Doing politics on walls and doors: A sociolinguistic analysis of graffiti in Legon (Ghana)

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Abstract

Graffiti act as a medium through which political (including socio-political) unmentionables are mentioned without the writer attracting any political or social sanctions. Graffiti in Legon (Ghana) have anonymous authors. Through graffiti, people of lower social/political status (students) express their opinions on political actors (people holding public office) and political decision making processes. They also express their anger and frustration about Ghana's political situation. Sequentially, the graffiti consist of stimuli followed by responses. They could therefore be said to constitute discourses with participants taking turns. Syntactically, the sentences are often short, and are of a simple sentence type. Graffiti exhibit all the properties of interaction – turn-taking, repair, opening and closing, adjacency pairs, indirectness, among other features.

1. Aims

In this paper, I show that graffiti is a medium through which political protest and critical political comment may be made. Additionally, I show that in Legon, Ghana, graffiti is a gender-based discourse with male students[1] as the sole participants. Finally, I provide evidence to show that an understanding of the culture of the participants, and of the entire communicative context are prerequisites for understanding the graffiti discourse.

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2. Introduction

In Ghana, as in most West African countries, graffiti is a rallying force for dissonant political and social communication since the sociocultural and the political atmosphere do not warrant protest discourse. A story is told of a man who was arrested for writing graffiti on the wall of a powerful Akyem ethnic group (Ghana) chief. The man had written '*Worebɔ ɔman yi*' which translates weakly into English as 'You're ruining this nation'. When put before the elders, the graffitist (the writer of the graffiti) is alleged to have employed both word play and knowledge of Akan orthography to defend himself. First, he claimed that there was no full stop at the end of the sentence implying that the sentence may have been incomplete. In addition, he claimed that the coal he was writing with was finished so he was unable to complete his sentence. What is most important, he said that he intended to praise the chief for the tremendous efforts the chief was making toward the nation's development by writing '*Worebɔ ɔman yi ho mmɔden*' meaning 'You're doing your utmost best for this nation'. The graffitist was set free because praising the chief was considered a good gesture. Whether the graffitist was sincere in his defense or not is not relevant to this paper. What is most important is that graffiti was, and still is, an important political communicative strategy. Second, it was the content of the graffiti and not the act of writing graffiti itself that was questioned. Finally, we learn that in view of the power-laden nature of Ghanaian society, dissenting political views may not be tolerated.

In Ghana, in spite of university and high school students' high level of political consciousness and their involvement in politics, they are sometimes excluded from the center of mainstream political activities. This by implication suggests that students who want to speak the politically unspeakable (that is, make statements deemed by the government as subversive or anti-government or discuss issues denied public discussion) must either give up on words (that is, remain silent although they have something to say) or speak obliquely. Among college students in Ghana, an often common form of obliqueness is graffiti. At the University of Ghana in Legon, these graffiti are mostly found on the doors and walls in men's lavatories. Gonos, Mulkern, and Poushinky (1976) note that the anonymity of public bathrooms provides graffiti authors with an opportunity to discuss restricted, tabooed, or proscribed issues. Nwoye (1993) notes that graffiti thrive in public bathrooms because the private nature of such bathrooms provides the authors with a form of privacy in which they can express their views without fear. In effect, public bathrooms help to create a high degree of anonymity in terms of authorship and subsequently provide the graffitists with a form of political, social, and communicative immunity and also immunity from prosecution (see Moonwomon 1995).

Graffiti act as a communicative strategy used by a particular social group (people of lower socio-political status – students). Furthermore, shared background information is necessary for the creation and maintenance of the discourse involved and this makes graffiti an important object of sociolinguistic study. In view of the shared communicative, contextual, and political knowledge of the graffitists, they may employ implicature (Grice 1975). Specifically, the graffitists use the cooperative principles that govern the efficiency of the discourse. They sometimes write and then expect the other graffitists to understand the pragmatic import of what is written (see Obeng 1994, 1996, 1997a for further details on indirectness.)

The graffiti studied in this paper bear a relationship with the political situation in Ghana. Specifically, they are related to Ghana's internal political affairs, particularly, what the graffitists see as either incorrect policies, deprivation, oppressive actions, and theft by public officials. Graffiti also reflect the graffitist's political and ideological inclinations, social and ethnic identities, and the prejudicial and stereotypical view they hold about certain people and their languages (Obeng 1998), as well as their views on specific persons and personalities.

In their work on urban graffiti in the United States, Ley and Cybriwsky (1974) note that wall graffiti could be indications of attitudes, behavioral dispositions, and social processes. They further note that graffiti in an ethnic neighborhood identify tension zones related to social change. The situation in Legon graffiti is completely different because the graffiti are neither in ethnic neighborhoods nor identify tension zones. The graffiti found in men's bathrooms in Legon constitute a lively discussion of political views. Thus, unlike the graffiti in parts of the United States, those in Legon do not suggest contested gang territories.

Three main views are held about the nature of, or the genre-specific characteristics of graffiti. McGlynn (1972) believes that graffiti are rhetorically removed from the obligations of debate. Specifically, he notes that the rhetoric inherent in graffiti is final and unimpeachable. He draws an analogy between the secure and final nature and unimpeachability of the rhetoric in graffiti and that of the latch on a lavatory stall. However, Nwoye (1993) calls McGlynn's viewpoint into question by noting that graffiti act as stimuli by provoking a public discussion of issues raised in the stimuli. Thus, close attention to graffiti points to a sequential development of viewpoints by different graffitists. Cole (1991) and Davies (1986) posit that graffiti in women's bathrooms constitute an advice-giving genre. The data used in this study lend a measure of support to Nwoye's thesis.

2. Students in Ghanaian politics

Although Ghanaian students have been very active politically since independence from Imperial Britain in 1957, they have often been on the sidelines in major political decision-making processes, including those decisions that affect them directly. The Ghanaian governments that had by far the most trouble with college students were the military governments – National Redemption Council (NRC) 1 and NRC 2 (1972–1979) – headed by Col. (later General) Ignatus Kutu Acheampong and General Akuffo respectively. Not only did the NRC governments label college students as subversionists, trouble makers, and hooligans, they (especially NRC 1) used the security forces to attack the students, and frequently even closed the universities. This is not to suggest that NRC 1 did not enjoy students' support at all. In fact in the earlier part of his rule, Acheampong's NRC 1 received their support especially for its agricultural policies, and it was quite common to see students working hand in hand with the government. Students were, for example, very instrumental in the construction of a canal (Dawenya Canal near Accra) to aid the NRC's agricultural policy code-named 'Operation Feed Yourself'. They also helped Ghana's traffic police during Ghana's transition from driving on the left side to the right side of the road. The students, however, strongly opposed the 'Union Government' political system forced on Ghanaians by NRC 1 in 1978.

