

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF GONJA IDIOMS

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

2023

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF GONJA IDIOMS



**A thesis in the Department of Gur-Gonja Education, Faculty of Ghanaian
Languages Education, submitted to the School of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Gonja)
in the University of Education, Winneba**

NOVEMBER, 2023

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

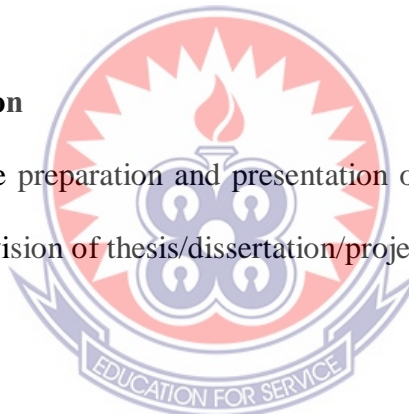
I, Kurabaso Yussif, declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

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Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised per the guidelines for supervision of thesis/dissertation/project as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



SUPERVISOR: MR. HENRY K. AFARI-TWAKO

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my benefactor, Ing. Dr. Clifford A. Braimah, who has contributed in diverse ways to bring me this far.

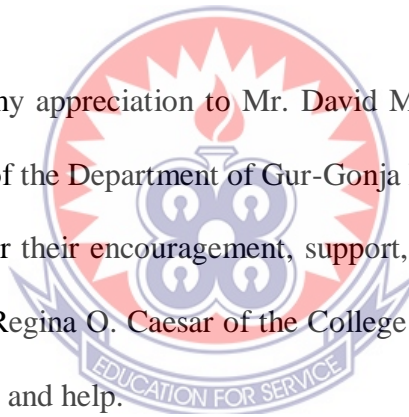


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise be to Allah, the All-Giver, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Owner and Giver of knowledge.

Uppermost acknowledge my indefatigable as well as committed supervisor, Mr. Henry K. Afari-Twako of the Department of Gur-Gonja Languages Education, College of Languages Education for being my guardian, mentor, lecturer, and supervisor throughout my University Education and the writing of this research work. He painstakingly, patiently, went through every bit of the work with professional succor.

I wish to also express my appreciation to Mr. David Moro Jindayu, Mr. Bodua Mango and Mr. Dari Dramani, of the Department of Gur-Gonja Languages Education, College of Languages Education for their encouragement, support, and help. I wish to also express my appreciation to Dr. Regina O. Caesar of the College of Languages Education, for her encouragement, support, and help.



I wish to express my indebtedness to all the Lecturers of the College of Languages Education for their constructive comments, criticisms, and inspiring ideas which made me muster the courage necessary to produce this research work. They made available the necessary materials that helped me to complete this thesis.

I extended my gratitude to my mother, Salamatu Kofi, my brothers, my loved ones, and my friends for their love, care, and support during this study.

I wish to also express my appreciation to Mr. Ibrahim Abubakari Dey, former Member of Parliament for Salaga-South and an indigene of Silmunchu in the East Gonja Municipality for his encouragement, support, and help.

Finally, I express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed in one way or the other to make the writing of this thesis possible. I must acknowledge that the success of this thesis is due to their support both in terms of material and moral support.



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ABBREVIATIONS

1 st	first person pronoun
2 nd	second person pronoun
3 rd	third person pronoun
CV	consonant vowel
CVN	consonant vowel nasal
CVV	consonant vowel vowel
DEM	demonstrative
DET	determiner
DISM	discourse marker
FOC	focus
FUT	future
HAB	habitual
LOC	locative
NEG	negative/negation
PASS	passive
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
POSTP	postposition
PROG	progressive
PST	past
QUANT	quantifier
SG	singular



SVO subject verb object

V verb



ABSTRACT

This study discusses the contextual analysis of Gonja idioms a Guan language spoken in the Savannah Region of Ghana. The study was conducted in the East Gonja Municipality. The study examines the categories, a thematic classification, and the contextual usage of Gonja idioms. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study, the research design was ethnography, and the study's approach was qualitative. It involves ten (10) respondents, comprising five (5) males and five (5) females, who were from age 41 and above. The instruments used in the study for the data collection were unstructured interviews and observations. The study employs a descriptive method in the data analysis. This was done with one hundred (150) Gonja idioms. The idioms were categorized and analyzed under different themes. The major findings of the study were that the meanings of Gonja idioms depend on the contexts in which they are used. In addition, it was also found that idioms improve the communication skills of the people and that the interpretation of some of the idioms is also a major challenge, particularly for the youth. It was again realized that the use of the idioms in varying contexts reflects the native speakers' grasp of their social reality that encompasses their interactional relationships and the cultural prisms of domains that characterize their co-existence in a speech community.



CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This study presents a contextual analysis of Gonja idioms, a Northern Guan language of the Kwa language family. The study examines the categories, themes, and contextual usage of Gonja idioms. Mohammad (2014:1) opines that idiomatic expressions can be seen as conventionally used phrases that have a figurative significance. They play a very important role in language usage, not only facilitating the communication of meaning but also conveying both emotive and cultural connotations. The fact that the meaning of idiomatic expressions often has no obvious connection with the literal lexical significance of the words they contain, together with their heavy reliance on cultural references, means that they can present a particularly difficult challenge for those learning a second language or for translators mediating between cultures. This linguistic and cultural variation is one of the reasons why this field has attracted the interest of the researcher to do the study.

The study is organized as follows: 1.1 discusses the background of the study which includes a brief look at Gonja and its speakers and the geographical area where Gonja is spoken in Ghana. It also highlights the languages affiliated with Gonja. Section, 1.2 is the statement of the problem; 1.3 discusses the purpose of the study; 1.4 and 1.5 state the objectives of the study and research questions respectively; 1.6 outlines the significance of the study 1.7 defines the scope of the study; 1.8 presents the organization of the study and 1.9 states the summary.

1.1 Background to the study

According to Dickins et al. (2017:293), an idiom is ‘a fixed expression whose meaning cannot be deduced from the denotative meanings of the words that constitute it’. Larson (1998:23), refers to an idiom as ‘a string of words whose meaning is different from the meaning conveyed by the individual words’. Other linguists have defined the idiom as ‘an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts’ (Richards & Schmidt 2002:246). For example, the idiomatic expression *It rains cats and dogs* cannot be understood from the meaning of each word separately and hence has nothing to do with the meaning of the idiom as a whole. Baker (1992:63), states that idioms and idiomatic expressions are ‘frozen patterns of languages which allow little or no variation in form and, often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their components’. For example, idioms such as *bury the hatchet* which is ‘to become friendly again after a disagreement or quarrel’, and *the long and the short of it* which means ‘the basic facts of the situation’ allow no variations in the form under normal circumstances.

Fernando (1996:25) postulates that ‘idioms not only ensure that our communication is coherent and cohesive, but they also produce a discourse that is socially acceptable as well as precise, lively and interesting’. In other words, using idioms can show more effectiveness and prove more powerful in communication than literal non-idiomatic language (McPherron, & Randolph, 2014). Ghazala (2003:204), highlights the main features of idioms by stating that idioms are all metaphorical and cannot be understood directly; they should not be taken literally as their meanings lie on their constituents rather than individual words; their syntactic form is usually fixed and

cannot be changed or described as ungrammatical; their meanings are also invariable and they are mainly cultural and informal.

According to Hornby (1987), idiomatic expressions are a group of words whose meaning cannot be guessed literally. He adds that idiom forms are usually in the form of phrases or words or even in the form of sentences whose meaning cannot be predicted through the individual meanings of the constituent words. Meanwhile, according to FellBaum (2007), idioms are a challenge to our understanding of grammar and lexis which has not been fully satisfied. The essence of this statement is that idioms are fixed expressions that have different meanings from the original words forming them. These definitions designate that an idiomatic expression is a phrase, a word, or even a sentence whose meaning is not easily understood because what it stands for differs from the individual words in the expression. It also comes to light that an idiom has a meaning that is based on the culture of the original language. For these reasons, we appreciate the fact that the best way to interpret idiomatic expressions is to view them based on the context in which they are used (Sofyani, 2021). Therefore, by examining this contextual usage one can gain a deeper understanding of the communication's intended meaning, potential misinterpretations, and the impact it may have on various audiences.

It can be seen from the above explanations that an idiomatic expression is a complicated and difficult expression since they are typically used, spoken and written, by individuals from some cultures or nations for informal and formal purposes (Sofyani, 2021). She adds that idioms are important, integral, and natural parts of all languages. Idioms are essentially figurative or metaphorical and are peculiar to a

people or a district, community, or ethnic group. When idiomatic expressions are used, they can be more conveniently understood and explained from the context and situation of use. Idioms can be explained or interpreted through the context in which they are used. Interpreting the meaning of idioms based on context is called contextual meaning which leads to understanding why the idiom was employed in the communication. (Sofyani, 2021).

1.1.1 The Gonja people

The history of Gonja is a bit surrounded by some myths but the general and popular view held by the Gonja people, is that the Gonja are a people who entered into their present modern-day area from one of the old Sudanese Empires; precisely the Mande Empire or Kingdom (Mali Empire as some historians prefer to call it) They were a group of fighters or preferably, invaders led by their leader and founder of the Gonja Kingdom in the person of Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa. Jakpa is said to have invaded vast areas as he moved on through conquest and after each area was captured, he would leave behind a son or a loyal servant as chief or leader of the conquered people and area. He did that through his spear and by the time of his death, the present Gonja Traditional Area was established fully as a centralized state under his sole leadership in 1675 (Huchulak, 2012).

The Gonja people, whose true name is Ngbanyɛ, (meaning Brave Men) derived the name “Gonja” from a corrupted Hausa phrase “Kasa Goro-Jaa” (meaning land of Red Cola). The language known by the natives as Ngbanyeto is a Northern Guan Language that belongs to a small language family within the Niger-Congo phylum that covers much of sub-Saharan Africa. The term Gonja is used to refer to both the

people and the language spoken by them (Deborah et al 2016). They occupy a large area that lies along the upper reaches of the Volta Lake and the White and Black rivers that pour into the Lake.

The Gonja language

Gonja is widely spoken by speakers of some other Gur languages Dagbamba, Safalba, Vagla, and others. This special status is of course due to the expansion of the Gonja Empire in the eighteenth century. As a result, in much of Western Gonja, the ruling clan in a town may speak Gonja as a first language but other tribes may speak Vagla, Hanga, Choruba, or another Gur language such as Dagaare, Safalba, Dagbani, etc. as their first language and Gonja as a second language (Dakubu, 2007). This language is spoken mainly in the Savanna Region of Ghana and also in the Upper basin of the Volta Lake area. In the Bono-East Region, Gonja is spoken in the Kintampo North District of Ghana (Eberhard, et al., 2022).

According to Afari-Twako (2005), Gonja has three dialects, East Gonja, West Gonja, and Ndompo, and is used in all domains and by people of all ages. Gonja is taught in basic, and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions in Ghana. Gonja is also spoken in a linguistically heterogeneous and highly multilingual context.

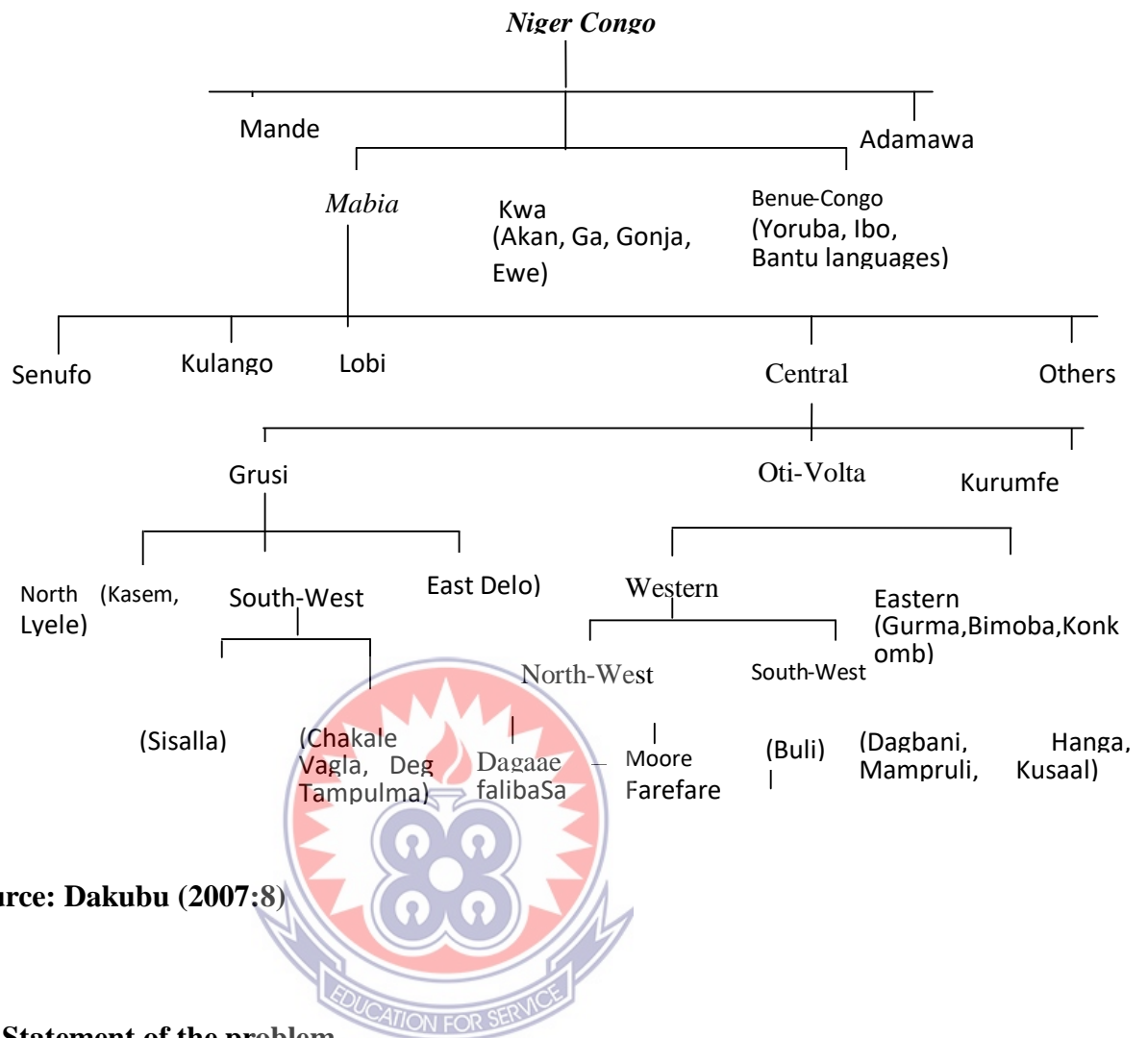
According to Dakubu (2007:76), Gonja is the second-largest Guan language in terms of speakers. The population and housing census 2021 gives the population of the Gonja as about six hundred and fifty-three thousand, two hundred and sixty-six (653,266) and the language is spoken over a large area stretching north to Tamale, the capital of Ghana's Northern Region. Its East-West extent is also considerable,

reaching from Salaga in the East to Bole in the West. Considering the linguistic features, the language exhibits both voiced and voiceless consonants at each place of articulation. Gonja has been analyzed recently as having nine vowel systems though seven are used in its teaching and learning. Gonja predominantly exhibits CV, V, CVN, and CVV syllable structure (Deborah, et al., 2016). The language is strictly subject-verb-object (SVO). The language also makes use of postpositions and the noun occurs preceding the determiner in the structure of the language.

1.1.4 Languages affiliated to Gonja

The North Guan language family comprises Nchumburung, Foodu, Gichode, Karachi, Nawuri, Choruba, Gonja, and Nkonya (Dakubu, 2007:76). The schema (i) below indicates the position of Gonja and the North Guan group to which it belongs. There is a considerable amount of mutual intelligibility among Yeji Nchumburung, Prang Nchumburung, and Krachi Nchumburung but considerably less intelligibility between these forms and Gonja (Dakubu, 2007). All major ethnic groups in Ghana claim to have come to meet the Guan already settled. The Guan people in Ghana can be classified into five major groups spread throughout the country. The major groups include the Northern Guan - Nchumburung, Nawuri, Gichode, Choruba; the Volta Guan - Nkonya, Anum-Boso; the Eastern Guan - Cherepong, Akropong, Larteh; the Brong Ahafo Guan and the Central Guan Awutu, Efutu, Senya.

Figure 1: Gonja and Her Relationship with Other Languages



Source: Dakubu (2007:8)

1.2 Statement of the problem

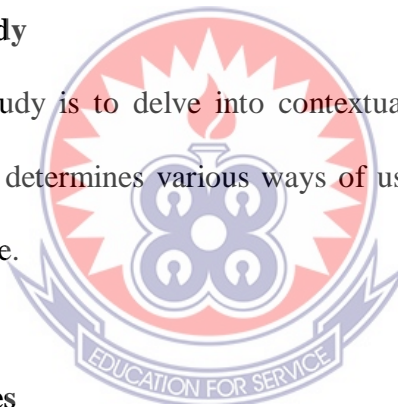
Some studies have investigated various aspects of Ghanaian language idiomatic expressions, including their typology, semantics, and syntactic behavior, Bisilki (2019), works on the body-part terms in Likpakpaln, Nyame J. et al. (2023), work on Nzema idiomatic expressions as indirection strategy, Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), works on the Akan phrasal verb as a syntactic manifestation, Yakubu et al. (2022), work on body parts idioms as a linguistic tool for polite communication among the Nzema. Also, Hockett (1958), Weinreich (1969), Fraser (1970), and Makkai (1972). Gibbs (1985), focuses on how idiomatic expressions are understood, while Strässler (1982), Fernando (1996), and Moon (1998), analyze English idioms using pragmatic,

functional, and corpus-linguistic approaches. However, the study or analysis of Gonja's idiomatic expressions did not attract the attention of scholars of Gonja in any way.

This creates a gap in the full understanding and usage of Gonja idioms. Hence this study is positioned to excavate idioms and their usage across contexts in Gonja. By bridging this gap, the study will preserve the aspect of idioms in the oral literature of the Gonja language for future generations and also for further studies in the analysis of Gonja idioms.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to delve into contextual analysis of Gonja idioms by exploring how context determines various ways of using idioms and their meanings among the Gonja people.



1.4 Research objectives

The objectives of the study are to

1. Examine the categories of idioms in Gonja;
2. Identify the themes in Gonja idioms;
3. Discuss the contextual usage of idioms in Gonja;

1.5 Research questions

This study seeks to provide answers to the following questions

1. What are the categories of Gonja idioms?
2. What themes are identifiable in the Gonja idioms?

3. How does context determine the use and meaning of Gonja idioms?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is on the contextual analysis of Gonja idioms. It provides useful information on the themes and the contextual usage as well as the categories of Gonja idioms. Also, it will add to the already existing literature in the Gonja language and contribute to the enhancement of the knowledge of Gonja idioms. Moreover, the study will serve as a documentation of Gonja idioms, and a reference point for teachers of the language and anyone who places his or her hands on it as well as, future works on the language.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The scope of this research was restricted to the contextual analysis of Gonja idioms, the categories, the themes found in Gonja idioms, and their usage in the context. The study will be delimited to the East Gonja Municipality. The subjects of the study are from Abrumase, Akamade, and Kpembe which are typically remote Gonja settlements where the language is not diluted by interference from other languages.

1.8 Organization of the study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One is a general introduction while chapter two discusses the literature review. In Chapter Three, the methodology approach is discussed. While Chapter Four of the study discusses the analysis of some Gonja idioms. The final chapter of this study discusses the summary, findings, and recommendations.

1.9 Summary

This chapter discussed the general introduction of the study which shows that Gonja idioms have not received any documentation and analysis. This has created a research gap that needs to be filled. The chapter also covers the objectives that will form the main focus of the study. In addition, the significance of the study was highlighted to show that it will add to the little literature available for the study of the language. Finally, the chapter gives an outline of some delimitations to the study and provides an outline of the organization of the rest of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

THE REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter looks at some related literature relevant to this current study of idioms. It discusses works by scholars on idioms that are relevant to the study so long as idioms as an aspect of oral literature are concerned. Section 2.0 is the introduction; while 2.1 reviews the concept of idioms; 2.2 talks about the history of idioms; 2.3 deals with the categories of idioms; 2.4 discusses the contextual usage of the idioms; while 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 discuss the importance of idioms and characteristics of idioms respectively; 2.4.2.1 talks about the structural features of idioms; while 2.4.2.2 deals with the semantic features of idioms. Section 2.5 discusses the themes embodied in idioms; and 2.6, provides a summary of the chapter.

2.1: The concept of idioms

Many attempts have been made to define the term idiom or idiomatic expression. Linguists like Katz and Postal (1963); Fraser (1970); Makkai (1972); and Kövecses and Szabó (1996), argue that the meaning of an idiomatic expression is indirect and cannot be deduced purely by reference to the meaning of its lexical components since idioms are linguistic expressions whose overall meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of their constituent parts. Idiomatic expressions therefore are multi-word phrases whose overall meanings are idiosyncratic and largely unpredictable, reflecting speaker meanings that are not derivable by combining the literal senses of the individual words in each phrase according to the regular semantic rules of the language (Hurford et al. 2007). They continue by saying that the meanings of some idioms are not fully compositional in the sense that most idioms have possible, though

unlikely, literal compositional interpretations along with their idiomatic senses. Which meaning is intended usually depends on the context in which the expression is used. They provide these examples.

To let the cat out of the bag and

To take the bull by the horns

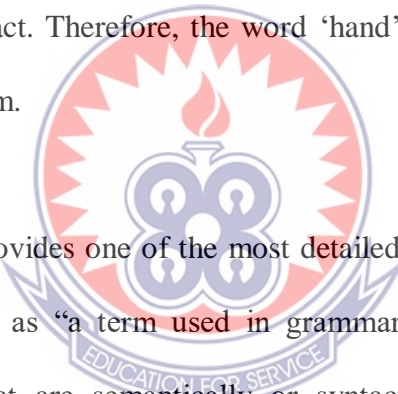
These are commonly used idioms whose usual meanings are not fully compositional but have to be learned as a whole. Any speaker of English knows, for example, *To let the cat out of the bag* is usually used to mean something like ‘reveal a secret’, though it also has a possible, though rarely intended literal compositional meaning, like ‘release a small catlike animal from a sack’. Similarly, *Take the bull by the horns*, typically evokes the idea that someone ‘takes charge of a situation’, though it could also have the more literal compositional meaning ‘grab a real bull by its horns’. According to Dabrowska, (2018), idioms generally refer to a group of words whose meanings are not deducted from its words but rather depend on the complete usage of the words. For example, the idiom *to shoulder* ‘take responsibility’ has nothing to do with ‘the shoulder’ as portrayed. Similarly, in Gonja the idiom *ta mobe enɔ* which means ‘to take after somebody’ or ‘to take somebody’s hands’ and has nothing to do with the hands but rather the individual’s attitude and behavior.

According to Langlotz (2006), cited in Suhununu (2021), idioms are peculiar linguistic constructions that have raised scholars’ interest in linguistics and often confuse newcomers to a language. They constitute a subset of the fixed expressions in a language community. This assertion is supported by Selma (2019), who holds that, idioms are expressions peculiar to a language, and they play an important role in all languages. This means that it is difficult or sometimes impossible to guess the

meaning of an idiom by looking at the individual words it contains. For example, the phrase *to Be in the same boat* ‘To be in the same unpleasant situation as someone else’, has a literal meaning that is easy to understand because two or more people can be in the same boat when they are to cross a river, but it also has the common idiomatic meaning as indicated above. Similar to Selma’s assertion, Gonja also has a similar idiomatic expression for example, *Keba wo ekuloṣ koywule to* ‘To be in the same boat which also as an idiom means to be in the same unpleasant situation as another person’. According to Akanmu (2014), in his work, *New Yoruba Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions*, he avers that idioms and idiomatic expressions are typically modern stock expressions, formed in response to the needs of the moment arising as a result of the linguistic constraints of the users which consequently necessitates the creation of new words and expressions. They are so called not only because of their complexity which requires the overlapping tendencies of their semantic realizations but also because of their distinctive difference from old, traditional idioms. They overlap metaphor and euphemism and also serve as a replication of the established Yorùbá idioms both in form and meaning. They are in spoken and written forms and mainly operate at the lexical and phrasal levels.

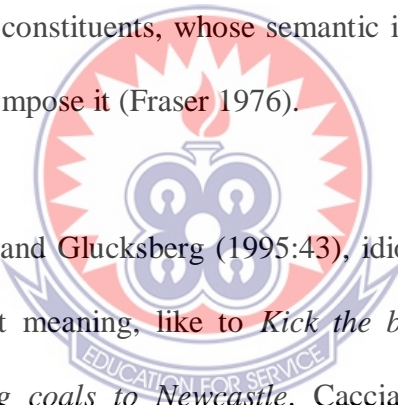
From another perspective, Ahmadi (2017), defines idioms as language-specific expressions which usually carry a non-literal meaning that can be very different from the literal meaning of the expression. Selma (2019), states that idioms are peculiar to a language. According to Thyab (2016), as cited in Suhununu (2021), in linguistics, idioms are defined as fixed expressions that are typically used in a figurative sense and have arbitrary meanings. That is, idiomatic expressions make their meaning by coincidence and by chance. On the contrary, some experts argue that some idioms do

not occur by chance, but they have a close relationship with the meanings they portray. For example, idiomatic expressions such as ‘to cool one’s temper’ and ‘to keep one’s temper’ refer to ‘stop from being angry’. These idioms carry the meanings that they do have because anger is restrained through the image of coolness and calmness (Thyab 2016). Suhununu relates this assertion to the Dagbani expression *Napɔŋ kan* which means ‘There is no leg’ referring to ‘being barred from traveling’. It is assumed that, for one to travel from one place to another, it requires the use of one’s legs. Therefore, the ‘word’ legs has a significant contribution to the meaning of the idiom. Similarly, Gonja has an idiom *kɔ̃ enɔ̃ tentɛŋ* ‘a thief’ which means ‘to have a long hand’. It is presumed that, for one to steal something, it requires the use of one’s hands to do the act. Therefore, the word ‘hand’ has a significant influence on the meaning of the idiom.

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central figure of a person with arms raised, set against a background of a sunburst. The emblem is surrounded by a blue border containing the text 'UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION' at the top and 'EDUCATION FOR SERVICE' at the bottom.

