Extract 23 (Twi)

Context [community engagement with a herbal medical practitioner]

...Sebe sebe mpre aduasa, m'ano si sumina so, ahaban a mereka ho asem yi Akanfoɔ frɛ no aberewakatawotwɛ.

..Sorry a multiple times, my mouth is at the incinerator the plant I am talking about is known in the Akan language as Abrewakatawotwɛ (Old lady cover your vagina) known in English as Leaf of life.'

The negotiation of language and social norms helps to maintain cultural continuity as individuals adjust their linguistic repertoire based on social settings. Disclaimers serve as crucial tools in managing face and establishing respect, reflecting broader cultural understandings of social hierarchy and relational dynamics. This multifaceted approach allows insight into how language not only communicates meaning but also upholds cultural values and social cohesion among interlocutors.

4.2.6 Maintaining social cohesion

By using disclaimers, individuals can address sensitive issues without causing rifts within the community. This practice supports the Akan value of maintaining social cohesion and unity.

Interview 11 (Fante)

Context [Interview with a Fante teacher who is also a linguist about the functions of disclaimers in Akan language]

R: Ebenadze ntsi na Akanfo rekasa a wɔdze nsantsirsem dzi dwuma?

Why do Akans use disclaimers in their communication?

IR2: Oboa ma asetsena mu nkitsahodzi wie mu dzi.

It helps to maintain social cohesion

Interview 12 (Akuapem)

Context [Interview with 40 years old Akan scholar at Akropong about the functions of Akan disclaimers]

R: Den dwuma na nsantiresem anaa sebetow di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan communication?

IR4: Eboa ma Nkabomu wie mu di.

It maintains social cohesion.

Disclaimers help maintain this harmony by reducing the likelihood of conflict. By carefully framing statements, individuals can address sensitive topics without causing offence or discord, as discussed in the following extract.

Extract 24 (Akuapem)

Context [Family arbitration- Role play]

M: Nana mesre metwesan.

Nana please I retract it.

FH: Afei Kofi so, efi nne rekɔ yi bɔ mbɔden na sesa wo saa suban bɔne no efi se mpanyin se, se wotu wo fo na wante a wokɔ anteade. Nti hwɛ na sesa.

Now Kofi, you must also reform your bad behavior, for our elders say one who does not heed to advice ends up in prison. So make sure you reform'.

Kofi: Nana mesre m'ate. Merenyε saa bio, mepa abusuafo nyinara kyεw

__Nana, please I have heard it. It will not repeat again. I apologize to the entire family.

The conversation illustrates how disclaimers promote social cohesion. The mother's statement, "Family head please I retract it," serves as an apologetic disclaimer, signaling a withdrawal of a potentially offensive remark. This helps restore peace and shows deference to authority, which is central to Akan cultural values. The family head's corrective response to Kofi is softened by the mother's disclaimer, allowing conflict resolution without tension. Kofi's respectful reply, "Alright grandpa... I will not repeat that again," reinforces the hierarchical structure and affirms communal values. This interaction demonstrates how disclaimers function beyond language. They act as social strategy for preserving harmony, minimizing face threats, and reinforcing respect and unity. Such disclaimers are essential tools for managing interpersonal relations in Akan discourse especially within family or hierarchical contexts, ensuring the continued stability and cohesion of the community members. Agyekum (2003) posits that the concept of face in communicative events is a universal one whose application is culture-specific; thus, in communicative interactions, interlocutors need to make recourse to the use of indirection so as to save face, and ensure cooperation.

4.2.7 Clarification of Intent

Disclaimers help to prevent misunderstanding by making the speaker's intentions clear. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that effective communication hinges on the ability to mitigate threats to face. In the Akan context, disclaimers serve to clarify intent, aligning with positive politeness strategies that seek to affirm the listener's self-esteem and foster a cooperative interaction. Let us consider the following interview responses:

Interview 13 (Akuapem)

Context [Interview with 72 years old woman about the functions of Akan disclaimers]

R: Den dwuma na nsantiresem anaa sebetow di wo Akan kasa mu?

What are functions of disclaimers in Akan?

IR4: Eboa ma yetumi kyerekyere yen nsem mu yiye.

It helps to clarify our Intent.

Interview 14 (Fante)

Context [Interview with 55years old woman about the functions of Akan disclaimers at Gomoa Eshiem]

R: Ebenadze ntsi na Akanfo rekasa a wodze nsantsirsem dzi dwuma?

Why do Akans use disclaimers in their communications?

IR5: Oboa ma yetum da hen tsirimpow anaa botae edzi

It helps to clarify our intention.