Another military head of state who initially enjoyed the support of Ghanaian students but later lost it is Jerry Rawlings. In 1979, Rawlings overthrew NRC 2, executed three former Ghanaian heads of state (Generals Acheampong, Akuffo, and Afrifa) ruled Ghana with his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) for a little over three months before handing over power to a civilian administration. He was hailed by college students as a redeemer and as someone who had no political ambitions. However, in 1981, Rawlings returned to the top of Ghana's political scene through another coup d'état and formed a 'provisional' government – Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). This time around, his aim was to stay in power. College students supported Rawlings' government by helping to transport cocoa (then Ghana's main foreign exchange earner) from the hinterlands into the harbor for export. However, like previous governments, the PNDC dealt with its political foes, including students, ruthlessly (Adjei 1994). Like the other military governments, the PNDC also closed the universities often and sent security forces to attack the students. For eleven years, Rawlings ruled Ghana as a dictator and a culture called the *culture of silence* (Obeng 1997a) became known in Ghana. People were afraid to speak openly against the PNDC and oblique communication became the order of the day. During this time, graffiti on college bathroom doors and walls, as well as those in obscure places, became a channel for dissonant political discourse. In 1992, Rawlings was elected president of Ghana's fourth republic. In December 1996, Mr. Rawlings was reelected to serve a final four-year term as president of Ghana. Political discourse, expressed through graffiti on college campuses continues unabated.

3. Legon graffiti as a political discourse

Van Dijk (1995) notes that political discourse is determined by its actors: professional politicians (presidents, prime ministers, district chief executives, and others), political institutions (political parties), and others. He notes further that politicians are not the only participants in the domain of politics. The various recipients of political communicative events, like the public, as well as other groups may be included as participants in political discourse.[2] Legon college students, as previously noted, have always engaged in political action or activity including protesting or actively supporting government policies; organizing people to either vote for or against a government policy or to refrain from voting.[3] They helped to bring Jerry Rawlings to power in 1979 (by openly declaring support for him and demonstrating in the streets of Accra in support for him in the heat of the 1979 coup). Since 1983, students have worked openly to bring down the government of Jerry Rawlings through demonstrations and declarations of support for the opposition parties. It may also be noted that many Legon students have, in the past, stopped their education to hold public office including becoming secretaries of state or regional ministers. In fact, a few have left the university to help stage a *coup d'état*.[4] Given the strong political involvement of students, the graffiti discourse they participate in may be termed political discourse.

Besides using the nature of participants in a discourse to determine whether it qualifies as a political discourse, it may also be noted that the complete communicative context and text are important in determining whether a text or discourse qualifies as a political discourse. For example, van Dijk notes that a session of parliament where elected politicians are debating in an official capacity during an official session of parliament will qualify as a prototypical political discourse. As far as Legon as a communicative setting is concerned, it is important to note that Legon has been the scene where major Ghanaian political parties have met to select their presidential candidates. In 1992, for example, several political parties including the National Independent Party and the New Patriotic Party, had their presidential primaries and final selections of their presidential candidates in Legon. Furthermore, several national political fora – political discussions on national

issues – are more often than not held in Legon. All these go a long way to make Legon a political arena and a possible setting for political discourse.

As far as the Legon graffiti discourses are concerned, a unique feature that makes the discourse political is the content and the overall discourse strategies inherent in the graffiti. The graffiti discourse involves such issues as political systems (communism, dictatorship, democracy, and other political systems), political values, and ideologies like accountability, probity, justice, freedom, equality, and so forth.

Other characteristics of political communication discussed by van Dijk (1995) which are found in the Legon graffiti discourse include the following: making negative references to the present and somewhat positive references to the future. Furthermore, the graffitists, like politicians, use inclusive and exclusive pronouns – *we*, *us*, *our*, *they*, *them*, and *their* (Obeng 1997a, 1998; Wilson 1990) to show closeness or co-membership and distancing or out-of-network status. Other political communicative strategies employed by the Legon graffitists that fit into those discussed by discourse analysts include name-calling (Cross 1989; Obeng 1997a), bending the truth (Orwell 1989), an employment of the defense-attack argumentation and organization of political dispute, use of disclaimers, euphemisms, and hyperboles (van Dijk 1995; Obeng 1997a). Besides these discourse characteristics, the graffitists employ both lexical and semantic intertextuality (Obeng 1998). In particular, they can express meaning through the text by borrowing from knowledge common to other graffitists and to the community. Such knowledge includes knowledge about Ghana's politics, vogue political terminologies, and in-group slang.

Finally, besides being a political discourse, the graffiti in Legon qualify as a social discourse, given the social networks of the graffitists as students, and the social nature of some of the topics.

4. Method

The data for this study consist of orthographic transcripts of graffiti found on the doors and walls of the men's lavatories at the University of Ghana, Legon. The data were collected over a two-year period – between July, 1993 to June, 1995.[5] The graffiti were collected from men's lavatories (in the halls of residence, various academic departments, and classrooms). The female assistant found no graffiti in the women's lavatories. I find the nonexistence of graffiti in women's lavatories in Legon surprising given the quantity of graffiti found in women's lavatories in Nigeria and in the United States by Nwoye (1993) and Cole (1991) respectively.

In all, thirty graffiti discourses were found and collected. Out of the thirty, only three dealt with social issues; two dealt with a local University of Ghana political issue; the remaining twenty-five dealt with national politics (Ghanaian politicians and political issues in Ghana). Table 1 shows the subject-matter of the graffiti discourse.

Table 1. *Subject matter of graffiti in Legon*

SUBJECT-MATTER	PERSONS MENTIONED	ISSUES DISCUSSED
Politics (national) (25)	Mr. Rawlings, Mrs. Rawlings, Adu Boahen, P. V. Obeng, Djiwa, Arkaah, Tsikata.	probity and accountability, oppression, threats, ridicule of political parties and of politicians, political humor, elections, language and ethnicity issues
Politics (campus) (2)	Akilakpa, Benneh, Dean, Head of Department.	students' loan scheme and cheating
Social (3)	—	prostitution, theft, and banalities.

The graffiti have not been altered in any way, thus, no grammatical errors have been corrected. Because the identities of the graffitists are unknown, they are represented by ordinary Roman letters.

The texts are analyzed within the framework of the ethnography of communication (Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Gumperz 1982; Gumperz and Hymes 1972; Hymes 1964). Particular attention is paid to the context of situation in which the graffiti occur – men's lavatories – because they have relevance for what is written and how it is written. I also look at the participants (male students), the content and form of the graffiti, the purpose and goals of the communication, the manner or tone in which messages in the graffiti are presented, the kind(s) of interpretations given by the graffitists through their reactions or orientations to prior turns, and the kind of genre used. This strategy helps to provide some one not familiar with the situation in which the discourse takes place an opportunity to understand the communicative behavior of the graffitists. My over ten years background in Legon – as a student, a teaching assistant and then as a faculty member – provide me with the necessary tools for understanding the discourse and the context of situation involved.

The following properties of interaction – turn-taking, repair (especially correction proper), opening and closing, adjacency pairs, indirectness – are found in the data. I also look at some of the excerpts from the pragmatic point of view by exploring the way in which the students make use of implicative relations.

Finally, because the graffiti are either in Standard Ghanaian English, Ghanaian Pidgin English, or in a Ghanaian ethnic language, translations into Standard American English are provided where necessary.

5. Text and discussion

The object of this section is a discussion of the content, discourse and syntactic structures, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics of seven of the graffiti discourses. The contents of the graffiti include accountability, political insults, oppression, political threats, political humor, and Ghana's 1992 general elections.

Close observation of Ghana's political scene and political discourse since 1981 suggests that the words *probity* and *accountability* have become vogue and are frequently used by Rawlings' governments – PNDC and National Democratic Congress (NDC). It therefore comes as no surprise when his critics judge him on those very words.

