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Author(s): Kwesi Yankah

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Kwesi Yankah

Power and the Circuit of Formal Talk

Introduction

In several inquiries into oratory and various forms of verbal art, one significant concept that recurs is the concept of power (Abrahams 1972; Brenneis and Meyers 1984; Fabian 1990; Knippers 1990), which appears to pervade all human endeavor. In the realm of verbal art, one could refer to the very act of performance as a source of empowerment, conferring some powers of control on the speaker or performer for as long as he holds the floor (McDowell 1979: 112 ; Yankah 1985).

Thus a beggar's lowly social status may become temporarily transformed as soon as he mounts the stage for a performance. On the other hand, one could talk of more permanent power roles, whereby power is conferred on the basis of social and political status. Where this power is wielded by an individual within a political entity, its ripples may be felt in various ways. Clifford Geertz rightly observes:

At the political center of any complexly organized society, there is both a governing elite and a set of symbolic forms expressing the fact that it is in truth governing. No matter how democratically the members of the elite are chosen or how deeply divided among themselves they may be, they justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities and appurtenances that they have either inherited or, in more revolutionary situations, invented. It is these that mark the center and give what goes on its aura. (1983:124)

Royal power may be asserted in the corpus of panegyrics, legends, and history. Another outlet is appellation and aphorisms. Thus the Akan of Ghana, who are the source of the data in this paper, say: *Otumfuor woro*

nkawa a oworo fa ne bati (When the Almighty King removes his ring, he does so from his shoulders). This depicts the unlimited scope of the king's capabilities; he exerts his power in accordance with his wishes. They also say, *Otumfuor kyekyere boa a yennsane mu* (When the Almighty King wraps a parcel, it is not unwrapped for scrutiny). This implies that the king is above reproach; he is to be trusted. The Akan also refer to their kings as *Okasapreko* (One who says the last word). His word is final.

One way by which royal power is preserved and enacted is in the conduct of formal talk, where certain norms of communication are observed in part to acknowledge the sacredness of the royal sphere, and partly to enrich the poetics of oratory.

In formal situations, a chief or king in several cultures does not directly speak to an audience in his presence. He speaks through an intermediary, known in several parts of Ghana as *okyeame*, who relays or reports his words to the audience present, whose words to the chief must also be channeled through the intermediary.

Communication in the royal realm, or within formal interaction, is thus mediated by a political functionary who coordinates the interaction to ward off face-threatening acts.

The use of an intermediary, through whom formal talk is routed, is the social dimension of the general practice of indirection that permeates the speech of several cultures, particularly in Africa and the Pacific. The verbal component of this involves manipulation of the linguistic code, such as in the use of metaphor, proverb, and circumlocution, where literal or delicate talk is routed through a linguistic vehicle partly for artistic effect and sometimes as a face-saving strategy in the conduct of culturally delicate business. Verbal and social indirection are two sides of the same coin, and it is not surprising that cultures that deploy social intermediaries in communication also indulge profusely in ambiguous discourse.

In predominantly non-literate cultures, the practice of using speech intermediaries attains an added significance due to the sociopolitical significance of oratory (Bloch 1975), but also because of the potency of the spoken word. Since it embodies acoustic energy (Ong 1982; Anyidoho 1983) and enjoins the co-presence of all relevant discourse participants, the spoken word has an immediate impact, and a capacity to make or break on the spur of the moment (Yankah 1985). According to the Yoruba of Nigeria, "Speech is like an egg; when dropped, it shatters" (Owomoyela 1981:11).

Face

An important corollary of the power of speech is the basic risk involved in all face-to-face communication, where there is an instant evalu-

ation of each other's communicative competence, and a test of the ability of discourse participants to deal spontaneously with emergent unforeseen structures. Everyday talk is replete with ritual dangers and uncertainties (McDowell 1985: 115). The stakes are higher in public speaking where discourse participants have a bigger audience to contend with.

This situation makes it necessary for cultures to adopt strategies to overcome or minimize the inherent risks in face-to-face interaction. The Akan theory of social interaction recognizes the significance of the concept of *anim*, 'face', which is delicate and must be protected at all times. Whereas *anim* has a physical dimension, it is basically an abstraction, representing that aspect of the individual's personal sphere that comes into daily interaction with the outside world. Owing to its delicateness, all attempts are made to protect the individual's face from being defiled. Words in Akan, such as *animguase*, literally 'face fall' or 'disgrace,' 'embarrassment'; and *animtia*, literally 'face violation' or 'disrespect,' attest to this. As an Akan proverb states, *Animguase mfata Okanni ba* (Disgrace does not befit the Akan born). The individual is urged here to veer from acts that are likely to compromise his face integrity, and rather to indulge in acts that would uplift his face (*te anim*).

This agrees with the elaborate thesis on the nature of face by Brown and Levinson, which appears to be universal:

Face is emotionally invested, and can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction, such cooperation being based on the mutual vulnerability of face. (1978: 66)

To ward off face-threatening acts, redressive strategies including the use of intermediaries have to be adopted by both the speaker and addressee. The equivalent term used by Goffman is *face-work*. This designates actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. Face-work serves to counteract incidents—that is events whose symbolic implications threaten face (1967:12).