For instance, a speaker might say, *Mennkaa de aye adze bon biara, mbom...* ‘I’m not suggesting you did anything wrong, but...’ to clarify their intent without imposing a negative judgment. Akan disclaimers are employed to forestall misunderstandings by clarifying the speaker's intentions. By framing statements with disclaimers, speakers can soften potentially contentious remarks and clarify their meanings, thereby enhancing the mutual understanding between interlocutors (Amfo, 2016). This is especially important in cultures where indirect communication is prevalent. In a society that prizes subtlety and indirect communication, this is especially crucial as it helps to avoid or prevent misinterpretation of one’s words or action. They provide precision in communication, ensuring the intended message is conveyed to avoid causing offence or conflict. Let us consider extract below:

Extract 25 (Twi)

Context [Appellation to Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II- Role play]

Osei Tutu e, memmɔ wo din weɛ

Osei Tutu, I do not call you without your title

Dokua nana a woho bɔn atuduro

Dokua's grandson who smells of gunpowder

W'atikɔ te sɛ obi anim

Your occiput is like someone's face

Osei Tutu e, memmɔ wo din weɛ

‘Osei Tutu, I do not call you without your title’ is a negation disclaimer which is issued by a praise singer to exonerate himself. In this extract a praise singer is seen chanting Asantehene's name without his title so he quickly disclaims by saying *Osei Tutu e, memmɔ wo din weɛ* (I do not mention your name without your title). Oyetade (1995), notes that in the address system of the Yoruba where influential personalities such as kings or their chiefs are expected to be addressed by their titles as a sign of politeness, there are sub-contexts where flouting these rule (as common with singers and praise chanters, especially in an atmosphere of friendliness) might not necessarily be construed as signaling impoliteness. This is similar to Akan culture, where the use of the negation disclaimer above quickly exonerates the speaker from being seen as rude and uncivilized.

4.3.8 Educational role

Disclaimers may serve an instructional role as well. They impart values such as humility, respect, and acceptable cultural communication techniques to the next generation. People pick up the social ethics and values of their group by seeing and employing disclaimers.

Interview 15 (Twi)

Context [(Interview with a 62years linguist about the general knowledge of Akan disclaimers)]

R: Deen dwuma na nsantiresem di wɔ Akan kasa mu?

What are the functions of disclaimers in Akan?

IR1: Ema adesua ne nteteie

For education and training

Interview 16 (Fante)

Context [Interview with 55years old woman about the functions of Akan disclaimers at Gomoa Eshiem]

R: Eɛnɛnɛn ntsi na Akanfo rekasa a wɔdze nsantsirsem dzi dwuma?

Why do Akans use disclaimers in their communication?)

IR2: Oma hen adzesua

It educates us

The Akan people have a rich language legacy that includes the usage of disclaimers. It highlights the elegance and intricacy of the Akan language while highlighting how crucial tone, context and gestures are in communication. In general, Akan disclaimers have a significant role in preserving social harmony, influencing social relations, and upholding traditional norms within Akan culture. These social norms are inculcated into the younger ones through language socialization. They teach younger generations about the importance of humility, respect, and the appropriate ways to communicate within the cultural context. By observing and using disclaimers, individuals learn the social rules and values of their community.

4.2.9 Smooth communication

In Akan culture, smooth interaction is a vital aspect of communication, significantly facilitated by the use of disclaimers. This process is intricately connected to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which emphasizes strategies to mitigate face threats and promote harmonious exchanges.

Interview 17 (Fante)

Context [Interview with a Fante teacher who is also a chief linguist]

R: Ebenadze ntsi na Akanfo rekasa a wɔdze nsantsirsem dzi dwuma?

Why do Akans use disclaimers in their communication?

IR5: Oma nkɔmbɔtwetwe dzi mu mapa

For smooth communication.

Disclaimers are employed in Akan discourse to preemptively address potential misunderstandings or negative implications of statements. They serve to soften directness and maintain social harmony, reflecting a deep-seated cultural value of respect and in the community (Osei, 2010). By using disclaimers, speakers can ensure that conversations flow smoothly, reducing the likelihood of conflict or offense. Politeness Theory posits that effective communication strategies are essential for maintaining “face” which is crucial for smooth interactions. In the Akan context, disclaimers often incorporate expressions that acknowledge the listener's feelings and contributions.

Extract 26 (Fante)

Context [request to get a place to pass at a durbar at Gomoa-Eshiem]

P 1: Iyi dze m^ɔnyi nnsa wo ɔhembaa, mepa wo kyew ibotum atwe w'egua yi akɔ nkyen kakra ama me?

I don't mean to cause any discomfort Queen, could you please shift your chair a little for me to pass by?'

P2: M'atse.

=Alright' [she shifts her chair for P1 to pass by]

P1: Nyame nhyira wo, Ohembaa.

=God bless you, Queen' [P1 passes by and smiles to her]

P2: Yoo m'atse, Nyame nhyira wo nso

=Alright, God bless you too she smiles back'.

The disclaimer helps to create a supportive atmosphere, aligning with Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness strategies. In our daily interactions, disclaimers help in navigating social dynamics smoothly. For instance, when asking for a favour or delivering news that might be disappointing, starting with a disclaimer helps mitigate any negative impact. This can be seen in extract 26 where P1 makes a request for P2 to pass by at a durbar. *Iyi dze m'enyi nnsa wo , mepa wo kyew ibotum atwe woagua yi akɔ nkyen kakra ama me a? ; „Idon”tmean to be rude, could you please shift your chair a little for me to pass by?* It is noticed that P2 shift her chair for P1 to pass by without any confusion because of the earlier disclaimer used by P1. This is as a result of the politeness strategy deployed by P1 by way of disclaiming. By drawing on politeness strategies that prioritize face-saving and respect, P1 is able to navigate complex social dynamics effectively. Understanding this interplay not only enriches our comprehension of Akan discourse but also highlights the universal significance of politeness in fostering constructive communication.

