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The Proverb as a Mitigating and Politeness Strategy in Akan Discourse

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Abstract. Among the Akan of Ghana, the proverb is highly valued as a mode of communication. Pragmatically, it may be used in the management of "face." Specifically, it may act as a mitigator that minimizes the offensive intent of an upcoming "difficult" utterance, it may show a speaker's humility or his acknowledgment of the addressee's sensibility by providing a common ground that does not impale the sensibility of any of the conversational participants; or it may show deference or solidarity. Structurally, it may function as a *predifficult*, a *preclosing*, or a *closing*.

1. Introduction. Proverbs are used extensively in Akan discourse. In this article, I demonstrate that Akan elders, in advising a younger person, even one of their own children, engage in "facework." Specifically, they acknowledge the vulnerability of "face" and therefore take steps to maintain it. I demonstrate that proverbs are used to mitigate upcoming potentially difficult, tense, or risky utterances. In the context of advising, therefore, proverbs serve to warn advisees of upcoming face-threatening acts (FTAs). Specifically, the proverb "softens" the force of the impending FTA, lest it be misconstrued as a verbal assault or an imposition on the advisee. The use of proverbs and of pre-proverbial utterances is thus in cognizance of the delicacy of the advice-giving event.

I also demonstrate that the use of proverbs helps to maintain a speaker's face, since his or her face is also potentially threatened by the FTA inherent in his or her own utterance. In particular, the desire to express warmth and positive concern for others ("positive politeness," cf. Brown and Levinson 1987) demands that FTAs inherent in a speaker's utterance be mitigated unless the speaker is to be seen as uncaring and rude.

Such proverbs, by acting as mitigators, perform a sequential function, namely, a *predifficult*. The proverb may also act as a *preclosing* or as a kind of *closing*. This article, then, situates the proverb in the context of advice-giving and explores the role proverbs play in conversational sequencing and organization.

I examine eight excerpts from an extended Akan discourse in which an old couple advises their son, the author, who is about to go on a journey. Prior to this, I briefly explore the literature on proverbs (especially that on Akan proverbs) and on politeness theory in order to help clarify this article's place in

the context of studies of Akan proverbs and politeness theory. Also, a background knowledge of the relevant literature on proverbs and politeness should assist readers in following the logic of the interpretations and in evaluating the claims made about the excerpts.

2. The Akan proverb. Akan proverbs have been studied by folklorists and linguists (Rattray 1927; Finnegan 1970; Yankah 1986, 1989a, 1989b); and by ethnomusicologists (Nketia 1971). By far the most comprehensive study of Akan proverbs is Yankah's (1989b) "The Proverb in the Context of Akan Rhetoric," in which he discusses the place of proverbs in Akan society, proverb authorship, and the use of proverbs and opportunities for creativity in various contexts, including jurisprudence and church sermons.

Yankah remarks that "the nearest Akan equivalent of the proverb, *ɛbe*, includes but is not restricted to epigrammatic expression; and is not bound to the spoken word" (1986:199). Apenteng-Sackey's (1990) work on the language of Akan clothing and textiles, as well as that of Appiah (1992), provides considerable insight into how Akan proverbs may even be "worn." "Proverb-wearing" among other African peoples has been studied by Eastman (1972) and Spencer (1982).

Akan proverbs may, in addition to epigrammatic expressions, include extended metaphors, illustrative anecdotes, parables, etc. They, like the proverbs of other sub-Saharan African cultures, are used in a variety of discourse situations, including natural conversation, storytelling, riddling, church services, eulogizing, singing, drumming, formal public speaking, and even in courts of law.

Proverbs are sometimes semantically ambiguous, especially when cited in isolation. Thus, an Akan proverb such as example (1), may be cited either to encourage or to discourage competition, depending upon the circumstances (Yankah 1986).

- (1) *Funtunfracu ne denkyemfracu kuta afu korɔ nso se wɔn redidi*
Funtunfracu and denkyemfracu hold stomach same but if they eat

a, na wɔrefom
when then they-scramble

'The Siamese twin crocodiles share a common belly, yet scramble over food.'