But it is not only oratory in the royal realm that is structured to minimize face threat. In some parts of Africa and the Diaspora folk tale, libation, and epic performances adopt various modes of mediation, such as integrated responses, that are intended to minimize the hazards of performance. These verbal genres, by their very norms of performance are thus partly conditioned to save face.

In the royal domain, where political power needs to be constantly reinforced to give the subjects a measure of security, the most cherished modes of performance are those contrived to pose minimum threat to royal face. (See also Brenneis and Myers 1984).

In several parts of West Africa, modes of royal communication similar to the Akan, have been observed by scholars, particularly historians.

Among the Ijo of Nigeria, the *ogulasowei* is the royal spokesman (Alagoa 1976). Of the Alafin of Oyo, Talbot remarked at the beginning of the century that “He made a speech in a low tone which was reported aloud by the eunuch” (1926:59). Talbot similarly remarked of the Edo people, “Whatever any person would say to the king, must first be told to the three great lords who would then report it to him and bring his answer” (Talbot 1926:580). In Dahomey, there were two types of spokesmen: the *meu*, who speaks from the king to the people, and the *migan*, who speaks from the people to the king. Richard Burton notes that, “It is not customary to address the royalty, even though the presentee be acquainted with the language” (1966:150).

In situations where there is more than one intermediary, and cultural mores demand that the message goes through them all, communication becomes even more circuitous. Tarr reported of the Mossi of Burkina Faso,

The message to be communicated originates with the source. He whispers it up to his friend, who in turn whispers it to a lesser chief, who in turn whispers it to a lesser chief’s spokesman, who then finally brings the message in an audible voice to the chief’s hearing. (Tarr 1979:204)

It is significant that this mode of communication does not characterize royal discourse only, but all formal oratory within or outside the realm of a high social personage. Ruth Finnegan observed a similar practice among the Limba of Sierra Leone:

The most elaborate and lengthy of all speeches are the long funeral harangues given on the occasion of memorial rites for some important man several years after his death...One of the principal highlights is the speeches made by the leading men; they speak in turn often going on for several hours, and their words are relayed, half intoned sentence by sentence, by a herald who is specially engaged for the occasion. (Finnegan 1970:454)

Communication Models

Such patterns of discourse demonstrate the inadequacy of the Jakobsonian (1960) and de Saussurian (1977:13) models of communication. They alert us to the simplicity of the notions of sender/receiver, addressor/addressee, as the primary categories of reference, and to the existence of more complex structures of communication.

In a communicative situation of such complexity, where an agent speaks on another’s behalf, finer distinctions have to be made between source of the message and sender, and goal of the message and receiver.

In recent times, ethnographers of speaking (Hymes 1975), students of pragmatics (Levinson 1983; Hanks 1989), and others (Goffman 1974) have widened the constituents of communication to encapsulate this complexity: "The speaker or spokesman can be distinct from the source of an utterance, the recipient distinct from the target, and the hearers or bystanders distinct from the addressees or targets" (Levinson 1983:68).

Erving Goffman, on the basis of framings within theatrical productions, distinguishes the *principal* or *originator* of discourse (the one held responsible for the utterance) from the *animator*, the actual sounding box, the emitter whose voice is heard. An individual engaging in ordinary talk often combines the two roles; he originates as well as animates the discourse (1974:516-523).

Where the two roles are separated as in the situation of *okyeame*, the question of responsibility for display becomes significant. Who takes the responsibility for performance flaws, and who takes the praise?

A related angle from which the mediated communication here can be viewed is through what Dell Hymes, and later Richard Bauman, call *metaphrasis* in performance, a reframing of what is conventionally a performance genre into another mode (Bauman 1977:34). Bauman laments, however, that this is a poorly documented aspect of performance systems, but one richly deserving of study, as a key to the creative vitality and flexibility of performance in a community (35).

If this aspect of performance is poorly documented, the same cannot be said of its reflexes in everyday use of language, as seen in the scholarship on pragmatics, philosophy of language, and metalinguistics, the study of speech about speech. Scholars in the philosophy of language (Bakhtin 1981; Goffman 1974; Volosinov 1973) refer to the permeation of everyday speech with other people's words. In other words, the concept of metaphrasis has relevance in everyday speech.

Reported speech is, perhaps, the commonest example of this (Volosinov 1973:115). Since human speech is generally filled with other people's words, which are transmitted with various degrees of accuracy, one could investigate the dynamic interrelationships in talk about talk, the extent to which social context and norms condition the dynamics of reported speech. Does the speaker under consideration fall within the mode of authoritative discourse (Bakhtin 1981:343)? Is the imputed source of the utterance an individual, or the collective wisdom of the people (Goffman 1974:522)? Does it allow for little semantic change, or does the speech fall within the domain of internally persuasive discourse, with an open semantic structure and free stylistic variation?

From yet another perspective, one could consider the nature of the framing rules at work, on the basis of the motive behind the reframing. Is it to faithfully protect the original speaker's image and words, or is it with

the intent of parodic distortion for the sake of mockery? In situations and cultural contexts where political power and authority are closely intertwined with speech, there is little room for parodying and mockery by an intermediary reframing or reporting the royal word.