4.2.10 Summary

It has been made evident in this section that disclaimers perform numerous functions in Akan culture. Some of these functions are mitigating face threat, emotional regulation, politeness and respect, navigating taboos. The section has also revealed other functions such as sociolinguistic etiquette, maintaining social cohesion, clarification of intent, educational role, and for smooth communication.

4.3 Socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers

The socio-cultural values embedded in the use of Akan disclaimers are rooted in the traditional values, beliefs, and communication norms of the Akan people. In the Akan society, communication is often characterized by a strong emphasis on respect, humility, and communal harmony. Disclaimers play a significant role in reflecting these cultural values and shaping interpersonal interactions among the Akan people. By understanding the socio-cultural context of disclaimer usage in Akan society, individuals can navigate communication more effectively and build positive relationships within the Akan community. Understanding and using these cultural nuances of disclaimers can be crucial for effective communication and maintaining good relationships within the Akan society. In Akan culture, disclaimers hold significant sociocultural influence, primarily because of the community-oriented and hierarchical nature of the society. Some of the socio-cultural values include the following: exhibition of moral values, respect for authority and elders, conflict avoidance, cultural transmission, establishing harmonious relationships, modesty and humility and cultural identity.

4.3.1 Exhibition of moral values

Courtesies and respect are highly valued in Akan culture. Disclaimers assist speakers in navigating social situations by demonstrating respect for others, particularly for elders or others with higher status. They guarantee that communication is courteous and thoughtful while also lessening the effect of straightforward comments. The use of ‘bad language’ or ‘taboo language’ is a serious socio-cultural affront in the Akan communities. There is, however, a way of expressing these in a socially acceptable manner through hedging. Socioculturally, it is highly insulting to stand before elders and say ‘I’m not a fool’. The implication is that all the addressees one is speaking to are fools. However, the use of the disclaimer ‘Sebe’ mitigates or takes away the insult for one to escape a rebuke or

punishment. This is another exhibition of high moral value in the community. It is an indication that the speaker is well aware of the etiquette of the Akan values and culture.

Let us consider Extract 27 on advice to marriage couple:

Extract 27 (Akuapem Twi)

Context [Advice to married couple at Akropong]

OS1: Sɛ Nyame ayɛ adom ma w'aka mo abɔmu sɛ okunu ne ɔyere yi, mɛsrɛ se **mo mmfa moho nkame mohomoho** wɔ mpa agoro mu, **sɛbe mekyerɛ odi** ...

As God has been gracious to put the two of you together as husband and wife, I will plead that **you do not deny each other of bed play**, sorry to say, I mean sexual intercourse.

In this extract, a newly wedded couple is admonished through idiomatic disclaimers to make sure they do not deny each other of sex as it can result in extra marital affair which can consequently bring about divorce in the near future.

After the programme, the researcher got closer to the first advisor and enquired from her as to why she used the disclaimer **Sɛbe** 'sorry to say' when she mentioned the issue of sex in the course of advising the couple. She responded by saying that **odi** 'sex' is considered a taboo language which cannot be mentioned anyhow in public. However, certain things are meant to be said as it is without mincing words. Looking at the surroundings, it did not permit her to say the issue of sex blatantly as needed to be said because of the presence of elders and children. As Akan culture does not permit her to say the issue of sex as she put it, there was therefore the need to quickly exonerate herself by issuing a disclaimer **Sɛbe** 'sorry to say'. Without the use of the disclaimer **Sɛbe**, she was going to be seen as uncultured and therefore causing a face-threatening act which is a sign of impoliteness.

4.3.2 Respect for authority and elders

Akan disclaimers frequently take note of the relative positions of the people in a discussion as well as social hierarchies. Disclaimers serve to reinforce social norms and institutions by demonstrating speakers' awareness of their own position and respect for that of others. Respect for authority figures and elders is ingrained in Akan society as a firmly held socio-cultural value that influences interpersonal interactions and community dynamics. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness theory highlights the significance of using language to manage social connections in a way that maintains "face" or the social value that an individual asserts for themselves in encounters. In Akan culture, clear language techniques and actions that show deference and humility are used to express respect for elders. Let us consider Extract 28:

Extract 28 (Akuapem Twi)

Context [Family arbitration-role play]

FH: Hei Adobea, **mfa woano nka saa mmususem** no. Sebe nsamanfo mpo se wɔpɛ wɔn dodow na yen ateasefo. Owu nyɛ adepa a yede yen ano bɔso Sebe. Nti twesan

Hei Adobea, **don't say that abominable thing. Sorry to say** even the dead say they want their multitude how much more the **living. Death** is not good to be professed **sorry to say** so retract it.

M: Nana **mesrɛ metwesan**.

Nana please **I retract it**.

In this extract, a frustrated mother declares her intention to commit suicide because of the recalcitrant nature of her ward. The family head quickly reprimands her to retract such utterance which she quickly does out of the respect she has for the family head. The use of disclaimer **Nana mesrɛ metwesan** Nana please I retract it aligns with the positive

politeness tactics delineated by Brown and Levinson (1987), as communicators want to communicate deference and fortify interpersonal connections. This outward demonstration of deference supports cultural norms around hierarchical relationships. Children are socialized into the appropriate manners and respect that are inherent in Akan culture as they observe and participate in these behaviours; they reinforce the expectations surrounding authority. Again the use of status bound disclaimers such as *Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu* and *Nana na ne Mpanyimfo* in Extracts 1 and 2 also demonstrates respect for authority and elders. This respect reflects not only a cultural imperative but also a sophisticated interplay between language use and socialization practices.