So also may the proverb given in example (2) below, which may be cited to warn someone to exercise self-restraint in an unfamiliar environment, or to console him not to be worried about the results of an action he may have taken in ignorance. The semantic ambiguity of proverbs is also noted by Schottman (1993: 540), and it is for this reason that considerable significance or emphasis is placed on the "contexts-of-situation" in which a proverb is cited or appropriately applied (Siran 1993).

- (2) *Jɔɔɔ na ɔwe akokɔ a, n'ani abɔ.*
stranger who he-eats fowl who its-eye blind
'It is the stranger who eats a blind fowl.'

Like other genres, several communicational "rules" govern proverb use. These rules relate directly or indirectly to Hymes's (1962) "ethnography of speaking." An appropriate use of proverbs recognizes the presence and significance of the participants in the discourse—namely, the proverb-giver and the proverb-receiver, the place and time of the discourse, the form in which the proverb should be presented (involving various opening formulas and whether to issue the proverb in a declarative, inverted, or command form), the occasion, and other contributing contextual factors. In sub-Saharan Africa, just as proverb use in a subordinate-to-superior social context is largely restricted (especially if the speaker does not use mitigators and various polite terminal addressives), so also is proverb use in a superior-to-subordinate context restricted, especially where the subordinate's linguistic sophistication might be in doubt.

Until recently, it was suggested that because proverbs represent cultural truisms and are ascribed to the elders or ancestors, there is little or no opportunity for individual creativity. Lord (1960) and especially Yankah (1986, 1989a) discuss creativity in proverb speaking. Novel proverb creation, the timely invocation of an effective proverb in a fitting rhetorical context, and the adaptation and manipulation of existing proverbs are facets of creativity mentioned by Yankah. However, he dwells mainly on the adaptation and manipulation of existing proverbs.

The role or function of proverbs in communication has also been studied by many folklorists, ethnographers, and linguists. Herzog (1936), Arewa and Dundes (1967), Yankah (1989), Obeng (1994), as well as others, have discussed the role proverbs play in managing social conflicts. Herzog, for example, remarks that proverbs "are the most important instrument for minimizing friction and effecting adjustment, legal, social, intellectual. . . . They form a vital and potent element of the culture they interpret" (1936:7). Okpewho (1992) and Olatunji (1984) have treated proverbs as social control strategies among the Yoruba and Asaba (Igbo) of Nigeria.

Other functions of the proverb among the Akan, as well as among other sub-Saharan African peoples include summing up a situation, passing judgment, reprimanding, recommending a course of action, serving as past precedents for present actions (comparable to cases cited in law courts to support or refute a line of reasoning), praising, cautioning, speaking the unspeakable, persuading hearers, asserting someone's status (Seitel 1977), and teaching a moral. They thus provide strategies for dealing with a variety of communicative situations.

3. Politeness. Studies of politeness have caught the attention of linguists (especially sociolinguists and those who work on linguistic pragmatics), philosophers, anthropologists, and folklorists. The work of Lakoff (1977), Grice (1975), Vigner (1978), Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987), Blum-Kulka (1989), and many others point to the extent to which politeness has been studied in different cultures.

In her "Politeness, Pragmatics and Performatives," Lakoff (1973) proposes three rules of politeness, namely, formality, hesitancy, and equality or camaraderie. With regard to formality, Lakoff argues that an interactant should remain aloof and refrain from imposing his ideas, feelings, or point of view on other participants in the discourse. For hesitancy, she explains that an addresser should allow an addressee to decide on his own options. Finally, for equality, Lakoff argues that a speaker should act as though he and the hearer were equal. Thus, the hearer is to be made to feel good by the speaker. Some of the problems inherent in Lakoff's rules have been discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and by Fasold (1984). Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that positing rules is tantamount to inventing a problem to be explained, rather than explaining it. Fasold (1984) discusses problems with the hesitancy rule.