On oppression, as stated earlier, although most ordinary Ghanaians see Rawlings as a liberator, most college students, and his political opponents, see him as an oppressor. Evidently, for Legon college students, political threats constitute a common jargon. Such threats are often not backed by any strong action and carry little or no real threat. The political humor is usually about vanquished politicians or about the villainies and immoral behavior of public office holders.

Ghana's 1992 elections were viewed by some people as unfair with one of the parties – the New Patriotic Party (NPP) – writing a book, *The Stolen Verdict*, in which they enumerate some fraudulent means allegedly used by the then PNDC government (New Patriotic Party 1993). Due to the controversies surrounding the elections, especially, the results, it comes as no surprise that the graffitists wrote about it.

As far as persons and personalities are concerned, President Rawlings, Mrs Rawlings, Adu Boahen (a history professor and former presidential candidate for the NPP), Mr P. V. Obeng (President Rawlings' former special adviser, who is no relation to author), Corporal Halidu Djiwa (a military corporal executed by Rawlings for attempting to overthrow his PNDC administration), vice-president Arkaah (President Rawlings' vice-president from 1992 to 1996), and Kojo Tsikata (Rawlings' chief security adviser) are the politicians whose names appear most frequently in the graffiti discourse. Having been in power briefly in 1979 and then again since 1981, it comes as no surprise that Mr Rawlings' name appears in the discourses frequently. Mrs Rawlings' own political involvement, especially with the December 31st Women's Movement, makes her an important public figure and therefore the focus of political discourse.

In view of vice-president Arkaah's political woes in Ghana, especially scandals about sexual immorality (which were never proven in any law court) and his opposition to the views of Rawlings, it is not surprising that he is the focus of ridicule by the college students. Adu Boahen, a history professor at the University of Ghana, and a former presidential candidate, has been vocal in Ghanaian politics since 1987. At a time when there was dictatorship in Ghana and hence a freeze on political activity, he broke what was then called the culture of silence and spoke openly against Rawlings' PNDC. He is admired by students for his boldness. However, his losing the 1992 elections and his party's pulling out of the parliamentary election made him the focus of ridicule by some students.

The fact that the other persons' – P. V. Obeng, Halidu Djiwa and Kojo Tsikata – names appear in the discourse suggests that in the opinion of the students these people are important political players in Ghana. P. V. Obeng was, for over ten years, Rawlings' personal adviser on governmental affairs and was probably the most visible politician in Ghana between 1981 and 1996. Most Ghanaian newspapers tipped him to succeed Rawlings in 2000 when Rawlings' second term as president ends. Corporal Halidu Djiwa became a household name in Ghana following his many coup d'état attempts and his execution by a firing squad. Finally, Kojo Tsikata, a retired captain of Ghana's Armed Forces first became popular in the 1970s when his planned coup d'état code-named 'One-man one-machete' failed and he was court-martialed. In 1979 and since 1981 he has been Rawlings' adviser on matters of security and is feared for his socialist hard-line.

Based on their content, the discussions of the excerpts are done under the subheadings political insults, accountability, elections, threats, and political humor. The categories are not mutually exclusive of each other. Most of the discourses involve more than one of the above categories. An observation of the excerpts suggests that political insults predominate in all discourses so I begin the discussion with political insults. In the excerpts that follow, T stands for turn so T1, for example, refers to the first turn of a discourse.

Political insults

Two kinds of insults are found in the excerpts. There are those in which the graffitists insult important public office holders (such as the president) and/or their spouses and those in which the discourse participants insult each other. Excerpts (1) and (2) exemplify the above category.

(1) (T1) A: Rawlings is a traitor. He has taken enough for the owner to see.

(T2) B: Anti-revolutionary! He's honest.
(T3) C: I *didn't not* know there were such stupid fools until I came here.
(T4) D: Foolish boy! Do you hate politics? Who teaches you Study Skills?
(T5) E: Don't write on the wall.
(T6) F: Block headed! Is this a wall?

A close look at the above excerpt suggests that there is one main issue—Rawlings being or not being a traitor – and two minor ones, concern about poor English and the act of doing graffiti. Rawlings is hailed as a revolutionary and viewed by some Ghanaians as honest. However, A and quite a number of students, especially those who do not belong to Rawlings' NDC party, see him differently. The word *traitor* and the expression *He has taken enough for the owner to see* suggest that A sees Rawlings as dishonest. Sequentially, A's string obviously acts as a stimulus or an opening (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) and B's string, a response to the stimulus. A's and B's strings constitute an adjacency pair, stimulus-response or offer-uptake.

B obviously disagrees with the proposition in A's string. The initial part of his response *Anti-revolutionary* is slang used by Rawlings' supporters to address Rawlings' opponents. Pragmatically, use of the above expression *anti-revolutionary* involves intertextuality – borrowing from previous discourse-types in creating this new text (Kristeva 1969). The second part of his response, *he's honest*, directly refutes A's allegation that Rawlings is dishonest. The pronoun *he* has anaphoric reference to *Rawlings* and is used for textual coherence.

C's string acts as a response to A's and B's stimuli. Sequentially, therefore, A's and B's strings constitute an opening or an offer and C's, an uptake. C's response points to the fact that he is either apolitical or he disagrees with A and B. He considers doing politics a foolish and stupid act. Further, like, B's, D's, and E's turns, C's turn performs two structural functions. First, it acts as a second part of an adjacency pair:

A: Rawlings is a traitor. He has taken enough for the owner to see.
B: Anti-revolutionary. He's honest.
C: *I didn't not know there were such stupid fools until I came here.*

and as a first part to the next adjacency pair;

C: *I didn't not know there were such stupid fools until I came here.*
D: Foolish boy. Do you hate politics? Who teaches you Study Skills?

In the first adjacency pair, A and B's turns form the first part of the first pair and C's, the second part. The plural word *fools* suggests that C is

referring to more than one person. In particular, it suggests that C is responding to A and B's strings. In the second pair, C's turn acts as the first part and D's as the second part of the pair.

D's string addresses two issues. First, he expresses his disgust about C's apolitical standing and then wonders why C's English is so bad. To fully understand D's last sentence, one ought to have knowledge of the Legon educational system. In the University of Ghana, it is a requirement that all undergraduates take a course in 'Language and Study Skills' to help improve their competence in English language usage, note taking, and essay writing. D's string points to the fact that C may not have had a competent instructor for this course.

E's string *Don't write on the wall* is a criticism of all the previous participants. What is ironical is that he criticizes them for an offence he has also committed – doing graffiti. The final turn *Block headed! Is this a wall?* by F is a direct response to E's turn. It is repair (correction proper or error replacement, Levinson [1983]) initiation. The repairable is *wall* and the repaired item is *door*. A, B, C, and D had written on the door not on the wall so F is prompting for a correction to be done. However, the repaired item is not provided by any other graffitist. The fact that a repair is initiated but not carried out is also a feature of some natural conversations.

As Obeng (1998) notes, in Legon graffiti, insults and name-calling act as either disagreement strings or as pre-disagreements. The strings *anti-revolutionary*, *foolish boy*, and *block headed* act as pre-disagreements in the above discourse. *Anti-revolutionary* precedes the string *he's honest* used by B to disagree with A; *block headed* is used by F to disagree with E's assertion that the graffiti had been done on a wall.