Avoidance

In Africa, formalisation of communication also involves physical distancing and avoidance, of which the situation prevailing in the domain of the king of Benin is a typical example. In the sixteenth century, his noblemen were not expected to have eye contact with him:

When his noblemen are in his presence, they never look him in the face, but sit cowering upon their buttocks with their elbows on their knees, and their hands before their faces not looking up until the king commands them. When they depart from him, they turn not their backs towards him, but go creeping backwards with reverence. (Talbot 1926:580)

Among the Akan, similar avoidances prevail. It is a prohibition to engage the chief in a direct interaction in public. Exceptions to this are artists like poets, singers, dancers, in artistic communication with the royalty; his personal confidantes and counselors whispering or passing on messages to him; or a subordinate chief or functionary swearing an oath of allegiance. All these exceptional situations convey little or no uncertainty and permit limited face interaction with the chief.

In formal assemblies, the chief's orators are seated beside him, and those addressing him should obey the relevant proxemic and visual norms of communication. The speaker should not be in direct bodily or visual confrontation with the chief. Indeed, the significance of gaze in the general norms of communication is demonstrated in the lore of certain occupation groups like hunters and weavers. Wives of such craftsmen may not speak directly to their husbands when they are in their menses. Even in situations where both are present, such wives must communicate with their spouses only through a child, whose innocence is immunity in itself. The condition of menstruation is believed capable of breaking down the spiritual immunity of direct addressees. Where such addressees, by the very nature of their vocation, are in constant interaction with spiritually potent animals and trees, a collapse in their spiritual immunity may lead to occupational fatalities.

The Akan further ensure the sanctity of royal space through lexical avoidance: the use of euphemisms for certain words and concepts considered indecent in collocation with the chief, for example, death, sickness, or misdemeanor. In all such cases, the *okyeame's* name may be substituted for the chiefs, or a different euphemism altogether is used.

The above modes of avoidance find their utmost fulfillment in public speaking where the threat to royal face is more immediate and must be contained through the use of an intermediary.

The threat to royal face, on the other hand, may entail putting him in a situation where his competence in oratory may be publicly called to question. The chief must not be seen to be rhetorically incompetent. Rerouting his speech enables the orator to edit the content and style of the royal message.

ROYAL SPEECH ACT

A royal speech act requires at least two role participants at the production end. First is the chief, who is the addressor and source of the message, one from whom the message officially originates. On the other hand, the chief's audible voice in a royal speech act is not obligatory. He has the option to exercise his part of the transmission by being present and speaking, or to declare it null. In this case, he may be present but not speak, or be completely absent from the scene of interaction, and make his views represented. Where he speaks his speech is still considered incomplete without the *okyeame's* voice.

Royal speech, among the Akan, is referred to as *adehye kasa*. This is typically hurried and laced with occasional stuttering. In some realisations, it is soft, and has a slight nasal resonance, the effect of its calculated low volume. A chief may speak undertone, whisper, or speak with moderate intensity. In any case, his voice need not be aimed at the ears of the entire audience. He aims it at the *okyeame*, who sits or stands adjacent to him. The entire audience or a greater part thereof, may also hear his word if they are not spread out in large numbers. The chief's word may be brief or extended, depending on the subject matter and the chief's personal style. The generally low-keyed nature of the chief's word is meant to portray its incompleteness as a speech act.

As the chief speaks the *okyeame* with his staff of authority in his hand rises to his feet as a mark of respect and also to signal his attentiveness. Ordinarily, he sits close to the chief, either facing the same direction, or facing his side view. The chief and the *okyeame* thus redirect their focus in a mutual gaze as the chief speaks. The two engage temporarily in an internal dialogue, even though they are allied role participants in the macro-communication model. In the course of the royal speech, the *okyeame* answers with token confirmatives (*sio*, yes), in solidarity with the chief's word. These responses are from the same mold as the supportive remarks made by assistants or audiences during the performance of epic in parts of West Africa (Johnson 1986), libation prayer in Ghana, folk

preaching (Jones-Jackson 1987), blues singing among black Americans, and storytelling in several African communities (Agovi 1973; Galli 1983; Finnegan 1967).

The responses to the chief's word lend support or vitality to the royal speech, enhance its rhythm, and set the pace for the okyeame's solo turn that follows.

After the chief's word comes the second part of the royal speech act, executed by the okyeame.

Akyeame (pl.) depict their own speech role as *nsoso*, as in *Meso Nana kasa so* (I supplement the chief's speech). The phrase *so so* literally means 'continue,' 'supplement,' 'add to,' or 'make complete.' There is thus the implication of supplementation, suggesting that the chief's speech is intrinsically incomplete. *Nsoso* lends wholeness to an act of speech. In the absence of *nsoso*, a royal speech act has not run its full cycle. . . . The two are, by definition, parts of one whole.

Modes of Relay

Holding his staff of office, the okyeame may complete the royal speech act in one of three ways: verbatim repetition, analytic relay, and token relay formula.