Crystal (2008: 237), provides one of the most detailed and specific definitions of the idiom by describing it as “a term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words that are semantically or syntactically restricted so that they function as a single unit”. From a semantic viewpoint, the meaning of the individual words cannot be summed up to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts. Fromkin, et al. (2013), argue that the words of idioms collocate together to the extent that they are unchangeable in most cases. Idioms have meaning outside of the meanings of their constituents. And idioms are culturally based because they vary from language to language and likewise from culture to culture. Therefore, one can understand the meaning of an idiom based on its context. A considerable number of researches have focused on studying idiomatic expressions.

According to Fillmore, et al. (1988), an idiom is an expression gifted with a specific interpretation by the speakers of a community. They distinguish between encoding and decoding idioms. Encoding idioms are those that can be understood by speakers of a language without having prior learning, for example, *Answer the door* which means 'To check the door'. On the other hand, decoding idioms are expressions that need to be learned beforehand to understand their meaning, for example, *kick the bucket* meaning 'to die'. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning is difficult or impossible to guess by looking at the meaning of individual words (Hornby 2010). The meaning of an idiom would be guessed through the meaning of individual words with a proper understanding of the context of use. An idiom is viewed as a single constituent or series of constituents, whose semantic interpretation is independent of the formatives which compose it (Fraser 1976).

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According to Cacciari and Glucksberg (1995:43), idiomatic expressions are divided into those with explicit meaning, like to *Kick the bucket* and those with implicit meaning, like *Carrying coals to Newcastle*. Cacciari and Glucksberg (1995:43), explain the example of *carrying coals to Newcastle* as one of the many idioms that cannot be understood without a good knowledge of the culture and environment that lie behind their use. In Gonja, a similar analogy can be found where you could get some of the idiomatic expressions being explicit and those with implicit meaning. For example, Gonja has idiomatic expressions like *min awɔrabi* 'to swallow pebbles', which means 'To be pregnant' and *Kɔ enɔ tentɛŋ* 'To have a long hand', which means 'someone who steals' or someone who is a thief. However, Ortony et al. (1978), and Titone and Connie (1999), claim that there are two classes of idioms, the first comprising those whose meaning has a relationship with the component lexical items

(known as compositional). For example, *Kick the bucket* in Gonja *Too kiya n sulɔ bokiti*, which means ‘someone is dead’. The second is those whose meaning has no relation with their components (non-compositional). For example; *Kɔ enɔ tentɔ* ‘Has long hand’ literally means ‘a thief’. Alexander (1987), defines idioms as ‘multi-word units which have to be learned as a whole, along with associated sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic rules of use’. Barkema (1996), defines idioms as lexicalized expressions with idiosyncratic meanings.

Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), posits that idiom as a phrasal verb type is a single semantic unit, and the surface meaning that could be derived from it as a combination of verb and ad-position items which are independent semantic units, referred to as a phrasal verb idiomaticity. He continues by asserting that idiomaticity may be seen as the level of deviation between the surface meaning of an utterance and the actual meaning or intention it is supposed to convey. He gives these examples below ‘*Da so*’ non-idiomatically means ‘lie on’. As a phrasal verb, it means ‘to persist’ (or do something persistently) or ‘to manifest as expected’. Certainly, ‘*da*’ (to lie) and ‘*so*’ (on) have nothing to do with these two meanings of the phrasal verb ‘*da so*’. Again, ‘*te ase*’ as a non-phrasal verb form means (to tear under) being a combination of ‘*te*’ (to tear) and ‘*ase*’ (under/below). As a phrasal verb, it interprets as ‘to live/be alive’ or ‘to understand’, and these meanings have nothing to do with the meaning of ‘*te*’ (tear) and ‘*ase*’ (under) put together. It turns out that languages also contain many phrases whose meanings are not predictable on the basic meanings of the individual words (Fromkin et al. 2013). They also argue that these phrases typically start as metaphors that catch on and are repeated so often that they become fixtures in the language. Such expressions are called idioms or idiomatic expressions or phrases. Here is where the

usual semantic rule for combining meanings does not apply. They continue by asserting that the principle of compositionality is superseded by expressions that act very much like individual morphemes in that they are not decomposable but have a fixed meaning that must be learned. Per the examples above in Gonja, one would realize that Gonja has similar classes of idioms in which some of the meanings of the idioms have a relationship with their components. For example, *Min awɔrabi* which means ‘Swallow pebbles’, and metaphorically ‘pregnant’, there is some relationship between the meaning of the idiom and its lexical component items (compositional). Likewise, those with no meaning relation, in the second example in Gonja *Enɔ tentɛŋ* which means ‘Long hand’ and metaphorically means ‘stealing’ or someone being a ‘thief’ has no meaning relation with the lexical component items (non-compositional).

2.2 History of Idioms

The existence and usage of idiomatic expressions in languages did not start today. For that matter, we will briefly review the historical background of idioms or idiomatic expressions. According to Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), idioms, like words, are generally inherited as part of our natural inventory of the language received, perhaps with the linguistic disintegration of biblical Babel. He went on to explain further that, idioms come from many sources like; historical/mythological transfer, metaphorical transfer, old words, symbolism, proverbs, borrowing/translation, and so on. The above assertion indicates that idioms are part of every language's vocabulary and are based on culture, heritage, and history. Selma (2019), contends that the mere occurrence of nonce-form for the first time does not in itself constitute the creation of a new idiom. An additional component is required, something more or less unusual either about the structure of the newly-produced nonce-form, about the attendant circumstances, or

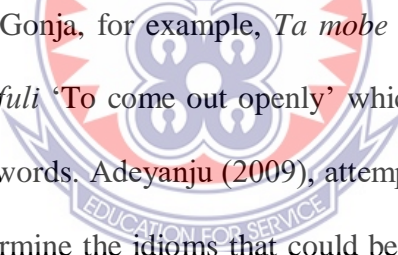
both to make it memorable. According to Lontas (2017), idioms have their origins in the fabric of human communication; some of them can be traced back as far back as 3,000 years. Without exception, all idioms from the ancient to the most recent owe their creation to the workings of human thought and language evolution. They draw on practical experience which makes even the oldest of them relevant to contemporary life. It is not surprising, then, that, idioms are omnipresent in natural human languages. All languages use idioms to express the realities of daily life and Gonja is no exception.

2.3. Categories/Types of Idioms

When it comes to the classification of idiomatic expressions, idioms are being grouped in numerous different ways. Some of these include: (1) as determined by their 'grammatical type', for example, verb-adverb idioms or idioms functioning like a specific part of speech, (2) as determined by the 'concept or emotion described', for example, the idiom *bite the dust* would be classified under 'fail' or 'die', and (3) as determined by the 'image' they express, for example, the idiom *weak at the knees* would be classified under the category of body parts (Lattey 1986). Gonja has a similar category to the above assertion which is some idioms are classified as death-related idioms, as body part-related, social interaction/gender-related idioms.

Fernando (1996), draws attention to the involvement of idioms in various aspects of the English language. Idioms may be found to exist in forms such as proverbs, similes, dead metaphors, allusions, slang, social formulate, and collocations. In addition, idioms are categorized by Ghazala (2003), into five most important types. These are (1) full/pure idioms, (2) semi-idioms, (3) proverbs, popular sayings, and

semi-proverbial expressions, (4) phrasal verbs, and (5) metaphorical catchphrases and popular expressions. Aldahesh (2009), claims that phrasal verbs (verb + particle, for example: *put up*, *back off*, etc.) make up an essential part of English idiomatic expressions. Elements of a phrasal verb sacrifice their meanings and adopt a new idiomatic meaning through the process of combination. For instance: *give up* which means 'to stop trying', *pass away* which means 'to die', *tell off* which means 'to criticize severely', *iron out* 'to resolve by discussion', *clam up* means 'to refuse to speak', and *abide by* meaning 'to respect or obey a decision, a law or a rule'. Turton and Manser (1985), point out that it is pretty obvious that in idiomatic phrasal verbs, such as those listed above, the meanings of the individual parts tell us little or nothing at all about the meaning of the entire expression.



That is also present in Gonja, for example, *Ta mobe eno* 'To resemble someone in features', and *Kedenji efuli* 'To come out openly' which are phrasal verb idioms that consist of two or three words. Adeyanju (2009), attempts a classification of 'Nigerian English' idioms to determine the idioms that could be regarded as standard and non-standard. He classifies idioms that are stable in formal usage as standard while those that do not satisfy the criteria are classified as non-standard idioms. The idioms that belong to the standard category have the same semantic sense as the native English idioms but are structurally different from their exact native English idioms, while the non-standard subsumes idioms restricted to colloquial usage as well as fairly recent Nigerian English idioms. The examples of the standard and non-standard Nigerian English idioms are shown in 1 and 2 below:

1. Standard Nigerian English idioms.

Idiom	Meaning
<i>To take in</i>	‘To become pregnant’.
<i>Son of the soil</i>	‘An indigene of a place’.
<i>Take kola</i>	‘Take a bribe’.

2. The non-standard or restricted to colloquial idioms.

<i>To branch</i>	‘To have a brief stop-over’.
<i>To take in</i>	‘To be pregnant’.
<i>To join one's ancestors</i>	‘To die’.
<i>To wet the ground</i>	‘To provide prior gratification or bribe’.

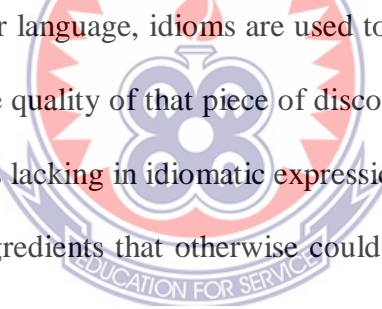
2.4 Contextual Use of Idioms

Idioms and idiomatic expressions, from ages, have remained a productive source of the collective wisdom of the elders. They constitute a rich linguistic source from which elders in the community draw their salient facts in a discourse. Short and sensitive with underlying meanings, idioms are expressions that are natural in a native speaker of a language (Opoola and Faniran 2020).

The literal and idiomatic interpretations of the idioms are not based on dictionary meaning. Rather, the inferences are based on the Nzema socio-cultural conceptualizations and context of use. As a veritable tool for ensuring polite communication, this category of idioms serves as an indirect means to rebuke people who are easily lured/cheated and people who live promiscuous lifestyles (Nyame J. et al. 2023).

Bisilki (2019:1), argues that an appropriate understanding and interpretation of a body-part-derived expression is heavily reliant on the pragmatic context and

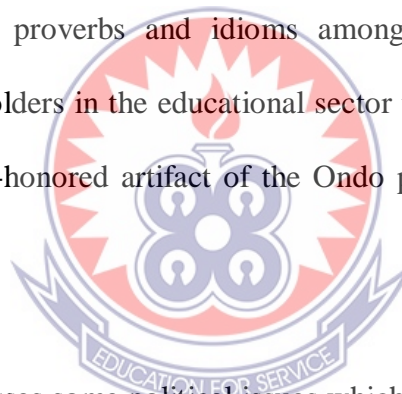
knowledge of the cultural models of the Likpakpaln native speakers. Lawal et al. (1997), aver that an idiom of a sort is a tightly condensed representation of a fairly comparable and rather large group of possibilities of socio-cultural experiences. Like proverbs, idioms have deep and embedded meanings that may sometimes, sound rubbish, or like a string of linguistic hocus-pocus to either the non-native speakers of the language or those with a low mastery of, or proficiency, in the language. Idiomatic expressions are mostly used by the elders among the people because of their age, vast experiences, and status in the community. This does not imply, however, that the younger ones are forbidden from deploying the rich linguistic pieces. But, oftentimes, they refrain from using them for fear of inappropriate usage and consequently, being mocked and criticized by their age-mates and the elders respectively.



In Gonja like any other language, idioms are used to complement written or spoken discourse to enhance the quality of that piece of discourse. For instance, it is believed that an expression that is lacking in idiomatic expression is like a colorless stew that is lacking in necessary ingredients that otherwise could have given it a delicious taste. Any expression that is not combined with the appropriate idiomatic expression usually sounds plain, characterless, and boring like childish talk. This is why the youth in society are always encouraged to share the habit of studying idioms so that they can use them to add stylistic high-quality expressions to their spoken and written language. Idioms represent the rich source of a people's wisdom and are transmitted from generation to generation. They are part and parcel of the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the traditional African people most especially the elderly ones.

Akinmade (2012), says that the use of idioms forms a part of the discursive strategies employed by the elders to draw home their points. Consequently, idioms are not

peculiar, or restricted to any particular community, but form an integral part of the speech repertoire among the elders in every society. Therefore, idioms are utilized in day-to-day interactions of elders to communicate social, ethical, cultural, and intellectual values that guide and control the lives of those who understand them. All these are true to the Gonja people. But, their usage either in speech or in written form is rare or, at best alternating, most especially among the upcoming generation of the speakers of Gonja language and this is a result of their exposure to Western education and foreign culture. Akinmade (2012), laments over the decline in the use of proverbs and idioms in the oral expressions among the Ondo people in the Southwest part of Nigeria as a result of the influence of Western culture on the youth which inhibits the utilization of Yoruba proverbs and idioms among the speakers. He, therefore, admonishes all stakeholders in the educational sector to *take the bull by the horns* by ensuring that the time-honored artifact of the Ondo people is not thrown inside the dustbin of history.



Akanmu (2015), discusses some political issues which utilize new and deviant idioms and idiomatic expressions in many socio-political contexts. According to him, the idioms utilized by the politicians reflect the dynamism and modernity-constrained stylistic choices in Yoruba. Motivated by the popular saying that ‘the world is a global village’ which imposes a new global communicative challenge on Yoruba people, especially the politicians and their followers and, encouraged by the dynamic characteristic of every language. According to Akanmu (2014), these are predominantly new idioms where issues on different areas of human endeavors, contexts, and linguistic strategies responsible for their formation are expressed using the pragmatic and stylistic approach. In his study, Akanmu (2015), cited in Opoola

(2020), stresses that Nigerian politicians and their followers have developed novel and rather old-fashioned idioms in their sloganeering repertoire which are worth being given intellectual attention. Their study, therefore, is a radical departure from the old traditional method of analyzing idioms. Rather, the study attempts to examine a new trend in the usage of idioms and idiomatic expressions in the domain of politics. These are some of the findings of their study, it has been discovered that new idioms and idiomatic expressions were found to be used to express new concepts. These new concepts and ideas were peculiar to the electronic media especially, radio, and were in the context of mobile phoning/Internet and other form of new experiences or technological difficulty. Examples of unique issues that were expressed include ‘yàúyàúù’ (yahoo) for internet fraud, ‘GSM lomo’ (the child is GSM) for ‘a sexually active person/sophisticated person’, ‘jẹun sókè’ (eat into the upper stomach) for ‘move on/enrich your pocket’, ‘já sí i’ (insert it there) for ‘be on the track/educate/inform/tell/enlighten’ and ‘gèranmáwo’ (cut the meat with its skin) for ‘choice of meat’ and ‘cheating’ respectively. Also, nominalization, composition, and phone-aesthetics coinages were the linguistic strategies employed for the formation of new idioms and idiomatic expressions in their study. It has been found that Nominalization occurred in one station in the contexts of cheating/corruption/choice of item (à-gé-má-wọ/ gé-eran-mó’-awọ), and composition occurred in virtually all the stations and was contextualized in advertisement/political sloganeering (jẹun-sí-òkè), entertainment/information (GSM-ni-omọ) and (já sí i). Phono-aesthetic coinages occurred in the contexts of fraud and information (yàúyàúù).

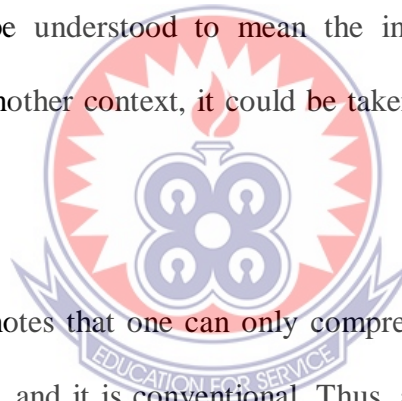
According to Alati (2015), figurative expressions, such as metaphors and idioms, as creative language in use are adapted to specific contexts and situations of speech

interaction. The human mind works in tandem with the social world by storing experiences from social interaction and discerning patterns from such experiences. In this case, the interpretation of expressions entails conceptually relating the cognition (mental recognition) of patterns of experiences to the cultural models that are continually constructed within social contexts. The cultural models are the recognizable and predictable patterns that speakers/listeners use to assign social meaning to expressions. Language explores a variety of means of expressing messages. She avers that the speakers' communicative competence partly enables them to package messages in a language that is either direct or indirect. Cultural etiquette requires that members of the speech community do not talk about certain issues and topics in plain language. It would be considered impolite to, for example, talk about issues related to death, birth, and parts of the body in direct language. Therefore, the usage of language depends on context. Any text or utterance is produced by a certain context. This deals with the context of the use of words, phrases, and sentences which might include idioms by the speaker of a language. (Ibid), these social roles are culture-specific functions, institutionalized in a society, and recognized by its members. By social status, we mean the relative social standing of the participants. Each participant in the language event must know, or make assumptions about his or her status with the other, and in many situations, status will also be an important factor in the determination of who should initiate the conversation sex and age are often determinants of, or interact with, social status. The terms of address employed by a person of one sex speaking to an older person may differ from those which would be employed in otherwise similar situations by people of the same sex or of the same age. In linguistics, context carries wonderful importance in negotiating meanings as well as in understanding the actual meaning of

words and sentences. Therefore, understanding the context becomes primary in the analysis of idioms. Identification of context, to a large extent, depends heavily on the intuitive ability of a language user. The term "context" can be referred to as an immediate linguistic environment (rarely detached or isolated) in which a particular word or sentence occurs. The socio-cultural meaning is concerned with the linguistic aspect of who says what to whom and, crucially under what circumstance. Casas & Campoy (1995), are of the view that idiomatic expressions are said to express the speaker's irritation, anger, a contemptuous attitude towards the person or thing denoted, or even a highly funny or quietly mocking view of the person or thing referred to. Therefore, idioms as part of language tools, have the power to communicate social and cultural ideas within the community and produce a mechanism to explain the reasoning of major ideas which can lead to a potential change. As explained by Ayers (2015), without the use of language to convey meaning and transmit ideas, cultural changes would be limited to non-linguistic ideas. Because a culture without language is not a true reality. Liontas (2017), says that the very use of idioms by members of a linguistic community regardless of the actual frequency with which they may be used demonstrates the cultural spirit of the people that use them. Rooted in the peoples' history, politics, sports, and culture, idioms become the mirror of their world, their hopes and fears, their lives and deaths. In short, idioms become part of the spiritual soul of their language.

According to Firth (1957), language is only meaningful in the context of the situation. This idea becomes the basis for the link between syntax and meaning in a context that has recently been developed in Halliday's Functional Approach (1978). Halliday (1978), asserts that "when people speak or write, they produce text; and text is what

listeners and readers engage with and interpret. The term “text” refers to any instance of language, in any medium, that makes sense to someone who knows the language; text can be characterized as language functioning in context. So, to the grammarian, the text is a rich, many-faceted phenomenon that ‘means’ in many different ways. Therefore, grammaticality is linked to appropriateness in this approach since the meaning of the sentence is understood according to a real-world context and the participants. For instance, the idiom *It’s raining cats and dogs* which means ‘it’s raining heavily’ is grammatical but will not be meaningful if **(a)** it is not raining and **(b)** the speaker is making a formal speech. This contextual usage of idioms is also common in Gonja. For example, the idiom, *Ede e chɔɔ mo na*, ‘it is a fire that has burnt him/her’, can be understood to mean the individual is in serious trouble idiomatically, but in another context, it could be taken literally as fire has burnt that person.



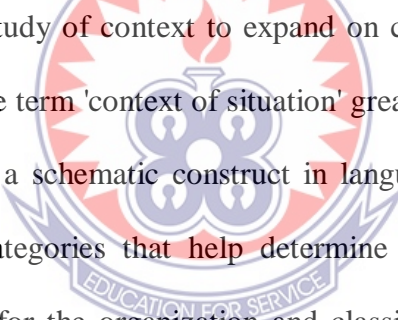
Hockett (1958:172), notes that one can only comprehend the meaning of an idiom within a given context, and it is conventional. Thus, an idiom is a common word or phrase that means something different from its literal meaning but can be understood because of its popular use and the context in which it is used. An idiom is any group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meaning of the individual words (Healey 1968). Accordingly, an idiom is learned and used as a single unit. Idioms are context-dependent (Langacker 1968), That is to say, an idiom is an expression that means something different from what its words seem to suggest (Sanchez Beneto 1977). Moreover, the constituents of the lexemes of idioms do not contribute to their meaning.

Thyab (2016), discloses that it is natural that non-native speakers find idioms difficult to understand because they do not know what the image of the idiomatic expression is based on. For example, if non-native speakers of the English Language come across the expression a *carrot and stick method*, which means ‘the method of persuasion or coercion’, they will find it difficult to process it. Non-natives will find it uneasy because they are unable to realize that, it is based on the image of a donkey that is encouraged to move forward by dangling a carrot in front of it or by hitting it with a stick. Similarly, a non-native speaker of Gonja for example, will find it very challenging to process the idiom *Ede ne pise* which conceptually means ‘To become enemies’ and literally ‘Fire and the broom’. The reason is that the non-native speaker will struggle to figure out the images of a broom and the fire and what makes them portray the concept of antagonism. Thus, the context has a substantial impact on idiom comprehension (Armstrong 2005). According to Armstrong (Ibid), idioms are varied, each having a specific context in which to occur, and their uses are only lightly related to the functions they will fulfill in discourse. According to him, there are three aspects of contextual usage of idioms which are, **linguistic, situational, and cultural**. These aspects of the usage of idioms are explained below.

Linguistic context: is a reference to the context within the discourse through its relationship with the words, phrases, and sentences of any discourse. The linguistic context plays a major role in the general system of language. Idioms are expressions that have a figurative meaning that is different from their literal interpretation. They add color to our language and often reflect the cultural and historical background of a particular region. The linguistic context of idioms involves understanding the words and phrases used within a specific language or dialect. Idioms can vary across

different languages, and their meanings may not directly translate word-for-word. The meaning of the idiomatic expression, therefore, depends on the other units in which it is used. For example, deictic, co-text, and collocation. For example, the word 'bachelor' we cannot understand the exact meaning of the sentence *He is a bachelor* without the linguistic context to make clear the exact meaning of this word. Linguistic context can be explored from three aspects: deictic, co-text, and collocation. In a language event, the participants must know where they are in space and time, and these features relate directly to the **deictic** context, by which we refer to the deictic expressions like the time expressions such as now, then, etc., the spatial expressions such as here, there, etc., and the person expressions such as I, you, etc. Deictic expressions help to establish **deictic roles** which derive from the fact that in normal language behavior, the speaker addresses his utterance to another person and may refer to himself, to a certain place, or to a time. It's important to consider the cultural and linguistic nuances when interpreting idioms. For example, the idiom *raining cats and dogs*. In this context, it means that 'it's raining very heavily', but it does not imply that animals are falling from the sky. The linguistic context here is understanding the figurative meaning behind the words to grasp the intended message. Another example is the idiom *the ball is in your court*. This phrase is often used to mean that 'it is now someone else's turn to take action or make a decision'. The linguistic context here involves recognizing the metaphorical use of the word 'ball' in a non-literal sense. Understanding the linguistic context of idioms is essential for effective communication, especially when engaging with native speakers. It allows you to better comprehend the intended meaning and use idiomatic expressions appropriately in conversations.

Situational context: This is the context of a situation, in which an idiom is used. Situational context relates to the environment of discourse in terms of time and space. It also relates to the relationship between participants. Idiomatic expressions are well understood in a given situational context. The context of the situation refers to the situation of discourse, which is, the context in which that particular sentence is uttered. The notion of contextual appropriateness and the fact that the utterance of an item of language is an act performed by speakers have led to the development of the theories of pragmatics. Since meaning is the concern of semantics and pragmatics in language, idioms are equally meaningful in the context in which they are uttered or used. (Song, 2010).



Firth (1957) uses the study of context to expand on current knowledge of linguistic theory. He has given the term 'context of situation' greater significance and has shown how it can be used as a schematic construct in language application. Firth (1957), establishes a set of categories that help determine the nature of the 'context of situation'. This allows for the organization and classification of language functions (Firth 1957). Hymes (1974), declares that there is a checklist of contextual factors known simplistically as 'SPEAKING'. Concerning 'SPEAKING', 'S' stands for setting and scene, which includes the time and place; 'P' refers to the participants involved in any form of communication; 'E' stands for ends, by which we mean the goal of any form of communication, i.e., what it hopes to achieve; 'A' refers to action sequence, which is concerned with the details about the 'event'. The 'event' may refer to something like a lecture and the action sequence; 'K' refers to the key, which is about how something is said; 'I' stands for the instrumentalities, referring to the mode of communication, such as speech, writing, etc. 'N' stands for the norm of interaction

and interpretation, which takes into account the norms of conducting certain methods of communication; and finally, ‘G’ refers to a genre, which refers to the genre of the utterance, i.e., whether it is a poem, a talk, a sermon or a joke. Hymes (1974), suggests that several key components are important in thinking about the context. These components include speech situation, which refers to both verbal and non-verbal events, speech events, which refer to the activities that are ruled by ‘norms’ of language, message form, which identifies how things are said, message content, which refers to what is being talked about, setting (place and time), scene (psychological setting), participants, which may involve examples such as the addressed or, the addressee and the audience. Also included are the important components of purpose, which refers to what is hoped to be achieved and includes outcomes and goals, channels, which describe the way information is uttered, and the form of speech, which identifies whether it is a piece of writing or a speech, etc. Norms of interaction and norms of interpretation are also significant and these specifically refer to the behaviors and the rules that are specific to a location. Finally, the genre is cited as the final component and this specifically determines whether an utterance is a poem, speech, joke, tale, etc. Therefore, idioms can best be interpreted based on their context of use, since they are contextually used in the chosen texts. In this case, it is logical that idioms be analyzed based on the contexts in which they are used in the text by considering the **field**, **tenor**, and **mode**. An example of the context of a situation could take place in a shop. The **field** could be the price of a certain item; the **tenor** would be a slight difference on the shop assistant’s part towards the customer because of a potential sale; the **mode** would be that of spoken inquiry: question, answer, response. Therefore, considering the **field**, **tenor**, and **mode** of the context, language is used in what is called the context of the situation, which is part of

what is called the context of culture. In the **context of the situation**, the reader or listener must identify:

- the **field** (What is being spoken about? The field of human activity? Is it at the beach? Going to school? Or what?)
- the **tenor** (What are the relationships? father to son? friend to friend? Judge to jury? Or what?)
- the **mode** (what are the circumstances in which the language communication takes place? Conversation? Reflection? Description? Or what?).

