



An Ethnographic Study of the Akan One Week Funeral Observation in Ghana: Making a Case for Its Stepwise Documentation

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ABSTRACT

Every society is culturally bound. Its tradition, values, norms are embedded in culture and language is the vehicle through which they are expressed. Language can be described as an identity of every human being. It is a natural endowment fund given to man for communication. One's feelings are expressed through language via either the verbal or the non-verbal mode. As language exists with man naturally, so does death exist, and it is inevitable. In every culture the dead is honoured, as it is believed that they are not dead but have exited to the world beyond, where their ancient ones have been. Thus, the Akans hold the celebration of the dead in high esteem, and it is observed in three main phases, namely the one-week funeral observation, the main funeral rites and the family sitting. The focus of this study is the one-week funeral observation with the aim of stepwise documentation of the events that transpire therein. The research adopted Hyme's Ethnography of Communication Theory for the analysis of information gathered. The data collection was a purposeful and a qualitative one that takes into cognizance surreptitious recordings (only) of the family gatherings, making observations and inquiries. The design of the study is a descriptive one that answers how the 'One Week Funeral' is observed among the Akans. The data were collected in Kumasi metropolis (as it is the capital of the Ashanti Region, the seat of the Otumfo Osei Tutu) in Ghana, from September 2022-February 2023. Ten different family gatherings in relation to the one-week funeral observation were visited for the study, and it was observed that there were no variations in the procedural approaches used in the different occasions. The study revealed the following: in terms of linguistic expressions; the use of specialised form of proverbs, peculiar euphemism, strict observations of social norms of speaking, special personae, avoidance of code-mixing and code-switching. Also revealing were the stringent adherence of cultural values associated with the one-week funeral observation and the specialised use of graphological features of colours. The paper concluded that the one-week observation has enchanting cultural values. The stringent adherence of rules in all the gatherings connote positive effect of the occasions on the unity and mutual coexistence of family ties and communal living. These are regarded as part of the forces encouraging and entrenching peace and harmony among the Akans, which is believed to have transcended to the entire nation, Ghana, and might be part of the reasons for the relative peace and harmony Ghana has been enjoying over the years. The study recommended that, the event should be digitalised into 'cybercem' (that is cyber-cemetery), where all activities concerning funeral rites be documented for future reference.

Keywords: Akan, Documentation, Ethnography, Funeral, Kumasi, One Week

1. INTRODUCTION

Society and culture are inextricably tied; they are entities that are somewhat difficult to separate. Every society is culturally bound, their ways of life such as tradition, values, norms etc., are all embedded and expressed through the vehicle called language, as language is used to express them. There have been various scholarly definitions of language. Lyons (2009) quoting Hall defines language as "the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols". Hall's definition recognises language as an "institution" and with the definite article "the" preceding it to show that the institution is an established one that cannot be denied by human entities who formed the team called institution. Language therefore, is a phenomenon that the

human is naturally endowed to communicate with. One's thoughts, feelings or emotions are expressed via language either through the verbal or non-verbal mode of its use.

As language exists with man naturally, so cultural norms have been institutionalised in language use. Saville-Troike (1982) asserts that the very concept of the evolution of culture is dependent on the capacity of humans to use language for the purposes of organising social cooperation. Thus, there is no boundary to the extent to which, language shapes and controls the thinking and the way of life of its speakers as well as the extent to which it reflects their worldview. The dynamism of expressions in language used to reflect cultural heritage makes language distinct in itself making one cultural group different from another. Language is thus a unique feature that describes the identity of every human society.

Death is inevitable, and a difficult life experience for loved ones. During bereavement, mourners use words to express their feelings in various ways to show the customary signs of grief. It is entrenched in such language use in adages, agog, proverbs, etc., in virtually every society. For example, expressions in the English language such as 'what soap is for the body, tears are for the soul' or 'Good men must die, but death cannot kill their names', etc., and others in Akan as '*owuo atwedee obaako mforo*' (*the ladder of death is not climbed by a single individual*) all go to say that the concept of death is part of life and it is euphemised in many cultural norms.

Every culture has its unique ceremony for the dead. The One Week Funeral Observation is one distinct way of life that is held in high esteem among the Akans. According to the Akans' belief system, there is a time to be born and a time to die. They believe that, death is inevitable and that as the living is honoured in life, the dead too must be honoured in death. It is their belief that the dead is not dead in the actual sense but have exited to the world beyond (which they called *asamando*), where their ancient ones have been and that, every living being will exit to be there too, eternally.