In verbatim repetition, the chief's message is relayed almost word for word, as he speaks one sentence after another, a type of simultaneous interpretation. This has been noticed, among other modes, at the palace of the King of Ashanti. Where he has a long message, the king speaks softly and slowly, pausing at the end of sentences (see also Moerman 1983:49-67), and the okyeame faithfully relays his message after every sentence or so, sticking as closely as possible to his patron's words. The fragmented relay is often a replica of the chief's words, with occasional variation.

Analytic relay, on the other hand, appears to characterize most of what akyeame do. By this, I refer to discretionary paraphrasing, elaboration, or proverbial embellishment of the principal's message without altering its logical focus. In this case, the principal makes an entire speech, which is then analytically reported or animated by the okyeame. This type of animation often presents a dynamic tension between the reporting and reported contexts. Embellishing the words spoken by the chief is the okyeame's prerogative, and he is considered to have been faithful so long as its logic has not been altered. Indeed, akyeame reserve the right to enhance the form and content of the principal's message. Where changes are made on the chief's words, they are presumed to be in the interest of improvement. Even so, the decision to manipulate the chief's words is based on several factors, such as occasion, and type of speech event. Generally, however, the extent of analytic relay rests on the aesthetic

appeal of the chief’s own words. Akyeame are very sensitive to the esthetics of discourse animation, the fact that the relayed message must be sweet. To many of them, this is the most delightful aspect of their public duties.

On the other hand, the okyeame needs not repeat or edit his patrons message. If he considers it audible, well articulated enough, or rather lengthy, he may simply draw the audience’s attention to it by a token relay formula, in local parlance, *oma nsempa*. He pronounces to the party for whom the message is meant, *mo nsempa* (the message is yours), or *mo asomu a* (it reached your ears; you heard it all). It is presumed that the message was clear enough, and does not require a meticulous relay.

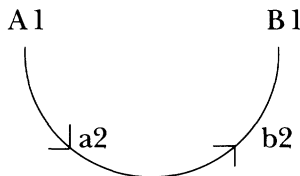
Reception

The receiving end of royal communication may also have two constituents. If the listening party is a group, or contains a dignitary, it is likely to have an okyeame of its own, or else an ad hoc one is appointed for the purpose. In this case, the second okyeame is the receiver of the message, and has to be distinguished from the addressee or goal, for whom the message is meant.

The speaking okyeame thus directs the message he relays to his receiving counterpart, who in turn passes it on to the principal or group he represents. A message from the addressor to the addressee then has the potential of going through three phases: from the chief (A1, source of the message), to his okyeame (a2), to the okyeame of the other party (b2), to the eventual addressee (B1). If there is a reply, it must trickle back in a reverse order, also a three part relay.

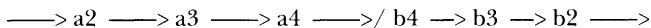
The phenomenon of formal communication may thus be schematized as follows:

A1 (Chief, Principal, Source of Message, Addressor) —> a2 (Okyeame, Intermediary, Animator, Speaker) —> b2 (Okyeame, Intermediary, Receiver) —> B1 (Audience, Principal, Addressee, Goal of Message)



In this diagram, the upper case alphabets represent the principals and the lower case stands for the akyeame who relay the messages of their

principals. A1 is the principal (here, the chief), source of the message, the one from whom the message emanates. His message could be under-tone, a whisper, or may be loudly spoken. In any case his word is meant for immediate deliberation within his party (A), and is subject to a strategic recasting by his orator, before it crosses the boundary to the other party (B). In cases where Party A has two or more functioning akyeame, the message from the source is received serially and relayed among them before it crosses the boundary. The lower case letters (a and b) representing the intermediaries are therefore subject to recursion:



In any case, the message circulating among the allied participants in A may have been unofficially overheard by participants in Party B, or other bystanders. So long as the message has not been officially tabled by the orator, however, it is not considered complete.

Receiving the message from his principal, the okyeame (orator and strategist), officially presents it to the official receiver, his counterpart in the other party, who also directs it to the ears of his principal, who is the intended goal of the message.

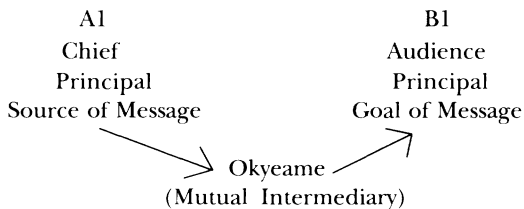
Conversely, B1’s reply trickles back in a reverse order until it reaches A1.

Under no circumstances, then, must the message move directly from A1 to B1, or vice versa, without going through the intervening stages, regardless of the spatial proximity between the two principals.

Some of the roles defined here are not permanent. The addressor/ addressee roles are, for instance, conflated or reversed at various stages of the discourse. The Addressor (A1) exchanges roles with the Addressee (B1) during the reply. The concept of emergence in role structures in speech and verbal art is thus clearly demonstrated here (Bakhtin 1986:67–73; Bauman 1977: 37–48).

The roles of Principal and Animator (chief and okyeame), however, are politically defined, and irreversible.