4.3.3 Conflict avoidance

In a community-focused society like the Akan, maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict are crucial. Disclaimers help in softening criticisms or controversial statements, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2020) defines conflict as a situation in which people, groups or societies or countries disagree strongly or are involved in serious argument. This disagreement may come from an incompatibility of opinions, rules or norms and others between the people, groups or societies over a particular claim. According to Brown and Marriot (1993), conflicts are bound to occur where there is incompatibility of interests. Moreover, there exists ample observation that conflicts, whether verbal or behavioral, which are not contained may lead to violence. What becomes clear from the position of Overstreet and Yule (2001) is the fact that disclaimers are linguistic resources used to avoid conflict and the misrepresentation of ideas as well as identities in communicative interactions. Again, avoidance of conflict can be seen in Extract 3 where a man who accidentally bumps into another person quickly issues an apologetic disclaimer to avoid misunderstanding and to ensure peace.

Extract 29 (Fante)

Context [Seeking forgiveness as a result of bumping into someone at a market]

P1: [P1 bumps into P2 unintentionally] Mesre wo fakye me, **mannhyɛ da nna merepɛ ntsem**

‘Please forgive me, it was unintentional, I was in hurry’

P2: M‘atse, mma ɔnnhaw wo.

‘I’ve heard it, don’t worry’.

PI: Nyame nhyira wo.

‘God bless you’

The extract demonstrates that P1 wants to avoid conflict, so he quickly apologises when he incidentally bumps into P2 at the market. P1 demonstrates cultural competence by seeing the need to apologise in order to bring harmony, which is also a sign of politeness in the Akan culture. This is corroborated by Yang (2021) when he said that disclaimers are related to an aspect of Chinese culture called *li* (politeness) that stresses attentiveness to others and avoidance of conflict and confrontation.

4.3.4 Cultural transmission

Disclaimers are often part of traditional storytelling, which are key tools for passing down cultural values and wisdom. By using disclaimers, storytellers and elders can convey messages that are open to interpretation, encouraging listeners to think deeply and apply lessons appropriately to various contexts. This is seen by the use of numerous proverbial and idiomatic disclaimers found in the data. Elders share proverbs and anecdotes at meetings to teach moral lessons about deference and compliance. Young speakers absorb the cultural significance of showing respect for authoritative figures through seeing and imitating these interactions. Proverbs like “*basia kɔ awar a ɔnye ne na kɔ*” (ladies go marriage with their mothers) teach the young girls about the need to learn from their mother while they have the

benefit of staying with them. This helps youngsters to learn the connection and interconnectedness within their community. Let us look at Extract 30:

Extract 30 (Fante)

Context [Advice at marriage ceremony at Goma Eshiem]

O S 3: Ɔye me enyigye de, da yi Nyame ayi wo hokafo ama wo. Mesre mma abusua no nsa nnsi famu. **Mpanyin de, abaa ko awar a, anye ne na ko** ntsi ndzepa biara wo na dze akyerɛ wo no fa ye edwuma. Bio, hu de aber biara ebeye biribi aboa wo kun osiande **“mpanyin de dua kor gye ehum a, obu”**

I am happy that today God has given you your life partner. Do not let the family's hand go to the ground- to mean (do not disappoint the family) The elders say, **if a girl (woman) goes to marriage, she goes with her mother** so any good thing your mother has taught you practice it.

The extract shows examples of some rich proverbial expressions which were issued during marriage counselling session at Goma-Eshiem. These proverbs were transmitted from our forefathers and it continues to be transmitted to posterity. Through language socialization, some of these disclaimers are learnt both consciously and unconsciously and they are passed on from one generation to another.

4.3.5 Establishing harmonious relationships

The use of disclaimers usually postulates politeness and this in effect help to establish a harmonious relationship between interlocutors. In Akan culture, maintaining harmonious relationships is a fundamental socio-cultural value that permeates various aspects of communication, including the use of disclaimers. Disclaimers serve as linguistic tools to navigate social interactions and uphold relational harmony. Language socialization theory posits that language learning occurs within cultural contexts, where individuals acquire both linguistic skills and socio-cultural norms through social interactions. In the Akan context,

children learn the importance of relational harmony through discourse practices that emphasize respect and social cohesion. Akan children are socialized to recognize that language is not merely a tool for conveying information but also a medium for building and maintaining relationships. The use of disclaimers reflects an understanding of the nuanced expectations in social interactions, such as showing humility and acknowledging differing opinions. Politeness theory, particularly as articulated by Brown and Levinson (1987), provides a framework for understanding how individuals manage ‘face’ thus self-image and the image of others, through communicative practices. In Akan culture, politeness is intricately tied to the value of harmonious relationships. Disclaimers allow speakers to express disagreement or concern while preserving the integrity of relationships. This practice is crucial in a collectivist society where interpersonal bonds are prioritized. Let us consider the excerpt below:

Extract 31 (Akuapem Twi)

Context [Family arbitration- Role play]

FH: Mɛsrɛ sɛ obiara beyi woati me ne woaka me nyinara afe n‘akoma mu. Sɛbe mpanyin sɛ prae wɔhɔ yi sɛ woyi biako ebu naaso sɛ wɔka bomu a emmu.