The idiom *spills the beans* means ‘to reveal a secret or information’ that was supposed to be kept private. For example: ‘I cannot believe you spilled the beans about my surprise party’. ‘Now it's ruined!’ *once in a blue moon* means ‘something that happens very rarely’. For example: ‘I only get to see my best friend *once in a blue moon* because she lives so far away’. The idiom *on thin ice* means that ‘someone is in a dangerous situation’. For example, ‘if you do not pay your rent on time, you will be *on thin ice* with your landlord’. The idiom *let the cat out of the bag* means to ‘accidentally reveal a secret or information’ that was supposed to be kept private. For example, ‘she accidentally *let the cat out of the bag* about the surprise party’.

Cultural context: Language is a central aspect of culture. Language expresses and represents culture. This means that language is the vehicle that reveals cultural practices, knowledge, and attitudes, together with beliefs and emotions, which are basic forms of culture. Language also reflects cultural behavior and practices carried out through the medium of language, whether this is verbal or non-verbal. Language also symbolizes culture since it serves as an expression of identity. Idiomatic

expressions are therefore culturally bound. Culture has a crucial role in encoding and decoding messages (Byram & Risager 1999). The 'context of culture' refers to the culture, customs, and background of the epoch in language communities in which speakers participate. Language is a social phenomenon, and it is closely tied up with the social structure and value system of society. Therefore, language cannot avoid being influenced by all these factors like social role, social status, sex, age, etc. (Song 2010), he continues by saying that social roles are culture-specific functions, institutionalized in a society and recognized by its members. By social status, we mean the relative social standing of the participants. Each participant in the language event, for example, must know or make assumptions about his or her status with the other. In many situations, status will also be an important factor in the determination of who should initiate the conversation, sex and age are often determinants of, or interact with, social status. The terms of address employed by a person of one sex speaking to an older person may differ from those that would be employed in otherwise similar situations by people of the same sex or of the same age (Song, 2010). Idioms are phrases or expressions that have a figurative meaning different from their literal meaning. These idioms are deeply rooted in language and culture and are often used as a way of communicating humor, cultural references, and historical insights. For example; *Kill two birds with one stone*. This implies accomplishing two things at the same time. This idiom has its roots in the ancient Roman sport of throwing rocks at birds, *min ajembu* 'swallow pebbles' this implies that to take in some solid substances that cannot be digested. This idiom culturally means that one is pregnant as referred to as swallowing pebbles or harboring something in one's stomach.

2.4.1 Importance of idioms

Since idiomatic expressions are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse, they require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum (Cooper 1998). He adds that the English language being very flexible constantly enriches its vocabulary with words invented by language speakers, making it more colorful with new idiomatic expressions, and, at times, refills its stocks with borrowings and neologisms. English is just amazed by its extraordinary linguistic diversity. Therefore, the focus is to share considerations of the importance of idioms. For every language, speakers as part of their mastery of the language demand more than knowing the denotative meaning of words. It requires the speakers to have connotative word comprehension and more understanding of figurative language. According to Cooper (1998), learning idioms is certainly not *a piece of cake* 'very easy', but once you know them, they can be a lot of fun they can use idioms nonstop but sometimes can be all at sea or confused in most conversations until they learn the rules or understand how things work. Idioms share cultural and historical information and broaden people's understanding and manipulation of a language. There is no doubt that there is an ultimate relationship between language and culture. They are insuperable. Words and expressions produced by people convey their cultures, (Rizq 2015). He further mentions that idioms remain the flamboyant components that embellish language. They are an integral part of every ethnic group and the people use them to communicate their thoughts and feelings. They are used to give life and affluence to the language by combining two or more existing words to generate a new sense and create new meaning. Unlike original phrases, idioms are recalled as integral units when needed. Most native speakers and writers frequently use these units in their

daily lives because they are very important in their language. The figurative meaning of an idiom is easier to comprehend than the literal meaning. Native speakers of a language may understand only the figurative meaning of words or particular word combinations rather than make an idiom. For example, native speakers recognize the meaning of the idiom *to have long hands* means ‘a thief’ as a figurative expression that should not be interpreted even though such expressions may have a literal meaning.

According to Kounin (1970), an idiom is a stable combination of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning. This definition emphasizes two inherent and very important features of idiomatic expressions. Idioms have lexical and grammatical stability. It implies that they are fixed in their form, hence any substitution and rearrangement in their structure can lead to a complete loss of their primary meaning. Idioms are always something special in any language; they build up some distinctive features that differentiate one language from another. What is more, idioms reflect certain cultural traditions and depict the national character. Idioms are not a separate part of the language that one can choose either to use or to omit, but they form an essential part of the general vocabulary of every language. A description of how the vocabulary of the language is growing and changing will help to place idioms in perspective. Idioms appear in every language, and Gonja has thousands of them. They are often confusing because the meaning of the whole group of words taken together has little, often nothing, to do with the meanings of the words taken one by one. For example, in Gonja, *Kɔ kɔnɔ* ‘Has mouth’ which means ‘one talks too much’ or ‘mingles in the affairs that do not concern one’ and, *Enɔ tentɛŋ* ‘Long hand’ which means ‘engaging in theft’, have words that when taken individually will confuse the

non-native speaker, therefore, to understand a language, one must know what the idioms in that language mean. If we try to figure out the meaning of an idiom, word-for-word, we will get confused. We have to know its hidden meaning. Because of idioms, learning a language can be complicated. Since vocabulary and culture are intertwined, speakers can gain more vocabulary through idioms and conversely, can learn more about idioms from being exposed to the target culture.

The more comprehensible input there is, the more learners' listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills will improve. Kounin (1970), has these examples, in Norwegian and Czech, *walking around hot porridge* refers to 'beating around the bush, which is also an idiom meaning not getting to the point'. If you are in Italy or Turkey and you say you are *as hungry as a wolf* 'then you are starving'. In Finnish, *with long teeth* means 'you are doing something that you don't want to do'. In French, *to have long teeth* means 'you are ambitious'. If it is raining in large amounts, most cultures have an interesting way of saying that. In English, it would be *raining cats and dogs*, In Africa, they might say *it's raining old women with clubs*. In Norway, they say *it's raining female trolls*. The Irish say *it's throwing cobbler knives*. An idiom's semantics can be influenced by national coloring. There are many cases when phrases are based on an old English prejudice, and a similar prejudice known in other countries of the world may lead the reader to some misunderstanding. For instance, *a black cat crossed her way* would mean different things to people of different nationalities. To the English people, 'a black cat' would mean good luck to the extent that some students are even said to be always looking for a black cat crossing their path on the way to the college examination. To Americans, it is mostly *a black cat* that would mean 'bad luck'. All these examples cited above, prove the divisibility and

variability of phraseological units in a particular discourse situation – convincing manifestations of their instability. Idioms are figurative units; they describe the situation metaphorically. They are often termed ‘dead’ or ‘fixed’ metaphors, because in many instances the things they are used to denote have already ceased to exist, as a result, the metaphoric character is lost to the modern speaker. Some linguists call them ‘sleeping’ metaphors rather than ‘dead’, there are speakers who are very good at ‘waking them up’. Educated people and students of language often play upon these idioms and make them serve their purposes. Thus, the metaphor underlying an idiom is ‘brought to life’ and gains its new colors (Kounin 1970).

Izotova (1988), opines that idiomatic expressions pervade English with a peculiar flavor and give it astounding variety, bright character, and color. They help language learners understand English culture, penetrate the customs and lifestyle of the English people, and gain a deeper insight into English history. Indeed, English learners utilize idiomatic expressions very carefully, being afraid of using them incorrectly and being misunderstood. This assertion is true for Gonja because many youths of today prefer to speak English and other languages and shun the use of Gonja idioms because they lack knowledge of the idioms and what they stand for. Gonja is a language with a vast idiomatic foundation, which makes learning very exciting and interesting. So, grasping the use of idioms is an essential part of learning the Gonja language. Idioms, therefore, provide an opportunity to think outside the box and expand comprehension skills for figurative language. When idioms are used in communication individuals can become confused and miss out on conversations; they can miss the boat. This is true for Gonja as we have an idiom like this, *Jenyi na min awɔrabi* ‘The cat has swallowed pebbles’. In a conversation between two interlocutors when one is not

familiar with Gonja idioms, the person will miss out on the conversation because the idiom is talking about a pregnant cat and not the cat necessarily swallowing pebbles. Murthy (2007), posits that every language has its idioms, which are an integral part of the language. His perception agrees with that of Okoye and Amandi (2012), who view idioms as culture-dependent. As language is an integral part of the culture, so are idioms, which are integral parts of the language. Stuckey (2008), adds that knowing idioms is essential to understanding spoken and written language and communicating effectively, as pointed out earlier. Selma (2019), has it that, idioms are expressions peculiar to a language, and they play an important role in all languages, it is difficult or sometimes impossible to guess the meaning by looking at the individual words it contains, for example, the phrase *be in the same* boat has a literal meaning that is easy to understand to mean, sitting or sailing in the same boat but it also has a common idiomatic meaning to be at the same level of understanding. Selma (2019), indicates that idioms are an important part of any language, and may be considered an indicator of a person's fluency in that language. Therefore, idioms play a significant role in languages, the mother tongue, and the foreign language. The foreign learner does not only learn the grammar and the vocabulary of the language but she/he also learns the idioms to help him/her fit into the culture of the foreign language.

Newmark (1988:104), considers idioms as an extended metaphor having two main functions: pragmatic and referential. The pragmatic function is to appeal to the senses, to interest, to surprise, and to delight. Idioms are expressions that function as a single unit whose meanings cannot be worked out from the separate parts (Schmitt 2000), To affirm the above excerpt Gonja has an idiom expression that *Kanyen na ta kato n gbesa* which is, 'The man is dead'. This example above shows that idiomatic

expressions function as a single unit as claimed by Schmitt. The definition above also emphasizes the non-compositionality of idioms whereby knowing the meaning of the individual words that constitute it does not guarantee the exact meaning of the entire structure. The meaning is metaphorical and outside the structure.

The **referential function** is to describe a mental state, a concept, a person, or an object more fully than is possible in literal or physical language. An idiom is an affixed phrase whose form is usually unchangeable and whose meaning is always the same, inflexible, metaphorical, and indirect (Ghazala 2008:20). According to Chang (2006), the textual function of idiomatic expression in English that idioms have important organizational and signaling functions and they appear at the important junctures in text. These functions are also found to be closely related to the fact that many idiomatic expressions are highly evaluative. Chang (Ibid) also explains that the issue of cohesion concerning the use of English idioms is that there is often a complex cohesive relationship between the idioms and their co-text, and speakers sometimes avail themselves of both the literal and idiomatic meanings of idioms for various textual or stylistic reasons. Every language makes use of idioms and these idioms function as a natural replication of customs, cultural beliefs, social conventions, and norms. This has confirmed the assertion of Glucksberg & McGlone (1995), who maintain that idiomatic expressions often indicate and reflect social norms, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions. According to Akanmu (2014), idioms are also multi-functional because of their semantic unity. They may equally function as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. For example;

Noun: *oní ebòlò* ‘owner-of-ebòlò’ ‘the seller of ebòlò vegetable’ ‘which means a prostitute’

- Verb: *Gbémú Yari* ‘carry nose’ which means ‘complain/grumble’
- Adjective: *Èyin yàtò` sáwọn omo yàúyàúú* ‘You are different from the Yahoo boys’ ‘Internet fraudsters’ who spend extravagantly.

Yakubu, et al. (2022), contend that in the Nzema language, by their composition, hardly an idiom ever means exactly what the words say. In general terms, they are meant to elaborate and reinforce expressions in any communication event. They concluded that expressions in Nzema that relate to body parts such as legs, hands, skins, heart, stomach, etc., have culturally established body parts-related idioms that are deliberately employed to save the face of interlocutors and also make the interlocutors sound polite to maintain social relations and promote peaceful coexistence. They further argue that the body parts are a rich source of linguistic discourse in the domain of idiomatic expressions. This assertion from Yakubu et al. (2022), is also true in the Gonja language in which idioms are also used indirectly to show politeness in a conversation to save the face of the addressee and speaker, and also, to show the communication competency of the interlocutors. Therefore, the assertion of Yakubu et al. (Ibid), that idiomatic expressions are indirect strategies for communicating unpleasant utterances or statements that carry meaning outside of the meaning of individual words is in line with Gonja language. For example, the idiom *Ɛ gye tu a ɛme* ‘You swallow your tooth’ literally ‘one is a pathological liar’, and another example is *Dle kila gye* ‘it is mouse’s teeth’ meaning ‘the house is not plastered’. For example, in Gonja, a speaker announces to an addressee or hearer that *Ewura be gbaɲɛ tuwe* which idiomatically means ‘the chief is dead’. But for the speaker’s language to conform with language decency, he cannot directly announce the demise of the chief as *Ewura wu* which means ‘The chief is dead’ in the plain

language, especially when it is in the midst of young people and non-native speakers. Thus, by employing idiomatic expressions, a speaker can ease the extreme shock and pain that his statements may bring to other people.

2.4.2 Characteristics of idiomatic expressions

Idioms, grammatically as well as semantically have special characteristics. They must be entered into the lexicon or mental dictionary as single units or items with their meanings specified, and speakers must learn the special restrictions on their usage in sentences because of their frozen nature. Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), explains that idioms exhibit certain characteristics, and if care is not taken, they may be misused or may not serve their intended purpose in discourse. Idioms are often frozen not only in their meaning but also in their form. This assertion portrays that, the full phrase of an idiom is semantically sensitive. Therefore, changing its structure means changing the idiom and the meaning that is associated with it. Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), describes this feature of idioms as fixed in nature. He asserts that an idiom must generally be represented in full. To explain this further, Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), uses the idiomatic expression *To pick one's brain*. He explains that this expression cannot be realized as 'one's brain to pick'. He also uses an idiomatic expression *To get something off one's chest* which cannot also be 'to get chest off on one's something. Following the above explanation, we identify two characteristics or features of idioms that have been discussed under their structural and semantic features which are presented below.

2.4.2.1 Structural features

The collocated lexical items are examples of what are referred to as fixed expressions in which the restricted elements cannot be changed or replaced. The assertion that

idioms are fixed and cannot be changed or modified by grammatical means is given by (Katz and Postal 1963; Husam Al-Din 1985). Ghazala (2008), states that idioms are fixed phrases whose form is usually unchangeable, and whose meaning is always the same, inflexible, metaphorical, and indirect. For instance, a *hard task* can be translated directly whereas *tall order* cannot be translated directly because it should not be translated unclearly into the target language but into a fixed indirect meaning, also maintains that an idiom is a fixed phrase having a figurative meaning and that the fixed characteristics of the structure of an idiom are expressed by the fixed order of the components forming the idiom.

Sofyani (2021), on the other hand, posits that idioms are a group of words whose meaning cannot be guessed literally. She further points out that idioms' forms are usually in the form of sentences whose meanings are not predictable through the individual meaning of the constituent words. For example, the idiom *drive someone round the bend* means 'making someone angry or frustrated', but we cannot know this just by looking at the words. From the assertions above one can say that idioms are structurally phrasal and sentence in form and they are fixed single units in meaning. This is happening in the Gonja language, which also has phrasal/sentence and fixed idioms. For example, the idiom, *Ewura be gbaɲɛ tuwe* 'the chief's horse has untied' literally 'the chief is dead'. Idioms make up a large part of our knowledge of the language and as such, persistent features of language that cannot be dismissed as marginal (Sofyani 2021). According to Fromkin et al. (2013), idioms are similar in structure to ordinary phrases except that they tend to be frozen in form and do not readily undergo rules that change word order or substitution of their parts.

2.4.2.2 Semantic features

Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), discusses the relationship between the phrasal verb as a single semantic unit and the surface meaning that could be derived from it as a combination of verb and adposition items, which are independent semantic units. This relationship may be referred to as a phrasal verb's idiomaticity. Therefore, idiomaticity may be seen as the level of deviation between the surface meaning of an utterance and the actual meaning or intention it is supposed to convey (Sekyi-Baidoo 2002). He denotes that the Akan phrasal verb, like all linguistic items, functions basically to give meaning, and it is necessary to understand that an item's semanticity or its capacity to give meaning goes beyond the lexical or the denotative i.e. the basic interpretation associated with the utterance, taking into consideration the associative or the emotive, and all meanings associated with the various things which are factored into the ethnography of any single utterance or speech; and above all, the relationship between its meaning as derived from the meaning of the constituent words and the meaning assigned to it in the language. Sekyi-Baidoo (2002), indicates that the meaning of the individual constituents of an idiom is unpredictable based on the surface meaning of those words that formed the idiom as a single semantic unit.

Idioms as having semantics features is one of the major characteristics of idioms. An idiomatic expression has been defined as a semantic unit or phrase that cannot be understood, derived, composed, or predicted from the meaning of individual words or idiomatic expression components (Makkai 1972:23). Consequently, idiomatic expressions are not linked to their lexical aspects. Furthermore, there is no denotational meaning in idioms. Rather, they are recognized merely through their pragmatic significance or use (Al-Hannash 1991:36). The significance of an idiomatic

expression lies exclusively in its distant figurative or metaphorical meaning, which cannot be close to the real meaning. Linguistic and situational context helps identify literal or figurative meaning (Nunberg et al. 1994:496). Both Gibbs et al. (1997:141-142), and Ortony et al. (1978: 465), refer to the importance of the concept of metaphor in idiomatic expression and the relationship between the interpretation of the meaning and metaphorical meaning. Kövecses and Szabó (1996), state that the figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions includes the use of metonymy and metaphor. For example, *hold your horse* ‘to slow down or be patient’, and *to be on cloud nine* ‘to be happy or excited’.

Cruse (1986), maintains that, although idioms consist of more than one word, they usually display to some extent the internal cohesion characteristic of single words. This is why they usually resist interruption, reversing of parts, and other variations in form. We may understand this assertion in terms of the complexity of the construction of idioms naturally which adds to the difficulty in translating idioms. That is why simple translations at the word level may be very misleading. Idioms are formed in phrases with their literal meanings which are rooted firmly into the language through constant use and application in discourse. Many literal phrases remain in form and meaning. It is arguable that many of these sets, rather than being made up fresh on each occasion of use, are simply stored and recalled as wholes. These phrases pass on to the next stage of development. They are figuratively extended, in terms of the whole expression, but may or may not also preserve their original literal sense (Cruse 1986).

2.5. Themes found in idioms

Most idioms have themes like generosity, death, greed, thievery, and many others. Many authorities have discussed themes that are embodied in idioms. For example, Agyekum (2013:150), states that theme refers to the major, central, or main ideas, or the moral precepts in a particular work. He says, sometimes, no two people can agree upon the wording of the theme or themes, because moral positions and abstract principles are naturally, more difficult to express than concrete facts. Even when a theme is expressed, often the tendency is to simplify a complex idea. According to Teye (2020), a theme refers to a point in a play that is stated as a generalization. He asserts that the theme can be an opinion statement suggesting the author's central insight or general comment about human nature of the human condition as conveyed through the character, action, and imagery. Teye (Ibid), continues by saying that the theme is a pivot on which the creative and artistic imagination of the story is woven. These Gonja idioms and every idiom can be interpreted based on its theme. Some themes that mostly manifest in Gonja idioms include; death, greed, love, truthfulness or generosity, and several others. Although figurative expressions may appear arbitrary, there exists certain structures and organizations among them and a large number of these expressions have common metaphoric themes (Kovecses & Szabo 1996). For example, there is a wide range of idioms related to the theme of animals, human body parts, specific names, and all senses that are used to describe personality appearance, work, health issues, and many others (McCarthy & O'Dell 2010). Glucksberg & McGlone (1995), posit that idiomatic expressions often indicate and reflect social norms, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions all of which bring out certain themes that reflect human behavior.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter is an embodiment of a comprehensive scholarly survey of idioms. It provides an overview of current knowledge which provides an insight into relevant and existing work concerning idioms. The chapter also analyses, synthesizes, and critically provides a clear picture of the state of knowledge on the subject of study, idiomatic expressions in Gonja. Conclusively, the chapter touches generally on what idioms are, the history of idioms, determining the meaning of idioms, contextual usage of idioms, types/categories of idioms, functions, and importance as well as characteristics of idioms.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology of the study. It covers the type of research design used, the population, the sample size and sampling technique, and the rationale behind their selection. It also deals with the instruments used for data collection; data collection procedures; sources of data, and data analysis.

3.1 Research design

This study is qualitative, Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) observe that qualitative research design involves the use of numerous tools such as case studies, personal experience, interviews, observations, and visual texts to gather empirical data about a specific phenomenon. According to Kankam and Weiler (2010), the qualitative research approach tries to uncover complexities that help understand the meaning of certain phenomena. Newman (2012) posits that descriptive research helps to provide information accurately about a group or a phenomenon; provides new information about issues, and also documents information that either counteracts or supports prior knowledge about a particular issue. The descriptive research design also has the advantage of allowing the researcher to describe semantic systems, relations or social events, background information about the issue in question as well as stimulating explanations (Sarantakos 2005).

This study adopted the descriptive approach as its main study design because the nature of the topic requires a detailed description of the constituent elements embedded in the Gonja idioms as well as the connectedness with their themes and

context of use. This is to give a description of these categories of Gonja idioms and their thematic analysis as well as the contextual usage as they prevail in the language. Also, I used a qualitative research design because the data was gathered in words rather than in numerals. This method is preferred for its interpretive strength through observing, asking, and analyzing which enables a comprehensive conclusion to be drawn by reflecting on practices that prevail, beliefs or attitudes that are held, ongoing processes, and issues that are developing in a particular language.

Also, qualitative research seeks to understand people's interpretation of phenomena which is dynamic because reality changes with changes in people's perceptions and experiences. The researcher also chose the qualitative approach because it produces "more in-depth" and comprehensive information. Again, it uses subjective information and participant observation to describe the context or natural setting of the variables under consideration as well as interactions of the different variables in the context. The purpose of descriptive research is to observe, describe, and document phenomena as they naturally occur among selected people. It was also selected because of its descriptive nature which nurtures the researcher's understanding of the meanings and symbols underlying every human activity. To understand the structural composition of Gonja idioms, the researcher deemed it appropriate to employ a qualitative method that entails the descriptions of characteristics, cases, and settings through the use of interviews and observations.

3.2 Target population

The target population for the study was all speakers of Gonja who occupy the whole of the Savannah Region of Ghana. The Gonja-speaking area stretches from Kpandai

in the East to Chachæ in the West around the Bole area. However, the fact that the population area is wide, limited the researcher to an accessible population of East Gonja District of which Salaga is the capital. This area was selected because that is where the researcher hails from. A research population is a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics. All individuals or objects within a certain population usually have a common, binding characteristic or trait. It is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific inquiry (Owu-Ewie 2022) However, due to the large sizes of populations, researchers often cannot test every individual in the population because it is too expensive and time-consuming. This is the reason why researchers rely on sampling techniques.

3.3 Sample and sampling technique

A sample can be defined as a group of relatively smaller people selected from a population for investigation purposes (Alvi 2016). He continues that the sample is said to be representative of the population. The higher the accuracy of the interpretations, the better the results generalizable. A sample is to be representative when the characteristics of the elements selected are similar to those of the entire target population. Sample techniques, on the other hand, are commonly used for research investigation to better estimate at low cost and less time with greater precision (Ajay & Micah 2014). They therefore assert that it is the method for the selection of individuals from whom information is to be collected and described in the literature. The sampling technique employed by the researcher during the study was purposive sampling. With this technique, the researcher chose the sample based on who he thought would be appropriate for the study. This sampling technique also

entails the targeted elements that are perceived to have the knowledge and deeper understanding of the area of study. This technique helped the researcher vastly select the people who were perceived to be experienced and knowledgeable based on the area of study. Having this as a motive, participants were selected based on the implicit knowledge and adequate understanding that they have about idioms in context. From the accessible population, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique to sample the participants from the following communities. Abrugase, Akamade, and Kpembe.

3.4 Sample size

The sample size that was selected and interacted with in the course of conducting the fieldwork was made up of ten participants. They were made up of one chief, one chief spokesman, and two female dirge singers, all from (Kpembe), one female dirge singer from (Akamade), one lecturer of the Gur-Gonja Department of the College of Languages Education of the University of Education, Winneba, one housewife from (Abrugase), one housewife from (Akamade), and one retired educationist from (Abrugase). In addition, one Gonja literacy facilitator from (Akamade) was also involved in the study. Another data source was *Abranyɔ be Kelannɔ*, a Gonja WhatsApp platform program named *Ngbanyabe Mmalgatɔmbi* ‘Gonja idioms’ The group/platform has over 100 participants but only a few of them contributed to the discussion. I asked permission from the group administrator and they permitted me to use the idioms I collected on the platform. The sampled participants were between the ages of forty-one (41) and above. The main reason for the selection of some of these people was that they had studied Gonja at various levels of education. The lecturer was also selected because he teaches oral literature of Gonja and has been in the field

for over ten years and I needed to engage the services of a high-caliber Gonja professional with the requisite skills and competencies who could assist me in understanding the Gonja idioms. In selecting the participants, I first did what is called house-to-house entering of the prospective participants.

Table 1: Participants with their Towns/Locations and Ages

Participant	No. of Participant	Town / Location	Age
Chief	1	Kpembe	67
Dirge Singers	2	Kpembe	46/52
Housewife	1	Abrumase	41
Chief spokesman	1	Kpembe	46
Lecturer	1	UEW	48
Retired educationist	1	Abrumase	66
Dirge singer	1	Akamade	68
Housewife	1	Akamade	42
Gonja Literacy Facilitator	1	Akamade	49
Gonja WhatsApp Group including contributors from the WhatsApp Group	10	Savannah R.	

Source: Field survey.

3.5 Data collection procedure

In dealing with any real-life situations, it becomes necessary to collect data, that is appropriate from many sources. But then, in collecting the appropriate data one needs

to consider the available resources of time and cost involved as well as other sources at the disposal of the researcher. Therefore, the major sources of data collection for this work were through observations and interviews. In this study, data collection had an important role. Megel & Heermann (1994), state that collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic way that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes.

