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## **The Use of Insults to Challenge Political Authority: A Critical Discourse Analysis**

Emmanuel Amo Ofori<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Many scholars have argued that insults are meant to cause mental pain, embarrassment, and disgrace; they violate the principle of politeness; and they are face-threatening acts (Agyekum, 2004; Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, they may be considered in many societies as socially unacceptable. In this study, however, I argue that the use of insults in Ghanaian political discourse is a means by which ordinary citizens challenge the existing political authority (herein refer to current elected politicians or those in political office). To achieve this end, I adopt two of Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional approach to the study of discourse: discourse-as-text and discourse-as-social-practice. Drawing on these two layers of analysis, I link text to context, and employ the sociopolitical and cultural context to link the entire discourse to the society in general. By studying the sociopolitical and cultural context, the analysis reveals media empowerment of the powerless in society to make their voices heard in political discussions to the extent of insulting and challenging the existing political authority.

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### **Keywords**

Insults, Politics, Ordinary Citizens, Ghana, Critical Discourse Analysis

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## Introduction

According to Samarin (1969, p. 324), the study of insults should be looked at as “a special genre on purely linguistic grounds.” That is to say, it has a structure like proverbs, riddles and other linguistic routines such as apology, compliment, thanking, greetings and gratitude. Insult as a genre has a topic, form and context of use. The topic normally involves speaking ill of a person’s physical characteristics and the moral intellectual of the target. This may at times compel the target to respond with an equal measure or more offensive words. With regard to the form, insults may be relatively short, consisting of two or three sentences or more. It could also manifest in the form of just a word, phrase, simile, descriptive adverbs or a non-verbal form of communication such as gestures. Indeed, the core of insults is a characterization of “some part of the target’s body or his/her action; this may be preceded or followed by other utterances relative to the situation” (Samarin, 1969, p. 325). There are some variations in terms of the context of insults. It could be face-to-face where the participants stand in proximity to one another. In political discussion, it could be on the radio, phone-ins on radio and television, press conferences, in print media (newspapers and online) and on political platform (Ofori, 2016). Aside these contexts, Agyekum (2010) contextualizes Akan insults into six (6) groups: animal names, types of disease, ethnicity and tribe, personal behavior and profession, sexual organs, part of the body and religion.

In this paper, I adopt Ofori (in press) modification of Yiannis’ (1998, p. 3) definition of insult, that is, “a behavior or discourse, oral or written, which is perceived, experienced, constructed and at all times intended as slighting, humiliating, or offensive. Insult can also be verbal, consisting of mocking invective, cutting remarks, negative stereotypes, rudeness or straight swearing.” The modified form is defined below:

A behavior or discourse, oral or written, direct or indirect, gestural or non-gestural, which is perceived, experienced, constructed and most of the time intended as slighting, humiliating, or offensive, which has the potential of psychologically affecting not only the addressee or target but his/her associates (Ofori, in press; 2015, p. 21).

It must be mentioned that the modified definition should not be taken as a universal concept because there is no universal measure of insults. The yardstick to measure insults differs from society to society and also from one culture to another (Ofori, in press; 2015, p. 25). The justification for choosing this definition relies on the fact that within the Ghanaian society insults do not only affect the target or addressee, but people who are in one way or the other connected to him or her, such as his/her family or in the context of this work, the political party the target is associated with.

In recent years, politics in Ghanaian political discourse has become a discourse of personal attack, vilification, and insults. There has been an extraordinary public concern on the recent surge of insults in Ghanaian political discourse. Some of the concerns are from the media, civil society, academia, leaders of political parties, chiefs, opinion leaders and others. However, I argue that while insult has its own ramifications on society, in a broader context it is a means by which ordinary citizens challenge the existing political authority, infantilize politicians and animalize political authority in Ghanaian political discourse. The argument is broadened to capture where ordinary citizens derive this power from to challenge the existing political authority.

## 1. Literature Review

Insult in its general sense is considered unacceptable in many societies. However, there are festivals and games in some communities in Africa where people freely use insults. Months, weeks and days are set aside in which social norms are reversed or suspended, and verbal and non-verbal behaviors that are normally a taboo allowed (Yankah, 1998). Though insults are considered a taboo, during these times people use them freely without any restrictions.