I will plead that we all put aside our differences. Respectfully, our elders say, it is easy to break a single broom than a bunch of broom.

In this extract, a family head is seen admonishing family members about the need to come together and unite as one people through the use of proverbial disclaimers *Mpanyin sɛ prae wɔhɔ yi sɛ woyi biako ebu naaso sɛ wɔka bomu a emmu*. ‘It is easy to break a single broom than a bunch of broom,- meaning in unity there is strength’. The examination of harmonious relationships as a socio-cultural value in Akan disclaimers highlights the intricate interplay between language socialization theory and politeness theory. Disclaimers serve as vital components of a communicative

practice that fosters social cohesion and respect within the Akan community. By understanding these dynamics, members of the community gain insight into the cultural significance of language and its role in shaping interpersonal relationships.

4.3.6 Modesty and humility

Disclaimers demonstrate modesty and humility, which aligns with Akan cultural values of understatement and avoidance of boastfulness. Understanding how the Akan people negotiate social relationships while adhering to these moral ideals may be gained by analysing these disclaimers using the framework of politeness theory. Politeness theory provided by Brown and Levinson (1987), urges to preserve *‘face’*, which is defined by one’s social identity and self-worth has a significant impact on the communication tactics used in social interactions. The Akan community is one of the several Ghanaian communities that highly values modesty and humility. They are essential to relational dynamics and societal equilibrium. The Akan people frequently value group identity above individualism, as noted by Agyekum (2006). This cultural viewpoint requires that when making assertions or judgments, speakers use language that reduces self-assertion and expresses deference to others.

Disclaimers are a way for individuals to convey these principles in language. An Akan speaker may, for example, include disclaimers in their comments or criticism that minimize their authority or personal viewpoint, demonstrating humility. Hedging language that conveys uncertainty or asks for the addressee's opinion might be used in these disclaimers to encourage cooperative rather than combative communication. Positive and negative politeness are the two main strategies for reducing face threats, according to Brown and Levinson, Akan people use both approaches to convey humility and modesty. The goal of positive politeness is to support the listener’s sense of self. An Akan speaker could, for instance, acknowledge their limited authority before expressing an opinion.

A practical illustration of Akan disclaimers can be seen during community decision-making processes. A speaker, while presenting their views on a communal matter, may begin with expression like; **M^oadwenkyerɛ kakra nye dɛ...**, ‘My little submission is that...’. This not only reflects their modesty but also invites others to voice their opinions, embodying the communal spirit that is highly regarded in Akan society (Ofori et al, 2021). Such linguistic choices showcase a conscious endeavour to uphold social harmony while fostering inclusivity. This is seen in Extract 32:

Extract 32 (Fante)

Context [Seeking permission to leave from a funeral]

L : ɔman mfrɛ yie! [the people respond] hɛn nuamnom Sunyanifo se sebi hɔn kwan war kakra ntsi **sɛ nana na ne mpanyimfo bɛma hɔn kwan a nkyɛ wɔdze akwansrɛ bɔto famu kakra**

A call for attention! [Our brothers from Sunyani say they have a long distance to cover back home, so with permission from the **chief and his elders**, they would like to take their leave].

In this extract, a group from Sunyani who attended a funeral at Gomao-Eshiem sought permission before leaving from the chiefs and elders of the town. This certainly shows modesty and humility indicating that they are socioculturally endowed. For, if the group had left without a formal permission, it would have constituted a serious face threat to the chiefs and elders present at the funeral. By analyzing these disclaimers through the lens of Politeness theory, one can appreciate how Akan speakers navigate the complexities of social interactions. Their language practices demonstrate a profound respect for the listener, a commitment to humility, and an adherence to the communal attitude that characterizes Akan culture. This highlights the importance of cultural context in understanding communication practices across different linguistic communities.

4.3.7 Cultural identity

Disclaimers contribute to Akan cultural identity, distinguishing it from other cultures and languages. Babatunde and Shobomehin (2007) affirm that the cultural content of language is the means by which members of society express their thoughts and ideas to one another and thus shows the diversity for each society. Every culture has a unique way of using language which differentiates it from other cultures. This uniqueness in language lends credence to the difference in human perception about issues and manners which is a confirmation that human behavior is conditioned, moderated, and influenced by the language they speak. Cultural identity plays a significant role in Akan disclaimers, particularly through the lens of language socialization theory. In the Akan context, disclaimers serve as a means to navigate complex social relationships and maintain communal harmony. Language socialization theory posits that language is a crucial medium through which cultural values and norms are transmitted across generations (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986).