In cases where the other party has no orator, the chief’s spokesman becomes the sole focus of the interaction. He relays his Principal’s message as well as the other party’s, even though he is not bound to imbue the relay of the two messages with the same finesse. The following diagram depicts this:



Metacommunicative Signals

The nature of the royal speech act becomes clearer when one takes into consideration the metalinguistic component of the okyeame's speech; as the entire duties of the okyeame may be subsumed under metalanguage, he mostly treats language as an object of reference or comment. In compliance with this, the okyeame's speech has a greater metalinguistic component than other speeches.

Since formal speeches are invariably routed through the okyeame, they are preceded by addressives referring to him. Thus one making a formal speech alerts the okyeame by an addressive, then starts the message. The introductory formula often suggests the intended route of the message's transmission, and the party for whom the speech is meant. The speech may simply begin with, *Okyeame wo ho?* (Is Okyeame alert?), where the speaker checks the channels of transmission and the perception readiness of his immediate target. Here the okyeame's role as the potential receiver of the message is highlighted.

To this, he may signal his readiness, *Mewo ho* (I am alert; the lines of transmission are open). One would then continue with the relay formula, *Okyeame tie ma ento Nana* (Okyeame, listen so Nana, the chief, may hear). The speaker here overtly distances himself from the chief or dignitary; he clearly distinguishes two participant roles at the receiving end of his message: okyeame and the party for whom the message is meant (the chief). Indeed, the speaker maps out an operational model of communication; he verbalizes the pragmatic model of formal talk. Even though the speaker may not be physically distant from the chief, he has no verbal access to him. He acknowledges the political distance between them by addressing the chief through the latter's surrogate.

In cases where the expected points of the message relay are more than one, the speaker provides an exhaustive list of the intermediaries along the relay path, and then names the eventual goal of the message, such as, *Okyeame W, tie ma ento X na Y aso nte se. . .* (Okyeame W, listen and pass it on to X, that Y may hear and in turn relay it to Z that . . .). Here the speaker encodes in his pragmatic model the multiple frames of reporting expected.

This type of multiple relay may be exercised where more than two different parties, all having okyeame, are represented in a formal forum, and a message delivered is relevant to them all. In this case the message may be picked up serially by the various okyeame and passed on to the parties. The multiple relay formula may also be used where a chief's two or more okyeame are present at a forum of considerable importance. In this case, the message to the chief may proceed from the lowest to the highest ranked (who often sits closest to the chief), and the message from

the chief may be channeled in a reverse order, the lowest ranked being the final medium of relay.

Ending a speech directed at an okyeame, a speaker may use the formula, *Okyeame, mepaa wo a na amannee ne no* (Okyeame, if I called you, that's the message). After a message from the chief or another has been received by an okyeame, he animates it and may end his speech with another metacommunicative formula: *Sedee Nana see ne no* (So says the chief). Here, the source of the message, the principal, is named.

Instead of animating his principal's speech, the okyeame may, on the other hand, opt for the token relay formula, *Wo nsempra* or *Mo nsempra* (The message is yours— sg. or pl.), or *Wo asomu a / Mo asomu a* (It reached your (sg.) ears, /It reached your (pl.) ears; you heard it all) which directs the message to its goal. The latter formula also depicts the intended goal of the message as an overhearer, who in actual fact has heard the message from the other principal, but does not react because it has not been officially tabled by the intermediary. The use of the token relay formula, 'You heard it all,' does not find favor with the Akan: it denotes an ineloquent okyeame, who lacks the skills to paraphrase, embellish or fully ornament his patron's words. Thus the Akan say, *Okyeame a onnim asemka na ose Nana wasomu a* (It's the ineloquent okyeame that says, 'Chief, you heard it all').

The Akan have a passion for eloquent rhetoric, and often exploit situations to demonstrate their verbal wit (see Yankah 1991). Similarly, audiences are often on the lookout for witty public speakers who ornament their public oratory with metaphor, aphorisms and proverbs. Since akyeame are selected on the basis of their forensic skills, they often justify their positions through witty manipulation of their patron's message, and attract such favorable comments as *Nano awo* (His lips are dried up, he is eloquent).

ILLUSTRATION

Below, I illustrate the various ways in which messages are relayed by the okyeame, particularly the verbatim and analytic modes of relay.

Verbatim Relay

The occasion was a judicial sitting in 1988 by the Kumasi Traditional Council of the Ashanti state, chaired by the King of Ashanti, Otumfuor Opoku Ware II.

A subchief, among others, had been charged with failure to attend the wake of one of the king's akyeame, who had died a few months before. This negligence on the chief's part had been greatly lamented by the jury, since the deceased was an important state dignitary. In the course of the

deliberations, the Asantehene (King of Ashanti) used the occasion to convey his concern about the subchief's negligence. His words, spoken undertone but overheard by many, were relayed simultaneously to the wider audience of eighty or more people, by one of his *akyeame*.

Note the shift in perspective between the two texts, and also the unique accompaniment of the king's words with confirmative phrases by the *akyeame* present. As the king spoke, his *akyeame* stood around him listening attentively and interspersing the speech with ratifiers (*sio*). At the end of a sentence or two, he would pause for one *okyeame* to relay his message to the audience present.