Syntactically, most of the sentences are of the simple sentence type consisting of a subject and a predicate – they consist of a single clause (Lyons 1982), for example, *Rawlings is a traitor*; *He's honest*; *Is this a wall?*; *Don't write on the wall*, and so forth. The pre-disagreement phrases – *anti-revolutionary*; *foolish boy*; and *block headed* – mentioned in the previous paragraph are adjectival phrases and a modified noun phrase. Sequentially, all three phrases are followed by strings which either refute or question the proposition in the preceding turn.

(2) GA: All female students who want quick money should see the Head of the 31st Dec. M'ment for their 'SPECIAL' assignment. If you want some of the joy of it contact prostitute h'se no. 1991 Legon branch of the 31st Dec. Women's M'ment. Rush!!!
IA: We shall not be perturbed. Against! Whether you like it or not, yɛn aa naa kɔ. Nana Konadu is great!!!!!!!!!!!!

(T1) GA: *All female students who want quick money should see the chair of the 31st December Women's Movement for a very important assignment. Men interested in having prostitutes should go to 'Prostitute House' # 1991, Legon branch of the 31st December Women's Movement. You must rush to this venue!*

(T2) IA: *Your animosity and lies won't in any way perturb us; you who oppose our party. Whether you like it or not, we are impregnable. Nana Konadu is indeed great.*

In (2), GA attacks Mrs. Rawlings' 31st December Women's Movement via implicature (Grice 1975). The fact that the movement is corrupt is implied but not explicitly stated. The graffitist also alleges that there may be prostitutes in the movement – a fact that can in no way be proved. The aim of the movement is to help empower women both politically and financially through primary cooperative ventures. There is no such house numbered 1991, and I am not aware of any branch of the movement on the Legon college campus. GA's initial sentence *All female students who want quick money should see the Head of the 31st Dec. M'ment for their 'SPECIAL' assignment* is a restrictive relative clause. It restricts the identity of the referents to those students who want quick money – money one gets by making little or no effort. It is a general feeling on the Legon campus, especially among the men, that some female students live above their means and that to pay for their lavish life style, they engage in prostitution. My own experience as a member of the Legon community from 1979 to 1995 as a student and then a faculty tells me that this feeling by the male students is either without basis or involves over exaggeration. Use of the uppercase letters in the word *SPECIAL* is for indirectness and also for emphasis. In the last word of GA's turn, he uses a graphological device, the use of three exclamation marks to emphasize the urgency involved in the proposition inherent in the previous sentences. Use of uppercase letters, punctuation marks, and other graphological features to emphasize facts in graffiti discourse is also noted in Moonwomon (1995) and Obeng (1998).

GA's turn attracts a response from IA. IA's response points to the fact that he either supports or identifies with the movement criticized by GA. His use of the inclusive first person plural pronouns – *we*, *yɛn* ('we') – supports the above claim. The word *against* is a jargon used by Legon students to designate a person with an opposing view. It has a negative connotation. The string after *against* involves English–Akan intra-utterance code-switching. The graffitist asserts that whether the previous turn-holder likes it or not, they, the movement, and its members, are unbeatable or impregnable. The string *Yɛn aa naa kɔ* ('We're impregnable') is a common political slogan used to taunt a political opponent. In other contexts, it may be used to assure someone of one's unfailing love or support. IA ends his turn by openly praising his heroine – Nana Konadu (Mrs Rawlings). In reality, IA's string is a show of support for Mr Rawlings through Mrs Rawlings. The above discussion points to the fact that through graffiti the students can show their political and social identities and also their allegiances. In effect, they can bring their political and social inclinations to the open. Use of the thirteen exclamation marks at the end of IA's turn emphasizes Nana Konadu's unparalleled greatness. In effect, the exclamation marks confirm the certainty and the high degree of forcefulness behind the proposition (greatness) in graffitist IA's string.

Sequentially, GA's turn opens the discourse and IA's turn closes it. Another significant sequential feature is that both turns end with exclamatory statements.

Like the strings in (1), the strings in (2) point to the graffitists' different political orientations and the extent to which they are prepared to either support or attack another's political views.

Political threat, accountability, and elections

A close observation of the excerpts points to the fact that the graffiti authors issue threats (involving possible revolt or insurrection) against the government and certain public office holders. They also complain about the fact that although the (P)NDC government promised the people of Ghana probity and accountability, it has just paid lip-service to matters relating to uprightness and accountability on the part of political actors and public officials. The graffiti discourse participants also write about Ghana's elections. The above claims are supported by excerpts (3) to (6).

In the next excerpt, (3), the graffitists write about threats and elections. The first turn, besides labeling Rawlings' previous government – PNDC – and present government – NDC – as made up of rogues, also involves a political threat, an insurrection. It must be mentioned however, that, like other political threats by students, this one has become political jargon with very little force behind it. The strings *suffering masses* and *rise against* became vogue expressions during Rawlings' AFRC era and the initial part of his PNDC administration when the government propagated socialist ideas and referred to its supporters as the masses and its opponents as either *reactionaries*, *anti-revolutionary*, or *bourgeoisie*. It is therefore ironical that his opponents now see themselves as the masses and Rawlings on the other side of the political spectrum.

(3) (T1) J: The suffering masses shall rise against (P)NDC rogues.
(T2) K: Bush Boy! Didn't you lose the last elections? We the real masses won. We shall Djiwa you rogues.

(T3) L: None of you shall win any more elections. My new party 'Hustler's Party' is still accepting members.

(T4) M: Make Arkaah your vice-P.

(T5) N: Where do all these politically minded rascals come from? Please do not write on the doors.

(T6) O: Passive citizen! Did you sing on the door?

(T1) J: The suffering masses shall rise against the (P)NDC rogues.

(T2) K: Bush Boy! Didn't you lose the last elections? We the real masses won. We shall kill you rogues.

(T3) L: None of you shall win any more elections. My new party, 'Hustler's Party', is still accepting new members.

(T4) M: Make Mr. Arkaah your vice-president.

(T5) N: Where do all these politically minded rascals come from? Please do not write on the doors.

(T6) O: Passive citizen! Did you sing on the door? (that is, you also wrote on the wall)

From the sequential point of view, Turn 1, J's turn, provokes a response and therefore forms an adjacency pair with K's turn (Turn 2). The initial part of K's turn *Bush Boy!* is an insult acting sequentially as a pre-disagreement. The pronouns *you* and *we* in the strings '*Didn't* you *lose the last elections?*' and 'We *the real masses won*' suggest that K sees J as belonging to a different political party. Use of the inclusive first person plural pronoun *we* in the final string of K's turn lends further support to the above claim. The pronominal paradigms encode the socio-political identities of the graffitists. They also encode different aspects of the communicative intentions of the graffitists.

In his final string – *We shall Djiwa you rogues* – K employs lexical intertextuality (Kristeva 1969). He borrows from knowledge about Ghanaian politics common to other graffitists to create his string. Specifically, he uses the noun, *Djiwa* (name of a military sergeant, Halidu Djiwa, executed for an attempted coup d'état) as a verb meaning 'kill'. Among some college students in Legon, the noun *Djiwa* is used as a slang to mean kill. K's string is therefore a threat.

L's turn marks a change in tone. Specifically, he changes the tone from more serious and harsh to a more relaxed, even comical tone. He says that he does not belong to any the known parties – there is no party in Ghana called *Hustler's Party* and no Legon student owns a political party. M joins in the political humor by asking L to make Vice President Arkaah his vice-president. At the time of this data collection, Arkaah had been the center of several controversies and alleged scandals. Unlike other previous vice-presidents who had office space at the Osu Castle (the seat of government), Arkaah had office space in a building inconsistent with his political standing.