Agovi (1987, 1995) puts acceptable insults into two traditional groups: institutionalized and non-institutionalized. The institutionalized ones can further be grouped into the occasional and non-occasional; the non-institutionalized is made up of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. The occasional ones are the ones in which people use insults as part of yearly celebration of the festivals or events. For example, the *Apoɔ* festival is a feast of eight days. In the course of the festival, there is all manner of singing, with the liberty to insult superiors as well as inferiors without any punishment (Rattray, 1923). During this festival, even women and children who are not normally given the opportunity to express themselves are permitted to openly point to the ills and the scandals of the society. Agyekum (2010, p. 140) points to the fact that the festival period is the time when “the attention of the rulers is drawn to some of the faults of their administration, so that they start taking corrective measures to rectify the shortcomings of the society after the festival.” Thus, this festival marks the beginning of free speech and democratic governance, which allows the rulers to have full support of their subordinates. It must, however, be mentioned that “social norms are frozen within the period of the festival, after which all social norms and courtesies are restored” (Yankah, 1998, p. 20-21). Though this festival, to some extent, empowers the powerless, it is for a very short period of time in very controlled circumstances. Subjects have only eight days in a year to review the performances of their leaders. Similarly, the *Kundum* festival of the Nzemas (Ethnic group in Ghana) creates a platform for the people to openly criticize the deeds of their rulers and elders in songs and poems (Agovi, 1995). Though this festival also empowers the powerless, it is also for a specific limited period of time.

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In terms of the non-occasional insults, there are verbal and speech games in traditional African societies that allow people to express themselves freely. The Akans have a game called the *aborɔme*. It is an invective game played among peers. The general rule of this game is searching one another for correct answers to some riddles, which is eventually meant to insult the addressee (Agyekum, 2010). If the addressee is able to find the right answers he then poses the riddle to the opponent, and this ensures the continuity of the game. The expressions are basically used to tease one another and do not constitute verbal invectives. This principle exists in games such as *dame* “draughts” (checkers in American English) and *ntetɔ* “playing marbles.” It must be mentioned that during these games the norms governing speech behavior are waived, and opponents can insult and use any abusive language without any fear or favor.

The non-institutionalized insults, as mentioned above, consist of verbal and non-verbal forms of communication (Agovi, 1987; 1995). The non-verbal form of insults is common among women. This is due to the social constraints in traditional African societies, which inhibit them from communicating freely. This, however, has led to some social innovation in that women have created other avenues to express their opinions and pent up feelings. Akan women, for instance, use garments and waist beads as a channel for the silent projection of arguments (Yankah, 1995). Some of these garments are used to insult other women or rivals.

Verbal insults according to Sakyi-Baidoo (n.d.) are invectives used among people of equality and intimacy, that is, among friends or colleagues such as politicians, professors, and doctors. Different forms of abuse are acceptable within these social networks. The main purpose of these insults within groups is to maintain “social cohesion and group identity” (Sakyi-Baidoo, n.d., p. 1). The rules of engagement in the use of insults among members are tacitly known to all of them; if someone contravenes the rules or applies them to a non-group member, the appropriate sanctions are applied. That is, the insult is meant to be used among the group members and cannot be extended beyond the borders of the group.

These traditions of institutionalized and non-institutionalized insults show that there is a limit as to when one is allowed to use insults. Insults have restrictive operational parameters beyond which socio-cultural norms are imposed. That is, power is invested in people in authority such as chiefs, elders, politicians and many others. These people wield a lot of power, and thus for an ordinary citizen to make unsavory comments about/to them is considered disrespectful and unacceptable. The powerless in society do not have the right to insult the powerful or people in authority even when they [powerful] deserve it; it is only in limited situations, as mentioned above, that the powerless have the license to do so.

However, the Ghanaian society has changed drastically to the extent that through the power of the media, ordinary citizens in democratic Ghana insult politicians on radio and on the Internet. This has become possible because political discussions are broadcast via affiliate stations to most parts of Ghana, and through Internet radio to those abroad. Ghanaians at home and abroad are able to contribute to political discourse via phone-ins, SMS, and online commentaries. This allows ordinary citizens to participate in political discussions in Ghana. As part of their contribution, some of them insult and challenge politicians for the bad state of the country. There is no time frame or culturally accepted or appropriate context for one to insult politicians. When callers are given the opportunity to call into the program or use any of the online websites, they could make such comments. As will be seen in the analysis of this paper, these insults serve various functions, such as (1) challenging the existing political authority; (2) infantilizing politicians; and (3) animalizing political authority

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## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk and Paul Chilton have developed institutional tools for conducting research in CDA. It must be mentioned that CDA is a position that has been taken by these scholars who agree on certain principles and also agree to address similar issues (Blommaert, 2005). The foundation of CDA is pivoted on the scholarly work of Fowler et al. (1979) on language, power, ideology, and control, as well as Michael Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (Blommaert, 2005). CDA became popular through the works of Norman Fairclough in that late 1980s. His theory is hinged on the research of Bakhtin, Foucault, Halliday, Trew and Saussure.