Thus, the Akan culture has entrenched into the way the dead is honoured. Many scholarly works (such as Hale, 1996; Ankrah, 2007; Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020) have unveiled that there are three levels of Akan funeral practices, which are One Week Funeral Observation (*nawɔtwe da*), the funeral rite (*ayie yɔ*) and the family sitting (*abusuafoɔ ntenasee*). This study aims at making a case for the 'One Week Funeral Observation' as a cultural norm of a people, that is unique and purposeful and to consider the stepwise documentation of the 'one week observation' in order to avoid its distortion or abandonment in the future.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

There is a plethora of information on the Akan's funeral practices with robust literature in such disciplines as Sociology (Adinkrah, 2016), History (Adu-Gyamfi et al, 2020), Religious Studies (Hale, 1996), etc. However, there is dearth of information in linguistics as well as the procedural documentation of the one-week funeral observation. Neither is there any specific data that has specifically considered the One Week Observation, which precedes all the other rites nor is there any linguistic documentation on it. In addition, no extant literature has used Hymes' (1976) concept of Ethnography of Communication to account for any data on the Akan funeral rites, as this study portends. For example, Adu-Gyamfi et al. (2020) considered the processes involved in the celebration of funerals among the Akan people, some belief systems and their modern trends that have evolved in funeral ceremonies. As extensive as their study seems to have captured the entire funeral rites, the authors did not specifically focus on each of them as this study carefully chooses to do with an aspect of the Akan funeral rite.

Again, Hale (1996) expressed concern that despite the proliferation and entrenchment of Christianity, Akans still hold on to their funeral cultural practices. Hale hinged his study on Samuel Asare Konadu's text titled '*Ordained by the Oracle*', where he recounted several instances of the religiosity of the Akan people when it comes to funeral rites. However, Hale's work is not an empirical oriented one. Another divergence of this current research work with Hale's is that, it takes into cognizance the step-by-step documentation of the one week funeral observation. Dakurah et al (2023) investigated the role of sorghum in funeral celebrations among the Dagaaba of North-west Ghana, which is quite different from other reviewed literature underpins in this study. The study revealed that sorghum known as *kagyin* is the first crop item that is placed beside a deceased to portray the farming prowess while alive. This practice among other reasons reduces laziness. Aside, the previous studies have drawn their conceptual framework within the purview of History, Sociology, Anthropology and Religious Studies with no focus on the linguistic elements that are useful for pedagogy. Thus, this study portends to complement the existing literature.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. Highlight its various modes of dissemination, its importance to the people and the Ghanaian society as a whole.
- ii. Explore the need to give it a proper documentation in the digital age to ensure its preservation and accessibility for future generations.

- iii. Identify the traditional practices and procedures involved in observing the one-week funeral rites.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Ethnography of Communication Theory

The theory adopted for the study is Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication, which was propounded in 1964 (Hymes, 1976). The goal was to create a theory that would help account for language use in specific contexts. According to Hymes, culture is the knowledge, which members in a community share and it is the basis of behaviours, which brings to certain meanings. To study the communication of a particular culture, Hymes proposed that linguists' basic goal is to indicate which area of the culture; one is most interested in examining. This view makes this theory accurate for the study. The theory enabled the researchers to make the right choices of the study area, Kumasi, which is the seat of the Ancient Asante kingdom that has maintained their cultural values. The theory also allowed the researchers to live among the informants, noting, observing and verifying the way the 'one week funeral rites' was observed.

2.2 Empirical Review

There are robust scholarly works on Akan funeral rites in various disciplines such as Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Medicine, History, Religion, etc., but dearth of information in Linguistics. For example, Hale (1996) quoting from Asare Konadu's 'Ordained by the Oracle', asserts that despite the rapid proliferation and entrenchment of Christianity in Ghana, the indigenous religious beliefs and practices continued to have a profound influence on many Ghanaians. According to him, it includes large number of those who profess the Christian faith attend funerals and involved in the ritual practice of pouring libations to appease the ancestral spirits.

In spite of the fact that honouring the dead is one of the Akans' cultural heritage, extant scholarly literatures inform that it is not all deaths that are accorded the deserved honour. Adinkrah (2016) elicits that there are evidences from the anthropological and historical literature, which demonstrate that suicide as a category of death and manner of dying was highly stigmatised and strongly censured in traditional Akan society of present-day Ghana. He unveils the negative and condemnatory view of the Akan society towards suicide and emphasized on the purification activities that the society carried out on suicide death. Punitive measures such as non-celebration with no social events like drumming and singing are accorded to such death, which serves as a warning to the living to value life no matter the challenges of life that might befall one. In addition, because funeral is highly valued, suicidal case is rarely seen or heard among the Akans and Ghana as a nation. This corroborates Goldsmith et al (2002) findings that literature on suicide suggests that societies with more accommodating attitudes towards suicidal behaviour tend to manifest high suicide rates while societies with severe sanctions against suicidal behavior tend to generate low rates of suicide. This shows the affinity the Akans have for their culture.