Among Ghanaians, the substandard nature of his office was a snub by the president and signified disrespect for the vice-president.

N's turn is a response to all the previous turns. He expresses his dislike for politics by insulting the previous graffitists. He resorts to name-calling by labeling them politically minded rascals. This expression suggests that N does not see himself as belonging to that particular social group. His question is a rhetorical question that does not require an answer. N's last string, although a piece of advice, is ironical because he falls into his own trap by engaging in graffiti, an act that he condemns. It comes as no surprise when O 'retorts' with the insult *Passive citizen* and draws N's attention to his mistake. The string *Did you sing on the door?* is Ghanaian English and is an insult. It points to the fact that N is a hypocrite because he criticizes people for an offence of which he is also guilty.

An interesting syntactic structure found in the above discourse is the use of a noun phrase of the structure [ADJ + N] (in which the adjective is derogatory) as pre-disagreement. The string *Bush Boy!* in Turn 2, and *Passive citizen!* in the last turn, act as pre-disagreements. Specifically, they are prefaced to a string that denotes disagreement with a previously made proposition. *Bush Boy!* acts as a pre-disagreement to J's assertion that his party is the party of the masses.

In (4), the graffitists discuss the hypocritical behavior of politicians. Although no politician's name is mentioned, any one familiar with Ghana's political system and its political discourse recognizes that they are talking about members of the AFRC and the PNDC administrations.

(4) (T1) P: They who just the other day were chanting probity and accountability – men of integrity they call themselves, are today basking in jacuzzi, living in stable, while they deplete the people's coffer.

(T2) Q: Interestingly, they are hiding below the unconstitutional clause of indemnity.

(T3) R: Poor Ghanaians, what can we do to debunk these ragamuffin politics-thieves from our back.

(T4) S: Ugly words.

As stated earlier, the words probity and accountability became vogue during the AFRC and PNDC's so-called moral revolutions. Under those administrations, certain individuals were put before vetting committees to explain how they got their wealth. People who, in the opinion of the committees, had ill-acquired wealth were either given long prison sentences or executed by a firing squad. P's string therefore involves indirectness; it is an insinuation against the AFRC and PNDC regimes. Specifically, P is criticizing the wife of President Rawlings, and other members of President Rawlings' party.

The Ghanaian privately-owned newspapers (referred to in Ghana as 'opposition newspapers') widely publicized an incident in which Mrs. Rawlings is alleged to have purchased a jacuzzi bath[6] – an act seen by the press as an unnecessary affluence cognizant of her husband's insistence on modesty. The string *are today basking in jacuzzi,* via implicature, is referring to Mrs. Rawlings' affluent living although her name is not explicitly stated. The string *living in stable* is also another form of indirectness – an innuendo against Mr. Rawlings because the Ghanaian private press alleges that he owns a stable – considered a form of affluence and therefore a criticism against the president. P's final string while *they deplete the people's coffer* is an accusation against Rawlings and his administration.

P's use of the pronoun *they* encodes his sociopolitical identity and that of his referents. It points to the fact that he and the referents belong to different sociopolitical groups. In view of the politically sensitive nature of P's turn, it comes as no surprise when it attracts Q's response. Q's string acts as a supportive to P's string. Before handing over Ghana's political administration to a constitutional government – the National Democratic Congress that Rawlings heads – the constituent assembly inserted a clause in the constitution that indemnified members of Rawlings' earlier government – the PNDC administration. Because of this clause, no one could prosecute any member of the PNDC for acts done officially. This constitutional clause was seen by some Ghanaians as an attempt to hide the truth. What is interesting is that although P did not explicitly mention the name of any politician or group of politicians, the context provides Q with enough information to respond.

Sequentially, P's string acts as an opening and a stimulus whereas Q's string is a response to the stimulus. The third person plural pronoun anaphor *they* connects Q's turn to P's turn and therefore helps bring topical coherence (Halliday and Hasan 1976).

R's turn is a response to P's and Q's turns. Sequentially, therefore, Q's turn acts in two adjacency pair systems. First, it acts as the second part of the first pair (P–Q) and as the first part of the second pair (Q–R).

R's turn involves an insult. He refers to President Rawlings and his associates as ragamuffin politics-thieves. His use of the pronouns also provides information on solidarity and distancing. His use of *we* and *our* suggests that he identifies with P and Q. The pronouns therefore perform a solidarity function whereas his use of *these* points to distancing. Finally, S's rather short turn (which is syntactically an NP made up of [Adj. + N]) acts as a response to R's turn. S sees R's words as ugly and inappropriate.

In the following graffiti discourse, political insults and political humor are triggered by a political slogan.

(5)(T1) T: Eeshi!
(T2) U: Didn't you see the man with the umbrella sitting on the elephant on TV?
(T3) V: NQ. 9 Man. Go-way-you.
(T4) W: Stop being tribalistic. We're all one. Is P.V. NQ. 9?
(T5) X: Are we? You hypocrite! By the way, P.V. Obeng is pay voucher. Your balls.
(T1) T: It's shaking (that is; there's an earthquake)!
(T2) U: Didn't you see the man with the umbrella sitting on the elephant on television?
(T3) V: Ewe; Out of my sight.
(T4) W: Stop being tribalistic. We're all one. Is P.V. an Ewe?
(T5) X: Are we all one? You hypocrite! By the way, P.V. stands for is pay voucher.

Like the other graffiti discourses, excerpt (5) involves inter-textuality and name-calling. In T1, graffitist T, in creating the discourse opener, borrows from Ghanaian political parlance. He initiates the discourse by issuing a political slogan, *Eeshi!* (a Ga – New Kwa language spoken in and around Accra, Ghana's capital – word meaning 'it's shaking' that is, there is an earthquake), of the NPP.

U's string involves indirectness expressed through symbols and an idiom. An umbrella is the party symbol of the NDC and the string *the man with the umbrella* refers to President Rawlings. The elephant is the political symbol of the NPP. Through indirectness, therefore, U is submitting that the NDC defeated the NPP. In most Ghanaian languages, *to sit on some one* is an idiom meaning 'to defeat them'.

V responds to U's turn by engaging in name-calling. He addresses U as *NQ. 9 Man* (an Ewe from Ghana's Volta Region – the ninth region to be established) and then insulting him in Ghanaian Pidgin English *Go-way-you* 'Out of my sight! '

A close look at V's strings suggests that he identifies U as belonging to President Rawlings' ethnic group. V's assumption may be based on the fact that Rawlings has great political following or support in the Volta Region where he comes from. However, this is surprising because in addition to the Volta Region, President Rawlings has some support in other regions as well. W's criticism of V for tribalism is therefore not surprising. In an attempt to show that President Rawlings is not tribalistic, W draws V's attention to the fact that Mr. Rawlings' then special adviser, Paul Victor Obeng (alias P.V.), is not from the Volta Region of Ghana. He is from Ghana's Ashanti Region.

The explanation above suggests that the meaning associated with an utterance is dependent on the specific context of the utterance and the roles

and goals of the discourse participants. The discussion also points to the fact that besides social and political identities, graffiti may also provide some indication on ethnic identities.