Following Grice's (1975) conversational maxims, Leech (1983) puts forward four politeness maxims. These are: tact, generosity, approbation, and modesty. With regard to tact, Leech writes that an interactant ought to minimize cost to other participants in the discourse, while at the same time maximizing their benefits. The maxim of generosity demands that an interactant minimize benefits to oneself, while at the same time maximizing one's cost. For approbation, Leech posits that an interactant should maximize praise for others, and thus minimize dispraise of them. Minimizing praise for oneself and maximizing dispraise of oneself are discussed under the maxim of modesty. Explaining the modesty maxim further, Leech argues that it is more polite, and thus preferable, to back an offer with an obligation since that minimizes praise for oneself. A criticism leveled against Leech's work by Fasold (1984) is that starting with rules or maxims like those proposed by Leech can only help us understand politeness in terms of the rules without knowing why there should be such rules.

Earlier work done on politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) is, by far, the most often cited, is the most widely influential, and offers the most thorough treatment of the concept. Yet, it is also the most widely debated. The thesis that they develop claims validity across cultures and is based on the idea that interactants engaged in discourse engage in rational behavior to achieve satisfaction of "face wants" that are related to politeness. "Face," according to the authors, ". . . is emotionally invested and cannot be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction. In general, people co-operate in maintaining face—in interaction, such co-operation being based on mutual vulnerability of face" (Brown and Levinson 1987:66). They distinguish two types

of face: positive and negative. *Positive face* concerns the positive consistent self-image that people want others to accept and appreciate. This is more or less related to Lakoff's third rule regarding camaraderie mentioned above. *Negative face*, on the other hand, deals with rights to territories, freedom of action, and freedom from imposition. According to Fasold (1984), Lakoff's formality and hesitancy rules may be seen as explications of politeness based on preserving negative face. Brown and Levinson consider negative politeness strategies less problematic than positive politeness strategies because the latter assume that the hearer shares the speaker's feelings of closeness, which may not be the case.

Although Brown and Levinson's politeness theory allows for some cultural variability, they contend that the use of politeness strategies in the management of face is universal. Hence, they outline four strategies on a scale from least to most polite (bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record hints) that can be used by speakers whose utterances involve a face-threatening act. Which form a speaker chooses, according to the authors, is dependent upon the distance between the speaker and the hearer, the power of the hearer over the speaker, and the perceived imposition implicit in the act. The authors summarize this in what they refer to as the weightiness of the act (W_x), based upon a formula stated as: $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$, where $D(S,H)$ = the distance between the speaker and the hearer, $P(H,S)$ = the power of the hearer over the speaker, and R_x = the degree of perceived imposition. An increase in W_x warrants the choice of a less face-threatening strategy by the speaker.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory has come under strong criticism. First, their definition of politeness in terms of threat to face (the more threat to face, the less polite an act is), which is in turn characterized in terms of the direct or indirect nature of an utterance (the less direct an utterance, the more polite and vice versa), is seen by such scholars as Blum-Kulka (1987), Holtgraves and Yang (1990), and de Kadt (1992) as being too simplistic. Specifically, these authors have concluded that the value of indirectness as a politeness strategy varies from culture to culture. Secondly, Brown and Levinson's assertion that speakers from different cultural backgrounds perceive politeness the same way but only opt for different forms of politeness solely because they perceive the weightiness of the situation differently, is disputed. Blum-Kulka (1987) notes that the perception of politeness is not the same across cultures and argues for the notion of *pragmatic clarity*, i.e., the degree to which the speaker's desires are made clear to the hearer. According to Blum-Kulka, in making a polite request the speaker must "weigh the imposition involved in being coercive against the imposition involved in cognitively burdening the hearer and making it difficult for him or her to guess the meaning" (1987:44). Phéh and Csató (1985) suggest age as a determining factor in politeness. De Kadt (1992) also suggests, among other things, that nonverbal communication should be included in any politeness theory.