Again, some studies have viewed the economic implications of the Akan funeral rites. Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) criticised the new trends in the performance of the funeral ceremonies. His opinion is on the grounds that, it is increasingly becoming too elaborate and attracting enormous expenses. Nevertheless, they failed to view it in the standpoint of the mutual and the peaceful coexistence of the Ghanaian people that have emanated from such a cultural practice. The Akan funeral rites is observed in this study to be one of such long standing cultural heritage that has helped to bridge cooperation among the Akans and other tribes. This study helps to unravel how the various activities in the One Week Funeral Observation have helped to nurture and mould lives among the Ghanaians and such have entrenched into other social activities positively.

The structure of the One Week Funeral Observation known as '*Nnawotweda*' is accorded with keen interest and held in high esteem by the people. Ankrah (2007) affirms that in the Akan cultural heritage, the death of an individual makes an extremely big difference not only to the relatives of the deceased but also to whatever association one had during his lifetime. He stressed that sympathizers from the deceased's religious, professional, political and other forms of affiliations mobilise financial donations, transportation, etc., just to attend the burial or funeral of their departed colleague regardless of the distance. This virtue signals in the living a huge sense of belonging, which helps to maintain relationships no matter how disenchanting it may be. However, Ankrah (2007) based his views on religious perspectives; he examined the concept of death and its ramifications in the contemporary Akan society by formulating a model of Christian response that would be an effective model for ministry among the people.

Ankrah (2007) also unraveled the elaborate burial ceremony and its financial implications but did not discuss the beneficial aspects of how the celebration build strong communal lifestyle rather than individualistic tendencies among the Akans as Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) opined. They confirmed that funerals are instances of exchanges and redistribution of resources but the funeral donations called '*nsawa*' has significantly bridged the spirit of communalism among the people as it is an act of irresponsibility to attend funerals without making donations. Aside this view, the

elaborate ceremonies are signals and reflections of the kind of life the deceased also lived among the people while alive. It is a way of signaling to the living that the kind of rapport one has while alive, reflects in the attendance of one's burial. Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) assert that the donations are meant to recoup the financial resources incurred in the funeral ceremonies. This act is worthy of note, in that, it fosters strong communal relationship instead of individualism, which is susceptible to communal vices such as hatred, malice, communal clash, riots, killings, kidnapping, etc.

Akans believe that there is good death and bad death. The good death is the one that occurs naturally at old age and the bad death is the one that occurs unnaturally. The natural death occurs following old age and normal illness (They believe that the decedent died his own destined death '*w'awu ne kra wuo*') while the unnatural death is the one that is attributive to prime or under aged, death at childbearing, accidents, diseased death, suicide, etc. Adu – Gyamfi et al (2020) identifies the bad death as '*owu bone*': they associated good death to those who die at age 70 and above, and those who die peacefully; and further stressed that dying peacefully, not suffering, experiencing spiritual connection and making peace with others before dying are all classified as good death. For the opprobrium reserved for bad death in the Akan culture, Adinkrah (2016) asserts that some of the proscriptions against suicide endures but the postmortem decapitation meted to the suicide's corpse has been abandoned. He further stated that the Akan mortuary beliefs and practices, as with other aspects of their culture, are conceived as mutable, undergoing evolution over time and susceptible to influence other cultural diffusion because of globalization. This view corroborates with this study, as with the fast-running rate of technology, which has enhanced the high growth of modernization, there is the high tendency for most of the positive part of some African cultural values to go into obliteration. It is therefore imperative to investigate and document the stepwise procedure of the inoffensive cultural values of one-week funeral ceremony for posterity.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The Ethnography of communication theory guides this research. The choice of this theoretical framework is shaped by the fact that it enables the researcher to dwell with the informants, observe and interview the right people, who have the actual knowledge about the Akan culture especially, the funeral rites. The theory is considered appropriate to guide this study as it emphasizes the analysis of communication within the wider content of the social and cultural practices and beliefs of the members of a particular cultural speech community. The term 'ethnography of communication' means the different features of an approach that is taken towards understanding a language from anthropological perspectives. The diagram below (Figure 1) explains the conceptual framework of the study.