In Akan society, disclaimers often reflect values such as respect, humility, and modesty. For instance, when an individual uses a disclaimer, they may express deference to elders or authority figures, reinforcing the cultural norms of respect and relational harmony. This is particularly important in the Akan cultural framework, where interpersonal relationships are highly valued. Additionally, language socialization helps individuals internalize these cultural values from a young age, shaping their communication styles and moral frameworks. As individuals learn to navigate social interactions, they adopt the use of disclaimers as a strategy to mitigate potential conflict and demonstrate their adherence to cultural expectations. This is seen in Extract 33:

Extract 33 (Fante)

Context [Advice at marriage ceremony 2, Gomoa-Eshiem]

O S 3: Mɛsrɛ mma abusua no nsa nnsi famu. Mpanyin dɛ, ɔbaa kɔ awar a, ɔnye ne na kɔ ntsi ndzɛpa biara wo na dze akyere wo no fa yɛ edwuma. Bio, hu dɛ aber biara ebɛyɛ biribi aboa wo kun osiande “mpanyin dɛ dua kor gye ehum a, obu” **Do not let the family’s hand go to the ground-** to mean do not disappoint the family’ The elders say, **if a girl (woman) goes to marriage, she goes with her mother** so any good thing your mother has taught you practice it.

The extract indicates that the Akan language is full of proverbs and idiomatic expressions. The use of apologetic disclaimers, combined with proverbial and idiomatic disclaimers, undeniably shows the cultural identity of Akans as a unique group of people.

4.3.8 Summary

The purpose of this discussion so far has been to identify the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers. These included demonstrating humility and modesty, showing respect for authority and elders, avoiding conflict or confrontation. Again, it also established other sociocultural values such as establishing harmonious relationship, modesty and humility and finally cultural identity. The next section looks at functions of disclaimers in Akan language.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated a comprehensive analysis of the findings on Akan disclaimers by categorizing them according to their forms and placement within discourse. The analysis reveals that Akan disclaimers are not merely linguistic devices but deeply embedded cultural tools reflecting the sociocultural values of respect, hierarchy, and communal harmony within Akan society. The categorization into form and placement shows how speakers strategically deploy disclaimers to manage interpersonal relationships and to

navigate potentially face-threatening acts. Furthermore, the study highlights the pragmatic functions of disclaimers, such as mitigating possible offense, showing deference, emotional regulation, politeness and respect, navigating taboos and creating a cooperative communication environment. The findings are interpreted through the lenses of Politeness theory and Language Socialization theory, providing a robust theoretical background for understanding how disclaimers are learned, internalized, and used as part of broader social practices. The Politeness theory helps elucidate how disclaimers serve as tools for face-management, while the Language Socialization theory reveals how speakers acquire the norms governing their use from early social interactions within the Akan cultural setting.

This analysis contributes to academic scholarship by offering empirical evidence of the interplay between language, culture, and society in Akan discourse. It enriches the literature on pragmatics and sociolinguistics by foregrounding African indigenous communicative practices, an area often underrepresented in mainstream linguistic research. It also expands theoretical discussions on disclaimers beyond Western contexts, demonstrating the need for culturally grounded pragmatic analyses. The chapter thus paves the way for future cross-cultural and comparative studies on disclaimers, contributing to a more inclusive and globally relevant understanding of pragmatic phenomena in human communication. Lastly, the analysis has demonstrated that Akan disclaimers are prospective and retrospective in nature which is similar to Persian language as revealed by Teyebi and Parvaresh (2014).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings of the study, general recommendations and suggestions for future research. The major objectives of the study which were to identify the categories of Akan disclaimers, the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers and the functions of the Akan disclaimers have been greatly achieved. The findings of the study are the products of the qualitative approach and the ethnography design methodology adopted to collect data.

5.1 Summary of findings

The study focused on an analysis of Akan disclaimers. The objectives were to identify the categories of disclaimers in Akan and subsequently assess the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers and also find the functions of disclaimers in Akan. The data for the study were sourced from various ethnographic backgrounds such as funerals, marriage ceremonies, durbar, festivals, community engagement, and market and roleplay sessions among others. The data collected for analysis helped to provide answers to the research questions.

5.1.1 Categories of disclaimers

The analysis of data for Research Question 1 revealed that Akan language has two major categories of disclaimers. These were disclaimers according to form and disclaimers according to placement. The disclaimers according form included status bond disclaimers, apologetic disclaimers, proverbial disclaimers, hedging disclaimers, idiomatic disclaimers and negation disclaimers. Placement disclaimers included prospective disclaimers, retrospective disclaimers, successive disclaimers and distributive disclaimers. It was revealed in the analysis that status-bound disclaimers reflect hierarchical sensitivity, and used by

speakers of lower status to show deference. Again, it is also used to acknowledge authority and to seek approval, which in effect helps to maintain politeness and social harmony.

Apologetic disclaimers are normally used to preface sensitive or unpleasant information. These soften the impact of potentially face-threatening acts, especially in public discourse. Proverbial disclaimers are frequently embedded within culturally rich proverbs, allowing speakers to convey criticism or caution subtly. This protects the speaker's face and enhances indirectness which is esteemed Akan communicative norm. Hedging disclaimers per this study were used to show uncertainty or caution. They help reduce speaker commitment to statements, especially in controversial deliberations. Idiomatic disclaimers were used to obscure directness and maintain politeness. These often require shared cultural knowledge for interpretation which reinforces in-group identity. Negation disclaimers has been seen in this study as denial or distancing strategy to help pre-empt misinterpretation and reduce offense.