The king's words have been poetically arranged here to coincide with the occurrence of the responses from his *akyeame*.

Discourse 1

KING:

Dee ama mani abre saa ayie yi ho ne se *sio*
 Owura no a ɔkɔ ne kra akyi no *sio*
 Wasom ahemfie ha mfee aduasa-nkrɔn *sio*

OKYEAME:

Otumfoɔ se dee ama nani abre saa nsɛm yi ho ne se, owura
 noa ɔkɔ ne kra akyi no, wasom ahemfie ha mfee
 aduasa-nkrɔn.

KING:

I am concerned about this funeral *sio*
 Because the gentleman who has returned to his soul's origins *sio*
 Served in this palace for thirty-nine years *sio*

OKYEAME:

Otumfuor, the Almighty, says he is concerned about these events,
 because the gentleman who has returned to his soul's origins, 5
 served in this palace for thirty-nine years.

KING:

Yen nyinaa nim dwuma a wadi wɔ ahemfie ha *sio*

OKYEAME:

Ɔse yen nyinaa nim dwuma a wadi no ahemfie ha

KING:

We all know the role he has played in this palace *sio*

OKYEAME:

He says we all know the role he has played in this palace.

KING:

Biribiara nni ho a nka yede behye no anuonyam sio
 Se nka yebeko akosi ne pe sio
 De agya no kwan sio

OKYEAME:

Ose biribiara nni ho a nka yede behye no anuonyam, se nka
 yebeko akosi ne pe, de agya no kwan.

KING:

We would have done him no greater honor sio
 Than to observe his wake sio
 To bid him farewell sio

10

OKYEAME:

He says we would have done him no greater honor, than to observe
 his wake, to bid him farewell.

KING:

Eno nti na mekaa se nka mpanimfoɔ nyinaa nko sio
 Ma enye fe sio

OKYEAME:

Ose eno nti na okaa se nka mpanimfoɔ nyinaa nko, ma enye fe.

KING:

That is why I said all elders should attend sio
 To create a good impression sio

OKYEAME:

He says that is why he said all elders should attend, to create a good
 impression.

15

KING:

Mo nyinaa monim se sio
 M' akyeame dee sio
 Menye won ayie basabasa sio

OKYEAME:

Ose nakyeame dee mo nyinaa monim se onye won ayie basabasa

KING:

You all know sio
 I do not haphazardly sio
 Observe the wakes of my akyeame sio

OKYEAME:

He says, for his akyeame's wakes, you all know he does not hap-
 hazardly observe them.

20

KING:

Enam hia a ehia sio
 Ene aseda a ese se yede da no sio
 Nti na yen nyinaa kɔɔe sio

OKYEAME:

Ɔse enam hia ehia, ene aseda a ese se yede da no, nti na yen nyinaa kɔɔe

KING:

It's due to the importance of this sio
 And the need for us to thank him sio
 That we all went

OKYEAME:

He says it's due to the importance of this, and the need for us to thank
 him that we all went. 25

KING:

Mpanimfoɔ, mesre mo sio
 Momfa eyi nye adesua kese sio
 Se asem bi ba saa, momma yen nyinaa nko sio
 Na obi nnim okyena asem sio

OKYEAME:

Ɔse osre mo, mo nyinaa mfa eyi nye adesua kese. Se asem bi ba saa
 a, momma yen nyinaa nko, na obi nnim okyena asem.

KING:

Elders, please, sio
 Learn a big lesson from this, you all sio
 If any tragedy occurs, we must all go and sympathize sio
 For no one knows what mishap the future may bring sio

OKYEAME:

He says, please, learn a big lesson from this, you all. If any 30
 tragedy occurs, we must all go and sympathize. For no one knows what
 mishap the future may bring.

Except for a few lexical changes and clause transpositions, the okyeame's relay is a complete replica of the chief's message, with all its stylistic contours. There is, of course, a shift in the orientation of the discourse, the chief's authorial voice maintaining a first person pronoun to depict his power and control over the interaction situation, and the interpretation rendering these in the third person, to create a distance between the primary and secondary situations. This way, the force of the chief's illocution is stepped down.

The first statement is replicated, except for a shift in the personal pronoun. The chief here explains his concern about the defendant's absence at the deceased's funeral, emphasizing the long years the deceased served the state. He uses an euphemistic expression in reference to death, which is adopted by the okyeame: *Oko ne kra akyi* (He has gone to his soul's origins). Okyeame here prefaces all his statements with a reporting phrase: *Ose* or *Otumfuor se* (He says; Otumfuor, Almighty King, says . . .). This clearly marks out his statements as reported.

In line 18 where the chief emphasizes the premium he places on state funerals, the okyeame conveys the same sentiments, but interchanges the position of clauses, to avoid monotony:

You all know I don't haphazardly
observe the wakes of my akyeame.

is reported as:

He says for his akyeame's wakes,
you know he does not haphazardly observe
them.

Here, the skillful orator preposes the complement of the sentence to avoid a complete repetition. Further, where the chief prefaces his statement with the factive phrase, *you know*, the okyeame shifts it to begin the second clause, in part to avoid a clash of reported verbs at the beginning of his sentence: *he says that you know that . . . (Ose monim se)*, which, though it is grammatical, is not stylistically pleasing, particularly in public speech.