X's string is a response to W's turn. It involves insults and humor; and like the other turns, knowledge of the context is a *sine qua non* to understanding the meaning of the strings. X's first string *Are we?* is a response to W's string *We're all one*. The inversion nature of the string suggests that X disagrees with the proposition in W's string. He ends his criticism and insult of W with the string *You hypocrite!* From then on, X changes the topic and the tone of the discourse. The topical and tone changes are signaled by the expression *by the way*. He embarks on play on words by associating Obeng's initials – P.V. – with the string, pay voucher. X ends the discourse with a string *your balls* (an obscene remark) which, among Legon college students is humorous slang used as a distancing or solidarity strategy. In this discourse, it denotes distancing.

A close look at the syntactic structure of the strings in example (5) confirms a statement I made earlier. Specifically, most of the strings involve simple and short sentences. Many of the utterances are also verbless (e.g., *NQ. 9 Man* – an Ewe from Ghana's Volta Region) and *You hypocrite!*)

In example (6) below, the graffitists 'communicate' in Ghanaian Pidgin English, Akan (a New Kwa language of wide communication in Ghana), and in standard Ghanaian English.

(7)(T1) ZD: Dem dey talk accountability accountability. But dem dey chop our money well well.
(T2) ZE: Asɛm bɛba da bi.
(T3) ZF: Afraid-man! All politicians be the same. You too you get chance, you go chop some.
(T4) ZG: God save us! If this stupid-fool thinks this way then we shall continue to suffer.
(T5) ZH: Hypocrite! Are you a Chrife?

(T1) ZD: They always talk about accountability; but they're very corrupt.
(T2) ZE: There will be trouble in the future.
(T3) ZF: A frightened man! All politicians are the same. If you become a politician, you'll also be corrupt.
(T4) ZG: God save us! If this stupid-fool thinks this way then we shall continue to suffer.
(T5) ZH: Hypocrite! Are you a member of Christian Fellowship/Scripture Union?)

In the above discourse, ZD accuses politicians who preach accountability and practice corruption. The reduplication of the word *accountability* is a feature of most Ghanaian languages. The repetition serves to emphasize the extent to which the politicians concerned talk about the issue being discussed (accountability). It points to the fact that it is a repeated action. ZD's use of the pronoun *dem* (they) suggests that he dissociates himself from those groups of politicians who *preach* accountability and practice corruption.

ZE responds to ZD's turn with an Akan popular saying *Asɛm bɛba da bi* ('There will be trouble in the future'). This saying is based on an Akan folktale in which the tortoise advised a tree-climber (a kind of parasitic plant) to warn a bird sitting on a tree under which the tortoise was resting and singing rather loudly. The tree-climber refused to warn the bird and the tortoise said the above-cited Akan saying. Later, the bird was shot and killed by the hunter who later cut the climber, and tied the bird up with it. As tortoise hid in the woods and saw the sad end of the bird and the tree-climber, he repeated the saying – *Asɛm bɛba da bi*. ZE obviously foresees a problem in the future and his fear of a possible conflict forms the basis of ZF's turn. ZF refers to ZE as *Afraid man!* ('A frightened man!') The string *Afraid man!* is a slang used by the Legon students to denote unwarranted fear on the part of a person. Thus, ZF is suggesting that there is no basis for ZE's fear.

ZF's second utterance functions as a response to ZC's strings. He is suggesting that it is not only those with whom the word *accountability* is associated who are corrupt; all politicians are corrupt. He is so firm in his belief that although he does not know ZC, he thinks ZC will also be corrupt if he becomes a politician.

ZG's turn is a response to the proposition expressed in ZF's turn. ZG expresses disbelief in ZF's utterance by using the interjection *God save us!* and following it with a string in which he refers to ZF as *stupid-fool*. ZH then retorts by accusing ZG of hypocrisy and by asking whether he is a Christian implying that Christians are hypocrites. The word *Chrife* is slang used by Ghanaian students to refer to someone who is a member of Christian Fellowship or the Scripture Union.

Political humor

The final excerpt involves political humor and ridicule. A former leader of the NPP (Professor Adu Boahen) is ridiculed and a humorous utterance once made by President Rawlings' security adviser, Mr. Kojo Tsikata, is employed by the graffitists to create further humor. Mrs. Rawlings is also mentioned in the discourse.

(8)(T1) ZI: Jerry is our saviour! Prof. Adu-Boahen has been sent to Ghana's political Siberia with his NPP rogues so vote for Nana Konadu in 2000.

(T2) ZJ: Don't be silly!!! Go-way-you. Aboa! Do you work for the BNI?
(T3) ZK: Why? Let him express his opinion. His mouth ibi gun? Freedom of Speech! Kojo T. will put all of you in his wooden pajamas.
(T4) ZL: Bush boy! He did not speak. He wrote. Any how, don't express stupid opinions on the wall.
(T5) ZM: When will all these riff-raff student politicians stop doing politics on the wall?
(T6) ZN: Go and live on Mars if you don't like politics. By the way, you've also written on the wall. YOU STUPID FOOL!!!!!!!!!!.

(T1) ZI: Jerry is our savior! Prof. Adu-Boahen has been sent to Ghana's political Siberia with his NPP rogues so vote for Nana Konadu in 2000.
(T2) ZJ: Don't be SILLY. Out of my sight! Beast! Do you work for the BNI?
(T3) ZK: Why? Let him express his opinion. Is his mouth a gun? Freedom of Speech! Kojo T. will put all of you in his wooden pajamas (coffin).
(T4) ZL: Bush boy! He did not speak. He wrote. Any how, don't express stupid opinions on the wall.
(T5) ZM: When will all these riffraff student politicians stop doing graffiti on the wall?
(T6) ZN: Go and live on Mars if you don't like politics. By the way, you've also written on the wall. YOU STUPID FOOL!)

In (7), ZI opens the discourse with two strings, each of which has a strong potential to elicit response from other student graffitists. Thus, by openly declaring President Jerry Rawlings as a savior ZI creates a situation in which people sharing his political views or those having different political inclinations will obviously respond to his stimulus. The pronoun *our* has some degree of ambiguity in it. It could refer to the people of Ghana or to the political party or political group to which the graffitist belongs. ZI's second string involves both political insult and indirectness. Among Legon students, the belief is that Siberia is the place to which leaders of the defunct USSR exiled their political opponents, to deprive them of any involvement in politics and hence silence them. The string *Prof. Adu-Boahen has been sent to Ghana's political Siberia with his NPP rogues* therefore suggests that the professor and members of his party have been made politically ineffective. The final part of ZI's utterance refers to rumors that in the early 1990s were spreading about the possibility of the president's wife standing for election as the presidential candidate for the NDC in the year 2000.

ZJ's response obviously suggests that he does not support ZI's statement. He produces two insults – *Don't be silly!* Unlike other varieties of English, in Ghanaian English, the sentence *Don't be silly is* an insult because *silly* is often used to mean either 'stupid' or 'foolish') and *Aboa* an Akan word meaning 'a beast' to show how he detests ZI's utterance. As stated earlier, among the college students, use of more than one exclamation mark suggests either the degree of emphasis or the extent of disagreement. Use of the three exclamation marks, therefore, shows that the degree of detest is considerable.