Prospective disclaimers are made before the main utterance. They prepare the hearer for what follows and minimize potential threats while Retrospective disclaimers appear after the main utterance to mitigate its impact, often offering clarification or apology. Successive disclaimers in this work have been seen as repeated use of disclaimers in close succession in a given discourse to mitigate an envisaged serious face threat. Distributive disclaimers are spread across discourse, with disclaimers embedded at various stages. Such disclaimers sustain politeness across extended talk, common in ceremonial or formal settings. It must be noted here that successive disclaimers and distributive disclaimers can either fall under prospective disclaimers or retrospective disclaimers depending on the context. These classifications reveal that Akan disclaimers are deeply embedded in cultural norms of politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. They demonstrate how speakers pragmatically negotiate meaning, manage face, and reinforce Akan values. The analysis thus enriches our

understanding of Akan discourse strategies and contributes to broader linguistic and pragmatic study of how disclaimers influence communicative effectiveness in Akan.

5.1.2 Functions of disclaimers in Akan

The data also revealed some functions of Akan disclaimers with respect to research question 3. These functions included; mitigating face threat, emotional regulation, politeness and respect, navigating taboos or the unmentionables, sociolinguistic etiquette, emotional regulation, maintaining social cohesion, educational role and smooth interaction among others. These functions of Akan disclaimers were also backed by data collected and research work which has been embarked upon by early research such as (Ajayi, 2020; Stoke & Hewitt, 1975; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). Through this work, it has been observed that Akan disclaimers help to mitigate face threat just as observed by other writers such as (Ajayi, 2022; Hewitt & Stokes, 1975; Hongladarom, 2007; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014). Akan disclaimers soften face-threatening remarks by lessening directness. They help speakers to express disagreement or criticism without damaging the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Akan disclaimers also function by regulating the emotions of interlocutors. These emotions are managed by reducing the intensity of personal feelings in sensitive conversations. This is also similar to what Ajayi (2022) discovered in metapragmatic analysis of Yuroba discourse. As politeness markers, Akan disclaimers express deference and courtesy, especially in hierarchical interactions. They maintain cultural expectations of respectful speech, especially toward elders and authority figures. This is similar to what pertains in the Yuroba disclaimers where people are accorded their rightful titles or accolades in order not to incur face threat by their interlocutors. Disclaimers in Akan allow speakers to reference taboo subjects indirectly. Through apologetic, hedging, or proverbial expressions, speakers mitigate the risk of social offense when addressing culturally sensitive or forbidden or unmentionable topics (Obeng, 1996). When such unmentionable topics are raised without

the proper usage of disclaimer, the individual involved is seen as stranger in his or her own community and also incompetent communicator (Agyekum, 2022)

Disclaimers serve as tools of proper linguistic behavior in Akan, aligning with expected norms of indirectness, humility, and honorifics in interaction. The usage of disclaimers or apologetic formulae signals competence in appropriate communication (Yankah, 1995). It serves as proper linguistic behavior in Akan communication by aligning with expected norms of indirectness, and humility in interactions. This is also seen in Persian disclaimer (e.g. Tayebi & Parvaresh). Disclaimers again function in Akan setting by reducing verbal aggression and promoting tactful speech, which avoid interpersonal conflict. This supports social solidarity and peaceful co-existence within the community. This is also similar in what pertains in Yoruba disclaimers as indicate by Ajayi (2022). Through this work, we have once again discovered that disclaimers help clarify speaker's real intention by preventing misinterpretation. Akan disclaimers do signal that a forthcoming statement is not meant to offend or challenge but rather foster a more understanding and considerate interaction (Obeng, 1997). Results of this study align with Tayebi and Parvaresh's assertion that disclaimers could be both prospective and retrospective in Persian language. This is contrary to the long-held view by early researchers (e.g. Fraser, 1980; Overstreet & Yule, 2001; Stokes & Hewitt, 1976) that disclaimers are proactive linguistic device which is used to word off potential threat.

5.1.3 Socio-cultural values of Akan disclaimers

With regard to the Research Question 2, it came to light that the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers included factors such as exhibition of moral values, respect for authority and elders, conflict avoidance, cultural transmission, establishing harmonious relationships and Cultural identity which were subsequently backed by the data collected. Disclaimers in Akan communication replicate moral standards by guiding speakers to express

sensitive opinions with care. They help to avoid direct accusations or insults, reinforcing societal ethics of decency (Yankah, 1995). Again, Akan speakers use disclaimers to show reverence to elders and authority figures, to avoid bluntness. This aligns with the Akan value of seniority and the obligation to speak respectfully in hierarchical relationships (Agyekum, 2004). This is also similar to what Ajayi (2022) described as status bound disclaimers as conferring title holders and the elderly with their rightful title or honorifics.

Disclaimers serve as linguistic tool to reduce tension and prevent confrontations in communication (Hongladarom, 2007). In this work it is seen to promote peaceful interaction by softening critical remarks. It also reinforced the cultural preference for non-confrontational communication (Obeng, 1997). Disclaimers play the role of cultural transmission through the use of proverbial and idiomatic disclaimers. Akan speakers pass on their culture via indigenous wisdom and communicative norms. This helps to preserve cultural knowledge across generations (Yankah, 1995). Through Akan disclaimers individuals are able to maintain social cohesion by reducing verbal hostility and fostering mutual understanding. This reflects Akan ethics of social harmony which is central to Akan society. Disclaimers express modesty by allowing speakers to downplay authority or certainty. Akan speakers often use hedging or apologetic disclaimers to present themselves as humble and open to correction (Obeng, 1996). Idiomatic and proverbial disclaimers in Akan reinforce speakers' cultural identity. They signal belongingness to the Akan worldview and linguistic heritage. This is also similar to what Ajayi (2022) discovered in Yoruba disclaimers. Ajayi avers that disclaimers are part and parcel of Yoruba language.