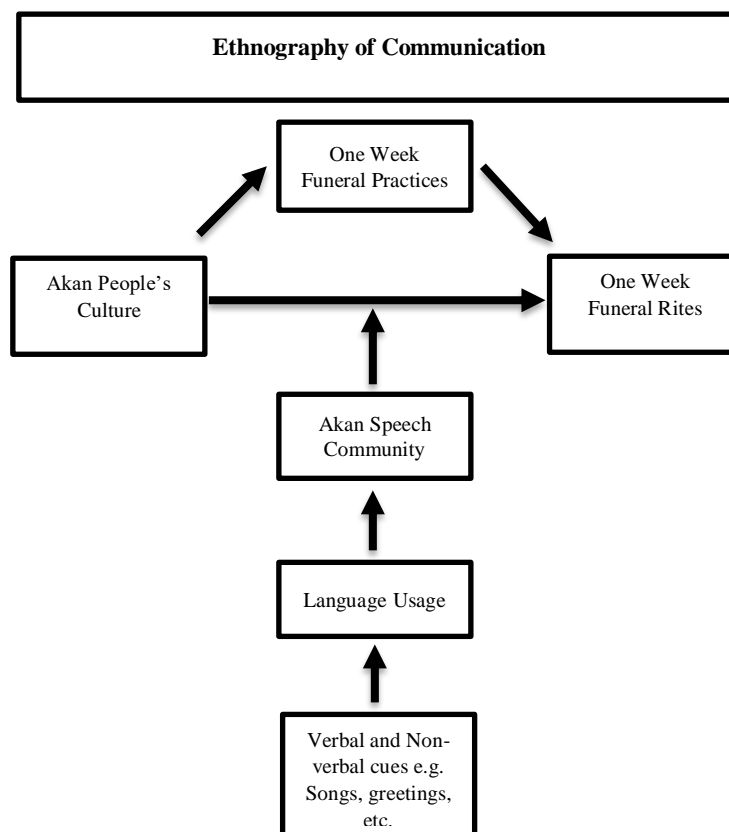


Figure 1
Conceptual Framework

At the apex is the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1, ethnography of communication, which all other elements are subsumed. They are branched out to perform a role in the discourse yet, they are related to one another. The one week funeral practices is the focus of the event performed by the tribe known as Akan in the present day Ghana, where their cultural norms and heritage are passed from generation to generation, where the cultural norms are internalised in them.

The rules regulating the one week funeral observation differ from the other funeral rites of the Akans. The language used are verbal and non-verbal cues. The speech acts of the verbal cues include greetings, dirge, elegy, songs, condolences, shouting, crying, wailing, weeping etc., and the non-verbal cues like waving hands to show signs of greetings, nodding, silences, and other kinetics are prevalent.

2.3.1 Hymes's Notion of Ethnography of Communication

Hymes (1976) first conceived Ethnography of Communication, shortly after he propounded the theory of Ethnography of Speaking. The proposed "ethnography of speaking" was to study how people talked, which later transcended to ethnography of communication to include other symbolic means of expression in communication. The goal was to create a theory that would help account for language use in specific contexts. To study the communication of a particular culture, Hymes proposed that linguists' basic goal is to indicate which area of the culture one is most interested in examining.

Hymes proposed the following models: speech community, speech situation, speech event, communicative act, communicative style, and ways of speaking. Morgan (2014) says speech community comprised a group of people that often use common signs. Because they communicate in a particular way, they are different from other groups, which is appropriate in the current study as the Akan is a group of people whose speech community is Asante or Twi. The Akans are in the present-day Ghana. Ghana is a multilingual nation, and as such code mixing and switching are linguistic features evident in their language use. It was observed that in the activities of the one week funeral observation, (especially at the family sitting and the sitting arena) the code used is the Asante dialect and was void of code-mixing and switching of the second language (L2) or another Akan dialect or any language of the environment. This is a linguistic bond which enhances comity, bridges mutual coexistence among the people of the speech community. It also helps in the preservation of the cultural norms.

Ankrah (2007) also affirms that death and customs are given much importance among the Akans based on their worldview, which is because a meaningful life is found in maintaining harmony with the spirit of the dead relatives, which he referred to as the 'living dead'. This worldview has unveiled many existing literatures on Akan funeral practices to have three forms. Each has its peculiar speech event, for example, the way the one-week funeral observation is performed is different from the way the final funeral ceremony and others are performed. As such, each has different communicative events and are performed in different communicative styles with such speech genres like proverbs, euphemism, agog, banter etc., and other forms and with different content.

2.3.2 Who Are the Akan People?

The word Akan is both a linguistic and ethnographic entity (Abakah, 2016). It refers to a congregation of dialects or languages (Sekyi-Baidoo, 2019). The Akans are numerically dominant ethnic group in the present-day Ghana. Historically, the Akans were said to be people from the linguistic Kwa group of the present-day Ghana, Ivory Coast and Togo in West Africa. The study concerns itself with the Akan people found in the present-day Ghana only. These groups of people speak the Akan language known as Twi/Fante, which are a group of dialect within the Central Tano branch of the Potou-Tano sub-group of language family of the Niger-Congo family. It is the only large and well-established branch of the Kwa family. Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) say that the word 'Asante' refers to both the people and their language.