A term very central in CDA is “discourse.” This term is used differently in different academic fields. Wodak (2006) makes a distinction between the uses of discourse. In the German and Central European context, a distinction is made between “text” and “discourse,” relating it to written and spoken language respectively, while in the English speaking world, “discourse is often used for both spoken and written language” (Wodak, 2006, p. 3). Blommaert (2005, p. 3), following Foucault’s perspective of discourse, sees it as “comprising all forms of meaningful

semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use.” Weiss and Wodak (2003) talk about the interdiscursivity of discourse. This means that texts are linked to each other in various ways. They are not restricted to just one field when addressing a specific topic.

CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to text and talk that “aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted and legitimized” (Wodak, 2001, p. 2). It insists that “all representation is mediated, molded by the value systems that are ingrained in the medium used for representation; CDA challenges common sense by pointing out that something could have been represented some other way, with a very different significance” (Fowler, 1996: 4). Thus, CDA looks at some critical terms that are central to the discussion of social inequalities, that is, power, ideology, hegemony, dominance and voice. In this paper, I focus on power because it is related to how ordinary citizens use insults to challenge their elected officials.

According to Fairclough (1995, p. 1-2), power is seen “both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed...in particular sociocultural contexts.” Wodak draws her definition from Foucault (1972), Bourdieu (1991) and van Dijk (1985), interpreting it as “discursive control [including] who has access to the various types of discourse, who can and cannot talk to whom, in which situations, and about what. The more powerful the people, the larger their verbal possibilities in discourse become (van Dijk, 1996, p. 66). In sum, power within CDA research is an illegitimate use of power leading to power abuse and domination.

There is constant unity between language and other social matters that ensures that language is knitted in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses social power, and is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power (Wodak, 2001). This means that “power does not derive from language but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter the distributions of power in the short or long term” (Wodak, 2001, p. 11). Ordinary citizens’ use of insults in Ghanaian political discourse is one of the ways in which political authority is challenged.

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For the current purposes of discussion, power can be seen to operate within the media and in the hands of politicians. The power that the media holds in political discourse in Ghana is transferred to the powerless in society (i.e. ordinary citizens) who are empowered to challenge the existing political authority through phone-ins and online commentaries. The CDA approach employed in the analysis of this paper is two of Fairclough’s (1989) three dimensional framework, that is, discourse-as-text and discourse-as-social-practice.

### ***2.1.1 Fairclough’s Discourse-as-Text through a focus on lexicalization and predication***

This is the first dimension of Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework, and it is concerned with the structure and combination of propositions (Fairclough, 1995b). The focus of the researcher, under this dimension, is to take cognizance of the fact that in terms of the text, that is, what is present and what could have been present, but is visibly missing; the choice to describe a person, an action or a process over another; the choice to use one way of constructing a sentence over an alternative; and the choice to include a particular fact or argument over another. Textual analysis in CDA focuses mainly on the lexicalization, predication, presuppositions, verbal processes, metaphors and figurative devices, and how these forms are used to describe and represent social actors. The two models that were used in



the collection of the data and identification of the themes for the analysis are lexicalization and predication.

Lexicalization involves the choice or selection and the meanings of words used to refer to social actors. A typical lexical analysis looks at the denotation (the literal or primary meaning of words) and connotation (the various senses that a word invokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning). This analysis is important because “words convey the imprint of society and of value judgments in particular” (Richardson, 2007, p. 47).

Predications, on the other hand, according to Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 27), are strategies or phrases that “appear in stereotypical, evaluative attribution of positive or negative traits and implicit or explicit predicates.” Resigl and Wodak (2001: 54) also see predicational strategies as “the very basic process and result of linguistically assigning qualities to persons, animals, objects, events, actions and social phenomena.” They suggest the various forms by which predicational strategies are realized. These are (1) specific forms of reference based on explicit denotation as well as on more or less implicit connotation; (2) attribution in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctive clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups; (3) predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/pronouns; (4) collocation; (5) explicit comparisons-similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures; and (6) implicit allusions, evocations and presuppositions/implications. Indeed, “predication is used to criticize, undermine and vilify certain social actors, sometimes with potential dangerous consequences” (Richardson, 2007, p. 53).

In this paper, I lump the analysis of lexicalization and predication together to show how ordinary citizens use lexical items and predications (insults) to challenge politicians, infantilize and animalize them. Drawing on these two models of analysis, I link text to context, and employ the sociopolitical and cultural context to link the entire discourse to the society in general. Thus, the inclusion of Fairclough’s third dimension: discourse-as-social-practice, which specifically links the text to the society.