5.2 The role of disclaimers in Akan communication

Disclaimers play a crucial pragmatic and sociocultural role in communication, which serve as linguistic tools to manage interpersonal relations and uphold communal values. They are also used to mitigate face-threatening acts, express humility, avoid offense, and show

respect, especially in sensitive or potentially controversial conversations. In a culture where indirectness, politeness, and deference are highly valued or are paramount, disclaimers help speakers to navigate taboos, express dissent cautiously, and maintain social harmony. Speakers of Akan who have sociocultural knowledge usually preface their statements with disclaimers to soften the impact of their utterance when the need be. This preemptive use shields the speaker from appearing arrogant or confrontational. Disclaimers in Akan also help to manage emotions to regulate discourse, by allowing speakers to express concerns without generating conflict. Moreover, they provide clarity of intent, ensuring that utterances are not misinterpreted in ways that could disrupt social harmony. Finally, disclaimers in Akan discourse emphasize their role in upholding societal values and maintaining relational harmony. These disclaimers help to illustrate how language use in Akan society is intertwined with conscience and social intelligence, which in effect establish disclaimers as indispensable communicative tool.

5.3 Implications for communication

Akan disclaimers have profound implications for communication. This is because they outline both the structure and intent of communication in socio-cultural manner. Pragmatic disclaimers emphasize respect, humility, and modesty, which function not just as linguistic mitigating device but as tools for managing relationships and social expectations. The use of these devices reflects the Akan traditional mindset or philosophy of life where speech is seen as a powerful act that moderate unguided utterances to ensure cohesion and unity (Agyekum, 2022). With respect to interpersonal communication, disclaimers support speakers to navigate face-threatening acts by softening the impact of potentially offensive remarks. Such expressions reduce the risk of being perceived as disrespectful or a stranger in one's own community. The use of disclaimers as strategic mitigation device is essential in hierarchical relationships (example status bound), such as between elders and youth or

teachers and students, where respect and deference is seen as cultural imperative (Ajayi, 2022). Ultimately, Akan disclaimers promote clarity and prevent misinterpretation by explicitly stating what is not intended. This is indeed important in conflict resolution, or when addressing unmentionables or taboos. Disclaimers also foster emotional regulation by enabling speakers to express dissension or sensitive opinions in a non-confrontational manner to preserve social cohesion.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

Disclaimers are universal with the world's languages and perform socializing functions. It is therefore suggested that much attention should be given to this unique aspect of language use by researchers. Ghanaian linguists are urged to delve deeper into these linguistic elements in the Akan language. The researcher strongly recommends that the various types of disclaimers such as status bound, proverbial, apologetic, hedging, idiomatic, and negation disclaimers in this study could be delved deeper and expand the tentacles of Akan disclaimers. Moreover, other sociological variables such as age and gender can also be considered in future studies to assess their influence on speaker choice of politeness strategy in expressing disclaimers. Again, it is recommended that future research should also conduct a comparative study to look at their unique characteristics. Lastly, the researcher recommends that other frameworks such as Speech Act Theory, Relevance Theory, or Conversation Analysis, can be used for analysis on disclaimers in order to understand any alternative interpretations that these models might offer.

5.5 Conclusion

Although a lot of research has been done by scholars such as Abeka, Agyekum, Amfo, Dolphyne, Obeng, Owu-Ewie, Sekyi-Baidoo, Yankah, and many others, the language still has a lot of unique features which provide important linguistic data for analysis. One of such linguistic features is *disclaimer* which has been the focus of this study. Disclaimers have

been defined variously in the literature (Ajayi, 2022; Caffi, 2007; Stoke & Hewitt, 1975; Tayebi & Parvaresh, 2014) as a linguistic device used to mitigate a potential threat. There are several types including prospective, retrospective, apologetic, hedging, proverbial among others. Data were collected through interview, role play and recordings. The analysis has been done to look at the categories, functions, and socio-cultural values of Akan disclaimers. The study has also given us the ethnographic background of the Akan people.

Analysis of the study was done using Politeness theory and Language Socialization theory to reveal the socio-cultural values embedded in Akan disclaimers such as conflict avoidance, exhibition of moral values, respect for authority and elders, cultural transmission, social harmony among others. Again, the interviews conducted also brought out some important functions of disclaimers which were backed by data collected in the study. Functions such as mitigating face threat, emotional regulation, politeness and respect, clarification of intent, communicative competence, navigating taboos among others were also revealed. To conclude, this study has demonstrated how disclaimers serve as tactical instruments that support interpersonal connections and preserve social peace in addition to reducing the likelihood of offending. Through an analysis of the several settings in which these disclaimers are utilized, we have acquired a deeper understanding of the cultural norms and values ingrained in Akan language. Moreover, the results demonstrate the subtle ways in which speakers negotiate meaning and intended difficulties, exposing a sophisticated language pragmatics at work. The study has also advanced knowledge of Akan discourse techniques and provided insightful avenues for sociolinguistic and intercultural communication.

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