Analytic Relay

While a greater part of the royal speeches were given near-verbatim renditions by the okyeame, there were certain segments of the situation that exemplify analytic reporting, editing the chief's words.

The subchief's failure to attend the important wake was not the end of the matter. He further displayed insubordination before the elders, which drew sharp words from the chief. Despite the chief's concern about the culprit's unruliness, he showed his mercy by pardoning him. His words follow.

Discourse2

KING:
Kyerɛ X sɛ mede no ho kyɛ no
Na ɔnnye saa bio

KING:

Tell X . . . he is pardoned
He should not do that again.

These words, which the chief said undertone, were further relayed by another okyeame with a proverb embellishment. The okyeame passed his relay through a chief, in whose jurisdiction the culprit belonged:

OKYEAME:

Nana X, Otumfoɔ se memma waso nte se, aniemmowoho a owura yi aye yi, nka eɛe se otee no paa, ama obi anye saa bio. Sebe sebe sebe, oburu, se wo ne wo mfefoɔ nam na yeredane mmoa, dane wo ho bi, na ebia na yerebekye wo awe. Otumfoɔ se, ɔde akɛ wo.

OKYEAME:

Nana X

Otumfuor bids that it reach your ears. The stubbornness displayed by the elder should have drawn a severe penalty, to deter others. Apologies, apologies, apologies, *oburu*; if you walk together with your colleagues, and they transform into beasts, do likewise; it may be a ploy to eat you up. Otumfuor says you are forgiven.

In this relay, the okyeame transforms the chief's brief words of pardon into an elaborate caution. Even though he routes the chief's official words of pardon through another chief, he exploits the situation to display his proverbial wit. The proverb he uses is not part of the chief's original diction, and momentarily appears out of context. Yet it telescopes sentiments that had been expressed in the initial segments of the interaction. Indeed, akyeame are at liberty to incorporate in their relay all relevant pieces of information they consider would enhance the logical appeal of their message.

The defendant, during the time of the wake, was at an informal meeting with other elders. Those elders had wisely left the meeting and attended the wake, knowing its political significance. The defendant should have followed suit, but had imprudently stayed out. The consequence he faces, according to the okyeame, is comparable to that of an imbecile who failed to join his colleagues' magical transformation and became their victim. Prudence requires that you adapt yourself, where necessary, to avoid alienation, the orator cautions.

The okyeame here overtly attributes his entire message to the chief: "these are not my own words, but the chief's," he implies in humility. Equally important is the orator's overindulgence in apologies prior to his words of wisdom. He profusely apologizes to unratified participants in his message, as a way of reducing the discourtesy of appearing to teach

wisdom to elders: “Elders, the impending proverb caution is not directed at you, but at the imprudent defendant,” he implies. His apology is reinforced with a polite term of address, *oburu*, directed at the chief.

The next example was also observed at the Manhyia, palace of the King of Ashanti, in April 1991, during the annual national conference of the Ashanti Students’ Union. This involved about forty students from the three universities of Ghana and other tertiary institutions. The King of Ashanti was represented by about ten subchiefs. In the chair was a subchief, Nana Akyempemhene who represented the king on that particular occasion. The meeting sought to discuss ways in which the youth could embark on development projects in the region.

Before discussions began, the chairman made a few introductory remarks that were expanded by an appointed okyeame (one of the students) and passed on to the audience; there was one okyeame serving both parties. Note the okyeame’s ornate speech, after the chief’s.

Discourse 3

CHIEF:

Mesusu se bere kɔ nti, momma yenhye ase
Se yɛka se yeretwen ma obiara aba, adee besa yen.

OKYEAME:

Adɔfo, sedee Nana see ne no. Ɔse yerekeka funu yi nyinaa na yerekeka ama adampɔn. Na sedee bere kɔ no, enni se yetena ase se yeretwen ma obiara efiri nakuraa aba. Mpanyimfoɔ se birekutire yedi no ohyee so. Yen a yehyia ha yi ara ye. Mpanyimfoɔ se, ketewa biara nsua. Yɛnim se yegu so ara a ebinom beba abeka ho; tiatia na ebɔ toa.

(Okyeame says a lengthy prayer, not in text)

CHIEF:

Yɛda Ɔkyeame Agyekum ase ne nsaguo a emu ye hwam. Yɛwɔ gyidie se Onyame sunsum beboa ama biribiara akɔ so pepepe. Megyina Otumfoɔ, ahemfo ne mpanyimfoɔ a wɔwɔ ha nyinaa anan mu ma mo akwaaba. Dee enne esi yen ani so ne se, yebedwendwen ɔkwan a yen mmerantee ne mmabaawa yi befa so ama ɔman yi atu mpon. Mmoa biara a ankoroankoro biara wɔ no, ewɔ se ɔtumi de boa.