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### ***2.1.2. Fairclough’s Discourse-as-Social-Practice***

Fairclough claims that a critical analytical work in CDA will have to consider an analysis of the text’s “socio-cultural practice” or “the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of” (Fairclough, 1995a, p. 57). There are general questions that explain these levels of analysis: (1) what does the text say about the society in which it was produced and the society that it was produced for? (2) What influence or impact do we think that the text may have on social relations? (3) Will it help to continue inequalities and other undesirable social practices, or will it help break them down? (Richardson, 2007, p. 42). It is at this level that the issue of social practice, ideological struggles, and power inequalities is crucial in explaining why a text or stretch of talk is how it is.

## **2.2. Data Collection**

The data for this study were obtained from commentaries online (websites) and recordings of phone-ins on political discussions on radio. They were gathered from 2012 to February 2014. This period was used for the data gathering because Ghanaians had elections on December 7, 2012, which was contested in court by the main opposition party, New Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2013. I employed purposive sampling technique to identify the various instances of insults on online political commentaries and radio that are relevant to this study.

The online websites from which the data were collected are: [www.peacefmonline.com](http://www.peacefmonline.com); [www.myjoyonline.com](http://www.myjoyonline.com); and [www.ghanaweb.com](http://www.ghanaweb.com). A total of 455 commentaries were gathered from the online websites of which 356 are from peacefmonline; 70 from ghanaweb; and 29 from myjoyonline. The unequal number with respect to the various websites is that peacefmonline is one of the most visited website for political news by Ghanaians both home and abroad. Followed by ghanaweb and then myjoyonline. This accounts for the disparity in the numbers.

With regard to the data on radio, I selected three radio stations, all in Accra, the national capital: Peace FM, Adom FM, and Happy FM. These stations were selected because most of their programs, especially political discussions and morning programs, are broadcast in Akan and sometimes in English (for those who do not understand Akan to contribute or understand the subject matter being discussed). In addition, they have affiliates and communication centers spread across the length and breadth of the country. This enables listeners, both home and abroad, to text and call-in to contribute to political discussions from every part of the country. The programs from which the recordings were done are: Peace FM's flagship daily morning show, *Kokrookoo*; Adom FM's evening program, *Burning Issues*; and Happy FM morning program, *Yεpe a Yεbehu* "when we search we shall find (it)." 100 phone-ins were randomly recorded, sampled, transcribed, and analyzed, using two of Fairclough's (1989, 1992a, 1995a,b, 2000, 2003) three-dimensional model: (1) Discourse-as-text and (2) discourse-as-social-practice. The data were first transcribed by the researcher and checked by a native speaker of Akan for accuracy and consistency.

It must be noted that the online commentaries were exclusively written in English and unedited. This was done to avoid the situation of changing the meaning and content of the comments. In cases where a word is spelt wrongly [SIC] is applied.

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The sampled data from both online commentaries and radio were subjected to thematic analysis in order to group the insults. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to analyze the patterns in the data. Based on the thematic analysis, the researcher discovered that the insults used to challenge political authority could be grouped under two themes, that is, infantilization and animalization of politicians.

### **3. Analysis**

This section concentrates on the various lexicalizations and predications used by ordinary citizens to challenge political authority. I divide this section into two different themes: infantilization of politicians and animalization of politicians.

#### **3.1. Infantilization of Politicians**

The analysis of the data reveals that ordinary citizens infantilize political authority by reducing them to the level of *girls* and *boys*, as exemplified in excerpts 1 and 2. Within the Ghanaian society, the representation of an adult as a *girl* or a *boy* is an insult. The reason is that these terms depict someone who is immature, cannot make his or her own decisions, is at the mercy of others, and frail. All these qualities are mapped onto the adult. The representation "rank-shifts" (in the words of Agyekum, 2010, p. 130) the adult, that is, it lowers his/her status to a lower rank and degrades him/her. It is the expectation of society that adults act maturely and not behave as kids. Any adult who behaves contrary to this is considered as a child. Therefore,



this infantilization implicitly presents the deputy minister of communication, Victoria Hammer and government communicator, Felix Ofori-Kwakye as unfit to hold leadership position because they are behaving like children. That is to say, society wants people who are matured enough to hold leadership position since governance is not a child’s play, which these politicians are displaying. This, notwithstanding, society admires young ones who conduct themselves in accordance with the standards set by society. A typical example is the Akan proverb, which states, *abɔfra hunu ne nsa hohoro a, ɔne mpaninfoɔ didi to wit* “If a child learns to wash his hands well, he may eat with elders.”