Among the Akan of Ghana, Yankah (1991) and Obeng (1994) argue that FTAs may be eliminated or "weakened" by routing one's speech through proxies or by suffusing one's utterances with polite terminal addressives or deference honorifics, and by apologizing for the commission of FTAs. An interactant may show an asymmetrical socioeconomic relationship between himself and the hearer through the use of such linguistic markers of politeness as: social titles (e.g., *Jkeseɛ* 'The Mighty One', *Jkyeadeɛ* 'The Magnanimous' or 'Generous One', *Jdeɛfoɔ* 'The Magnanimous One', *Nana* 'elder, chief', *Me Wura* 'My Lord'), and terms of respect denoting the addressee's or referent's affiliation with a respectable social class or family (Yankah 1995). This category of linguistic markers of politeness are suffixed to expressions of thanks and to greetings. Among the terms of respect are *apeaw* (a deferential title for members of the Asene lineage), *ahenewa* 'small or sub chief', *anyaado* 'benevolence', *eson* (deferential response for members of the Asona lineage), and *amu* 'wholeness, dignity'.

Linguistic markers of politeness that act as in-group identity markers include, but are not restricted to, such consanguinal and affinal kinship terms as *me nua* 'my sibling', *wofa* 'uncle', *agya* 'father', and *ena* 'mother'. They may also be used to denote metaphorical kinship proximity to the referent.

4. Data and method. This work is based on transcripts of tape-recorded natural discourse. A couple advise their son (the author), who is leaving the village and country for another country. The couple, Yaw Gyasi, eighty-one years of age, and Abena Humuu, seventy-three years of age, are from Asuom in the eastern region of Ghana. They were born in this village and have lived there all their lives. They are monolingual and speak only Akan. The advisee, thirty-five years old, lived in this village until he was sixteen. He visits this village regularly. He speaks Akan, English, Swahili, Dangme, and some German.

Among the Akan, during an advice-giving session, the adviser controls the discourse. An advisee may briefly speak to clarify a point but generally he utters supportives only. It is usually at the end of the advice that the advisee expresses his gratitude to those who advised him and "promises" to abide by their advice, and this is exactly what was done. An advisee who frequently interrupts his advisor with utterances other than necessary clarifications or acceptable explanations and supportives is almost always reprimanded with proverbs such as those given in examples (3) and (4).

- (3) *Yeretu wo fo a na enam w'aso akyi.*
 we're-advising you if then it-passes your-ears back
 'You don't pay attention when we give you advice' (i.e., you don't take other people's advice).

- (4) *Yetu wo fo na woante a, yede wo ko*
 we-give you advice and you-not-hear if we-with you go

Anteade.

Never-Hear-Thing

'If you don't heed advice, you're "deported" to Deaf Township' (i.e., disobedience leads to destruction).

An uncalled-for interruption by an advisee is treated as disobedience or inattention and is regarded as foolish pride—a behavior that is not tolerated in important matters. The result of inattention or disobedience could be ostracism or banishment from the family.

I have analyzed the text of this advice-giving session within the framework of conversational analysis, as practiced by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), and politeness theory (Lakoff 1977; Blum-Kulka 1989). The "context" within which the discourse takes place are also relevant to my analysis (cf. Malinowski 1924; Seitel 1981; Duranti and Goodwin 1992).

In this analysis, interactive categories provide the basis for the statements and claims made. The statements are derived inductively from my data and are shown to be relevant for the interactants. Excerpts are placed alongside my analytical claims to prevent my analytic claims from standing insulated from any kind of inspection. This practice also helps to minimize idiosyncratic judgments.

I also attempt to answer the call by Hymes (1962, 1972), Malinowski (1924), Seitel (1981), Duranti and Goodwin (1992), Briggs (1995), and many other scholars, for linguists, folklorists, and anthropologists to study communication as a process governed by context—i.e., as the fundamental juxtaposition of two entities, a focal event and a field of action within which that event is embedded (Duranti and Goodwin 1992:3). Thus, like Duranti and Goodwin, I take the conversational pieces (talk) and the contexts in which they occur as standing in a "mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk, and the interpretive work it generates, shaping context as much as context shapes talk" (Duranti and Goodwin 1992:31). The contextual cues that help provide appropriate interpretations (Goffman 1974) for the excerpts examined in the core sections of this paper are therefore taken into consideration as well. In view of this, I emphasize the notion of *context of situation* both directly and indirectly in my analysis. For example, I take into consideration the ages and social relationships of the interactants, their sociocultural status, etc., and how all these combine to influence what is verbalized and how it is verbalized.