The data collection component of research is common to all fields of study including physical and social sciences, humanities, business, etc. (Sofyan, 2021). A way of getting to an acceptable solution is to collect empirical data, (Owu-Ewie, 2016). Data collection is a systematic process of gathering observations or measurements. In academic research, like any other research activity, data collection allows you to gain first-hand knowledge and original insights into your research problem. While methods and aims may differ between fields, the overall process of data collection remains largely the same. Before you begin collecting data, you need to consider, the aim of the research, the type of data that you will collect, and the methods and procedures you will use to collect, store, and process the data (Owu-Ewie, 2022). The goal of any data collection is to capture quality evidence that allows analysis to lead to the formulation of convincing and credible answers to the questions that have been posed. Every good data collection technique comes with its advantages and disadvantages. Some methods are better for projects that require quantitative data, while others are better for uncovering qualitative data. Based on this belief, the data collection was done with the use of unstructured interviews and observations. These data collection techniques were chosen because they were to aid in the provision of accurate data

through further questioning by the researcher. It also helped to capture both verbal and non-verbal communication ideas of the interviewees. The non-verbal communication included body language which also contributed to the answers of the interview. From the 27th of March to the 2nd of April, 2023, I moved to the selected communities and met the interviewees before the interview sessions to discuss the times and places of the interview and motivated them to feel free to bring out their best during the interviews.

Throughout the data collection process, five (5) weeks, that is, one (1) month and one (1) week for data collection of which one week and four days, one week and three days were used for Abrugase and Akamade respectively and one week was used for Kpembe. I moved to the selected communities to meet with the respondents for the data collection. On the 3rd to 10th of April 2023, I was at Abrugase, then Akamade on the 12th to 19th of April 2023 and Kpembe on the 24 to 30th of April 2023. All the selected communities were visited with the same kind of interview schedule. In all the communities, the interviewees preferred to be interviewed individually except the chief and his spokesman at Kpembe. The interview was conducted through face-to-face meetings in respondents' various homes. The questions were unstructured although an interview guide was available. Prior notice was given to the people concerned especially the Chief, farmers, and other respondents on the day of my visit. Also, the mission was made known to the respondents in the first week of my visit to the selected communities which was from 27 March to 2nd April, 2023. The respondents agreed to have time for me in the evening but on Friday I could meet the respondents in the morning and also this is the day the respondents did not go to farms. The interview was conducted on the general concept of idioms, the categories

of idioms; the themes that emanate from the idioms, and the contextual implications of the idiomatic expressions. Apart from this, avenues like funerals, arbitrations, community social gatherings, and naming ceremonies were exploited. Some data on Gonja idioms were gathered during these events. It was done through my observations and random interactions with the people. During the conversations and observations, diligent attention was given to the idiomatic expressions. These respondents were interviewed informally and their responses with their permission were recorded with a TECNO CAMON 18 Premier Android mobile phone and later played back, transcribed, and glossed in English as natural data for the study. Moreover, the respondents were made to discuss and explain some of the idioms and state the context of usage and the themes portrayed by the idioms. This was because there were some idioms that I as a researcher did not understand or know and that needed to be explained to me. Also, it helped me during the analysis.

3.6 Instrumentation

According to Owu-Ewie (2022), research instruments are tools used to collect, measure, and analyze data related to your research interests. He asserts that the term also refers to any tool that you may use to collect or obtain data, measure data, and analyze data that is relevant to the subject of your research. These tools are most commonly used in health sciences, social sciences, and education to assess patients, clients, students, teachers, and staff. They are measurement tools. The primary instruments used for gathering the data were an unstructured interview guide, observations, and the use of the TECNO CAMON 18 Premier Android mobile phone for recording information from the respondents. In this study, the researcher used an unstructured interview schedule to collect all the data from the selected respondents.

This type of interview schedule had a few questions written down before the interview. Also, during the interview questions emerged from the immediate context and were asked as the interview evolved.

3.7 Interview

The study used unstructured interviews on the sample selected purposefully. The objective of the research interviews was to elicit from the interviewees the necessary information concerning the idioms of Gonja. The interviews also enabled the researcher, to observe the interviewees' non-verbal behavior. The schedule comprised questions that were put to all interviewees, but there were variations based on the elaborations and the directions of probing as dictated by the circumstances and specific responses from individual respondents regarding the use of idioms.

Gall et al. (1996), note that interview consists of oral questions by the interviewers and oral responses by the research participants. An interview, as a data collection method, is used to enquire about the feelings, motivations, attitudes, accomplishments, and experiences of individuals.

Bryman (1998:313), notes that a qualitative interview is a flexible tool that takes cognizance of the direction of the interview to get detailed answers, the interview schedule only acts as a guide to which new questions can be introduced as a follow-up to the interviewee's responses. It is an appropriate tool for gathering information on the roles and relationships (formal and non-formal), values, beliefs, and the significance of social attitudes and behavior related to the Gonja idioms. During the study, interviews were granted to the participants at various places. Each participant

was interviewed based on his/her experiences and knowledge. The kind of interview that was employed was the unstructured interview approach. The questions were determined by the situation and aspect the researcher was looking out for. Sometimes, questions were initiated to encourage respondents to speak their minds about the topic. For the fact that the researcher is a native speaker, it was easy to meet and discuss issues with respondents. However, it was surprising to realize that some of them were not expressing their knowledge very well on the topic. During the interviews, the researcher took an active listening role as he questioned with particular details. Some interviews lasted 20-30 minutes and in some cases one hour depending on the type of responses the researcher wanted to elicit and the availability of time on the respondent's side. The respondents were assured of the security and confidentiality of the information they were providing. The establishment of this cordial relationship with respondents was a major tool that won respondents' interest during the data collection process. The respondents were guided to freely talk about the idiomatic expressions concerning their everyday life interactions. Extensive discussions were the means of authenticating the data of the idiomatic units concerning the structured social life of the speakers. The respondents' viewpoints and observed attitudes provided insights into the representational, interactional, regulatory, and imaginative functions of the Gonja idioms as aspects of the social creativity of the Gonja speech community. In addition to collecting data from the selected respondents, some data were also collected during a Gonja WhatsApp group/platform program named *Ngbanyabe mmalgatrɔmbi* 'Gonja idioms' every Saturday I asked the group administrator and the group leader my intention to use some of the idioms discussed on the platform in my research work and I was permitted to go ahead and use the idioms. They permitted me and I wrote down the

idioms, which were used by native speakers in their natural context, as data for the study. In addition to this, some of the data from the primary source was based on my own native speakers' intuition which was cross-checked with other native speakers to ensure validity. Pictures were taken at some of the places to serve as evidence.



Fig. 2: The researcher is in an interview session with one of the sub-chiefs at Kpembe



Fig. 3: The researcher is in an interview session with the retired educationist

3.8 Observation

Observation is the primary technique for collecting data on non-verbal behavior. It involves getting to the field; participants, organizations, etc., to collect data based on their behavior (Owu-Ewie, 2022). The researcher has a keen interest in the totality of the lives of the Gonja including their way of using the idiomatic expressions in their interactions. For that matter, the researcher employed observation as another process for data collection in the study. Observation implies collecting information by way of

observing a situation or something. In more practical terms, observation can be a combination of watching, listening, and questioning. An observer may seek clarification for a behavior or attitude by asking questions during the process. Therefore, taking into consideration the nature of the investigation, the scope of inquiry, the objective, and the time available, I combined the methods in certain situations. This helped to ensure the effectiveness and accuracy of information. In collecting data for this study, both participant and non-participant methods of observation were used. Observation was used at various places in the communities to collect first-hand information about the idiomatic expressions. The practical environment within which the expressions are used is critical in providing the contextual cues associated with the idioms and testing the correlation of the variables. Being a native speaker, I attended occasions and events where the language of interaction would be predominantly Gonja. Other fora are the local arbitration sessions, informal public conversations, public socio-cultural events, and funerals. In the spirit of participant observation, I immersed myself in the groups of speakers for an extended period, observing behavior, listening to conversations, asking questions, sharing experiences, and seeking specific explanations. In the complete observer approach, the subjects pay little attention to the researcher's presence. In this study, the researcher attended gatherings and occasions (formal and informal) and listened to spontaneous utterances from speakers. As an observer/participant, the observer would get involved in activities that could provide the necessary data. The attitudes and perceptions of the speakers towards their social reality were observed from their reactions and responses. The stretches of discourse in conversational interactions formed part of the corpus of analysis. At Abrugase, where there was a funeral, I observed the mourning process, and with permission from the dirge singers, I

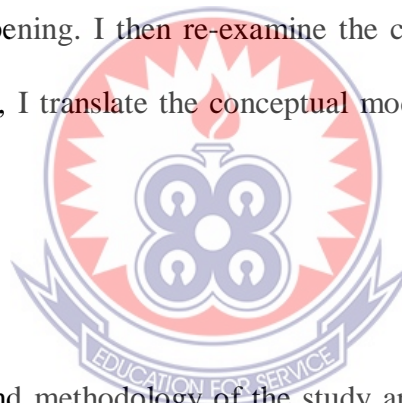
recorded some of their dirges with my phone. After that direct interactions were held with some of the dirge singers and they explained the dirges to me, while they were explaining I took notice of the idioms in their utterances. Also, at Kpembe the researcher observed an arbitration at the chief's palace and again he sought permission from the chief and the people and recorded some idioms in the proceedings, afterward the researcher interacted with some of the people for explanations of the idiomatic expressions and then he interviewed the chief and his spokesman who are the main respondents for the study. The researcher wrote down idioms, which were used by native speakers in their natural context, as data for the study.



Fig. 4: The researcher is in an interview session with one of the dirge singers

3.9 Data analysis

Patton (2002), mentions different forms of data analysis which include unique case orientation, holistic perspectives, context sensitivity, voice, perspectives, and reflexivity. Another data analysis strategy is an inductive analysis and creative synthesis. In inductive qualitative analysis, I group responses based on my judgment that the responses are similar. I then describe this similarity conceptually and create domains into which responses can then be grouped as the analysis continues. The data analysis of this study was purely descriptive focusing on the categories, themes, and contextual usage of Gonja idiomatic expressions. I look at the themes emerging from the data, code them, and then put them into conceptual categories in a way that describes what is happening. I then re-examine the categories identified to see how they are linked. Lastly, I translate the conceptual model into a storyline that will be meaningful to readers.



3.10 Summary

The research design and methodology of the study are covered in this chapter. This specific research technique was examined through the qualitative data collection method. The methods used to determine accuracy, reliability, and validity were described. This section included a discussion of the data collection instrument. Also, the method of data analysis was highlighted. A thorough explanation of the data analysis, conclusions, and insights drawn from the intuitive data are provided in the upcoming chapter. I wrapped off this stage by organizing and analyzing the data. Making the study's conclusions understandable to readers is the aim of the conclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data gathered during the research. In this chapter, the researcher attempts to find or provide answers regarding the categories of idiom expressions, themes, and their contextual usage in daily conversation and discourse among the Gonja. The analysis is done based on one hundred and fifty (150) idioms (see Appendix A) that were collected during the research. Out of the 150 idioms, 73 were used in the analysis. The data is presented and analyzed in answer to the research questions. The first aspect looks at the categories of Gonja idioms, the second presentation focuses on the thematic classification of Gonja idioms, and the third presentation deals with the contextual usage of the idioms of Gonja.

4.1 The categories of Gonja idioms

It is important to identify the categories of idiomatic expressions as collected from the various respondents of the study. The idiomatic expressions collected were coded and categorized. From the fieldwork, I found out that there are categories of idioms in Gonja such as; death and burial-related idioms, body-part-related idioms, gender stereotype-related idioms/social interaction-related idioms and that is how the data has been categorized and coded for analysis. The first category contains a collection of idioms that are related to Death and Burial. Seventeen (17) idioms were collected under this category in **Table (2)**. The information below shows the idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

Table 2: Death-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/meaning
1	<i>Ebɔrɛ bishi mo so</i> 'God asked him/her on'	God has asked for him/her.	'S/he is dead or out of this physical world.'
2	<i>Kii Ebɔrɛ peya</i> 'Turn God own'	S/he has become God's own.	'S/he is dead.'
3	<i>Yɔ ndɔtɔ a maŋ ba</i> 'Go farm come'	S/he has not returned from the farm.	'S/he is dead.'
4	<i>Kayigboŋ tiya</i> 'Big tree uproot'	A big tree has fallen/uprooted.	'The prominent person is dead.'
5	<i>Ta kato n gbesa</i> 'Take spon and lean'	S/he has leaned a spoon (against something).	'S/he is dead.'
6	<i>Yɔ mo nanaana kutɔ</i> 'Go his/her grandparents there'	S/he has gone to the world of the grandfathers.	'One has traveled out of this physical world to the ancestors.'
7	<i>Kilgi anishi n shoyi egbel</i> 'Turn eyes and face wall'	S/he has turned the face against the wall.	'S/he is dead or cannot turn to see people.'
8	<i>Ewura be gbaŋɛ tuwe</i> 'Chief's horse untied'	The chief's horse has untied.	'The chief is dead.'
9	<i>Maŋ koso edi to</i> 'Not get up sleep in'	S/he did not wake up from sleep.	'S/he is dead.'
10	<i>E man wɔtɔ</i> 'he/she not aroud'	He is no more	'S/he is dead or departed.'
11	<i>Kii pantɛ n dɔɔ n tii</i> 'Turn cricket and farm and closed'	Become a cricket and dug to close.	'S/he is dead or departed.'
12	<i>Kepaŋte to</i> Burst into	To burst into parts.	'S/he is dead or departed.'
13	<i>E laŋɛ</i>	S/he has gone back.	'S/he is dead.'

_____	'he/she returned'		
14	<i>Nchu muti n wurge</i>	The water has poured	'S/he is dead (of a baby).'
	'Water poured and out. spill'		
15	<i>For n wurge</i>	To wash out.	'When a baby less than a day is dead.'
	'Wash and spill'		
16	<i>Bu nana mo</i>	They have hidden	'S/he has been buried.'
	'They hide him/her' him/her.		
17	<i>Fin mobe edese kpa</i>	To find him/her a	'S/he has been buried.'
	'Look his/hers laying resting place. place'		

Source: Field survey.

According to one woman dirge singer from the Kpembe Traditional area, the Gonja believe that death is the final end of life, and it is the ending of all breathing processes and functions that sustain a living creature. She adds that death can occur in various ways, often due to disease, injury, or old age, and the experience of death is typically seen as a natural part of the life cycle, but it can also be a traumatic and painful event for those who remain alive. Therefore, idioms (1), (2), (9) & (10) could be used when announcing the death of someone or an ordinary person. For example, *Ebɔre bishi mo so* 'God has asked for him/her', *Kii Ebɔre peya* 'S/he has become God's own' etc. She avers that many cultures have different beliefs and practices surrounding death, including beliefs in the afterlife, funeral rituals, and mourning customs.

The Gonja respect their chiefs because they constitute the highest social class in the Gonja society and activities surrounding them should be given such importance so that their image is still upheld in the society. As a result, one must understand the Gonja language very well so that one will not make unnecessary mistakes when one is making a speech about the chiefs. That is why some of these idiomatic expressions

exist in the language to make appropriate reference to their death. It was gathered from the study that the passing on of a chief is something that is usually kept secret for some time to prevent children from knowing about it too soon, hence beautifying the language by employing idioms such as (3), (4), (5), (6), (7) & (8). For example, *Yɔ ndɔtɔ a maŋ ba* 's/he has not return from the farm', *Kayigboŋ tiya* 'A big tree has fallen', *Ewura be gbaŋɛ tuwe* 'The chief's horse has untied' etc. For the death of children, the research revealed that the idioms (13), (14), and (15) replacements are used when the woman delivers and immediately loses that baby. For example, *E laŋɛ* 'S/he has gone back', *Nchu muti n wurge* 'The water has poured' etc. Even for the first day and days that follow before the naming ceremony, the above idioms are appropriate for use when the child is dead before the naming ceremony. Most respondents explained that the use of these idioms console the individual whose heart has been troubled with sorrow, i.e., the parents and their families. This goes a long way to minimize the effects of the trouble being experienced by the mother. It is also believed that the use of these idioms also prolongs the lives of the living ones as they are not overwhelmed by the sorrow experienced through the demise of a relative or friend but are somewhat consoled.

From the study, burial idioms unlike death idioms bring consolation to the family of the deceased. Using idiom (16) in the language also prevents little ones from understanding the matter directly. Among the Gonja people, the *kepuli* 'burial' rituals form the climax of the ceremony, as they constitute the dramatic and saddest period. This is because it encompasses much wailing and mourning. Some of the mourners and those who are enriched in dirge singing will be singing dirges while wailing at the same time. This is because they will not see the corpse again. As the wailing goes on,

preparations are ongoing to find a resting place for the deceased, and idiom (17) is used in that context.

4.1.1 Body part idiomatic expressions

Many idiomatic expressions collected during the survey were related to human body parts. Therefore, the second category contains a collection of body-part idioms that are related to the human head, eyes, ears, mouth, tongue, chest, hands, stomach, and legs. Several idioms were collected under this category.

4.1.1.1 Head-related idioms in Gonja

The head plays a very significant role in the human body. Apart from the head giving form to the human structure, it is also assumed that it contains life; without the head, the human body is lifeless. It is also believed that the head is the processing center through the functioning of other peripheral or passive organs like the brain and others. Simply, the overall functioning of the human body depends on the head (Suhununu 2021). The information below shows the idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

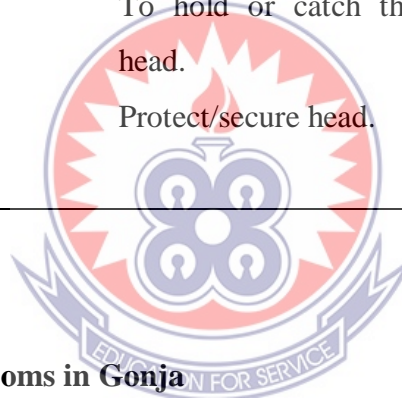
Table 3: Head-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/meaning
1	<i>Kumu maŋ chuwoɔso</i> 'Head not connect'	To be headless.	'To be mentally derailed/insane.'
2	<i>Kumu wieto</i> Head mixed up	To have a mix-up head.	'To be mentally derailed/unsound mind.'
3	<i>Kumu kilgiso</i> Head turned	Turned head.	'Mental retardation/unsound mind.'

4	<i>Kumu maŋ wɔ epe</i> 'Head not is home'	Head not at home.	'Not sane/not well/mad.'
5	<i>Kumu maa shuŋ</i> 'Head not work'	The head is not working.	'To be out of one's mind/crazy.'
6	<i>Kumu wuso</i> 'Head dead'	A deadhead.	'Intellectual weakness/ stupid.'
7	<i>Kɔ kekoshimu</i> 'Have fowl head'	Has fowl head.	'Unable to carry load/ dislike for carrying load.'
8	<i>Kemaŋ kɔ kumu</i> 'Not have head'	To be headless.	'Unsound mind/ Bad luck.'
9	<i>Tase kumu so</i> 'Sit head on'	Sitting on head.	'Unmarried woman who lives independently.'
10	<i>Keba kɔ kumu</i> 'To have head'	To have a head.	'To be lucky in life.'
11	<i>Kɔ kumu lubi</i> 'Have head bad'	Has a bad head/ is Unlucky.	'Not to be lucky/not lucky enough.'
12	<i>Kefor kumuto n ler</i> 'Wash head and out'	To wash and clean the head.	'To be exempted from blame.'
13	<i>Kumu bel ede</i> 'Head hot fire'	Warm/hot-headed.	'To be in a difficult or frustrating situation.'
14	<i>Kumu maŋ walɛ</i> 'Head not good'	Head not good.	'One faces unfortunate circumstances in society/to be unlucky.'
15	<i>Kumu bra ase</i> 'Head brought down'	Head brought down.	'To humble oneself in front of other persons.'
16	<i>Kɔ kamuwu</i> 'Have head seeing'	Has head seeing.	'Not humble/ Does not humble oneself in front of other persons.'
17	<i>Kamu tij</i> 'Head swollen'	Head swollen.	'To have the feeling of appraisal/ to feel proud.'
18	<i>Kumu maŋ so</i> 'Head raised'	Head raised.	'To be proud (before the public) or to be boasting.'

19	<i>Kumu to leŋ</i> 'Head in strong'	Strong headed.	'To easily pass through difficult situations/to be greedy.'
20	<i>Keta amu m ŋmia abar</i> 'Take heads knock each other'	To knock heads together.	'To cause misunderstanding between two or more people.'
21	<i>Kelera kumu sarga</i> 'Remove head sacrifice'	To remove a head gift.	'To sacrifice/ be committed.'
22	<i>Kumu yuu to</i> 'Head bent down'	Head bent down.	'To be in a state of embarrassment or shame.'
23	<i>Kekuu kumu</i> 'Cut head'	To chop off the head.	'To punish severely.'
24	<i>Kumu be kepe</i> 'Head is catch'	To hold or catch the head.	'To keep to oneself.'
25	<i>Kamuakuŋ</i> 'Protect head'	Protect/secure head.	'To remain cautious and not cause problems for someone.'

Source: Field survey.



4.1.1.2 Eye-related idioms in Gonja

Apart from the head related idioms others were collected that relate to the eye. The human eye is part of the head and is considered an organ that can be used to perform some communication functions either by voluntarily blinking or closing to send a signal. In communication, particularly when eye-related idioms are used, those idioms may talk about the state of vision, that is, to watch, see, or look. It may also center on behavioral manifestations, inattentiveness, etc. The table below presents the eye-related Gonja idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

Table 4 Eye-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/meaning
1	<i>Anishi lubi.</i> 'Eyes bad'	Evil eyes.	'To bewitch/to engage in witchcraft'.
2	<i>Anishi maa shuli</i> 'Eyes not agree'	Eyes do not agree.	'To be partially blind'.
3	<i>Keta anishi n deji so</i> 'Take eyes and put on'	To put eyes on.	'To be hopeful/expectant'.
4	<i>Kenishi wol to</i> 'Eye dry in'	Dry eye/face.	'Lack of respect'.
5	<i>Kenishi lej</i> 'Eye strong'	Eye strong.	'To fearlessly articulate one's thoughts before an audience'.
6	<i>Woto kenishi</i> 'Put eye'	Put an eye.	'To be observant'.
7	<i>Kenishi buwi</i> 'Eye open'	Eyes opened.	'To be wise/civilized'.
8	<i>Lera kenishi</i> 'Remove eye'	Remove an eye.	'To ignore something or someone'.



Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.3 Ear-related idioms in Gonja

The human ears play a very crucial role in how human beings communicate among themselves. They are the organs that are responsible for hearing and maintaining equilibrium. For this reason, when someone's ears fail to function properly, the

person is perceived by many to have lost a very valuable asset in terms of communication. The information below shows ear-related idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings in Gonja.

Table 5: Ear-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Asoe wɔ nteŋ</i> 'Ears is long'	To have long ears.	'To have secret information/have informant'.
2	<i>Kebuwi asoe</i> 'Open ears'	To open ears.	'To pay attention to/ to listen attentively'.
3	<i>Buri ndibi n tii asoe</i> 'Break stick and close ears'	To close ears with sticks.	'To remain unconcerned'.
4	<i>Kusoe maŋ wɔtɔ</i> 'Ear not there'	The ear not there.	'To be inattentive'.
5	<i>Asoe be kefulɛ</i> 'Ears is lying'	To lie the ears.	'To hear information from an unreliable source'.
6	<i>Kebra kusoe kaseto</i> 'Bring ear down'	To lower one's ears.	'To be critically attentive/to listen to obtain information'.
7	<i>Kewɔtɔ kusoe</i> 'Put ear'	To put ear.	'To pay attention'.
8	<i>Kegberge kusoe</i> 'Pull ear'	To pull ear.	'To punish'.
9	<i>Kesoe to du kpakpa</i> 'Ear in is hard'	To have a hard ear.	'To be deaf or remain adamant/unyielding'.
10	<i>Kusoe to kɔr afuibi</i> 'Ear in grow hairs'	To have hairs in the ear.	'To be disobedient'.

11	<i>Kɔ asoepe</i> 'Have ears hole'	To have ears holes.	'To be able to keep information/Understand easily'.
12	<i>Keji asoe to</i> 'Eat ears in'	To eat into ears.	'To a warn/To inform secretly'.

Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.4 Mouth and tongue-related idioms in Gonja

The mouth is one of the very important components of the head, and as such it is perceived as a major part of the human body in the area of communication. Naturally, the mouth plays an important role in eating, speaking, or talking and in drinking. The mouth in performing its natural functions also serves as a backup system when there is an obstruction to breathing through the nose. These and other reasons have triggered a sense of purpose as to why the Gonja consider the mouth as important in idiomatic expressions. The information below shows mouth-related idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

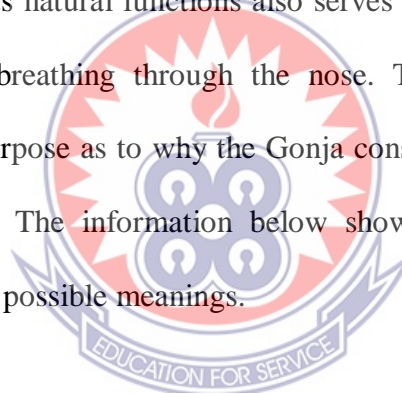


Table 6: Mouth and tongue-related idioms Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Kɔnɔ tentey</i> 'Mouth long'	Long mouth.	To engage in meaningless talk/ things that do not concern one.
2	<i>Keba kɔ kɔnɔ</i> 'To have mouth'	To possess mouth.	'One who conscientiously uses the mouth anyhow/One who talks a lot'.
3	<i>Kɔnɔ be kekuuso</i> 'Mouth is reduce'	To reduce the mouth.	'To exercise self-control in the use of one's mouth'.

4	<i>Kɔnɔ duɔ</i> 'Mouth extinguished'	To have an extinguished mouth.	'To be miserable after failing to observe due diligence in society'.
5	<i>Nchu wɔ kɔnɔ to</i> 'Water is mouth into'	Water is in the mouth.	'To restrain from talking in a situation'.
6	<i>Keta n che kɔnɔ so</i> 'Take and join mouth on'	To add to one's mouth.	'To support someone's idea'.
7	<i>Keta kɔnɔ ashi so</i> 'Take mouth from on'	To get mouth off one's matter.	'To express a displeasure at the insensitive use of the mouth/To stay off one's matter'.
8	<i>Kɔnɔ jɔŋ kumuni so</i> 'Mouth squats refuse damp on'	The mouth is on refuse damp.	'To condemn negative behaviour'
9	<i>Kɔnɔ koɲwule</i> 'Mouth one'	One mouth.	'To express a sense of friendship/unity'.
10	<i>Kɔnɔ to be kenu</i> 'Mouth into is hear'	To hear/seek one's mouth.	'To request one's opinion or judgment on an issue'.
11	<i>Kenya kɔnɔ yul</i> 'Get mouth cold'	To get a cold mouth.	'To be granted permission'.
12	<i>Keba de kudunduloŋ so</i> 'To watch tongue on'	To guard the tongue.	'To conceal information and secrets in all circumstances'.
13	<i>Kudunduloŋ belbelso</i> 'Tongue sweet'	To possess a sweet tongue.	'To have a smart persuasive ability'.

Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.5 Hand-related idioms in Gonja

The hand is one of the components of the human anatomy. It plays an important role in the performance of activities of every human being. The main function of the human hand is to reach out and grab something such as food, tools, and handholds that may be of help. Apart from these, the concept of ‘hand’ in discourse, is associated with a variety of meanings like to help, to involve, to be part, available, care, give, etc. Table 7 presents hand-related idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings in Gonja.

Table 7: Hand-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Enɔ maa teji</i> ‘Hand not stretch’	Arms/hands not stretching.	‘Being stingy/unwilling to give support’.
2	<i>Enɔ to du kpakpa</i> ‘Hand into is hard’	To possess a hard hand.	‘To be stingy/unwilling to give’.
3	<i>Enɔ maa buwi</i> ‘Hand not open’	Hand is not open.	‘To be stingy/difficult to share’.
4	<i>Enɔ bee teji</i> ‘Hand is stretch’	Hands stretching.	‘Being generous’.
5	<i>Enɔ to kɔ nchu</i> ‘Hand into have water’	Hand have water.	‘To be wealthy’.
6	<i>Enɔ be kewɔɔ</i> ‘Hand is put’	The hand is dipped in.	‘To be fully part/fully involved’.

7	<i>Kefor enɔ</i> 'Wash han'	To wash off hands.	'To distance oneself from something/an issue'.
8	<i>Kelara enɔ</i> 'Remove hand'	To remove the hand.	'To distance oneself from an issue'.
9	<i>Enɔ maa fo kaman</i> 'Hand not reach back'	Unable to stretch hands to reach one's back.	'To be in abject poverty'.
10	<i>Enɔ maa choŋ loŋkoŋ to</i> 'Hand not enter gourd into'	Hand is not entering into gourd.	'To be in abject poverty'.
11	<i>Kechina enɔ fuloŋ</i> 'Sit hand empty'	To sit with empty hands.	'To be poor/financially handicapped'.
12	<i>Enɔ du fuwofuwobi</i> 'Hand is light'	To possess a light hand.	'To be quick to physically react to any little provocation'.
13	<i>Enɔ tentey</i> 'Hand long'	Long hand.	'Thievery/to be covetous'.
14	<i>Kata bɔiŋ</i> 'Take slowly'	To take slowly (with the hand).	'To steal/To take without being noticed'.
15	<i>Keta enɔ n kpa ataŋ</i> 'Take hand and throw slap'	Take hand and slap.	'To cheat/dupe'.



Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.6 Heart/chest-related idioms in Gonja

Other Gonja idioms that emerged were those related to the heart or the chest. These body-part-related expressions are used in Gonja to portray the beautiful/bad quality that one must have. They include kindness, selflessness, and willingness to give and help others discourage timidity, and also to rebuke quick-tempered people and others. The information below presents the idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

Table 8: Heart/chest-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/meaning
1	<i>Kagbene kpakpa so</i> 'Heart hard on'	Hard heart.	'To be heartless'.
2	<i>Kagbene boni</i> 'Heart bad'	Bad heart.	'To be unkind, dishonest, and lacking empathy'.
3	<i>Kagbene nyɔɔso/lembir</i> 'Heart black'	Blackheart.	'A lack of compassion and empathy'.
4	<i>Kagbene to maa wu</i> 'Heart into not see'	Heart inside cannot be seen.	'Someone who is very secretive and does not open up to others'.
5	<i>Kagbene jaje</i> 'Heart spoil'	Spoilt heart.	'The inability to handle disappointment or setbacks/Unhappiness'.
6	<i>Kagbene wushi</i> 'Heart cold'	Cool heart.	'To remain level-headed and calm'.
7	<i>Kagbene koɲwule</i> 'Heart one'	One heart.	'Oneness of unity, truthful and honest'.
8	<i>Kagbene cheche so</i> 'Heart pure on'	Pure heart.	'To be kind-hearted and lovely'.

Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.7 Stomach-related idioms in Gonja

Generally, the stomach performs a core function as a reservoir for the reception of food and drink. In human anatomy, the stomach is located between the chest and the renal pelvis. This brief description of the concept of the stomach is not different from what the Gonja know about the physical structure of the stomach. The information below shows the idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

Table: 9: Stomach-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Keta epun n deji so</i> 'Take stomach and put on'	To put one's stomach on.	'To rely on someone to be fed'.
2	<i>Epun to bee gbiri</i> 'Stomach into is cray'	Stomach complaining.	'To be starving/to be hungry'.
3	<i>Epun to fuful</i> 'Stomach into white'	To have a white stomach.	'To be happy with everything/To be good'.
4	<i>Epun to nyɔɔ so</i> 'Stomach into dark on'	To have a black stomach.	'To be wicked/wickedness'.
7	<i>Keta keshej n wɔtɔ epun to</i> 'Take issue and put stomach into'	To harbor issues in the stomach.	'Not to forgive easily/to be hypocritical'.
5	<i>Epun to chinglij</i> 'Stomach into deep'	To have a deep stomach.	'Not open with issues'.



6	<i>Epun maa chela afuu</i> 'Stomach not blow air'	The stomach not taking a break.	'Easily become hungry/behavior of one who likes food too much'.
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Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.8 Leg-related idioms in Gonja

Generally, the human legs are used to support the body and also provide locomotion. For a human being to move, the legs are actively involved. It is for this important reason, that, 'legs' are commonly used in most of the idiomatic expressions. In close comparison, the majority of the leg idioms in their abstract relate to movement or state of movement. The table below shows leg-related idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings.

Table 10: Leg-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/meaning
1	<i>Keyili kiya so</i> 'Stand leg on'	To stand on the leg.	'To take decisive action'.
2	<i>Keyili kiya koŋwule so</i> 'Stand leg one on'	To stand on one leg.	'To be relentless in a position taken'.
3	<i>Keyili aya so</i> 'Stand legs on'	To stand on legs.	'To be capable of getting something done'.
4	<i>Keyili to</i> 'Stand into'	To stand into.	'To step into an issue/to take up an issue'.
5	<i>Ta afore n kre aya</i> 'Take "afore" and tie legs'	To tie leg with dried yam leaves "afore".	'Thievery/To hide under something to steal'.

6	<i>Keboɔ kiya</i> 'Fold leg'	To fold leg.	'To travel'.
7	<i>Keta kiya</i> 'Take leg'	To take a leg.	'To travel'.
8	<i>Kepulɔ kiya nchu</i> 'Wet leg water'	To wet leg with water.	'To take to noes heels/to run from a situation'.
9	<i>Tɔr aya to</i> 'Fall legs into'	To fall on one's feet.	'To show humility before those in positions of authority'.
10	<i>Kechichi kiya so</i> 'Step leg on'	To step on a foot.	'To provoke/to annoy'.
11	<i>Keji aya</i> 'Eat legs'	To eat legs.	'To follow unknowingly/to envy'.

Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.9 Social interaction-related idioms in Gonja

The third category contains a collection of social interaction-related Gonja idioms. Twenty (20) idioms were collected under this category in Table (11). The information below shows the idioms, their literal translation and possible meanings.

Table 11: Social interaction-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Kulor bee gbeni ashi to</i> 'Hernia is destroy mounds into'	Hernia is scattering yam mounds.	'To be dishonest'.
2	<i>Bulo ekpa</i> 'Pass road'	Pass road/way.	'To travel'.
3	<i>Maa bulo ekpa</i> 'Not pass road'	Does not pass road/way.	'To be untruthful'.
4	<i>Ko achanchilay</i> 'Have funny'	Have jokes/have matters of playing.	'To be funny'.
5	<i>Duu chij</i> 'Plant vein'	To stand firm.	'To be bold in decision making'.
6	<i>Chichi ede so</i> 'Step fire on'	To step on fire.	'To be bitten by a snake'.
7	<i>Kebri efɔŋ</i> 'Beat lean'	To beat lean.	'To grow lean'.
8	<i>A luri ebu a ler</i> 'Enter room come out'	Enter room and come out.	'To be in abject poverty'.
9	<i>Tuu achɔl n wɔto eno to</i> 'Spit saliva and put hand into'	Spit saliva into the hand.	'To be blessed'.
10	<i>Aji a tɔr abarso</i> 'Eat fall each on'	Eat and fall on each other.	'To have a cordial relationship'.
11	<i>Koshi maŋ ta kuyu</i> 'Fowl not take corn'	Fowl did not take grain.	'Immediately/very quickly'.
12	<i>Keji m mur</i>	To eat and sink.	'To spend all assets'.

			‘Eat sink’
13	<i>Kifii be kebuwi</i>	To open anus.	‘To be disgraced/To be exposed’.
	‘Anus is open’		
14	<i>Ayoyul be kepe abar</i>	Spirits catching each other.	‘To be cordially related’.
	‘Spirits is catch other’		
15	<i>Keshuli kaposhi</i>	To accept defeat.	‘To surrender’.
	‘Agree defeat’		

Source: Field survey.

4.1.1.10 Gender stereotyping-related idioms in Gonja

The third category contains a collection of idioms that are related to gender stereotyping-related idioms in Gonja. Gender stereotyping refers to the social and cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity that shape people's identities and roles in society. The study also discovered issues related to gender inequality, such as sexism, gender-based violence, and discrimination against marginalized groups. From the study, the researcher found the following themes: marriage, responsibility, independence, maturity, denial, control, fertility/infertility, and infidelity. Fifteen (15) idioms were collected under this category and are presented in Table (12). The information below shows the idioms, their literal translations, and possible meanings in Gonja.

Table 12: Gender-related idioms in Gonja

S/N	Idiom	Literal Translation	Interpretation/Meaning
1	<i>Min awɔribi</i> 'Swallow pebbles'	To swallow pebble.	'To be pregnant'.
2	<i>Kekre afuu</i> 'Tie win'	To tied win.	'To be pregnant'.
3	<i>Pe afuu</i> 'Catch win'	To catch win.	'To be pregnant'.
4	<i>Kre adiku</i> 'Tie load'	To tied load.	'To be pregnant'.
5	<i>Nuu afuu</i> 'Drink win'	To drink win.	'To be pregnant'.
6	<i>Kenyɛ epun</i> 'Have stomach'	To get stomach.	'To be pregnant'.
7	<i>Kewɔɔ egbe</i> 'Do heavy'	To be heavy.	'To be pregnant'.
8	<i>Ebɔɛ lara mo</i> 'God remove her'	God has removed her.	'To successfully give birth'.
9	<i>Kii ebuto wura</i> 'Turn room owner'	Turn to room owner.	'Be put to bed'.
10	<i>A maŋ walɛ so</i> 'Not clean on'	She not clean.	'To be in her period'.
11	<i>Kemaa ji baasa</i> 'Not eat people'	Not eating people.	'To be in her period'.
12	<i>Keluri baasa to</i> 'Enter people into'	Enter into people.	'To be in her period'.
13	<i>Chebra maa kpa</i> 'Lighter not throw'	Lighter is not throwing.	'Manhood not functioning'.



14	<i>Kanase tɔr nchu to</i>	Hoe fell into the water. ‘Hoe fall water into’	‘To be impotent’.
15	<i>Kejembu dese epun to</i>	A stone is in the stomach. ‘Stone lay stomach into’	‘Not able to contain a developing embryo’.

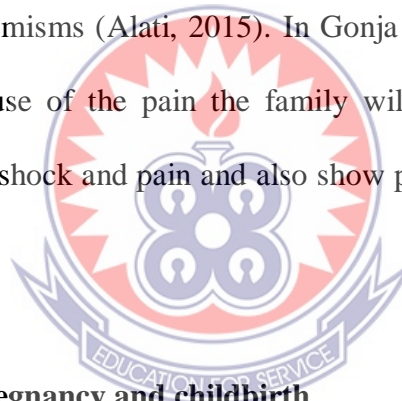
Source: Field survey.

4.2. Themes of Gonja idioms

A “theme” refers to the major, central, or main ideas, or the moral precepts in a particular work. Sometimes no two people can agree upon the wording of the theme or themes because moral positions and abstract principles are, naturally more difficult to express than concrete facts. Even when the theme is expressed, the tendency is to simplify a complex idea. In many cases, themes can also be related to social, political, or philosophical problems (Agyekum, 2013). Several themes were found to be embedded in the idiomatic expressions collected during the data collection process for which explanations were sought from the respondents. Some of these themes include the theme of death and burial, pregnancy, human ability/steadfastness, human disability, unity, dependency, distress, covetousness, mobility, generosity, pride, greed, wickedness, evil machination, information tolerance, caution/punishment, worthlessness, stubbornness, carefulness, expectation, sacrifice, enlightenment, persuasion, and reluctance.

4.2.1 The theme of death

Death signifies the end of the lifecycle of all living things in the entire world. It is believed by the Gonja people death is a transition from the physical life to the spiritual life. As a result, when a person dies, the Gonja people believe that he/she is making a journey to another world from the family. Death is one of those subjects about which the Gonja do not comment directly. For example, one reporting about the demise of a relative may use the idiom *Ebɔre bishi mo so* ‘God has asked for him/her’ to mean that somebody is dead. This euphemistic expression gives the Gonja people the self-regulatory mechanism that ensures that desirable levels of politeness in communication are maintained. Idioms, therefore, cover these taboo subjects in decent-sounding euphemisms (Alati, 2015). In Gonja when discussing the demise of the dead person because of the pain the family will be going through, they have idioms that reduce the shock and pain and also show politeness when commenting on such subjects.



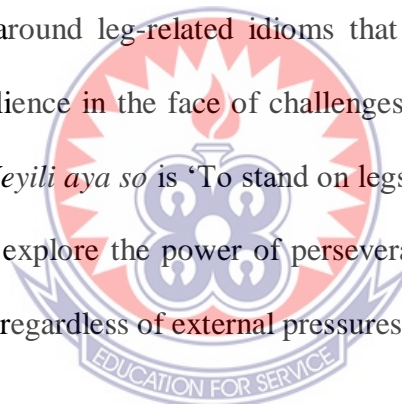
4.2.2 The theme of pregnancy and childbirth

Among Gonja people, pregnancy *Kedampo* can be a time of excitement, joy, and anticipation in the marriage. In as much as pregnancy is a time of excitement among Gonja people, when a woman is pregnant for a month or two, people will start using idioms like *E min awaribi*, *E kre afuu*, etc, to prevent children and non-native from knowing about the woman’s pregnancy in that early stage. But it can also be accompanied by issues such as the physical and emotional changes experienced during pregnancy such as protruded stomach *Kenyε epun*, *Kewɔrɔ egbe*. The idiom *Ebɔre lera mo* or *Kii ebu to wura* is used for childbirth, the process of giving birth, the impact of pregnancy on relationships, the challenges faced by pregnant women,

anxiety, uncertainty, physical discomfort, and more. Also, in Gonja society, pregnancy outside wedlock is frowned upon. When this occurs, the idioms above are used to reduce the embarrassment that comes with it and to make it less obvious. Someone who does not understand the Gonja language well and children will also be prevented from knowing what is being discussed when these idioms are used.

4.2.3 The theme of human ability and steadfastness

The idiom *Pulo kiya nchu* ‘Wet leg water’ is equivalent to the English idiom *took to one’s heels*. In certain domains of discourse, idioms containing legs may also portray resemblance, imitation, or intimacy. Among the Gonja human ability and steadfastness revolve around leg-related idioms that bring out the concept of firm determination and resilience in the face of challenges, adversity, or temptations. For example, idioms like *Keyili aya so* is ‘To stand on legs’, and *Keyili kiya koɲwule so* is ‘To stand on one leg’ explore the power of perseverance, commitment, and staying true to one’s principles regardless of external pressures or obstacles.



4.2.4 The theme of human disability

In Gonja, human disability is the experiences, and challenges of individuals with disabilities in their personal, social, and cultural contexts. It is the physical, mental, or cognitive impairments that can affect a person's abilities and the impact these disabilities have on their everyday lives and relationships. The theme contains a collection of body-part idioms in which the majority of the idioms are related to the human head *Kumu*. According to Gonja people, the head plays a very significant role in the human body.

4.2.5 The theme of unity

Most respondents explained that unity *Kɔnɔ koŋwule* is the power and importance of coming together as a collective, regardless of differences or diversity. It emphasizes the idea that when individuals join forces *Yili kagbene koŋwule* and work towards a common goal, they can achieve great things and overcome challenges. Unity can be examined in various contexts, such as relationships, communities, or societies, and even on a global scale. It has also been explained that when people put aside their differences, prejudices, and personal interests, they can create a harmonious and organized environment where everyone feels valued and supported. The theme of unity “*Kɔnɔ koŋwule*” ‘one mouth’ always talks about concepts such as collaboration, teamwork, empathy, understanding, and acceptance.

4.2.6 The theme of dependency

In Gonja, depending on someone *Keta anishi n deŋi so*, ‘To put eyes on’ *Ketɔr aya to* ‘To fall onto leg’ is the way by which individuals or groups may be dependent on others for their well-being or survival. In society, some individuals are vulnerable and such people must depend on some privileged ones for survival or for some things to be done in their favor. In the study, the researcher found out that dependency is about the emotional and psychological aspects of relying on others *Keta epun n deŋi so* ‘To put stomach on’. Also, it is about one’s feelings of helplessness, and insecurity, that will let him/her put his or her trust in others. Another aspect of the theme of dependency is the societal and complete dependencies.

4.2.7 The theme of distress

According to some of the respondents, this often relates to hardship *Enɔ maa fo kaman* ‘Hand is not reaching the back’, this is talking about suffering or a poor person. It discusses the emotional and psychological confusion *Kagbene to jeja* ‘spoiled heart’ experienced by individuals who are dealing with intense stress, pain, or hardship. One of the elders mentioned that distress can involve various aspects such as personal struggles, or societal issues. The use of the above idioms in the language has the sole aim of bringing consolation to the individual. As a result, the sorrow or pain of the individual tends to reduce or decline. It helps to minimize the tension on the affected individual.

4.2.8 The theme of covetousness

In Gonja society, covetousness *Ko enɔ tenten* ‘long hands’ can be likened to stealing or an act of greed, desperation, or the struggle for survival, depending on the context and the action involved. In covetousness, an individual’s motives, personality, and values, as well as the social and cultural norms that influence the behavior of the individual are exposed. This theme centers on morality, ethics, and personal upbringing. Being covetous *Katabɔin* ‘take solely’ can lead to disgrace and hatred from people affected by such actions. Eventually, the act of covetousness or stealing can affect society negatively in various aspects of life.

4.2.9 The theme of generosity

In Gonja, a beautiful quality that one must possess includes kindness, selflessness, and willingness to give and help others. It has been noted that the use of idioms such as *Enɔ bee teji* ‘hand is stretching’, *Kagbene cheche so* ‘pure heart’ celebrates the

goodness of humanity and the positive impacts of acts of generosity. In real life, acts of generosity can range from small gestures of kindness to large-scale philanthropy. Generous individuals, according to Gonja, often play a significant role in making positive changes in society by supporting, and helping those in need, and fostering a sense of community. The theme of generosity reminds us of the importance of empathy, compassion, and sharing. According to the respondents it highlights the belief that by giving, we not only benefit others but also experience personal fulfillment and create a more harmonious world.

4.2.10 The theme of pride

Most respondents explained that pride *Kamu maŋ so* 'Raising head' is about self-worth, arrogance, and an overstated sense of power. It often examines the negative consequences that can arise from excessive pride. It is believed that excessive pride can lead to a person's downfall. One of the respondents said that people who are consumed by their pride often make reckless decisions or underestimate their opponents, eventually leading to their downfall. The research also reveals that in Gonja society excessive pride *Keŋini kamuawu* 'To show off head' can distance people from their loved ones or community. It prevents them from acknowledging their mistakes or seeking forgiveness, leading to broken relationships.

4.2.11 The theme of greed

According to Gonja people, greed *Kejimuni* is the human desire for excessive wealth, power, or possessions. It can be seen in various aspects of life, from individual behavior to societal structures. According to the research gathered, a greed person is referred to as *Enɔ to du kpkakpa* 'Hand is hard', *Enɔ maa teŋi* 'Hand is not

stretching’ which can lead to personal and societal consequences. In an attempt by the Gonja to refer to greed people, they find an appropriate way to deal with that. This is done by using the right idioms to refer to them *Kagbene kpakpa so* ‘Hard heart’. This is mostly done in the speech related to an important personality in the society, for example; the chief, elders, and opinion leaders. Greed can also be found in real-life situations, such as business greed or the pursuit of personal wealth at the expense of others. There are several motivations behind greed and how it affects individuals and society as a whole such as loss of interpersonal trust, social isolation, stigmatization, etc.

4.2.12 The theme of wickedness

Typically, in Gonja society wickedness is evil actions, intentions, or traits displayed by an individual. The Gonja society is not free from people who naturally have feelings of negative jealousy and shared wickedness. Such people hate to see others progress or even possess good things. They will do all that they can to spoil the efforts of others just to see them fall. These individuals are best described with the use of this idiom such as *Kagbeneto nyɔɔ* ‘Inside heart is black’, *Kagbeneto maa wu* ‘Inside heart cannot be seen’. The research reveals the destructive and morally corrupt aspects of human nature such as corruption of power, which examines the abuse of power and the lengths individuals will go to maintain or expand their authority. *Epun to nyɔso* ‘Black stomach’ often showcases the manipulation, deceit, and immorality that accompany the pursuit and exercise of power and wickedness can distort the lines between right and wrong, challenging traditional notions of morality.

4.2.13 The theme of evil machinations

From the research conducted, evil machinations relate to actions intended to accomplish some usually evil end. Among the Gonja, such actions are often typically associated with people who possess supernatural and magical powers *Anishi lubi* ‘Bad eyes’. Such people are often suspected to be individuals who practice witchcraft *Kegba*. To find the appropriate way of referring to such people, Gonja uses the above idiom. Their actions are often thought to involve the use of spells, potions, and rituals to influence or control events or people. Witchcraft is also often linked to spirituality, nature, and the supernatural realm. People who have such evil machinations are usually feared and referred to as having bad eyes *Anishi boni/lubi*.

4.2.14 The theme of receptive

Most Gonja people believe receptive refers to the availability and ease of access to information by the chief or any other person from all individuals in the society, regardless of their cultural background, and physical ability. Therefore, human ears have largely gained recognition relative to their usage in idiomatic expressions in the daily lives of the Gonja people. In Gonja, the idiom *Kusoe wɔ nteɲ* ‘Long ear’ is the most frequently used idiomatic expression by speakers in normal conversations. It means to have informants or the ability to hear/listen to every piece of information by opening the ears *Kebuwi asoe to*. This theme emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all people have access to information, knowledge, and resources that are necessary to make informed decisions to be able to participate fully in societal activities by putting their ears on the ground *Kewɔtɔ kusoe* or bring ears down *Kebar kusoe kaseto*.

4.2.15 The theme of caution/punishment

Among the Gonja people, caution/punishment *Kasoe gberge* or *Kegberge kusoe* ‘To pull ear’ which means to punish severely, is a way of trying to correct someone for wrongdoing and also to discipline the individual for unlawful behavior. From the study it was revealed that caution/punishment is often described as a form of justice, intended to discourage future wrongdoings or to reform the offender. The researcher also found out that cautioning and punishment can take various forms, including, banishment, fines, or physical harm, and it is often used as a means of applying power and control over individuals or groups.

4.2.16 The theme of worthlessness

In Gonja, the lack of wealth or poverty *Ketir* focuses on the economic and social struggles of individuals, often resulting in a lack of access to basic needs such as housing, healthcare, education, and food. For instance, the expression *Eno maa fo kaman* ‘Unable to stretch hands to reach the back’ or *Eno maa chon lɔŋkɔŋ to* ‘Hand do not enter into calabash’ means is to be in abject poverty. It has been explained that such individuals are struggling to break free from the constraints of poverty and face barriers to social and economic flexibility. The theme of worthlessness is about the differences that exist in society and the need for action to address general issues that bring about poverty. It also takes the resilience and strength of individuals who face poverty, as they must find creative ways to survive amidst hardships.

4.2.17 The theme of stubbornness

From the study, the researcher found out that stubbornness *Kesoe kpakpa so* ‘a hard ear’ is a refusal to change one's attitude, beliefs, or actions. Stubbornness is often

associated with a strong sense of determination and perseverance, but it can also lead to a refusal to consider alternative perceptions. From the study conducted, the theme of stubbornness can be revealed in various ways and contexts, but it generally refers to the unwillingness or resistance to change one's mind or behavior. For example, *Kusoe to kor afuibi* 'To have hairs in the ear', that is to be disobedient.

4.2.18 The theme of carefulness

From the research, most respondents explained that carefulness *Kemu be kepe* 'To hold or catch the head' which means to keep oneself, centered on the notion of being cautious, and deliberate in one's thoughts, actions, and decisions. The importance of paying attention, taking precautions, and considering the potential consequences before proceeding with an action. This theme often addresses the value of carefulness in various aspects of life, such as personal relationships, or moral choices. The chief's spokesman in Kpembe Traditional Council said *Kono jɔɔ kumuni so* which means 'Mouth is on the refused dump' is the need for mindfulness, and attention to detail to avoid mistakes, harm, or regret. Additionally, the theme of carefulness can touch on the idea of self-preservation, both physically and emotionally. For example, *Kamuakuy* 'Protect head', meaning to remain cautious and not cause problems for someone may highlight the significance of self-care, setting boundaries, and being cautious of one's well-being to maintain personal balance and mental health.

4.2.19 The theme of expectation

Gonja people believe that the idea of expecting something from others and making requests of them could depend on the relationship one has with others. From the research conducted, this theme discusses how people rely on each other and how their

expectations and requests can impact their relationships and interactions. For instance, one could say *Me sha ne n nu mobe kɔnɔ to* ‘Seek one’s mouth’ or *Kenya kɔnɔ yul* ‘To get cool/wet mouth’ which is to request one’s opinion or judgment on an issue. It highlights the importance of communication, negotiation, and cooperation in meeting expectations and fulfilling requests. Also, expectations and requests can be seen in various contexts, such as personal relationships, social interactions, etc.

4.2.20 The theme of sacrifice

According to the Gonja people, sacrifice is the act of giving up something of great value or importance for the safety or well-being of others or a higher purpose. For example, *Kelera kumu sarga* ‘To sacrifice oneself’. In the study, it was observed that sacrifice can take various forms, such as putting others' needs before one's own; giving up personal ambitions, desires, or comfort, or even risking one's own life for the sake of others. The theme of sacrifice is often associated with selflessness, compassion, and bravery but can also reflect the darker side of human nature, such as pressure, and manipulation.