The sub-language groups of the Akan people include the Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Bono, Fante, Kwahu, Wassa and Ahanta. They all have cultural attributes in common, most notably the tracing of matrilineal descent, inheritance of property, and succession to high political office and funeral rites, which is now a popular ceremony among them. Adinkrah (2016) explicates that the Akan society is characterised by internal diversity of customs and practices and that what pertains in one group may be slightly different from what is in another group even though the substance of the practice will be the same. He stresses that there are minor cultural and linguistic differences such as major cultural beliefs and practices are similar for the various sub-ethnic cultures.

The study focuses on the Asante people who are in the present-day Kumasi. The language of the Asante people is known as Twi but Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) assert that Asante is one of the divisions constituting the Akan ethnic groups in Ghana. They are found in the Asante and Ahafo Regions of present-day Ghana. The Asante people are not only identified by their geographical location but also by language, culture and tradition of which the one week funeral observation is one of them and it is greatly held in high esteem.

2.3.3 What is the One Week Funeral Observation About?

The Asante people believe that death is inevitable; there is a time to be born and a time to die. Hence, the saying that '*owuo ye obiaa ntoma*' (death is everyone's garment). Thus, when one dies, the dead must be honoured and part of the honour is to perform the Asante ritual in funeral rites called *ayieyo*, which according to Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) quoting Agyekum, posits that for a person to enter into glory in the next world, a befitting burial is required.

The One Week Funeral Observation is always observed a week of the departed soul. It is a period when family members of the deceased come together to announce formally the actual date of the burial. It was gathered that in the past, it was only the affairs of the family members but it has come to be the concern and the involvement of members of the community, friends, church members, professional colleagues, school/classmates and associates of the deceased to come together to observe the one-week funeral observation.

The first announcement of the death is made to the family members, friends, associates and the community where the deceased lived. It is from the day of the announcement that mourners become aware of the one week ritual, except in a situation where adequate preparation are yet to be put in place, in which case the family members postpone it to the week that follows it, which according to the data gathered, cannot be beyond two weeks. It is not a common thing for it to be shifted but when it becomes necessary to do so, it then means that an important person like the head of a family known as '*abusuapanin*' has given the approval, as he spearheads decision making. Sometimes, some family members shift it into the second week as a preference, which the Akans believe that it must not go beyond that. The strict adherence of these cultural regulations build up certain degree of positive habits that make them responsible and any deviance is regarded as an outlaw.

From the moment of the announcement, everyone puts on black, red, or red and black attire and shoes. No one goes to the bereaved compound with other colours of attire or shoes rather than those mentioned above. Though it was observed that on rare occasions, attire having black and white are used, which is based on family's discretion. It was gathered that if the affected family has never experienced death of a child, (which is called *sodo*) then the family would announce to the community that on the day of the one week, mourners are to wear black and white. It is also used if the deceased died at a good old age, which is believed to be the 'good death'. This is however for the day of the one-week celebration only and not the start date of the announcement of the death.

Family members wake up as early as possible to wail the dead by chanting the soul name of the deceased in dirge or elegy. Family members, friends, associates, neighbours and the community gather around the immediate family members of the deceased to cry, wail, console, condole, encourage and or comfort them. Family members of the deceased sit in the family compound in circle to receive condolences, which are most times in low tone of voices, silences, gestures, sobbing or wailings. The condolences run through the same or varied personae from the day of announcement to the one-week ceremony and even beyond. The condolence greetings start from as early as 5 a.m. to 6 p.m., which is a communal norm. No food or water is served the mourners because it is believed that it is the moment of intense pains and food at that time is immaterial. Even when food is being cooked, it is off the scene. During this time, *fufuo*, which is the staple meal of the Akans is not among the food to be served.

2.3.4 Preparation towards the One-Week Funeral Observation

The preparation into the one-week is systematic. It takes a step-by step approach, which are categorised in subheadings below.

The Family Heads: Every family has a head known as *abusuapanin*. The family heads are the major decision makers. They are the ones to give orders and directives on what to do. They have the final say on all the matters concerning the rites.

Poster Announcement: A poster containing the picture of the departed with some vital information concerning the one-week such as the name of the deceased, picture, age, date and venue for the one-week are expressed on the poster and placed in strategic places and on vehicles.

Communal Involvement: Few days to the ritual, some members of the community give gifts of cash or water to the deceased's family members. The cash gift is to enable them augment whatever remains for them to do. The gift of bottle water is for the family members to serve the visitors that would come for the actual day.

2.3.5 The Activities Involved in the One-Week Funeral Observation

Timing: Family members who have come from far and near to observe the one-week wake up as early as 5 a.m to wail the deceased. However, it was observed that during this time many remember their loved ones, who have died long time ago, and as the tempo of the wailing increases, the deceased's name and that of others already departed are mentioned.