For anonymity purpose, the names and the exact dates of the people who communicated online and phone-ins are not mentioned.

### Excerpt 1

[Background: The focus of the discussion was on a Deputy Minister of Communication who was heard on a leaked tape saying that she will not quit politics until she has made one million dollars. After the discussions, the phone lines were opened to solicit the views of the public. Below is a comment from an ordinary citizen.]

Adom FM (Burning issues) November 11, 2013

Woahu girl no nyankopɔn na ɛretete ɔɔmo to saa no. ɔhia one million dollars na sɛ ɔnya saa sika no to ne account mu na sɛ ɔgyae politics a ɛnye hwee. Woahu adwene? Ghana ahokyerɛ senea esi bɔn ha no. Master, bra B/A bra Sunyani behwɛ, 1000 Ghana ntumi nhae dan. Na mmrantee nam desert so kɔ Libya kɔ wu sei a, na nnipa ɛwia sika, politicians. Nyankopɔn mfa nkyɛ ɔɔmo o.

“Have you seen that girl (Deputy Minister of Communication), God is revealing all their bad deeds. She will not quit politics until she makes one million dollars into her account. Have you seen such mentality? People are suffering everywhere in Ghana. Master, you come to B/A and come and see things for yourself, you cannot rent a room with 1000 Ghana cedis. And young men die on the desert en route to Libya, and politicians are stealing from the state. God should forgive them.”

### Excerpt 2

[Background: The comment from the ordinary citizen below is a response to a government communicator who insulted the running mate of the New Patriotic Party’s (NPP) presidential candidate, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia.]

Comment to: Dishonest Bawumia has not been fair to his parents who educated him- Kwakye-Ofosu.

I think this boy should be sent to a psychiatric hospital, he is not normal. Can National Democratic Congress (NDC) have such a technocrat in their party? Even they don’t respect their party founder. Shame unto them! GOD will punish them one after the other, o God save mother Ghana. (Source: Myjoyonline)

Similarly, ordinary citizens chide politicians to behave in accordance with their ages and positions in society. This is seen in “I have always believed that there is wisdom in old age”; “Yaw Boateng Gyan should humbly grow with his age why?”; and “I actually thought age is proportional to wisdom and maturity but it seems my own uncle Yaw Boateng -Gyan is on the contrary” in excerpts 3, 4, and 5 respectively. Ghanaian and most African cultures equate old age to maturity and wisdom, and this is insisted upon at every forum and situations. This is because age is a significant cultural measure, which encompasses the social and cultural conventions, expectations and perception of the society about the ways in which people should act and behave, as they get older. Those who do not act in line with their growth and age are

infantilized for behaving like children while those who act above their age are elevated, as in the Akan expression *abɔfra no yɛ mpaninsem* to wit “the child behaves like an adult.” Thus, the behavior of some politicians in Ghana are questioned by citizens, revealing that they are not acting in accordance with their age and positions they hold in society. This portrays them as not paying attention to the cultural priorities of displaying wisdom in speech and deeds with regard to their age and positions in society, as seen in excerpt 3, 4, and 5.

### Excerpt 3

[Background: This comment was as a result of the barrage of insults rained on the NPP and its Greater Accra regional communicator director, Michael Ampong by Allotey Jacobs, NDC central region communications director. Mr. Allotey claimed that Mr Ampong had described him as a fetish priest. Below is a comment from a citizen in response to Allotey Jacob’s insult.]

Comment to: Allotey Jacobs: “NPP People Are Very Stupid and Behave Stupidly...They Are Getting Crazy And Mad”

*I have always believed that there is wisdom in old age.* This confirms my {believe} [SIC] belief in the scripture concerning what Apostle Paul said that “when I was a child, I acted and spoke like a child and now that I have grown ... Behavior of characters like Allotey Jacobs make you think that for some it is the reverse. Is the Peace Council alive? (Source: Peacefmonline)

### Excerpt 4

[Background: The comment below is a response to an NPP MP, Edward Ennin whose comment is borne out of Yaw Boateng Gyan, NDC national organizer and presidential staffer’s assertion that “NPP is neck deep in tribalism.”]

Comment to: Yaw Boateng Gyan Stooped Low...He Should Rather Counsel Mahama On How To Govern Efficiently

*Yaw Boateng Gyan should humbly grow with his age why?* This man always talks about tribal politics in Ghana. They will never learn to solve the economic problems, but will get time and do naughty politics on OKAY FM Shameless talks. (Source: Peacefmonline)

### Excerpt 5

[Background of this excerpt is the same as excerpt 4.]