Further, in most Ghanaian cultures calling some one a beast is a big insult and by implication suggests that ZJ sees ZI's opinion like that of a beast. ZJ wonders whether ZI works with Ghana's secret service – the Bureau of National Investigation (BNI). My own knowledge about Ghana's politics is that students do not support the BNI because they see them as infringing on their liberties. The expression *Do you work for the BNI* is usually put to a student or to any one who attempts to speak in favor of the government. In fact, occasionally, it may be addressed to someone who, in the opinion of the students, is not on their side.

ZK's turn is a response to Turn 2 (ZJ's turn) and involves humor. In particular, the strings *His mouth ibi gun?* and *Kojo T. Will put all of you in his wooden pajamas* are popular Legon jokes. The first string – *His mouth ibi gun?* – is part of a joke in which a Ghanaian soldier who fought for the British in World War II is alleged to have said that an enemy of the British army would win the war. The joke continues that what the Ghanaian said allegedly made his British commander angry. It is further alleged that the Ghanaian soldier was court-martialed. In court, the soldier is alleged to have spoken in broken English (substandard English) by asking whether merely saying someone will win a war in any way helps that person to actually win the war. What ZK is implying by the statement *His mouth ibi gun?* is that merely saying President Rawlings is a savior or saying anything for that matter does not suggest that what is said will, in reality, happen.

The expression *Kojo T. Will put all of you in his wooden pajamas* is also a Ghanaian joke. It was rumored some time in the 1980s, that President Rawlings' chief security adviser – Kojo Tsikata – had died. This was obviously not true and Tsikata in a reaction to the rumor said in a humorous way that he had not worn his wooden pajamas yet. He used the expression *wooden pajamas* to mean a casket and therefore implied that he was alive. By the expression *Kojo T. Will put all of you in his wooden pajamas*, ZK is suggesting that ZJ might be put in a casket or might die. The above expression, like other political threats in Legon, does not in any way involve a threat at all.

ZL's turn is a response to ZK's turn. It involves a repair initiation and repair performance. ZL embarks on an out-and-out correction or a correction proper. He interprets ZK's string *Freedom of Speech!* to mean freedom of what may be said and not what may be written and because ZJ wrote but did

not speak, ZL thinks ZK has, by writing *Freedom of speech!*, committed an error that requires immediate correction. The expression *He did not speak* is the repair initiating feature and the repaired string is *He wrote*. ZL sees ZK's opinion as 'stupid.'

ZM's string is a reaction against all the previous turn occupants. As often happens, he accuses the previous participants of doing politics on the wall and it is this very accusation that provokes the next response by ZN. ZN's initial string suggests that politics is an integral or an essential part of student life. In Ghanaian English, as in most Ghanaian languages, ZN's initial string constitutes an insult because it suggests that the referent is unrealistic. In this context, it suggests something like 'It is only unrealistic and unreasonable people like you who do not do politics on the wall; you therefore do not qualify to be with us so do what only unreasonable people will do.' ZN's insult is similar in nature to such Ghanaian English insults like 'Go and burn the sea'. ZN draws ZM's attention to the fact that he is as guilty as those he is accusing of writing on the wall. ZN sees ZM as being extremely stupid and foolish.

Close examination of discourse (7) above reveals that there are as many as six adjacency pairs – (a) ZI and ZJ; (b) ZJ and ZK; (c) ZK and ZL; (d) ZL and ZM; (e) ZL,ZK, ZJ, ZI and ZM; and (f) ZM and ZN. From the above, we see that apart for Turns 1 and 6 (ZI and ZN's turns), each of the other turns functions in more than one adjacency pair. Like the other discourses, most of the sentences in example (7) are short and are simple in nature. Finally, there is a great deal of cohesion between and within the turns and this cohesion is achieved with anaphoric pronouns and also verbs and nouns of anaphoric reference.

6. Conclusion

The Legon graffiti discourses provide insights into such social networking as political affiliations and political dissociations. The graffiti perform both referential and indexical functions. Through the graffiti, the students were able to label persons and groups, refer to them, and make predictions about the future actions of politicians and political parties.

A close look at many of the graffiti strings points to the fact that they contain implicatures which can be understood if and only if one understands the cultural and communicative contexts of the discourse as well as Ghana's political culture and political communication strategies. Therefore, throughout the discussion, I emphasized the fact that shared background knowledge about the overall communication situation is assumed to be necessary to ensure the success of such a referential communication. As Bloomfield puts

it, the value of language for social cooperation depends upon people using it in the same way. Although the Bloomfieldian homogeneous speech community notion of organization of linguistic diversity with a shared common code is heavily criticized by Hymes and Gumperz (see Irvine 1989), if one extends the meaning of the phrase 'shared common code' to include common communicational strategies, then the Bloomfieldian referential function of linguistic form could be applicable to the Legon graffiti political discourse. After all, the students often use lexical items to label social groups and political activities.

Irvine (1989) notes that there is linguistic diversity, a repertoire of ways of speaking, which are indexically associated with social groups, roles, and activities. In particular, she discusses the fact that specific codes may be associated with persons and groups and with situations. The indexical correlation between realms of linguistic differentiation and social differentiation, Irvine notes, are not wholly arbitrary. They bear some relationship to a cultural system of ideas about social relationships. In the discussion of the graffiti discourse, I have shown that there is a close connection between the graffitist's socio-political network and the kind of language employed in the graffiti. Access to political group membership requires the use of specific flattery comments about one's group and insulting or damaging comments about the opposing group. Differentiated ways of writing thus index social groups and thus enter the socio-political networking.

Graffiti play a significant role in the political and social lives of Legon students. It is a sex-based communicative tool because only male students use it. Specifically, it is males in a particular social group (students) who practice it; one could therefore argue that it is an expression of male identity. The graffiti act as a channel through which the male students express grievances on political and social issues – issues whose verbalization could attract social or political sanctions. It is noteworthy that the female students during this study did not engage in graffiti and this is worth further investigation. Some important questions that remain unanswered are about female students: Do the female students in Legon 'give up on words'? Do they see graffiti as destructive behavior? Or do they have other means of expressing their political and social grievances?

The context, particularly the setting and scene in which the graffiti take place (lavatories) provides protection for the graffitists from judicial liability and from any possible loss of face. The fact that the students do the graffiti in an area that facilitates anonymity acknowledges the vulnerability of face (Goffman 1967). It is usually during face-to-face encounters that hazards are maximized due to the instantaneous consequences inherent in face-to-face behavior. I would therefore like to suggest that graffiti constitute *avoidance discourse* and that like other avoidance discourses, it insulates the participants

against face-threat. In view of the stratified nature of Ghanaian society and personal danger inherent in candid socio-political discourse, it comes as no surprise when students resort to oblique means of expressing their ideas and feelings.

The dominant themes in the Legon graffiti include politics (Ghana's national political issues and issues affecting major political actors, as well as university campus political issues) and social issues. It was also shown that at the national political front, the politicians most mentioned in the graffiti discourse are the president and the first lady. As far as campus politics is concerned, the vice-chancellors, deans, and heads of departments are mentioned the most. This suggests that the higher one is on the political hierarchy, the more likely one is to be the focus of political communication and therefore be mentioned in the graffiti discourse.