Libation: This is the moment where the head of the family pour libation calling on all the ancestors. They are called upon to drink so as to continue to watch over the living and never to allow any death in the nearest future.

Drumming: Very early in the morning, a group of drummers gather in the family compound to drum from 6 a.m. which lasts for 30 minutes. The beating of the drum is special and a unique one, it alerts the world that someone has exited from this world to the world beyond. The drummers consist of only male gender, who wear black 'kuntunkuni' (it is always a 12 yard unsewn male cloth wrapped around the body exposing one side of the upper limb).

Wailing: Drummers gather in the deceased's family compound early in the morning to beat a dirge tone of drumming. The beating of drum alerts people to converge in intense mourning and wailing, recounting the good deeds of the deceased. The time is also another moment to remember those who have long gone to be with their ancestors.

Feeding: During the one-week observation, family members of the dead prepare meal for mourners. It is believed that the living has mourned for one week and that they could now put something in the stomach. However, any prepared meal has to be something that is not cherished by the Akans, so every other meal could be served but apparently not *fufuo* (which is the staple food of the Asantes). 'Fufuo' is prepared from cassava and unripe plantain and served with groundnut, palm-kernel or light soup.

Family Gathering: It is expected that family members of the deceased must gather before the rituals, which starts at noon and runs into the evening, thus, it was observed that most family gatherings start at 9 a.m. and runs through before noon. Every member of the community is aware that the one-week celebration starts at 12 p.m. and donations starts from then to 6 p.m. People troop into the arena within the period and everything comes to a halt the moment it is 6 p.m.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed. The study adopted ethnographic method of data collection. Ethnography is a field of study, which is concerned primarily with the description, and analysis of culture, and linguistics is a field concerned, among other things, with the description and analysis of language codes (Saville-Troike, 1982). The data collection started from September, 2022 through February, 2023. Ten different funeral gatherings were selected purposefully from different quarters of Kumasi, Ghana. Three different sections were the focus of the study namely: the preparation, the family meeting and the donations arena.

The research takes into cognizance the qualitative research approach of both primary and secondary sources of data. Researchers dwelt mostly on observation, verifying, noting and recording some parts of the events. Aged Akan informants who are believed to be knowledgeable about the Akans' 'One Week Observation', were consulted. All the data recorded were in the Asante language; they were transcribed and translated into the English language. The information sourced are all useful hints that helped to scaffold the analysis.

3.2 Description of the Study Area

The data gathered for the study was in Kumasi metropolis. Kumasi is the seat of the Asante Kingdom with the title of the paramount ruler as Otumfo. It is a city in the Ashanti Region known to be one of the largest metropolitan areas in Ghana. Kumasi is the second-largest city in Ghana, after the capital, Accra. The city has Adum, Bantama, Kejetia, Asawasi, Pampaso, and Bompata (Roman Hill) as the central business areas. However, modernity and technological advancement have drawn many investors into the city, so much so that other suburbs have grown to merge into the city areas and it is still growing fast. In the early days, there was the presence of only one university, which is the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. With modernisation and the advancement of science and technology, Kumasi has spread in size and in socio-economic activities such that there are two more government universities, non-government universities and other tertiary institutions. These institutions among others have drawn people from all walks of life in search of greener pastures to inhabit in the city known to be the ancient seat of the Asante Kingdom. The Asantes, in spite of modernization, still hold in high esteem their cultural heritage and they have denied the intrusion of modernisation to water down their practices. Funeral practice is one of such cultural activities that is highly esteemed. People travel from far and near to show their last respect to the dead, which has fostered unalloyed unity among the people.

3.3 Research Instruments

The researchers used android phones to record the interactions at the various study area to collect the data. Each researcher did the recording concurrently. This is to avoid any loss of data, which allowed the researcher to harness the data and adopt the accurate one. The data was transcribed for the analysis. A research notepad was used to write down some items that were observed during the data collection. Some verbal information gathered were written down for further enquiry, and also for the researchers to consult during the analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis and Presentation

The study is a qualitative one that takes into cognizance descriptive approach. The data were in the Akan language and they were translated into English language. Where necessary the Akan lexeme was retained in its raw form but were translated into the English language. All the Akan words found in the in-text appear in italics for proper identification. The analysis was presented in headings and subheadings for proper readership.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 The Family Gathering

The family gathering is a crucial business of decision-making. It is the moment where the family heads assume their positions to show their prowess of the Asante culture and the family norms bequeathed to them by their ancestors. This ancestral background as well as the power and authority that are invested on them as '*abusuanpanin*' is valued and respected by all. There are many communicative acts exhibited by members. This is what Durst-Andersen (2023) refers to as linguaculture, which is a structured system of symbolic, indexical and iconic signs that functions as a common means of communication, as a common frame of reference and as a cultural guide for all members of a speech community to act and interact in its public and private spheres. Thus, the linguacultural knowledge of the Akans includes the ideas, feelings and values represented in the lexicon and how the use of its grammar reflects traditions, norms and the rules as entrenched in the one-week funeral rites. This linguacultural knowledge shows the deep sense of the linguistic knowledge and the communicative competence that individuals know about the Akan culture, which are contextualised in the family gathering.