4.2.21 The theme of enlightenment

Most respondents explained that the enlightened person *Kenishi buwi* ‘eye open or civilized’, seeks to encounter and modify the existing social, systems that were built around inborn status and privileges, and to promote the principles of right, equality, and independence. The research conducted contributes to the development of a more materialistic and current worldview that emphasizes human progress through the pursuit of knowledge.

4.2.22 The theme of persuasion

This theme is often prominent in society, where people may use different techniques and strategies to persuade others by using *Kudundulɔŋ bebelso* ‘sweet tongue’. In some cases, the act of persuasion can be positive, as when a person encourages others to do the right thing. However, in other cases, persuasion can be negative, such as when a person manipulates others or uses trickery to achieve their goals.

4.2.23 The theme of reluctance

The study reveals that reluctance and avoidance seem to touch on the various ways in which we navigate social situations and make choices, sometimes with a certain indecision. Reluctance and avoidance can manifest in different ways, such as being hesitant to engage in difficult conversations or shying away from making important decisions due to fear or uncertainty. For example, *Kusoe maŋ wɔtɔ* ‘Ear is not in/there’, *Kumu be kepe* ‘To catch the head’. It is a common human experience to oppose these feelings. From the research, the reasons behind reluctance and avoidance can help us gain insight into our behaviors and empower us to make positive changes. Exploring this theme could involve diving into psychological factors like fear of failure or rejection, or examining the consequences of avoiding difficult situations. For example, *Kefor enɔ ashi demu to* ‘To wash hand out of an issue’.

4.3 The contextual usage of idioms in Gonja

This sub-section analyses data related to the contextual usage of Gonja idioms. According to Alati, (2015), the pragmatic use of language requires that the speakers and listeners give specific meaning to words and expressions within applicable situations. Figurative expressions such as idioms, as creative language in use, are

adapted to specific contexts and situations of speech interaction, therefore, context plays a significant role in the meaning and usage of the idiomatic expressions.

4.3.1 The contextual usage of death-related idioms

Globally, death causes anxiety among those directly affected. This fact may make speakers cautious while engaging in conversations about death. It is perhaps for this reason that indirect language is used to capture the emotional finality of death and the beliefs about life beyond death (Apari 2021). In the study, most of the respondents explained that Gonja expresses immortality by portraying death as a temporary state in many forms. It is a journey with an anticipated destination or a momentary sleep from which the deceased will wake up in the next world. Gonja idioms generally tend to euphemistically capture the psychological and emotional strain that results from death occurrences. The efforts to bear and eventually overcome the situations of death are collectively undertaken within the cultural norms of Gonja society. Funeral and burial rites are guided by the cultural norms and beliefs of the society.

According to the respondents, Gonja people have idioms they use to report the death of their people. The expression *E wu* 's/he is dead' is hardly heard by the indigenous Gonja people. The people believe that if one utters the above expression, one is likely to evoke shock in the hearer, especially if the addressee is related to the deceased. The breaking of the news about death uses idioms that metaphorically depict the deceased as one merely resting especially when the person had been suffering from the pain of illness. The expression *Ebɔre bishi mo so* 'God has asked of him/her', *E kii Ebɔre peya* 's/he has become God's own' are idioms used to make a pronouncement of death. The idioms for death collected from the field can be grouped under three

categories. These include: the death of adults, the death of a chief, and the death of children (0-1 years). Below are some idioms relating to the death of an adult/ordinary person:

Example 1:

Ebɔrɛ bish mo so
God asked 3SG FOC
'God has asked of him/her'

Example 2:

E kii Ebɔrɛ peya
3SG become God's own
'He/she has become God's own'

Example 3:

E yɔ ndɔtɔ a maŋ ba.
3SG go farm PROG NEG come
'He/she did not return from the farm'

One of the common Gonja death expressions used when announcing the death of an adult or ordinary person is *Ebɔrɛ bishi mo so*, 'God has asked of him/her', to show that the deceased has only answered God's call. The Gonja believe that people leave the earthly world to join their ancestors in the spirit world. *E yɔ mo nana ana kutɔ* 'to go to the world of ancestors' recognizes another level of human existence. It is believed that the ancestors continue to watch over the living by protecting them from the traps of the devil. It was gathered from the field survey that the passing on of a chief is something that is usually kept secret for some time. Also, because of the status of chiefs, tradition has it that they do not die but transition to another state of

existence in the spirit realm. Idioms for the death of chiefs therefore accord them respect; minimizing the impact of this information on his or her relatives and preventing children from knowing about it too soon, hence beautifying the language using the below idioms. The use of such idioms of death accords some respect and dignity to both the dead individual (deceased) and the family left behind.

Example 4:

Kayi gboŋ tiya

Tree big uprooted

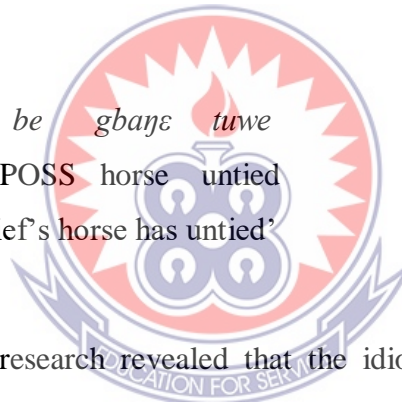
‘The biggest tree has been uprooted/fallen’

Example 5:

Ewura be gbaŋe tuwe

Chief POSS horse untied

‘The chief’s horse has untied’



For the children, the research revealed that the idioms below are used when the woman delivers and immediately loses that baby. When the woman gives birth even for the first day and days that follow before the naming ceremony, the idioms *E laŋe*, ‘He/she has return’ *Nchu muti n wurge* ‘Water has poured’ are appropriate for use when the child is dead before the naming ceremony. Most respondents explained that the use of these idioms consoles the individual whose heart has been troubled with sorrow, especially the parents. This goes a long way to minimize the adverse effects of the trouble being experienced by the mother.

Example 6:

E laɲɛ
3SG return
'He/she has returned'

Example 7:

Nchu muti n wurge
Water move 1SG poured
'Water has poured'

4.3.2 The contextual usage of body-part idioms

The body parts are a rich source of linguistic discourse in the domain of idiomatic expressions. According to Bisilki (2019), the semantic domain of body-part terms (BPTs), also known variously as body-part nouns, body-part words, or body-part names, has proved to be a rich source of input in the linguistic structure and usage of human languages across the world. Lehmann (2017: 2) cited in Bisilki (2019), asserts that because human body parts provide a major means by which human beings execute physical actions and experience physical impressions, these body parts naturally assume an indispensable role in human actions and experiences and, ultimately, in linguistic expressions representing such human actions and experiences.

4.3.2.1 The contextual usage of head-related idioms

In Gonja, the head *Kumu* plays a very significant role in the human body. Apart from the head giving form to the human structure, it is also assumed that it contains life; without the head, the human body is lifeless. The meaning in context is motivated by our knowledge about the head and the fact that the brain, where thinking operations take place is located there. In addition, the head is a container that can contain things.

Concerning spearheading a matter in context, the meaning is motivated by the position of the head as the topmost part of the body hence it is this location of the head that maps the person at the top of an issue. The head is also used to represent a person. Simply, the overall functioning of the human body depends on the head. It is therefore not for nothing that, the majority of the Gonja body-part idioms are related to the head. The cognitive mechanisms involved in the meaning interpretation of the expression include the head standing for the person's metonymy, the head standing for control and the head is a container metaphor. Below are some idioms relating to the head *Kumu* which talks about human disability:

Example 8:

Kanyɛn na be kumu maŋ chuwɔso

Man DET POSS head NEG fix

'The man's head is not fixed'

Kumu, 'the head', is a human organ that carries the brain. It is also responsible for the human psychological processes and mental capacity. The proper functioning of the head ensures rational thinking and sound judgment. One who is thought to be out of one's mind and whose behavior does not exhibit a clear human conscience will be described as *Kumu maŋ chɔ so*, 'head is not fixed'.

Another head idiom that is frequently used by the Gonja is *kumu wieto* which is translated as 'to be mentally derailed'. The expression means 'to be mad'. According to one of the respondents, the same idiom could in another context mean to be in a state of confusion as can be found in example 9b above.

Example 9:

a. *Mumuni be kumu wieto.*

Mumuni POSS head mix-up.

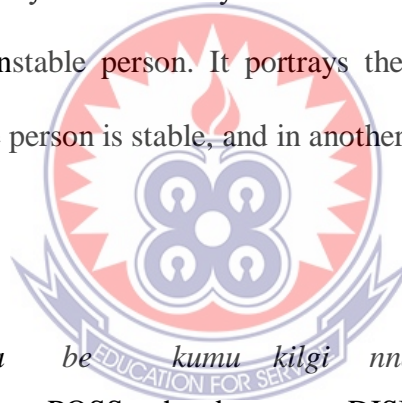
‘Mumuni has a mix-up head’.

b. *Brakumu be kumu wieto saɲɛ nɛ bu tere ma ewurkpa na.*

Brakumu POSS head mix-up time when 3PL called 3SG chief-palace
DET

‘Brakumu’s head mixed up the time they called him at the chief’s palace.’

Another head idiom that has found a place in the discourse is *Kumu kilgi*. This idiom means ‘mental instability’ and literally ‘turned head’. It is used by speakers to describe a mentally unstable person. It portrays the state of mental instability, in which in one sense, the person is stable, and in another time the person is unstable.



Example 10:

Shunkpa be kumu kilgi nna.

Shunkpa POSS head turn DISM

‘Shunkpa’s head has turned’

Another commonly used body-part idiomatic expression in the daily discourse of Gonja society is *Kumu maɲ wɔ epe* ‘Head is not at home’ literally, whose conceptual interpretation is ‘To be mentally derailed/to be extremely foolish’. It is often used to refer to mentally unstable people. In other situations, people who do things in an extremely foolish manner are also described with the same expression.

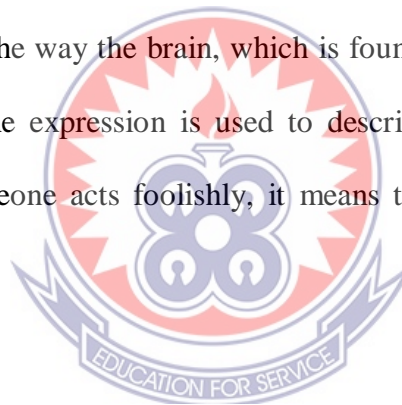
Example 11:

Brakiniso be kumu maŋ wɔ epe
Brakiniso POSS head NEG LOC home
'Brakiniso's head is not home'

Example 12:

Kujɔfɔanyi be kumu maa shuŋ
Kujɔfɔanyi POSS head NEG working
'Kujɔfɔanyi's head is not working'

The idiom *Kumu wu* which means 'a dead head' conceptually means 'intellectual weakness/stupid'. It is assumed that the intellectual level and behavior of an individual depend on the way the brain, which is found in the head, functions. Based on this assumption, the expression is used to describe the state or behavior of an individual. When someone acts foolishly, it means there is a problem with his/her intellectual ability.



Example 13:

Kebia na be kumu wu
Child DET POSS head dead
'The child's head is dead'

Another important idiom in the theme of human disability is *Keba kɔ kekoshimu*. It means 'one is unwilling to carry the load' and literally 'to have a fowl's head'. The nature of the fowl's head makes it impossible to carry anything. It is on this premise that, the head of the fowl is associated with the head of someone who is not always willing to carry a load on his/her head. Therefore, the expression primarily describes people who dislike carrying loads.

Example 14:

Maman be kumu kekoshimu nna
Maman POSS head fowl-head DISM
'Maman's head is a fowl head'

The idiom *Kemaŋ kɔ kumu* means 'to have no head/to be headless' which means 'to be insane/mentally derailed' or 'to have bad luck' in another context. Once the head is perceived to be responsible for the human state of mind, when someone is insane, it means the head has failed to perform one of its major functions; hence making the person lose his/her conscience. Some of the respondents explained that the Gonja assume that wisdom lies in the head, and for one to be headless means, the person has no wisdom or has no stable mind. The expression may also be used to describe an individual who has bad luck in 15b. The expression, in its conceptual interpretation, means 'not to be lucky enough/bad luck. Gonja speakers in conversation regularly use this expression to describe an individual who narrowly misses an opportunity that is considered worthy or good. It is assumed that luck is found in one's head and once the head is tilted, the luck is poured off; hence its attribution to bad luck. The opposite expression is *Kumu maŋ so* 'To raise the head.' This is an act, that boosts another person's self-esteem or makes one proud before the public.

Example 15:

- a. *Gbeadese maŋ kɔ kumu*
Gbeadese NEG has head.
'Gbeadese has no head.'

- b. *Issah maŋ kɔ kumu nɛ beche.*
Issah NEG has head with women.
'Issah has no head with women'.

A child who passes an examination makes the parents proud and so a parent may say *Mabe kebia shine mabe kumu maŋ so* ‘My child has made me proud.’ In English, we may talk of ‘walking with heads high.’ *Kumu maŋ so* ‘to raise one’s head’, in another contextual usage, will mean that one has suddenly become disrespectful. One who disregards or defies authority is described as *E kɔ kumu maŋ so ga*, ‘he raises his head’ or *E kɔ kamuawu* ‘he is head raising’.

Example 16:

E kɔ kamuawu
2PSG have head-raising
‘He/she is head raising’

4.3.2.2 The contextual usage of eye-related idioms (Anishi/kenishi)

One respondent explains that *Keta anishi bɔni n keni* ‘To look at somebody with a bad eye’ is an expression of displeasure at undesirable behavior or unwanted presence. The respondent, adds that it also indicates disapproval.

Example 17:

Mo nanache sa mo anishi lubi
3SG grandmother give.PST 3SG eye.PL bad
‘His/her grandmother gave him/her bad/evil eyes’

It came to light that *Keta anishi bɔni n keni* is usually used to refer to old men and women who are suspected of possessing witchcraft. They are the people who use their *anishi bɔni* bad eyes to look at people they dislike or plan to do evil. *Anishi bɔni* ‘bad eye’ was also explained to be the same as *Anishi lubi* which are usually used interchangeably. The expression *Kesa esa anishi lubi* ‘To give another person evil eyes’ culturally means to bewitch one so that the person could become ill and die.

Example 18:

Awodima be anishi maa shuli mo
Awodima POSS eyes NEG agree 3SG
'Awodima's eyes is not agree her'

Anishi buwi, 'Eyes open' is contextually interpreted as a state of being wise/civilized or smart. To have clear eyes communicates that one is current. The person who is seen as being knowledgeable or civilized is usually described as having his/her eyes open.

Example 19:

Kebia na be kenishi buwi ga
Child DET POSS eye open QUAN
'The child's eye opens too much'

Apart from the descriptive phrases revolving around eyes, elders note that Gonja speakers are keen on the way their looks express emotions and attitudes. The expressions formed from these parts reflect and regulate behavior as speakers communicate for interaction. *Anishi* 'eyes' are sight organs. The constructions from eyes talk about desirable conduct. *Kenishi wol to* 'To be dry-eyed' were explained in one context to mean a lack of respect and being rude toward people who are older than one.

Example 20:

Kpenbɔrɛ be kebia na be kenishi wol to ga
Kpenbɔrɛ POSS child DET POSS eye dry POSTP QUAN
'The child of Kpenbɔrɛ's eyes dry too much'

The dry-eyed idiom is commonly used to comment on the conduct of wives and people considered to be younger or subordinate in social authority. It is common to hear utterances such as *Loŋ be kebia na be kenishi wol to ga* ‘That child is dry-eyed’ towards elders. The idiom is also explained to mean a child who is strong-willed and bold to take initiative.

Example 21:

Kebia ere be kenishi wol to
Child DEM POSS eye dry POSTP
‘This child’s eye is dry’

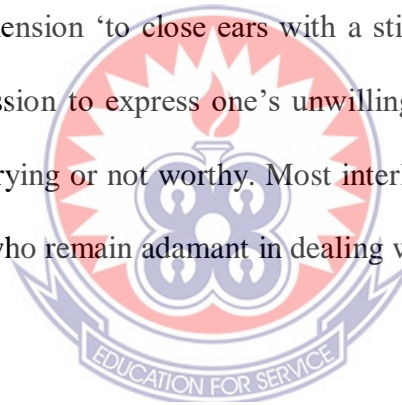
Kebia na be kenishito wol to is also explained to refer to a child who can fearlessly articulate one’s thoughts before an audience”. Another Gonja idiom *kenishito wol to* ‘dry-faced’ is used to portray commendable confidence. One who can stand up to aggression and also fearless in the face of confrontation from peers, or people in authority is thus complemented *Kebia na be kenishito wol to ga* ‘The child has a dry-face’ unlike *Kenishi wol to* ‘Dry-eyed’, is a positive evaluative comment on the fluency and confidence of speakers who are young or thought to be subordinates.

4.3.2.3 The contextual usage of ear-related idioms (*Kusoe/asoe*).

The human ear plays a very crucial role in how human beings communicate around themselves. They are the organs that are responsible for hearing and maintaining equilibrium. For this reason, when someone’s ears fail to function properly, the person is perceived by many to have lost a very valuable asset in terms of communication. Physically, the ears contribute significantly to the beautification of the human make-up. Therefore, it is not for nothing that, human ears have largely gained recognition relative to their usage in idiomatic expressions in the daily lives of

the Gonja society. The discussion on the ear-related idioms that were collected took place on the WhatsApp platform with members of the group with each member giving an example of an idiom and explaining it with a sentence.

The idiomatic expression *Kɔ asoe tentɛŋ* 'To have long ears' is one of the most frequently used idiomatic expressions by speakers in normal conversations. It means 'to have informants or ability to hear/get every information'. In other contexts, people who use different techniques to have access to classified information are also beautifully described with the use of this idiomatic expression. Another expression is *Keburi ndibi n tii asoe* This expression means 'not to listen' or 'not to pay attention to' and in literally dimension 'to close ears with a stick'. To explain, speakers make good use of the expression to express one's unwillingness to pay attention to issues that they consider worrying or not worthy. Most interlocutors also use this to portray the attitude of people who remain adamant in dealing with certain critical issues.



Example 22:

Ewura kike kɔ asoe tentɛŋ
Chief every have ears long
'Every chief has long ears'

Example 23:

Ewura na buri ndibi n tii asoe
Chief DET break sticks 1SG close ears
'The chief has closed his ears with sticks'

Another useful idiomatic expression is *Kebuwi asoe to* which means 'To open one's ears' and conceptually, it means 'to critically pay attention to'. This idiomatic

expression is used in conversation when a speaker intends to introduce an important topic in a discourse. In other contexts, it could also be used when a speaker wants to emphasize an important point. For the listeners to grasp or understand the issue under discussion, speakers employ this idiom to call the attention of their listeners during a conversation.

Example 24:

Mbia na a buwi asoe to n nu
Child.PL DET to open ears POSTP 1SG listen
'The children to open ears and listen'

Another idiomatic expression that is *Kusoe maŋ wɔtɔ*, literally means 'The ear is not here'. To put it conceptually, it means 'to lose concentration or attention'. According to the explanation given by one of the group members, it is used as a communicative tool to describe the attitude of people who lose attention or concentration in an ongoing conversation. The concentration loss may be attributed to several factors; the listener may virtually lose interest or be thinking about other things that he/she deems very important.

Example 25:

Akoso be kusoe maŋ wɔtɔ mfa
Akoso POSS ear NEG in here
'Akoso's ear is not here.'

The idiomatic expression *Asoe bee ful* means 'To listen to fake news' or 'unreal issues' or 'have information from an unreliable source' and literally 'to hear with curvy ears.' Most often, people give information that eventually turns out to be false or unreal. Therefore, this idiomatic expression is used to describe this unpleasant behavior and attitude.

Example 26:

Kache na be asoe bee fule mo
Woman DET POSS ears PROG lie 3SG
'The woman's ears are deceiving her'

Keta asoe n nase kaseto 'To lower one's ears' is also another ear-idiom that Gonja people use in casual speech and it is worthy and has stood the test of time in the communication domain. It means 'To be attentive, observant or listen to obtain information'. The idiom is used by speakers to direct an individual to pay attention to issues around him/her to be able to pick vital information. It may also be used to call an individual to remain attentive to be able to hear something at a far distance, particularly; noise, sounds, and conversation.

Example 27:

Ewura ta fobe asoe n nase kaseto
Chief take 2SG.POSS ears 1SG put down
'Chief put your ears on the ground'

Without any slightest doubt, the idiom *Kusoe to du kpakpa* 'To have a hard ear' is another idiomatic expression that has persistently been used in many communication cycles. It means 'to remain adamant'. In discourse, it is used to describe the behavior of an individual who acts contrary to an acceptable value. In other communication environments, speakers also tend to associate the idiom with people who perpetually remain adamant and engage in acts that they have not been approved to do.

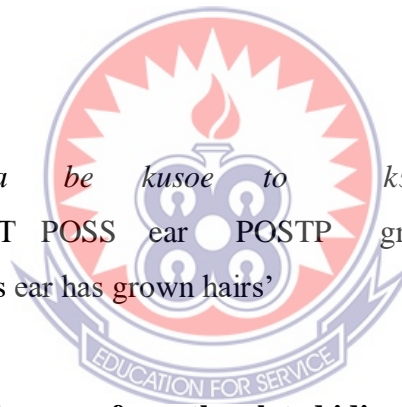
Example 28:

Kebia na be kusoe to du kpakpa ga
Child DET POSS ears POSTP is hard QUAN
'The child's ears are very hard'

Kusoe to kor afuibi is much of a useful idiom that also has commanding linguistic importance that cannot be underestimated. To interpret this conceptually, it means 'To be disobedient' and in the literal sense, 'To have hair in the ear'. Gonja people use this expression to describe the behavior and attitude of a person or a child who constantly remains disobedient and finds it difficult to correct themselves or change for the better.

Example 29:

Kebia na be kusoe to kor afuibi
Child DET POSS ear POSTP grow hairs
'The child's ear has grown hairs'



4.3.2.4 The contextual usage of mouth-related idioms (*Kɔnɔ*)

The oral parts are depicted as the sources of both understanding and misunderstanding among speakers, and expressions revolving around these parts, therefore, emphasize the need to regulate their use. The speakers use *kɔnɔ* 'mouth' in conversations to cover the tongue and teeth as well. There are, however, a limited number of idioms that consider the tongue as an independent part. These expressions regulate the manner speakers use oral parts to foster interpersonal relationships. The expressions package and comment on the speakers' use of body parts in a manner that provides insight into the cultural evaluation of social behavior. In Gonja, speech and silence are

contextually interpreted to serve different purposes determined by the predominant circumstances.

The idiom *Kɔɔ tentɛŋ* ‘A long mouth’ is used to describe one who engages in talks or things that do not concern the person. The expression scolds people who talk in situations where they would ordinarily be silent listeners, especially children.

The idiom *Kɔ kɔɔ tentɛŋ*, ‘To possess a long mouth,’ means that the subject in reference cannot conscientiously use the mouth as socially expected. One who feels irritated by the verbal behavior of another person may say, *Ta fobe kɔɔ ashi ma so* ‘Get your mouth off me’ to express displeasure at the insensitive use of the mouth.

Example 30:

a. *Kebia na kɔ kɔɔ tentɛŋ*

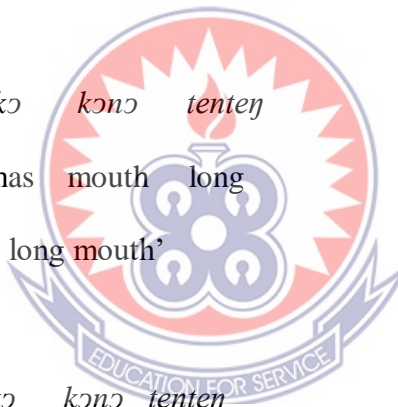
Child DET has mouth long

‘The child has a long mouth’

b. *Dɔŋkɔɔmo kɔ kɔɔ tentɛŋ*

Dɔŋkɔɔmo has mouth long

‘To has a long mouth’



To have a long mouth’, as earlier noted, is a negative evaluative comment on a personality that does not consider the effect of utterances on other people. Such a person is advised by the idiomatic expression *Ba kuu fobe kɔɔ na so* ‘Reduce your mouth.’ This means that one should exercise self-control in the use of one’s mouth. Body part expressions are generally loaded with what Leech (1974:43) refers to as ‘...content that has evaluative affective meaning’. This conceptual meaning is overtly derivable from the speakers’ objective interaction with reality, the affective meaning

is ‘covert, implicit and has something cunning’. Thus, emotions and attitudes associated with idiomatic constructions functionally evaluate social behavior against a set of cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Evaluative utterances are a means of ensuring conformity through social control. Although body-part expressions package messages with certain social evaluations, there are a few that are used as ordinary interactional comments.

Example 31:

Nchɛbɔre kuu fobe kɔnɔ na so
 Nchɛbɔre reduce 2SG.POSS mouth DET FOC
 ‘Nchɛbɔre reduce your mouth’

The idiomatic expression *Ta nchu n wɔtɔ kɔnɔ to* ‘One to put water in one’s mouth’ expresses the need to restrain from talking in situations where speech is likely to aggravate a conflict. The advisory act of the expression depends on the pragmatic knowledge that one cannot speak with water in the mouth. The water metaphor is used to relate ‘the cooling effect’ to the effort of calming or avoiding trouble.

Example 32:

Ndefoso ta nchu n wɔtɔ kɔnɔ to
 Ndefoso take water 1SG put mouth POSTP
 ‘Ndefoso put water into the mouth’

According to one of the respondents, it has been confirmed that an idiomatic expression, *Mabe kɔnɔ jɔŋ kumuni so* ‘My mouth is on the refuse dump’, is a figurative phrase used to condemn any utterance that may sound disrespectful to compromise harmonious co-existence. The idiom notably defies the politeness

principle in the use of language by explicitly referring to a taboo word. This word seems to feature in other idioms in Gonja such as *Kepe kɔnɔ* ‘To hold mouth’ that is, to be careful of one’s utterances. From the idioms collected, lexemes from the Gonja oral parts are structured with verbal and adjectival units to form figurative phrases that activate messages that are interpretable within the various realistic social contexts. Through the use of such idioms, the speakers advise each other on the need to determine and regulate conformist behavior and condemn those who are unable to control their body parts.

Example 33:

Mabe kɔnɔ jɔŋ kumuni so
 My-POSS mouth squats refuse-damp FOC
 ‘My mouth is on the refuse dump’

The idiomatic expression *Kɔnɔ koŋwule* ‘One mouth’ is an expression uttered to express a sense of friendship or unity or when people have agreed to do things together. Apart from verbalizing propositions about the state of affairs of the objective world and expressing their feelings about such affairs, the oral parts are a source of idioms that realize a variety of social acts performed through spoken discourse.