Comment to: Yaw Boateng Gyan Stooped Low...He Should Rather Counsel Mahama On How To Govern Efficiently

*I actually taught age is proportional to wisdom and maturity but it seems my own uncle Yaw Boateng -Gyan is on the contrary.* An old man like him should reason and sit to counsel the young ones on such irresponsible statement but he himself is doing this. Who then would correct him. Uncle, please don’t lower yourself to that level. Maintain your dignity. Your position is assured. (Source: Peacefmonline)

Closely related to age is the metonymic use of grey hair to represent wisdom. Ghana like most African societies believes that grey hair is a repository of wisdom. The general assumption within traditional African societies is that, a leader would only be respected if he or she looked older than his followers due to believe that wisdom and skilled leadership are endowed in grey hair. That is why chiefs are called “Nana/Togbe/Nii” in Ghanaian society. This is because the elderly are respected for their wise advice. They also hold fast to traditional social norms, and are therefore trusted not to deviate from these norms.

Correlating the metonymic use of grey hair understanding with excerpt 6, former President Rawlings is challenged by the citizen to act in line with his grey hair when he insulted former President Kufuor as an “autocratic thief.” Literally speaking, Rawlings has grown a lot of grey hair, but according to the citizen, he was not showing the wisdom associated with it. That is to say, he is not exhibiting the characteristics or dignity of people with grey hair. Therefore, the ordinary citizen infantilizes Rawlings for not exhibiting the wisdom society attaches to grey hair and old age.

#### Excerpt 6

[Background: The citizen’s comment below is in response to an New Patriotic Party (NPP) Member of Parliament (MP), Major (Rtd) Derrick Oduro’s insinuation targeted at former President Rawlings who described former President Kufuor as “autocratic thief.”]

Comment to: Kufuor Will Not Speak From The “Chamber Pot” As JJ Does...

This is the tale of two cities. The city of wisdom and the city of folly. Kufuor rules over the city of wisdom and Rawlings the city of folly. *Gray hair is supposed to be the crown of old age in dignity.* Rawlings, show me your dignity. You have none. (Source: Peacefmonline)

In addition to the infantilization of politicians, citizens question the cultural understanding and upbringing of politicians. This is reflected in “this mogul talks like he was not raised by his parents” and “my ten (10) years old girl is more cultured than Hammond” in excerpts 7 and 8 respectively. It is common practice in Ghanaian culture that children are socialized and trained from a very early age to respect and obey elders, be humble towards elders, not to insult elders and to take their advice. Gyekye (1996, p. 85) aptly states: “Character development is an important aspect of upbringing of children. In this connection, efforts are constantly made to instruct children in the values of the society to help them acquire the virtues that a person should possess in order to live a most satisfactory life.” Juxtaposing this with the behavior of adults, recall that in the previous discussions on age and grey hair, we mentioned that adults are respected as repository of knowledge and wisdom. So, an adult who has gone through these socialization processes but does not pay attention to proper speech behavior, is infantilized of needing proper training. That is to say, such adults were not properly trained as kids and therefore needed to go back for another socialization to learn societal norms governing speech behavior. This is seen in the infantilization of Kennedy Agyapong, MP in excerpt 7 and K. T. Hammond in excerpt 8.

#### Excerpt 7

[Background: The comment was a response from a citizen in reaction to NPP MP, Kennedy Agyapong who described the chairman of Electoral Commission as “stupid.” This insult was as a result of the 2012 election petition spearheaded by the NPP.]

Comment to: Ken Agyapong: Afari Gyan Is Stupid And Not Indispensable

*This mogul talks like he was not raised by his parents.* He should open his warmouth and let the militant patriot go and kill Afari Gyan. God is only giving him time to repent. (Source: Peacefmonline)

#### Excerpt 8

[Background: The ordinary citizen’s comment below was a reaction to NPP MP, K.T. Hammond who launched a blistering verbal attack on the Majority Leader of

Parliament, Benjamin Kumbour in the house, for making anti-corruption statement that did not go well him (Hammond).]

Comment to: EXPLETIVES GALORE!!!! K.T Hammond Slams Majority Leader For Passing “Foolish, Stupid And Useless Comments”  
I can’t believe I voted for this thing? *My ten (10) years old girl is more cultured than Hammond.* Am not sure Kumbour was trying any mischief here. Clearly, Hammond seems to be running away from his shadows. (Source: Peacefmonline)

### 3.2. Animalization of Politicians

One common theme in the analysis of the data is the use of animal imagery to represent and describe political authority. The use of animal names to insult people is a common trait across cultures. The target or the object of such insults is addressed dysphemistically using animal names, most of which have their own metaphorical extensions and denotations (Allan and Burrige, 1991). Some unpleasant characteristics, appearance, behavior or parts of the animals are metaphorically mapped onto the target human. The traits manifested by some of the animals in the society carry heavy semantic loads, which in most general sense are negative.