During the gathering, the communicative stylistic features expressed are specialised proverbs, peculiar euphemism, agog, banter (these are used to ease certain tension), strict observation of social norms, special personae, avoidance of code mixing and code switching, specialised use of graphological features of colours. However, among all of them, proverbs are mostly used. The graphological features are mostly expressed in colours and in such colours as only black or red or combination of the two. There is a stringent adherence of cultural norms and values. For example, no one enters the arena without first showing their presence first to a special persona designated for that purpose alone. They would announce to the family gathered and thereby introduce them. The persona would then usher them into the arena in order for them to greet the family members.

Akans do not greet from the left but the right. They do not also greet from the outside of the arena but from the inside and exit. When they have finished with the greetings, someone would usher them to a designated seat, where another set of people would in turn welcome them and after a while, water is served. The exhibition of the cultural norm is what Morgan (2014) informs as speech communities. According to her, the concept of speech community does not simply focus on groups that speak the same language, rather, the concept takes as fact that language represents, embodies, constructs and constitutes meaningful participation in society and culture. In the view of that, a mutually intelligible symbolic and ideological communicative system must be at play among those who share the knowledge and practice about how one is meaningful across social context. Thus, when it comes to the one-week rites, everyone within the Akan speech community is aware of the cultural norms.

Every decision taken at the family gathering is finalised by the family head. The actual date of the funeral is determined at the family gathering, which is relayed to the people at the end of the one-week ritual ceremony. At the family gathering, decision of where the deceased is to be laid to rest is ascertained and it remains so. The actual expenses of the funeral are pre-estimated and shared among family members. Though, this depends largely on the status of the deceased. If the deceased was married, the two family members come together in the gathering to take decisions. Moreover, in that instance, each family is represented by their family heads. There is a ceremonial representative called '*ɔkyeame*' of the two families, who present matters to the family heads '*abusuanpanin*', and passes what the '*abusuanpanin*' elucidates to the entire families.

The communication trend follows smooth exchanges but whenever there are any flaws, conversationalists make amends and the family head(s) assumes the position of correcting the anomalies. When everything about the funeral arrangements is ascertained and responsibilities shared, then they pour libation (either to appease the gods or to thank them, or both). They proceed to the one-week observation arena (which each community has a designated venue). These cultural values have long lasting positive effects on the Asante community. Some of the positive effects are: firstly, there is a communal lifestyle of healthy relationship among the Akans and this is extended to the entire Ghanaian society. Again, it culminates into unity of purpose and sustains communal living. Moreover, there is a good sense of stewardship. Finally, it bridges a good sense of collaboration among neighbours and associates.

Thus, advocating for the funeral rites' stepwise documentation would reinforce its wide spread among the Ghanaians in diaspora who may not have in-depth knowledge of the practices. It would also help them to embrace and integrate into their rich cultural heritage.

4.2 At the One-Week Ritual Arena

There is always a designated arena in most communities. It is on few occasions that it is held in a family compound. The arena is always decorated in modern style with the deceased's picture placed in strategic position for everyone to see, and that is, where all mourners gather to donate money in honour of the dead in order for the family to give the deceased a befitting burial. At the arena, there are special people who usher in guests into the scene. It was observed that when people come into the arena for the first time, which is mostly in group of people, the ushers speak of the identity of the group and the relationship they had with the deceased. It is then announced by another special persona who then allows them in to first greet the family members and while the greetings are ongoing, the announcer announces their identity to the entire gathering. The exact amount of donations called '*nsawa*' is mentioned and the donors are later given printed receipt with the amount donated and duly signed. It was observed that the receipt always has the picture and inscribed information of the deceased. The family chooses representatives to note and document the donations. These representatives give account of what has been received after the ceremony. Family members' standby to appreciate the donors for their kind gesture. The greetings and donations continue until 6 p.m.

The linguistic features of the data revealed at the family gathering are euphemisms and proverbs, which are associated with death in Akan. According to Saville-Troike (1982), "the most highly regarded language skill in other societies may be knowing how to use speech levels well or the ability to use similes, metaphors, proverbs and rhymes in appropriate contexts." Perhaps, all the figures of speech would have been addressed in Saville-Troike's 1982 perspectives of the adept use of speech levels among some set of people within a speech community, but for space, as each has its own aesthetic form in language use. It was observed in the study that in announcing death, the under listed were predominantly used. They are euphemisms that avoid the direct use of the word 'death or dead'

- i. *W'atwa n'ani ahwe dan* (he/she has turned his/her eyes to the wall).
- ii. *W'ada ne benkum so* (he/she has slept on his/her left hand).
- iii. *W'aka nkyene agu* (he/she has poured salt away).
- iv. *Ɔdaae a, w'ansore* (he/she has slept but did not wake-up).
- v. *W'adane atɔ* (he/she has fallen).
- vi. *W'ako atɔ* (he/she battled and lost).