OKYEAME:

Sedee Nana see ne no. Ɔse ewɔ se yen nyinaa ka bom boa yen Asanteman yi. Mpanin se baanu so a emmia; sebe hu mani so ma me nti na atwe mmienunam. Ewɔ se yen mmerantee a yen ho ye den yi bɔ mmɔden hye yen sapɔ mu nsuo, biri yen bogya ani, ko gye yen Asanteman yi. Sebe ɔdehwe anko a akoo dwane; enna som wo ho nye akoo. Asanteman yi nkosɔ gyina yen so. Kwaee biara a nnuu nketewa nni aseɛ no na enye kwaee pa. Sedee Nana see ne no.

CHIEF:

I suppose time is far spent, and we should begin the function.
If we decide to wait till everybody arrives, night will fall on us.

OKYEAME:

Friends, so says the chief. He says, as we decorate the corpse, we decorate it for the empty parlor (where it will be laid in state), and that since time is far spent, we need not wait till all villagers arrive. The elders say, the head of the clock bird is eaten in haste. Those of us gathered here are not too few. The elders say nothing little is too small. We know more delegates will arrive when we begin; little additions break the bottle.

(Libation prayers are said by the okyeame, not in text)

CHIEF:

We thank Okyeame Agyekum for his nicely flavored libation.
We believe God will help, and everything will smoothly proceed.
I stand here on behalf of Otumfuor the King and all the elders assembled
here 10
To bid you welcome.
Our main concern is to deliberate on how our young men and women
Will come together and help for the prosperity of our state.
Any manner of help is welcome from anyone.

OKYEAME:

So says the chief. He says we should all come together to help the Ashanti state. The elders say, when two carry a load, it does not weigh down. Furthermore, my apologies, antelopes walk in pairs to blow dust in each other's eyes. We the energetic young men must endeavor to moisten our sponges, darken our blood in determination, and fight for the Ashanti state. My apologies, if the royal retreats in war, the servant flees; then also self service is no servitude. The future of the state rests on us. Any forest with no undergrowth is not worthy of its name. So says the chief.

This event is a typical example of macaronic diction by an orator interpreting royal talk. The chief's introductory remark urging that the meeting begin despite the relatively low attendance, is picked up by the orator in an elaborate speech spiced by three proverbs. The first refers to the eventual destination of a corpse to be laid in state. In other words, the meeting had better begin and move towards its goal. Even though the chief had merely urged that the meeting begin soon, the okyeame exploits the situation to cite a proverb parallel in which unsavory meat is hurriedly consumed, lest it becomes agonizing to endure. Problematic issues are better solved without delay, or else they magnify, he implies. Then comes another proverb that advocates that small numbers should never be underrated; even though the number present is not large, it is enough to get a meeting started.

In the second part of the text, the chief alludes to the okyeame's libation prayer (not in text) and starts the discussion, urging the congregation to work together towards the upliftment of the Ashanti state. These few words by the chief are profusely embellished by the okyeame with two consecutive proverbs that call for the pooling of resources; unity is strength, he implies, recalling the image of a burden reduced when carried by two. Then comes the proverb that depicts the interdependence of two antelopes walking abreast. In both proverbs, unity in labor yields greater productivity.

Note also the idiomatic expression used by the okyeame in urging the congregation to brace itself for the task ahead. The act of moistening a sponge implies getting equipped for social transformation, the sponge being an agent of change and environmental sanity. The other idiom the orator uses, *darkening the blood in determination (biri bogya ani)*, transports the audience to the battlefield, and ties in with the overt image of war that follows: a retreating royal at the battlefield encourages the servant to flee. For citizens of such a historically war-happy state like Ashanti, there couldn't have been a more fitting image. If the initiative for development does not come from the true born Ashantis, nothing much should be expected from immigrants.

Conclusion

The above pattern of formal speech interaction, in which intermediaries are used to ratify or interpret messages, underscores the search for concord in the art of persuasion—the aim of the performer to solicit the support of his audience. Using an intermediary to repeat or confirm word or argument lends a measure of objectivity to opinion expressed, implying that the speaker's viewpoint is not a subjective one, but a shared experience.

Verbal genres in which speech mediation is a built-in device tend to diffuse the hazards of performance, since the interaction is intrinsically conditioned to achieve token success.

In the case of the mode of oratory just discussed, there would appear to be a high degree of redundancy (from repetitions), which would reduce the esthetic value of formal speeches. Paradoxically, however, it is this very replicating frame which enhances the beauty of formal talk. Each version of the principal's message may convey a linguistic, poetic or thematic nuance missing in the others, such that the subtle inflections within a single viewpoint get eventually spelt out through a collective effort. Besides this, there is a built-in esthetic within any mode of performance that consciously avoids directness, or promotes suspense. As the same message moves from one phase to another, action or reaction is momentarily frozen (stylistically delayed); the suspense this promotes

among the interactants is contrived to lend greater visibility to the performance, as an end in itself.

In the royal domain, where political power needs to be constantly enacted to mystify royal ego, the most cherished modes of communication are those contrived to enhance power, at minimal cost to royal face. The circuit traveled by formal talk, the deployment of professional orators, as well as the communicative devices marshaled in the entire enactment are all part of the strategy to consolidate the royal position, and enhance the beauty of power.

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