As exemplified in excerpts 9 and 10, citizens describe the behavior of politicians as *mooasem* (animalistic behavior) and *aboa* (animal) respectively. Agyekum (2010) translates “aboa” as “a beast” and considers it to be a generic term used for all animals. It is often applied to a person, as in *woye aboa* “you are a beast.” The representation and description of the behavior of politicians as “animals” is telling, in that, it implicitly presents them as not human beings; their behaviors are incongruous with society’s acceptable behavior of other human beings. Indeed, they have broken the social contract of how normal human beings should behave and do not have to exist alongside humans. That is to say, their behaviors do not conform to human society and therefore deserve to live in the bush with animals.

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#### Excerpt 9

[Background: The discussion was focused on the erratic power supply and the increased electricity tariffs in the country. Below is the conversation that ensued between the host of the program, Afia Pokuaa and the caller, Sam.]  
Adom FM (Burning issues) October 21 2013

Ye trust wo; yegye wo di. Kyere se dee President okaa ye yi. Kyere se ministers no oomo pay ne nnooma no eso so dodoo, me nuabaa. Ade no ye otele, otele, abodee, abodee, abodee, abei. Wogye gye wei nyinaa wie na owie wosan abekye agu yen so, hei ye nye deen? Akyede won nya, mesee ministers, akyede a won nya as ministers akyede nkorofoo de ma won, eno dee yefre no odwan to onka nam ho, onno dwem, bebre kake. Na lady, wei bebre na owie nso woabeye mooasem, woabeye rough akyere yen. Abei!

“We trust you. We’ve confidence in you. What the President said means that the pay and other things for the Ministers are too much, my sister. It is too big, too big, too big! They receive all these and pass them onto us, what do they want us to do? These Ministers receive a lot of gifts from people; those ones are just the tail of a goat. It is not part of the meat. They enjoy them. It is too much! And Lady, after all these many things, they exhibit these animalistic tendencies on us. Why?”

#### Excerpt 10

[Background: the comment below is an ordinary citizens’ response to Dr. Tony Aidoo, a Senior Presidential Aide and Head of Policy and Evaluation at the Presidency, for describing the NPP’s 2008 and 2012 presidential candidate as having an “offensive body language.”]

Comment to: Akufo Addo Has An ‘Offensive Body Language’ That Puts People Off  
- Tony Aidoo

*Aboa* Tony... I sincerely do not think you are in the position {of} [sic] [to] make such a comment on Nana Addo. Just leave the man alone and if you do not have anything to say just smoke, ok. (Source: Peacefmonline)

In the same way, there are instances where specific domestic animal names such as “dog,” “sheep,” “goat,” “pig,” “horse,” “donkey,” among others, and the insults associated with them, are used to insult politicians. An example is excerpt 11, where an NPP MP, K. T. Hammond was described as a “dog” when he insulted the Majority Leader of parliament as “foolish, stupid and useless.” Also, in excerpt 12, Rawlings is presented as a “dog” for his “loud silence over corruption under President Mahama (the current President of Ghana).” Akans and most cultures in Ghana as well as Africa have negative perceptions of “dogs”. According to Agyekum (2010), a “dog” is considered as a very good pet but it has some negative characteristics: (1) it is promiscuous, especially the males; (2) it steals; (3) it is quarrelsome; and (4) greedy. Some of these characteristics are ascribed to the politicians in question. More importantly, in excerpt 11, the most suitable characteristic mapped on the NPP MP is “stealing,” since the discussion that resulted into the insult was about the selling of a drill ship and the inability of the state to trace the proceedings from the sale, which the MP was involved.

In excerpt 12, the suitable attribute of dogs extended to former President Rawlings is “greed,” because according to the ordinary citizen, he was now enjoying under President Mahama and that he is too busy with his “bones” (reference is made to the enjoyment of dogs’ attention and steadiness with respect to bones) and does not have the time to criticize the administration over corruption. The “bones” represents the supposed “goodies” given to Rawlings. Recall that Rawlings has criticized all presidents who came after him, including his own vice president, John Evans Mills of blessed memory, who was elected in 2008. His unusual silence of not doing same under the current administration (President Mahama’s government) baffles the ordinary citizen who therefore compares his attitude metaphorically to that of a dog with a bone.