Among other linguistic implications of using euphemism, it is used in this context to honour the dead, in that death to the Akans is a painful exit to both the living and the dead, thus, giving the direct reference is somewhat harsh to the dead. Again, it is to confirm the belief that the dead has exited to the world beyond and to be transformed to a place called *asamando*, where ancestors await as hosts. This corroborates with Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020) assertion that "...when an elder dies, he is transformed into an ancestor", and the ancestor according to African world view is believed to watch over the living. Hence the pouring of libation.

Proverbs have been identified as witty sayings or words of wisdom. Culturally, it is believed to be the words of elders. Thus, its uses and usages must reflect cultural norms. When it is to be used by an underage in many African cultural settings, the user must ask for the permission of the elders. This cultural distribution is featured in such expressions as '*sebe*', '*mpaninfo ka se*' (according to our elders). At the family gatherings, the following were used contextually: i. *Owuo atwedee baako nfuro* (death is not an individual's ladder). It was observed that it is mentioned when the gathering is discussing on money matters. The speaker says that to inculcate in the minds of the hearers to be responsible in the expenses needed for the funeral, perhaps sending a signal that it is someone's turn now, it could have been anyone among them. ii. *Agya tua ka, na ɔne ka* (father is obligated but does not necessarily owe). This proverb signals the fact that the Akans practice matrilineal relation and not patrilineal, which excludes fathers from being part of those who would be coopted by family members to pay any outstanding debt incurred from the one-week observation or the entire burial process. So, such proverb was mentioned on the patriarch side of the family gathering. As a matter of fact, all the preparations and arrangements are conducted in the matriarch's compound.

4.3 Documentation of Akan One-Week Funeral Observation: A Necessity

Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020), explicate that, the actual purpose of funeral is to honour the dead for their meritorious services on earth, ushering them into eternal glory and to integrate them into the next world. Underscoring the notion of 'meritorious services' used by Adu-Gyamfi et al (2020), there is the need to go beyond the celebration to proper procedural documentation, which can be digitalised. The current trends in information technology development has made documentation easier and accessible to larger audience around the world. It has been ascertained that the world is a global village and the use of internet and social media platforms disseminate information rapidly. Faleke and Solomon (2022), assert that "the presence of people on the cyberspace outnumbered those on the surface of the earth". Nowadays, it is common for people to own more than three technological gadgets, which they use for different purposes on the cyberspace. For example, an individual may belong to different social groups on the cyberspace, surfing the internet for information or engaging in different cybermall interactions. Creation of cyberspace for documentation of the dead and



associated cultural rites is essential especially for people to know about the cultural practices of different communities around the world when it comes to the funeral rites.

The creation of cyberspace for these activities is highly imperative as many cultural heritages especially in Africa are going into extinction due to modernity and nonchalant attitude of people. In addition, many great and good people have died especially in some parts of Africa and after the burial rites, they fade into oblivion, likewise, many families cannot even trace the history of their patrilineal and matrilineal lineages. Urbanization is leading to encroachment of local cemeteries in some localities whereby tombs and epitaphs therein that serve as a reminder are cleared-off for development.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study has shown the way the Akans observe the One Week Funeral Observation rites. The activities are internalised among the people. The society frowns at any violation of the procedure, hence its strict adherence. The study asserts that the one-week funeral observation is didactic. Its features have a long-term effect on the people, in that, its continuous observation has bridged a communal living, which has fostered mutual affection and commitment. One may then say that, the entire nation with its known relative peace, unlike some other Africa nations, could be attributive to such a cultural heritage. The study advocates for the sustainability and proper stepwise documentation of all aspects of the one week funeral rites in the cyberspace. This would preserve it and make it available for future generations.

5.2 Recommendations

The study focuses on how the Akans observed the 'one week funeral' gathering in Kumasi metropolis. The study area used is to ascertain the actual way it has been observed overtime and the results showed high stringency in the maintained norm. The researchers recommend that future researchers could consider other study areas in order to study how the 'one week' funeral gathering is observed, taking close interest in comparative analysis. It has also been mentioned in the current study that the Akan funeral rites are in three phases of which the 'one week' takes precedence; the researchers recommend that future researchers could consider any of the remaining two. Finally, there is the need for proper documentation of the orality of all the three types of the Akan funeral rites.

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