The multilingual nature of Ghana features in the graffiti with English, Ghanaian Pidgin English, and Ghanaian languages (notably Akan) being the main languages used by the graffitists. It is important to note that, like several sub-Saharan African countries, Ghana is a multilingual country. There are over 44 indigenous languages with Akan being, by far, the largest indigenous language[7] with over 44 percent of the total population speaking it as first language and over 60 percent speaking it a second language). Other major indigenous languages are Hausa (a Chadic language spoken mainly in Nigeria and Niger, but spoken in Ghana mainly in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West regions and in the inner cities in the south),[8] and Ewe (spoken in southeastern Ghana and parts of the Republic of Togo and constituting 13 percent of the total population). The English language, is the only language of formal education beyond the third year of elementary school and is the only official language at the national level and, therefore, the language of administration, of the judiciary, and of the legislature (Dakubu 1988; Obeng 1997c). The major indigenous Ghanaian languages have significant demographic weight and a tremendous sociolinguistic significance, including serving as national languages and as lingua francas. They have been assigned national language functions such as being used in schools, on national television and on the radio, and in the print media (to a limited extent).[9]

In the data for this study, because the graffiti writers are bilingual, they engage in codeswitching and codemixing for the effective expression of ideas. Thus, through codeswitching and codemixing, the graffitists can express politically difficult ideas in a humorous yet effective manner. The codeswitching found in the graffiti discourse is either lexical, intrasentential, intersentential (Myers-Scotton 1993), or interturn. The lexemes switched into the discourse were nouns or nouns used as verbs. For example in excerpt 3, K in T2 while writing in Standard Ghanaian English switched the noun *Djiwa* (a personal name) into the string. The noun is used as a verb to mean 'kill'.

The only probable reason was to make his string consistent with Ghanaian political discourse since, as stated earlier, the college students use this personal name as a verb when talking about political assassination (as stated earlier, Corporal Djiwa was himself executed by the government for staging an unsuccessful coup d' etat). In excerpt (7), the graffiti author ZJ, in T2, engages in Ghanaian Pidgin English–Akan–Standard Ghanaian English codeswitching. The Akan word involved in the switching is a noun *aboa* 'a beast'. Here, a possible explanation for the switching is social-psychological – the tendency to express anger, insult, and other forms of emotion in one's native language.

Regarding intrasentential codeswitching, the graffiti discourse participants switch from one language to another within the same sentence. For example, in excerpt (2), IA switches from Standard Ghanaian English to Akan. In the sentence *Whether you like it or not*, *Yɛn aa naa kɔ* 'Whether you like it or not, we are impregnable', the initial part of the sentence, Whether you like it or not, is the subordinate clause whereas the second part, *Yɛn aa naa kɔ*, is the main clause.

There are examples of intersentential codeswitching in corpus. In excerpt (7) (T2), for example, ZJ switches from Standard Ghanaian English, to Ghanaian Pidgin English, then to Akan, and finally back to Standard Ghanaian English. A look at each sentence suggests that in this switching situation, the standard Ghanaian English sentences are longer and exhibit the features of a complete sentence – SVO. The Ghanaian language (Akan) has just one word *Aboa* 'a beast' functioning as a verbless sentence whereas the Ghanaian Pidgin English sentence *Go-way-you* 'go your way, i.e., out of my sight', has the structure Verb + Object + Subject. In the same discourse, (7), ZK switches from Standard Ghanaian English (*Let him express his opinion*), to Ghanaian Pidgin English (*His mouth ibi gun?* 'Is his mouth a gun?') and back to Standard Ghanaian English ('Freedom of Speech').

Finally, there are several instances of interturn codeswitching in the data. In excerpt (5), for example, the discourse is initiated by T in the Ga language. Specifically, the string *Eeshi* is a Ga expression meaning 'It's shaking'. In T2, U switches to Standard Ghanaian English; and in T3, the next graffitist switches to Ghanaian Pidgin English. Given the participants' bilingual status, they have no problem understanding the previous texts.[10]

The use of slang like *Ghana's political Siberia*, *afraid man*, *against*, *wooden pajamas*, and *pay voucher* also helps to create humor and by that makes political unmentionables tellable with minimum difficulty.

The aggressive language of the graffiti helps to relieve some of the tensions generated by the difficult political atmosphere in the country and on the university campus and the difficult academic and social environments in which the graffitists live.

On the nature of syntactic structures involved, most of the sentences are simple involving single clauses with a [NP + VP] structure. There are very few compound and complex sentences.

Most pre-disagreements are short (usually one or two word phrases) and are either adjectival or noun phrases. Among the phrases cited are: *Bush boy*; *Foolish boy*; *Anti-revolutionary*; *Afraid-man*; and *Hypocrite*. Most of these phrases are exclamatory in nature and are interjections in the contexts in which they occur. Declarative sentences act as openings in almost all the discourses. They are then followed by either inversions, imperatives, or other declarative sentences. The speech styles used (especially the brief nature of the sentences, the anaphoric pronouns and nouns as well as lexical repetition) generate textuality.

Although the graffiti reflect the different political and sometimes social and ethnic inclinations and different political views of the graffitists, the graffiti also reflect solidarity relations among the participants.

The nature of pronouns used by the graffitists also provide insights into the solidarity or distancing relationship between the graffitists and their referents. Specifically, the pronouns encode the political and social identities of the graffitists as well as the relationship between them and the political parties or political issues being discussed.

Regarding the pragmatic structure, the graffiti constitute a discourse, a political discourse to be precise. Being a discourse, it has such properties of interaction like opening and closing, offer and uptake, turn-taking, and repair. Most of the turns are adjacency pairs.

It is important to reemphasize the fact that a thorough understanding of the overall context of situation within which the graffiti discourses take place is very important for understanding the pragmatic import of the genre. In particular, an understanding of the Legon campus culture including the male students' political awareness and political inclinations, their communicative culture and metacommunicative strategies, and the political atmosphere in Ghana at the time these graffiti discourses took place are all necessary for a proper understanding of excerpts discussed in this paper. In effect, pragmatic, and metapragmatic features of the communicative context are needed for a proper understanding of the graffiti discourses.

In sum, the graffiti in Legon provide sociolinguists, political scientists, anthropological linguists, and pragmaticists material for understanding the communicative behavior of male college students in Legon. Although the paper is based on the graffiti discourse carried out in Legon, the observations have general relevance to Ghanaian male college students' political discourse as a whole.

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Notes

1. In Legon, faculties have their own lavatories so they do not use students' lavatories. Janitors who work on these lavatories are mostly illiterate and are therefore unlikely to have done the graffiti. The graffiti found in the students' lavatories are therefore done by the students themselves.
2. These include those people or groups which are active and are participating in political actions such as governing, ruling, legislating, protesting, dissenting, voting, etc.
3. For example, in 1978 the Legon students organized protest against General Acheampong's Union Government.
4. For example, Sgt. Akatapori helped Rawlings to overthrow the government of President Hilla Limann and his People's National Convention in 1981.
5. The data were collected by me and by assistants – Seth Ofori and Elizabeth Ampaw.
6. A whirlpool bath or a recreational bathing tub.
7. An Akan dialect, Bono, is also spoken in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire where it is called Abron.
8. Due to the decline in the overland trade by the Hausa and with the trade taken over by the Akan, the use of Hausa is on the decline whereas the use of Akan has increased tremendously (Dakubu 1988).
9. In Obeng (1998), I discuss attitudes (including prejudices and stereotypes) towards the various indigenous Ghanian languages and the English language.
10. For a detailed discussion of lexical, inter- and intra-sentential codeswitching, see Sankoff and Poplack (1981), Myers-Scotton (1992, 1993), and Poplack (1980).

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