Example 34:

Bu kɔ kɔnɔ koŋwule
 They have mouth one
 ‘To have one mouth’

The idiomatic expression *Kɔnɔ to be kenu*, ‘To seek one’s mouth’, means to request one’s opinion or judgment on an issue. Sometimes a person’s opinion is sought on an issue and the person from whom permission is sought responds in the affirmative by

saying, *N shuli so or ekpa wɔwɔ* ‘I have agreed or permission granted.’ This means that the speaker has permitted the hearer to proceed with the intended action.

Examples 35:

Kenu mobe kɔwɔ to
Hear 3SG mouth POSTP
‘Hear from one’s mouth’

Any person who undertakes an action for which one must seek permission is asked whether one ‘sought the mouth’ of the one in authority, *Fo nya kɔwɔ yul aa?* If the person who holds authority is not consulted to give consent, he may express displeasure over the matter. Such a person may pose the question such as *Wanɛ e sa fo kɔwɔ yul or Wanɛ e sa fo ekpa?* This is translated as ‘Whose ‘mouth’ (permission) did you get?’

In a conversation, ‘the mouth’ idiom can also be used to indicate support for what has been said by an earlier speaker. In the survey when I went to the chief’s palace for data collection, after I had interacted with the chief, and was about to have some discussion with his spokesman, he made this expression: *N ta n chɛ Ewura Gbeadese be kɔwɔ so* ‘May I speak to add to Chief Gbeadese’s mouth’. The literal interpretation is that the spokesman is speaking in support of Chief Gbeadese by taking sides with him or supporting his point/ideas. The reason for taking up another participant’s ‘mouth’ is to concur with the contributor or add a related issue.

Example 36:

a. *E nya kɔwɔ yul*
3SG get mouth wet
‘He/she gets cold mouth’

- b. *Fo nya kɔnɔ yul aa?*
 2SG get mouth wet?
 ‘Did you get wet mouth’

Some idioms were also collected concerning the tongue. According to one of the respondents, the idioms constructed from the tongue are used to encourage controlled verbal interaction that fosters cordial relationships. He adds that idioms, therefore, caution and advise people to weigh and consider the impact of their utterances during social interaction. It was explained that with the idiom, *Keba de kudunduloŋ so* ‘To guard the tongue’ is an expression that reminds the speaker of the need to conceal information and secrets in all circumstances or not to have a loose tongue. A person who many times, uses oral persuasion to convince other people to grant particular favor is described using the tongue idiom, *Keba kɔ kudunduloŋ bebeso* ‘To have possess a sweet tongue’.

Example 37:

Kebia, ba de fobe kudunduloŋ so
 Child be careful 2SG.POSS tongue FOC
 ‘Child, be careful of your tongue’

Example 38:

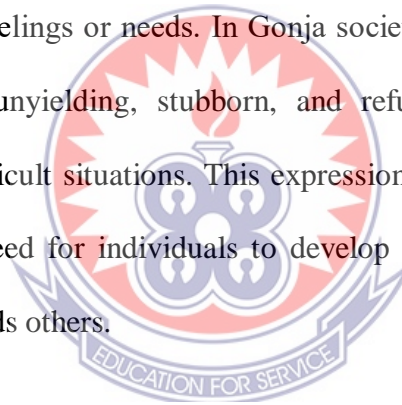
E kɔ kudunduloŋ bebeso
 2SG has tongue sweet
 ‘He/she has a sweet tongue’

4.3.2.5 The contextual usage of Heart and chest-related idioms (*Kagbene*)

In Gonja, *Kagbene* ‘Heart’ is a symbol of love, compassion, peace, and kindness. It is often used to express deep emotion and affection for someone or something. The heart is also a symbol of courage and resilience, as it is seen as strong and capable of

enduring hardships. *Kagbene cheche* so 'Pure heart' is a heart that is filled with love, kindness, and compassion. It is free from all forms of prejudice, selfishness, and hatred. A person with a 'pure heart' is genuinely concerned for the well-being of others and seeks to help them whenever possible. They strive to live a life of integrity, truth, and justice.

A person with *Kagbene kpakpa* so 'A hard heart' is seen as being callous, emotionless, and indifferent to the emotions and needs of others. They may be insensitive to other people's pain, suffering, or struggles, and tend to be unapproachable and aloof. A 'hard heart' may be characterized by selfishness and a disregard for others' feelings or needs. In Gonja society a 'hard heart' may also refer to someone who is unyielding, stubborn, and refuses to show vulnerability or weakness, even in difficult situations. This expression highlights a lack of emotional intelligence and the need for individuals to develop a greater capacity for empathy and compassion towards others.



Example 39:

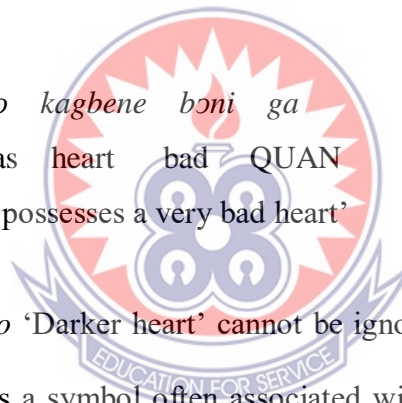
Kanyen na be kagbene du kpakpa ga
Man DET POSS heart is hard QUAN
'The man's heart is very hard'

The term *Kagbene boni* 'Bad heart' has also gained important recognition in the Gonja language, literally and figurative expression. A 'bad heart' may be characterized by selfishness, a disregard for others' feelings or needs. In a literal sense, a 'bad heart' refers to a condition where the heart is not functioning properly. This can include conditions such as heart disease, or heart failure which can be caused

by a variety of factors such as lifestyle choices or genetics. In a figurative sense, a ‘bad heart’ is an expression that describes someone's character or personality. A person with a ‘bad heart’ is seen as being unkind, dishonest, and lacking in empathy. They may engage in behaviors that harm others, such as lying or cheating, or they may be overly critical or judgmental. The concept of a ‘bad heart’ can also extend to a pessimistic person. They may consistently see the worst in people and situations and may spread negative energy to those around them. Therefore, the ‘bad heart’ can refer to both physical and emotional issues, and can have serious consequences for a person's health and well-being.

Example 40:

E kɔ kagbene bɔni ga
3SG has heart bad QUAN
‘He/she possesses a very bad heart’

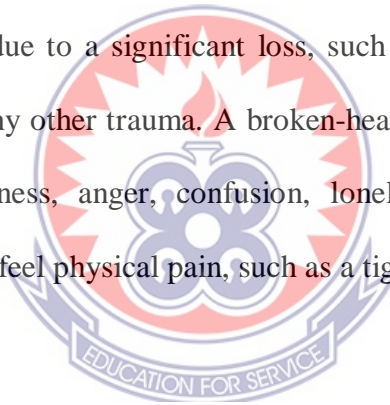


The *Kagbene to nyɔɔso* ‘Darker heart’ cannot be ignored. It is the direct opposite of the ‘white heart’ and is a symbol often associated with negative emotions and traits such as sadness, grief, anger, and evil. It can signify a lack of compassion, empathy, or remorse. In popular culture and symbolism, a ‘darker heart’ can represent darkness, danger, or even death. However, it is important to note that interpretations can vary depending on the context or the cultural background, and some individuals may use a ‘darker heart’ to express personal struggles or to represent strength, secretive and resilience in the face of adversity also one’s always getting his/her way, often resulting in a sense of entitlement and a lack of gratitude or appreciation for what they have.

Example 41:

Enimu Dukulbi be kagbene to nyoo to ga
Elder Dukulbi POSS heart POSTP dark POSTP QUAN
'Elder Dukulbi's heart is very darker'

Kagbene jaje 'Spoil heart' refers to someone unable to handle disappointment or setbacks. This term can also imply a lack of resilience or the ability to cope with challenges or adversity. It is important to note that a 'spoiled heart' is not a medical or psychological term, but rather a colloquial expression used to describe certain behavioral or personality traits. A 'spoiled heart' may also refer to a broken-hearted person in another context. This describes someone who has experienced emotional pain, sorrow, or grief due to a significant loss, such as the death of a loved one, a romantic breakup, or any other trauma. A broken-hearted person may feel a range of emotions such as sadness, anger, confusion, loneliness, helplessness, regret, or despair. They may also feel physical pain, such as a tightness in their chest or throat.



Example 42:

Kache na be kagbene jaje mo
Woman DET POSS heart spoiled 3SG
'The woman's spoiled her'

The term *Kagbene wushi* 'Cool heart' is a commonly used expression in the Gonja language. It could be interpreted depending on the context. The interpretation could suggest a calm or composed demeanor, as 'cool' in this sense can mean unemotional or collected. A 'cool heart' in this sense could describe someone who remains level-headed and calm in the face of stress or pressure. In another sense, it could be describing people who are angry with each other and they are trying to calm their

nerves. This expression can be used to describe one trying to calm down or cool tempers. Overall, the meaning of ‘cool heart’ can vary depending on the context and usage.

Example 43:

a. *Achansah be kagbene wushi mo*
Achansah POSS heart cool 3SG
‘Achansah’s heart cool him’

b. *Nchubɔrɛ be kagbene wushi ga*
Nchubɔrɛ POSS heart cool QUAN
‘Nchubɔrɛ’s heart is very cool’

When someone is in the mood for happiness or success, white clothes are usually worn to complement or portray his/her happiness. The expression is regularly used to describe a person or someone who is always and constantly happy with everything, particularly when he/she opens up for good opportunities and blessings to come to others. In another instance, it is used to portray the goodness and generosity of the individual.

Kagbene fuful ‘White heart’ is a symbol of purity, innocence, and love. It is often used to represent pure and unconditional love, as well as a sense of peace and harmony. In some cultures, the ‘white heart’ is also associated with spiritual purity and enlightenment. Overall, the ‘white heart’ is a positive and peaceful symbol that conveys love and purity.

Example 44:

Amonɛbusa kɔ kagbene fuful ga
Amonɛbusa has heart white QUAN
'Amonɛbusa has a very white heart'

The 'heart' plays a very deep and important role in all aspects of the Gonja people's daily lives. The lexeme for 'Heart' in Gonja is *Kagbene*. The people's understanding of 'heart' is that it is at the center of a person's thoughts and emotions, especially of love. For example, *Kagbene checheso* means 'Pure heart'. *Kagbene kpakpaso* 'Hard heart' is a figurative expression that refers to someone who is unfeeling, cold-hearted, or lacking in compassion and empathy.

Example 45:

Shaibu kɔ kagbene cheche ga
Shaibu has heart pure QUAN
'Shaibu has a pure heart'



4.3.2.6 The contextual usage of Hand-related idioms (*Enɔ*)

The hand *Enɔ* is one of the components of the human anatomy. It plays an important role in the performance of activities of every human being. The main function of the human hand is to reach out and grab something such as food, tools, and handholds that may be of help. Apart from these, the concept of hand in discourse is associated with a variety of meanings. For example; to help, involve, to be part, available, take care of, give, concede, etc.

In the process of giving, *Teŋi enɔ* 'The hand is stretched' out by the giver. If one is unable to stretch the hands, it means nothing can be given. This idiom is frequently used by

Gonja people to depict stinginess and greed. It is also very common to hear the expression being used to show one's unwillingness to support. In a situation where one is seeking assistance be it financially or in kind, from someone whom one thinks can offer one such assistance but the person is not willing to support, that idiom can be used to describe the stinginess of the person.

Example 46:

E maa teji enɔ.
3SG NEG stretch hand
'He/she is not stretching the hand'

Another interesting and important idiomatic expression is *Enɔto du kpakpa* which means 'To be stingy/unwillingness to give out'. In a literal sense, it means 'to possess a hard hand'. Certain individuals in society have difficulty in giving out or supporting others. Speakers employ this idiomatic expression to describe their behavior without incurring their anger or feelings. In some extreme situations, the expression could also be used to express the attitude of those who by far do not even want to use their resources for their good. A person who does not share resources in adequate measures is said to have *Enɔ kpakpa so* 'A hard hand'.

Example 47

- a. *Shekere enɔ kpakpa so wura*
Shekere hand hard FOC owner
'Shekere hard hand owner'
- b. *Kajɔne be enɔ to du kpakpa ga*
Kajɔne POSS hand POSTP is hard QUAN
'Kajɔne's hand is very hard'

The idiom *Enɔ bee teji* ‘Stretching hands’ is used to describe people who generously share whatever they have. The speaker who wishes to request that an offer be increased says *Ba teji enɔ gbre* ‘Stretch your hand a little further’ to mean that one should improve the offering of whatever one has.

Example 48:

Kowurnyan Biikunuto bee teji enɔ
Mr. Biikunuto is stretching hand
‘To be stretching hands’

Another hand-idiom that has a very significant recognition is *Ke tuu achɔl n wɔtɔ enɔ to or Enɔ to kɔ nchu* ‘Hand have water’ which means ‘bless’ and literally ‘to spit saliva into someone’s hand’. Speakers use this expression when they offer prayers and want to appreciate someone who has done something good or worthy to the individuals, persons, or society. It is believed that the progress and promotion of an individual lies in the hands of God. Therefore, this expression is largely used when the intervention of God is sought to lift someone above all odds so they can attain a higher level than expected.

Example 49:

Ebɔrɛ tuu achɔl n wɔtɔ mobe enɔ to
God spite saliva 1SG LOC 2SG.POSS hand POSTP
‘God spite saliva into his/her hand’

The act and practice of offering support is a phenomenon that is largely accepted in the Gonja society. The idiomatic expression *Kewɔtɔ enɔ* is a hand-related idiom that is interpreted as ‘to help or offer support’ and literally ‘to put hands’. The expression

is used to describe an act of giving support to someone. The support may be financial, physical, or material as illustrated in the example below.

Example 50:

a. *Kanyɛn na wɔtɔ kebia na ɛnɔ*
Man DET puts child DET hand
'The man has put hand the child'

b. *E wɔtɔ ɛnɔ kumo to*
3SG puts hand it POSTP
'He/she has put hand in it'

The idiomatic expression *Wɔtɔ ɛnɔ* means 'to be fully involved or part' and literally 'The hand is deep in the matter'. It is used to portray the actions of persons who have fully engaged themselves in an activity or event. In some cases, when this expression is used, the activity is purported to be bad or unpleasant. In another situation, *wɔtɔ ɛnɔ* could mean that one is being invited to partake in a meal.

The idiomatic expression *Kemaŋ ta ɛnɔ n wɔtɔ* literally 'Not put hands in something' is also a recognized idiomatic expression among the Gonja. It means 'To be partially involved/not to be serious about something or an issue'. In certain situations, people who find themselves in jobs or activities do not attend to or do them with all the seriousness they deserve. Speakers in their normal conversations describe the attitudes of such people with the use of this idiomatic expression.

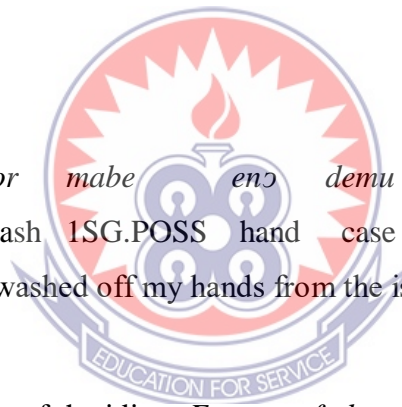
Example 50:

c. *Kanyiti maŋ wɔtɔ mobe ɛnɔ kushuŋ na to*
Kanyiti NEG put 3SG.POSS hand work DET POSTP
'Kanyiti did not put her hand into the work'

The idiomatic expression *Kefor enɔ* ‘To wash one’s hands out’ literally means ‘To distance oneself from problem or trouble to show no interest anymore’. The expression is predominantly used in describing the actions and attitudes of people who have previously engaged themselves in some activities and upon reflection, want to distance themselves by washing off their hands. It is used by speakers when they feel that, the affected person stands the chance of benefiting nothing from the activities he is undertaking. They may also foresee that those at the center of the discourse will not benefit from the said activity. It is much more used as a signal by speakers to caution themselves or others to stay away from issues that may give them trouble or affect them negatively.

Example 51:

N for mabe enɔ demu na to
 1SG wash 1SG.POSS hand case DET POSTP
 ‘I have washed off my hands from the issue’



The impact of the usage of the idiom *Enɔ maa fo kaman* cannot also be overlooked in conversations. This idiom means ‘to be in abject poverty’ or ‘one’s inability to stretch the hand behind the back’. In the line of the communication chain, poverty is associated with this expression. It is employed to demonstrate one’s inability to sufficiently provide his/her needs, do nothing, unable to be self-dependent. It has more to do with a lack of financial resources or, better still, resources that can keep one going.

Example 52:

Mobe enɔ maa fo kaman
3SG.POSS hand NEG reach back
'His/her hand does not reach his/her back'

Enɔ fulon 'To be empty handed', literally is another idiom that occurs in everyday conversation of the Gonja society. The expression means 'to be poor'. One of the concepts associated with the hand is to keep one's resources. The emptiness in this expression is therefore directly used to show the state of the individual's inability to afford or the state of an individual who has nothing in terms of finances. If the hands are empty, it means the person cannot afford to be perceived by society.

Example 53:

E tase enɔ fulon
3SG sit hand empty
'He/she sits empty-handed'



A person who is easily provoked into a fight is said to have *Enɔ du fuwofuwobi* 'a light hand'. This means that the person is quick to physically react to any provocation. A furious person could warn a listener by using the phrase *Meeɲ sa fo enɔ boni*, 'I will give you bad hands' to mean that one is being provoked and could cause harm to the listener.

Example, 54:

Meeɲ sa fo enɔ bonɛ
FUT give 2SG hand bad
'I will give you bad hand'

In Gonja, *Enɔ tentɛŋ* is another idiomatic expression that means ‘To have long hands’ which abstractly means, ‘to be a thief’. This idiom is used in a communication environment or situation that describes someone who is a thief. In the Gonja society, people curse and frown upon stealing and thievery. Because of this, speakers normally choose to use the expression over the word ‘thief’ to reduce the communication injury of the use of the word *eyu* ‘a thief’. The idiom, *Enɔ tentɛŋ*, ‘A long hand’ refers to an individual who steals, in the sense that one stretches the hand to get other people’s properties. To say that one has a long hand is therefore to imply that one is a thief.

Example 55:

Jamjɛ be enɔ wɔ tɛŋ
Jamjɛ POSS hand LOC long
‘*Jamjɛ* has long arms/hands’

4.3.2.7 The contextual usage of Stomach-related idioms (*Epun*)

Generosity refers to the act of being kind, open-hearted, and giving, it is a willingness to share time, resources, or wealth without expecting anything in return. Generosity is often associated with selflessness and empathy, as it involves putting the needs of others before one’s own. It is considered a virtuous trait that promotes compassion, gratitude, and positive social interactions. Therefore, body-part idioms that depict the theme of generosity are: stomach, heart, and hand. Generally, the stomach performs the core function as a reservoir for the reception of food. In human anatomy, the stomach is located between the chest and the pelvis. This brief description of the concept of the stomach is not different from how the Gonja know about the physical structure of the stomach. Because of the crucial value of the stomach as a body component, it is featured in most idioms of the Gonja language. Among the Gonja,

the word ‘stomach’ in idioms performs some functions like: keeping, a portrayal of one’s state of thinking, hunger, and hard work.

The stomach-related idiomatic expression *Keta epun n deji esa so* literally ‘To put one’s stomach on someone else’, means ‘To rely on someone to be fed’. The expression is always used in conversation to describe the actions of those who by their statutes rely on others to be fed. It is mostly used when the individual is noted to be lazy or those who cannot afford it.

Example 56:

Mobe epun deji kanyen na so
3SG.POSS stomach on man DET FOC
‘His/her stomach is on the man’

The idiomatic expression *Epun to bee gbiri* ‘The stomach is crying’ is also used when one is hungry. It is believed to be an embarrassment among Gonja for an adult to openly disclose his/her hunger. For this reason, speakers fall on this indirect expression to carry their messages across without attracting the embarrassment that is associated with openly declaring one’s hunger in public.

Example 57:

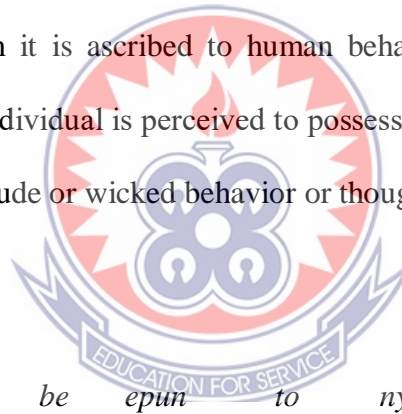
Mabe epun to bee gbiri
1SG.POSS stomach POSTP PROG upset
‘My stomach is complaining’

The relevance of the stomach idiomatic expression *Epun to fiful* literally ‘To possess a white stomach’, cannot be left untouched. It means ‘To be good’. Among the Gonja people, one of the meanings ascribed to the color white is ‘happiness’.

Example 58:

Kanyɛn na kɔ epun to fiful ga.
1SG DET POSS stomach POSTP white QUAN
‘The man’s stomach is very white’

Again, the idiom *Epun to nyɔɔ* abstractly means ‘To be wicked/not open up’ and literally ‘To have a black stomach’. Black is a color that is perceived by Gonja to be bad or not good when it is ascribed to human behavior, attitude, personality, and thought. So, once an individual is perceived to possess ‘a black stomach’ the person is seen to have a bad attitude or wicked behavior or thought.



Example 59:

Dukulbi be epun to nyɔɔ
Dukulbi POSS stomach POSTP black
‘Dukulbi’s stomach is black’

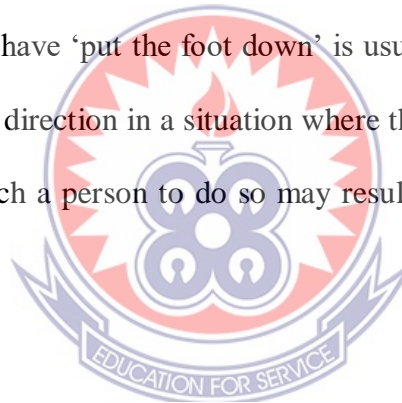
The idiom *Epun maa chela afuu* means ‘The stomach does not take the break’ which conceptually means ‘To easily become hungry’ or ‘Always wanting to eat’. Under normal conditions, an individual is expected to eat at regular intervals. So, for one to always keep asking for food shows that there is a problem. Speakers relate this situation to describe individuals who have the natural feeling of easily becoming hungry or, better still, people who love to eat at all times. It is however used as a derogatory remark to chastise those people who fall under this category.

Example 60:

Mapuchi be mbia ere be epun maa chela afuu.
Mapuchi POSS child.PL these POSS stomach NEG breeze air
'This Mapuchi's children's stomach does not take a break'

4.3.2.8 The contextual usage of leg-related idioms (*Keya*)

Keya 'the leg' is used to refer to the part comprising the foot, and ankle and extends to the knee. Some idioms were collected during the survey from the selected participants. The example below talks of falling into someone's legs. This body organ symbolizes stability and focus in making decisions on crucial matters. *Keyili keya so* 'to put one's foot down' is used to mean to remain firm and take decisive action. The speaker who is said to have 'put the foot down' is usually the person who is required to provide the ultimate direction in a situation where there are competing positions on a matter. Failure of such a person to do so may result in confusion and social event stalling.



Example 61:

Kanyen na yili kiya so.
Man DET stand leg FOC
'The man stands on the leg'

The idiomatic expression *Keyili keya koywule so* 'to stand on one foot', is to be uncertain of a position one is taking. The person who appears undecided on whatever course of action or the position to take is said to be 'standing on one foot'. In this context, one may change one's mind and therefore 'stand on the other foot'.

Example 62:

Chɔdoŋ be eche yili kiya koŋwule so.
Chɔdoŋ POSS wife stand leg one FOC
'Chɔdoŋ's wife stands on one leg'

Once one has taken a particular definite position on a matter, the expression, *Keyili aya so* 'To stand on legs' is used. In other contexts, *Keyili aya so* 'To stand on legs' is used to indicate that an individual is capable of getting things done.

Example 63:

- a. *Kasheŋeba yil aya so*
Kasheŋeba stand leg.PL FOC
'Kasheŋeba is standing on legs'
- b. *Kasenyi yil mobe aya so*
Kasenyi standing 2SG.POSS leg.PL FOC
'Kasenyi stand on his legs'

Another idiom constructed from *kiya* 'foot' is *Keyili to* 'To step into an issue'. This utterance means to offer assistance or help acting on an issue that gets one's attention. 'To step into an issue' is to be concerned about taking action on an issue that concerns or is pointed out to someone. The speakers are encouraged to emulate the positive deeds of those people they interact with

Example 64:

Kanyɛn na yili demu na to
Man DET stand issue DET POSTP
'The man stood in the issue'

Ke tɔr aya to 'To fall into someone's legs or feet' depicts humility before those in positions of authority or have the capacity to assist. Someone seeking to be pardoned

or asking for a particular favor could be urged by the expression “*Ya tɔr mobe aya to*” ‘Go and fall into his legs.’ The addressee will not get anywhere close to the lap. It figuratively means that one should plead with politeness and humility for forgiveness after wayward behavior or for a favor.

Example 65:

Anye tɔr fobe aya to
2PL fall 2SG.POSS leg.PL POSTP
‘We fall into your legs’

The Gonja idiomatic expression *Kechichi kiya so*, ‘To step onto someone’s foot,’ was explained to mean, ‘provoking one by talking about the most sensitive and secured secret touching on the individual’. This recognizes that people have certain unknown bits of information that are ‘hidden’. To disclose such secretive information about an individual is to provoke one’s anger. The expression relates to the politeness principle that requires that the speakers attempt to remain sensitive to the listeners’ feelings in the use of language for social interaction. Such Gonja idioms discourage verbal behavior that is considered an interference with the private lives of others. In another situation, the idiom could mean that one has been informed about the information or an issue he/she does not know about.

Example 66:

a. *E chichi mobe kiya so*
2SG step 2SG.POSS leg FOC
‘S/he step on his/her leg’

Example 66:

- b. *Kanyɛn na chichi Ewura na be keya so*
 Man DET step Chief DET POSS leg FOC
 ‘The man step on the Chief’s leg’

4.3.2.9 The contextual usage of gender stereotype-related idioms

Language is a powerful tool for creating and revealing social categories (Hudson, 1996). The distinct roles of males and females are partly defined by the cultural orientation that is transmitted through and by the gender-based differences in the use of language. Whereas sex distinctions are based on predetermined biological differences, gender, as one of the categories that control social behavior, is a product of cultural socialization (Wardhaugh, 1986:128). Gender as a social category is embedded in the communicative practice and use of idioms as linguistic forms. There are indeed idioms in Gonja that depict social roles and relationships as defined by gender differences. The Gonja society is a patriarchal community, with men expected to take a central role in the leadership and organization of social units and cultural activities. Women, on the other hand, are culturally socialized into passive submissive roles. This gender-based differentiation is embedded within the ideological worldview of the speakers; the set of beliefs that rationally explains and assesses behavior.