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### Excerpt 11

[The background of this excerpt is the same as excerpt 8]

Comment to: EXPLETIVES GALORE!!! K.T Hammond Slams Majority Leader For Passing “Foolish, Stupid And Useless Comments”.

This dog is fighting hard to win back the confidence of his mother. He says his mother does not believe him about the \$3.5m. (Source: Peacefmonline)

### Excerpt 12

[Background: The comment below is in response to NPP MP, Derek Oduro who was surprised at the sudden loud silence of former President Rawlings over corrupt practices in the Mahama-led NDC government. Recall that Rawlings has criticized almost every government after him, including his own party.]

Comment to: Rawlings’ Conscience Has Been Bought...Why The Loud Silence Over Corruption Under Mahama?



If you give meat to a *dog* it finishes it fast and starts barking again. But if you give it a bone it does not come back. Mills gave Rawlings meat and he quickly finished it.  
(Source: Peacefmonline)

#### **4. Discussion: Media, Power, Voice and Ordinary Citizens**

Throughout the analysis, we have observed that ordinary citizens challenged the existing political authority via phone-ins and online commentaries an avenue created by the media. We saw that citizens used insults to infantilize politicians and animalize them. The broader question I discuss in this section is where do ordinary citizens derive this power from to challenge the existing political authority, taking into the consideration the conservative nature of Ghanaian society?

Recall also that in the literature review, the *Apoɔ* and *Kundum* festivals all of which empower the powerless in society to review the performance of their leaders, are done within a very short period of time in a controlled circumstance. Similarly, the various speech games that give people the license to insult are operational within the parameters of the game. Further, members of a particular social network cannot use “group insults” outside the domain of the network.

The moral priorities and direction of culture as well as the restorative and regulatory functions of the tradition of institutionalized insults, particularly the festivals, point to the power imbalances in traditional Ghanaian society. Juxtaposing the power asymmetry in Ghanaian traditional and cultural set up to the current democratic context, the right to vote is a basic fundamental right of every citizen in a democratic state to elect political leaders. For example, article 42 of the constitution of the republic of Ghana states that “Every citizen of Ghana of eighteen years of age or above and of sound mind has the right to vote and is entitled to be registered as a voter for the purposes of public elections and referenda.” After exercising this fundamental right and power to vote, how do ordinary citizens contribute to political discourse or challenge the people they have elected into office? What are the avenues created for the ordinary citizens to make their voices heard in political discussions? How do citizens see themselves as partners and not observers in the governing process?

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The argument I want to put across is that the power in Ghanaian political discourse operates within the media, in that, it is the main medium for the dissemination of political information, ideological enactment, and a persuasive tool for socio-political and cultural activities of people. They also provide an opportunity for citizens to participate in political discourse.

Communication researchers see the media as the place where politics occurs (Ross, 2004) as well as the institution whose function is to mediate politics in democratic society (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). These views are in line with political radio program and online commentary, because they are avenues that empower the powerless in society to contribute to political life. Listeners on radio, for instance, feel a strong sense of civic duty, which makes them call into a political program, send text messages or send comments online to contribute to political discussions. Indeed, it offers ordinary citizens a communication outlet that conforms to their desire to participate in politics, yet allows them to take an outsider stance (Owen, 1997).

The power the media holds in political discourse in Ghana is transferred to the powerless in society (i.e. ordinary citizens) leading to their empowerment to challenge the existing political authority and also contribute meaningfully to the day-to-day political discourse via phone-ins,



SMS messages and online commentary. By observing the actions of political authority, ordinary citizens use the power given to them to insult and challenge the existing political authority. As observed by Wodak (2001, p. 11), “power does not derive from language but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter the distributions of power in the short or long term”. The use of insults in Ghanaian political discourse, as has been explained, therefore, is one of the ways in which the existing political authority is challenged.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have utilized CDA and one of its critical terms, that is, power. I specifically employed one of the prominent approaches in CDA: two of Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework. Drawing on these two layers of analysis, I took the text and linked it to the cultural and sociopolitical practices to give a broader explanation on the discourse of ordinary citizens and how they used insults to challenge the existing political authority.

The primary objective of CDA is “the object of moral and political evaluation, and analyzing them should have effect on society by empowering the powerless, giving voice to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 25). Based on this core tenet of CDA, I have argued and analyzed how the media empower and give voice to the powerless and voiceless in society to challenge the existing political authority. To understand the discourse of citizens, I brought together “linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 92).

Generally speaking, the findings of this study point to the conclusion that Fairclough’s framework, has given a broader insight into the understanding of how the media empower ordinary citizens to challenge the existing political authority by going to the extent of insulting them.

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