Gender ideology is the set of beliefs that govern people’s participation in the gender order, and by which they explain and justify that participation. Gender ideologies differ concerning such things as the nature of male and female, and the justice, the naturalness, the origins, and the necessity of various aspects of the gender of the gender order. Ideologies differ on whether the difference is fundamental, whether it should be maintained, and whether it can or it should be maintained without

inequality, the maintenance of the gender order is a moral imperative, whether because it is of divine origin or simply because it is embedded in convention. The study of Gonja idioms demonstrates that social responsibilities and expectations are structured along these gender differences. This subsection illustrates the idioms that reinforce gender-based cultural inequality and depict the cultural constraints on the separate behavior of men and women. An informant, notes that discourse on the domain of child-bearing implicitly relies on euphemistic idioms because any direct references to procreation among Gonja speakers tend to be considered impolite and are believed to bring bad luck to the newborn baby.

Pregnancy which is a prelude to procreation is considered an important stage in the life of every Gonja woman. Every married couple in the Gonja society is expected to give birth. It is the wish of every parent that their daughters get married successfully, be pregnant, and give them grandchildren. The man's parents also pray and ask their ancestors to bless their daughter-in-law with the fruit of the womb. These prayers are mostly said during the marriage ceremonies. Due to the importance attached to it, the procreative process is considered valued and important and must be respected. It is assumed that during pregnancy, various devilish spirits can harm the unborn child. They can afflict the unborn child and the pregnant woman with some diseases. According to Agyekum (2010), as cited in Apari (2021), pregnancy is a matter of life and death. A pregnant woman may either labor successfully and come back to life or may lose her life during the labor period. Gonja people have a strong belief in witchcraft. Therefore, upon hearing that someone makes a literal reference to it by saying *E di kedampo* 'She is pregnant'. It is believed that the spirits and witches could interfere to abort the pregnancy. According to another respondent, if one says that

Kache na di kedampo, ‘The woman is pregnant’ an evil one would trouble the unborn child with diseases. This therefore may lead to the child being born with diseases and dying later. Below are some examples of pregnancy idioms used contextually.

In a marriage, women have a cultural role of procreation. Gonja has idioms that capture the female reproductive function from conception to childbirth. *Ke pε afuu*, with the literal translation as ‘To catch the air’, as one informant said, refers to the act of a woman conceiving a baby. When a woman is pregnant, the expression *Kewɔɔ egbε*, ‘To be heavy’ is used to describe her state and that has been illustrated in examples (67) and)68) below respectfully.

Examples 67:

Kache na pε afuu
Woman DET catch air
‘The woman catch air’



Example 68:

E wɔɔ egbε
3SG do heavy
‘She is heavy’

Among the Gonja people, the transition period between the labor and delivery is considered very delicate and everyone is prevented from entering into the labor room except the local midwife and maybe some elderly women in the house till the time the woman delivers a baby. During this period children are also prevented from entering the labor room. This period ends when they hear the voice of the baby and then finally an elderly woman or the local midwife officially draws their attention by saying *Ebɔrε*

lera mo meaning ‘God has remove her’ and then let them know the sex of the baby. There will be so much joy and happiness in the family, but a new and important stage begins again. To avoid the spread of the news of the delivery by children the above expression is used.

One of the informants in the study holds the view that an expectant mother carries a baby on behalf of the clan and hence the pregnancy could be considered as luggage or weight. The whole duration of nine months is a journey that ends when the woman delivers the baby. At this point, the idiom *Ebɔɛ lera mo*, ‘God has removed her’ is used to refer to the ultimate birth, and that is the theme of deliverance.

Example 69:

Ebɔɛ lera mo
God remove 2SG
‘God has removed her’



In Gonja, there is a hoe metaphor for the penis, whereby the erected penis by its shape and function is equated to a hoe, ready to be used on the farm or work. It may be branded as *wu* ‘dead’ when it is not functioning, but due to the embarrassment it may bring to the individual, the hoe metaphor is used to minimize the shame and to prevent children from knowing the topic of discussion by employing the idiom *Kanasebi tɔr nchu to* ‘A hoe fall inside water’ to mean an impotent person.

Example 70:

Mobe kanasebi tɔr nchu to
3SG hoe fall water POSTP
‘His hoe falls into water’

The expressions, that is impotence and barrenness among the Gonja, are known to result from witchcraft. The idiom *Mobe kanasebi tor nchu to* ‘His hoe has fallen inside water’, refers to an impotent man. Failed manhood is a metaphorical falling into the water in the Gonja culture. A barren and impotent man is said to have been ‘tied up’, *Bu shuŋ mo kushuŋ* or *Kejembu dese mobe epun to*. This results from the acts of juju by the evil-minded people in society.

Example 71:

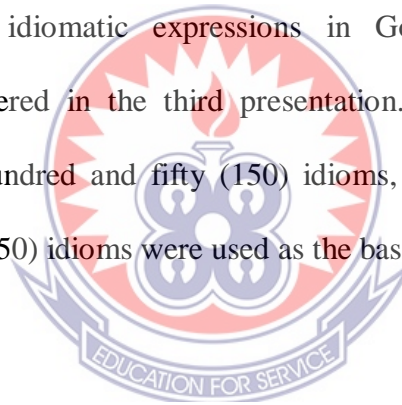
- a. *Bu shuŋ mo kushuŋ nna*
3SG do 3SG work DISM
‘They do him/her work’
- b. *Kejembu dese mobe epun to*
Stone lying 3SG stomach POSTP
‘A stone is lying in her stomach’

Among Gonja people, menstruation is considered a filthy thing and the woman in her menstrual period is therefore considered unclean *Kemaŋ wale so* ‘Not clean’ and usually prevented from mingling freely with the people in the house, especially men. Therefore, women try to handle themselves and avoid doing certain domestic duties that may affect their husbands or other men in the house during that period. According to one of the female respondents for the study, the Gonja men, especially those who deal with spirits and medicine, try as much as possible to avoid a menstruating woman. The research reveals that men may not eat food prepared by a menstruating woman or drink water from her hands which means the woman will be preparing her food separately because she does not eat with people *E maa ji baasa*

‘She does not eat people’. Men are also forbidden from having sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, an examination and discussion of the data acquired during the research were descriptively presented in this chapter. This chapter provides solutions to the research questions, in which the categories of Gonja idioms are examined in the first part: (death and burial-related, body-part-related, and gender/social interactional-related idioms), the thematic classification of Gonja idioms was the subject of the second presentation: (themes such as generous, greed, unity, distress, etc.), and the contextual usage of idiomatic expressions in Gonja discourse and everyday conversation was covered in the third presentation. The data was presented and examined with one hundred and fifty (150) idioms, that were gathered during the research, (73) of the (150) idioms were used as the basis of the analysis.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the research. It takes into account the research questions that the study sought to explain. The chapter also touches on the conclusions, findings, and recommendations for future considerations by others, taking into account the area of study. The study accounted for the contextual analysis of Gonja idioms. The study took place in the East Gonja Municipality of the Savannah Region of Ghana, (Abrumase, Akamade, and Kpembe). To accomplish the research objectives, three specific objectives were posed. These research objectives are to examine the categories of idioms, the thematic classification of idiomatic expressions in Gonja, and the usage of idiomatic expressions in context.

5.1 Summary of major findings

Generally, the linguistic competence of every speaker depends on how rightly or properly the individual makes use of idioms in the language to tone down messages that are considered harsh or inappropriate in a more acceptable manner or better still attenuate the effects of their inappropriateness in discourse. Below are some of the findings of this study:

- ❖ From the one hundred and fifty (150) idioms collected, it was found that the body-part-related idioms are significantly greater than the other categories. This was witnessed when the researcher attempted to categorize the idioms into various themes for easy analysis but that does not dispute the fact that the other categories of Gonja idioms are not relevant or used in everyday conversations among the Gonja people.

- ❖ It was also observed that the meaning of the idiomatic expressions has a direct or indirect relationship with the state of mind. and the level at which the body parts function. It was also very intriguing to notice that, some of the idioms are also frequently used relative to good and bad luck and the rate at which an individual progresses or succeeds in life.
- ❖ Through the study, it was also found that body-part-related idioms contribute significantly to describing the state of the individual mildly and acceptably without committing a communication injury in the process of discourse.
- ❖ It was again realized that the use of the idioms in varying contexts reflects the native speakers' grasp of their social reality that encompasses their interactional relationships and the cultural prisms of domains that characterize their co-existence in a speech community.
- ❖ The contextual study further demonstrated that the Gonja idioms regulate the behavior and interactions of the speech community for social harmony, cultural continuity, and communal co-existence. This regulatory function of Gonja idioms is realized in conversational utterances that serve various speech acts of social control through positive and negative evaluation of behavior.
- ❖ The study also found that the use of idiomatic expressions among the Gonja people made the language very difficult for children and non-natives to comprehend since most of the idiomatic expressions are used with the motive that the children and non-natives around should not understand what the elders are communicating about in their presence. That is seen most when the elders are going to talk about some sensitive issues or talk about some other person in the presence of the children or non-native speakers.

5.2 Conclusions

- It is concluded that Gonja idioms project the people's cultural beliefs and perpetuate the norms and values of the speakers in their mutual interactive use of language. The Gonja idiomatic utterances regulate people's behavior for harmonious co-existence. The composition and comprehension of the idioms are therefore context-dependent in realizing deliberate acts that control social interaction.
- In general, the idiomatic expressions that were gathered during the study significantly enriched the Gonja language and the culture as a whole. It is on these grounds that, speakers or people who frequently make use of idiomatic expressions in their speeches are perceived to be communication experts and command respect in society.
- It is also important to note that the beauty of the Gonja language partly depends on the use of idioms. However, even though body part idioms have gained much recognition in the communication space, they exist not without many challenges in terms of usage and interpretation. Some respondents or participants had challenges in using the idioms properly and interpreting them conceptually.
- In summary, idioms are part and parcel of the Gonja people and continue to play a very significant role in their daily communication and interaction.

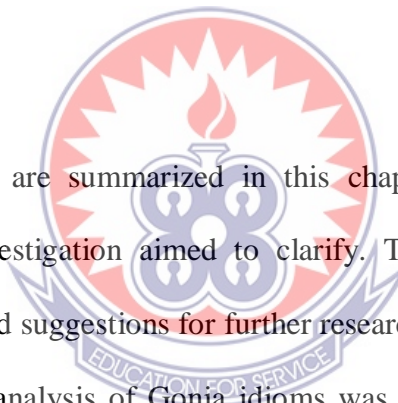
5.3 Recommendations

Having undertaken the study of Gonja idioms I have noticed certain limitations and wish to make the following recommendations: From the study, there is still much to be done as far as Gonja idiomatic expressions are concerned. This study only focused

on the contextual analysis of idioms which included human body parts: the hands, the head, the mouth, the ears, the eyes, the stomach, the legs the heart, and the tongue, death-related and social/gender-related. It is recommended that future studies be carried out on the other systems of Gonja idioms such as their syntactic structure. Additionally, future studies could be carried out on the full analysis of the semantic aspect of Gonja idioms. Furthermore, the investigation between idioms and other levels of indirect language could provide an enriching understanding of language and linguistics which makes it an area to be researched in the future. I also, recommended that research could be done on the aesthetic analysis of Gonja idiomatic expressions in the future.

5.4 Chapter summary

The research findings are summarized in this chapter. It considers the research questions that the investigation aimed to clarify. The chapter also discusses the results, conclusions, and suggestions for further research, keeping the field of study in mind. The contextual analysis of Gonja idioms was taken into consideration in the study.



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APPENDIX A

S/N	Idioms	Literal translation
DEATH-RELATED GONJA IDIOMS		
1	<i>Ebɔrɛ bishi mo so</i>	'God has asked of him/her'
2	<i>Kii Ebɔrɛ peya</i>	'S/he has become God's'
3	<i>Yɔ ndɔɔto a maŋ ba</i>	'S/he has not returned from the farm'
4	<i>Kayigboŋ tiya</i>	'The biggest tree has fallen/uprooted'
5	<i>Ta kato n gbesa</i>	'S/he has learned a spoon'
6	<i>Yɔ mo nanaana kutɔ</i>	'S/he has gone to the world of ancestors'
7	<i>Kilgi anishi n shonji egbel</i>	'S/he has turned the face against the wall'
8	<i>Ewura be gbaŋɛ tuwe</i>	'The chief's horse has untied'
9	<i>Maŋ koso edi to</i>	'S/he did not wake up from sleep'
10	<i>A maŋ wɔtɔ</i>	'S/he is no more/ not around'
11	<i>Kii pantɛ n dɔɔ n tii</i>	'Become cricket and dig to close'
12	<i>Kepaŋte to</i>	'To burst into'
13	<i>E laŋɛ</i>	'S/he has returned'
14	<i>Nchu muti n wurge</i>	'Water has poured out'
15	<i>For n wurge</i>	'To wash out'
16	<i>Ɖana mo</i>	'To hide him/her'
17	<i>Fin mobe edesekpa</i>	'To find him/her a resting place'
BODY PART-RELATED GONJA IDIOMS		
18	<i>Kumu maŋ chuwoɔso</i>	'Head does not connect'
19	<i>Kumu wie to</i>	'Head mixed up'
20	<i>Kumu maŋ wɔ epe</i>	'Head is not home'
21	<i>Kumu maa shuŋ</i>	'Head is not working'
22	<i>Kumu wuso</i>	'Dead head'
23	<i>A la kekoshimu</i>	'To be fowl's head'
24	<i>Kemaŋ kɔ kumu</i>	'To be headless'
25	<i>Kebaa kɔ kumu</i>	'To possess head'
26	<i>Kefor kumu to n ler</i>	'To wash onto the head and remove'
27	<i>Keŋini kamuawu</i>	'To show off head'
28	<i>Kamu a tiŋ</i>	'Head swollen'
29	<i>Kumu maŋ so</i>	'Raising head on'
30	<i>Kumuto leŋ</i>	'Strong head'
31	<i>Keta amu m ŋmia abar</i>	'To hit heads against each other'
32	<i>Kelera kumu sarka</i>	'To remove head sacrifice'
33	<i>Kumu be kepe</i>	'To hold the head'
34	<i>Kumu wɔ awule to</i>	'Head is on top'
35	<i>Anishi lubi</i>	'Bad eyes'
36	<i>Anishi maa shuli</i>	'Eyes do not agree'
37	<i>Keta anishi n deŋi so</i>	'To put eyes on'
38	<i>Kenishi wol to</i>	'To have dry face'
39	<i>Kenishi to leŋ</i>	'To have a hard/strong face'
40	<i>Wɔtɔ kenishi</i>	'To put eye'
41	<i>Kenishi buwi</i>	'Eyes open'
42	<i>Kelera kenishi</i>	'To remove eyes'

43	<i>Kusoe wɔ nteŋ</i>	'Long ear'
44	<i>Kebuwi asoe to</i>	'To open ears into'
45	<i>Buri ndibi n tii asoe</i>	'Put sticks into ears'
46	<i>Kusoe maŋ wɔtɔ</i>	'Ears are not there/around'
47	<i>Asoe be kefulɛ</i>	'Ears is deceiving'
48	<i>Kebar kusoe kaseto</i>	'To bring ear down'
49	<i>Kewɔtɔ kusoe</i>	'To put ears'
50	<i>Kegberge kusoe</i>	'To pull the ear'
51	<i>Kusoe to du kpakpa</i>	'To possess a hard ear'
52	<i>Kusoe to kɔr afuibi</i>	'To grow hair in the ear'
53	<i>Kɔ asoepe</i>	'Ears possess holes'
54	<i>Keji asoe to</i>	'To eat into ears'
55	<i>Keta n chɛ kɔnɔ so</i>	'To take and connect to the mouth'
56	<i>A kɔ kɔnɔ tentɛŋ</i>	'S/he possesses a long mouth'
57	<i>Kelute kɔnɔ to</i>	'To dig out one's mouth'
58	<i>Kɔnɔ be kekuuso</i>	'To reduce the mouth'
59	<i>Keta n wɔrɔ kɔnɔ kelela</i>	'To take and do good to the mouth'
60	<i>Nchu wɔ kɔnɔ to</i>	'Water is in the mouth'
61	<i>Kɔnɔ maŋ kɔ buuso</i>	'The mouth doesn't have a cover/lid'
62	<i>Keta kɔnɔ ashi so</i>	'To take mouth off on'
63	<i>Kɔnɔ jɔŋ kumuni so</i>	'The mouth is on a refuse dump'
64	<i>Kɔnɔ koŋwule</i>	'One mouth'
65	<i>Kɔnɔ to be kenu</i>	'To hear in one's mouth'
66	<i>Kenya kɔnɔ yul</i>	'To get mouth wet'
67	<i>Kɔnɔ bee wule</i>	'Mouth is itching'
68	<i>Kudunduloŋ bebelso</i>	'Sweet tongue'
69	<i>Adunduloŋbi maa beso</i>	'The tongue is not following'
70	<i>Enɔ maa teji</i>	'The hand is not stretching'
71	<i>Enɔ to du kpakpa</i>	'To possess a hard hand'
72	<i>Enɔ maa buwi</i>	'Not open hand'
73	<i>Enɔ be ketɛŋi</i>	'To stretch hand'
74	<i>Enɔ to kɔ nchu</i>	'Hands possess water'
75	<i>Kewɔtɔ enɔ</i>	'To put hands'
76	<i>Kefor enɔ</i>	'To wash of hands'
77	<i>Kelera enɔ ashi to</i>	'To remove hands out'
78	<i>Enɔ maa fo kaman</i>	'Hands do not reach the back'
79	<i>Enɔ maa choŋ lɔŋkɔŋ to</i>	'Hand doesn't enter into calabash'
80	<i>Kechina enɔ fuloŋ</i>	'To sit empty-handed'
81	<i>Enɔ du fuwofuwobi</i>	'Hands is too quick'
82	<i>Kɔ enɔ tentɛŋ</i>	'To possess long-hand'
83	<i>Keta kataboŋi</i>	'To take solely'
84	<i>Keta enɔ n kpa atan</i>	'To take a hand throw slap'
85	<i>Kagbene kpakpa so</i>	'Hard heart'
86	<i>Kagbene bɔni</i>	'Bad heart'
87	<i>Kagbeneto nyɔɔ</i>	'Inside the heart is black'
88	<i>Kagbeneto maa wu</i>	'Inside a heart cannot be seen'
89	<i>Kejaje kagbene</i>	'To spoil heart'
90	<i>Kagbene wushi</i>	'Heart cool'

91	<i>Yili kagbene koŋwule</i>	'Stand one heart'
92	<i>Kagbene cheche so</i>	'A pure heart'
93	<i>Kagbene dese</i>	'The heart is down'
94	<i>Kemaŋ ta n wɔɔ epun /kagbene to</i>	'Not to put into the stomach/heart'
95	<i>Keta epun n deŋi so</i>	'To put stomach on'
96	<i>Epun to bee gbiri</i>	'Stomach is crying'
97	<i>Kefuli epun to</i>	'To white stomach'
98	<i>Epun to nyɔso</i>	'Black stomach'
99	<i>Epun to chingliŋ</i>	'Deep stomach'
100	<i>Epun maa chela afu</i>	'Stomach is not blowing air'
101	<i>Keta kesheŋ n wɔɔ epun to</i>	'To take issues and put into stomach'
102	<i>Keyili kiya so</i>	'To stand on a leg'
103	<i>Keyili kiya koŋwule so</i>	'To stand on one leg'
104	<i>Keyili aya so</i>	'To stand on legs'
105	<i>Keyili to</i>	'To stand into'
106	<i>Keta afore n kre aya</i>	'To tie leg with dry yam leaves'
107	<i>Keɔ kiya</i>	'To coil leg'
108	<i>Keta kiya</i>	'To take leg'
109	<i>Pulɔ kiya nchu</i>	'Wet leg water'
110	<i>Ketɔr aya to</i>	'To fall onto legs'
111	<i>Kechichi kiya so</i>	'To step on the leg'
112	<i>A ji esa be aya</i>	'To eat one's legs'
113	<i>Too kiya n sulɔ bokiti</i>	'To kick a bucket'
SOCIAL INTERACTION-RELATED GONJA IDIOMS		
114	<i>Kulor bee gbeŋi ashi to</i>	'Hernia is scattering yam mounds'
115	<i>Bulɔ ekpa</i>	'Pass away'
116	<i>Maa bulɔ ekpa</i>	'Do not pass away'
117	<i>Kɔ achanchilaŋ</i>	'Have jokes/have funny'
118	<i>Duu nchiŋ</i>	'To stand firm'
119	<i>Chichi edɛ so</i>	'Step on fire'
120	<i>Kebri efɔŋ</i>	'To beat lean/to grow lean'
121	<i>A luri ebu a ler</i>	'Enter room and come out'
122	<i>Tuu achɔl n wɔɔ enɔ to</i>	'Spit saliva into the hand'
123	<i>Aji a tɔr abarso</i>	'To eat and fall on each other'
124	<i>Koshi maŋ ta kuyu</i>	'Fowl did not pick a corn'
125	<i>Keji m mur</i>	'To eat all'
126	<i>Kifii be kebuwi</i>	'To open anus'
127	<i>Ayoyul be kepe abar</i>	'Spirit catching each other'
128	<i>Keshuli kapɔshi</i>	'To agree defeat'
129	<i>Keta n chuwo kpaŋa</i>	'To take and burn hernia'
130	<i>Kemaa yige kujɔ a sa ede</i>	'Not leave yam for fire'
131	<i>Kefirgi n shin nia</i>	'To fly and stark'
132	<i>Keshuŋ kushuŋ lubi</i>	'To do one a bad thing'
GENDER STEREOTYPE-RELATED GONJA IDIOMS		
133	<i>Min awɔribi</i>	'To swallow pebble'
134	<i>Kekre afuu.</i>	'To tie air'
135	<i>Pe afuu</i>	'To catch air'

136	<i>Kre adiku</i>	'To tie load'
137	<i>Nuu afuu</i>	'To drink air'
138	<i>Kenye epun</i>	'To have a stomach'
139	<i>Kewɔɔ egbe</i>	'To be heavy'
140	<i>Geshi maŋ nye</i>	'Not get angry'
141	<i>Kenye geshi</i>	'Get angry'
142	<i>Eboɔɔ lera mo</i>	'God has removed her'
143	<i>Kii ebuto wura</i>	'Turn into room owner'
144	<i>A maŋ wale so</i>	'She not clean on'
145	<i>Kemaa ji baasa</i>	'Not eating people'
146	<i>Keluri baasa to</i>	'To go/enter into people'
147	<i>Chebra maa kpa</i>	'Lighter is not throwing'
148	<i>Kanase toɔ nchu to</i>	'A hoe has fallen into the water'
149	<i>Kejembu dese epun to</i>	'A stone is lying in the stomach'



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This interview aims to get your views on idioms in Gonja. Any information you give will be treated with confidence and will only be used for this academic research.

1. *Ku wale n ka ta mabe kumu n nini*

[It is good I introduce myself]

2. *Fobe lakal to manne ela mmalgaṛɔmbi?*

[In your view what is/are idioms?]

3. *Feeṅ tiṅ n kaṅe ma mmalgaṛɔmbi ne a bee lea luwu aa?*

[Could you tell me idioms that relate to death?]

4. *Anye ko mmalgaṛɔmbi ne a bee lea kepuli aa?*

[Do we have idioms that relate to burial?]

5. *Anye tiṅ a ta eyur be mba mba be mmalgaṛɔmbi ere a wɔɔ kamalga nko kelijima to aa?*

[Do we usually employ the body part idioms in discourse?]

6. *Feeṅ tiṅ n buwi to n sa ma kusɔ ne kula eyur be mmalgaṛɔmbi aa?*

[Could you explain to me what is body idioms?]

7. *Eyur be mba mone anye bee tiṅ a ta a wɔɔ mmalgaṛɔmbi to?*

[Which body part do we mostly use in idiomatic expressions?]

8. *Wɔɔ ania n kaṅ ma mmalgaṛɔmbi ne a bee lea kumu.*

[Kindly tell the idioms that relate to head.]

9. *Fobe lakal to kaṅe ma mmalgaṛɔmbi ne a bee lea kusoe/asoe.*

[In your view tell me the idioms that relate to ears.]

10. *Feeṅ tiṅ n kaṅe ma mmalgaṛɔmbi ne a bee lea anishi aa?*

[Could you kindly tell me the idioms that relate to eyes?]

11. *Gafra buwi to n sa ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi nɛ a bee lɛa kɔɔ nɛ kudunduloŋ.*

[Please, kindly explain to me, the idioms related to mouth and tongue.]

12. *Wɔɔ ania mbuwi to n ŋini ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi nɛ a bee lɛa enɔ.*

[Kindly explain to me the idioms that relate to hands?]

13. *Feeŋ tiŋ n kaŋɛ ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi nɛ a bee lɛa kagbene aa?*

[Could you tell me the idioms that relate to heart?]

14. *Wɔɔ ania feeŋ tiŋ n kaŋɛ ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi nɛ a bee lɛa epun aa?*

[Could kindly tell me the idioms that relate to stomach?]

15. *Buwi to n ŋini ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi nɛ a bee lɛa kiya.*

[Explain to me the idioms that relate to leg.]

16. *Manne a ba nɛ benimu bee ta mmalgaṭrɔmbi a wɔɔ kelijima to?*

[Why do elders always use idioms whenever they are talking?]

17. *Ade be kaman anye krakɔ mmalgaṭrɔmbi ko ana aa?*

[Which other idioms do we have apart from those mentioned earlier?]

18. *Feeŋ tiŋ wɔɔ ania n kaŋɛ ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi monɛ a bee lɛa keche nɛ kenyeŋ?*

[Could you kindly tell me the idioms that relate to gender?]

19. *Wɔɔ ania mbuwi to n ŋini ma mmalgaṭrɔmbi n a bee lɛa kachina to be kebaɔɔ.*

[Kindly explain to me the idioms that relate to social interactions.]

20. *Feeŋ tiŋ kaŋɛ ma sheŋ nɛ a ler afuli a shi Ngbanya be mmalgaṭrɔmbi to aa?*

[Could you tell me some of the things that Gonja's idiomatic expressions is bringing out?]