5. Text and discussion.

5.1. Proverbs as mitigating and politeness strategies. In this section, I demonstrate that interactants preface FTAs with redressive actions, and that in the context of advising, a redressive action can be a proverb alone, or a proverb

issued conjointly with other redressive strategies. In particular, I demonstrate that these redressive actions (especially the proverbs) "are impersonal vehicles for personal communication" (Arewa and Dundes 1964:70), convey a degree of "unwillingness" on the part of the speaker to impose his thoughts and ideas on the hearer, and show the speaker's humility, since they are an acknowledgment by the speaker of the hearer's linguistic sophistication. These redressive actions, then, indicate how a speaker shares the hearer's interests and desires, mitigate the offensive nature of the FTA, and hence convey politeness.

Excerpt 1

[Context: KO, then 34, is about to emigrate to the United States to work. YG, KO's father, is not happy about KO's decision to emigrate and advises him to change his decision. KO attempts to explain to YG that his (KO's) boss is not against the journey. YG then advises KO not to forget his roots.]

YG: *Wo dee wonim nyansa enti merenkasa nkye.*
you as-for you-know wisdom so I-won't-talk long

Wo ara wonim se wokwa baabiara ntwoma a, ebere.
You EMP you-know that you-paint anywhere red-clay if it-brightens

Menko dee a, anka meka se tena eha ara.
me-only as-for if would-have I'd-say that stay here only.

'You're wise so I won't make a lengthy speech. You know that *wherever you paint with red clay, it will be bright*. Left to me alone, I would have said, "Stay here."

KO: *Me panin a wo Nkran no ntia mekorɔ no.*
my boss who he-be in Accra who not-against my-travel that.

Wapene so.
He's-agreed.

'My boss in Accra is not against my travel. He has agreed.'

YG: *Ɛɛ eye; nanso Kwadwo wonim yie se*
well it-good but kwadwo you-know well that

se wo se akyi nnye wo de a, Ɛho ara na wotafere.
if your teeth back not-be you sweet if there only FOC you-lick

Bo mmɔden na bra efie ntem.
try hard and return home early

Ɛmma biribi ara ngye wo nka ho mmere tenten baiara.
don't-let thing any draw you leave there time long any

'Well, that's fine. But Kwadwo, you know very well that *no matter how tasteless your gums are, that's the only place you lick*. Try as much as you can to return home in the nearest future. Don't let anything keep you there for a long period of time.'

In excerpt 1, the adviser, YG, attempts to discourage KO from traveling. Pragmatically, the context situation (Burke 1957; Seitel 1977) involves a wrong decision, to emigrate to the United States, taken by the addressee. The first proverb is thus meant to signal to the addressee that the speaker is unhappy with the decision taken. However, telling a young man not to travel, especially in a society where people who travel are respected, is face-threatening to YG. In fact, if YG does not handle himself well, he could be considered as promoting his self-interest and not having any interest in his son's future. To convey such a FTA, YG first and foremost acknowledges KO's wisdom and promises not to make a lengthy speech, in accord with the Akan proverb given in example (5).

(5) *Jba nyansafoɔ, yebu no be na yenka no asem.*
child wise we-address him proverb but we-don't-tell him story
'A wise child is addressed in proverbs, not in a lengthy speech.'

Acknowledging the addressee's wisdom shows the speaker's respect for the listener. Among the Akan, such a complimentary remark is an indirect persuasive strategy. Specifically, the compliment acts as a "downtoner" to an upcoming FTA. The compliment is then immediately followed by the proverb, repeated here in example (6).

(6) *Wonim se wokwa baabi ara ntwoma a, ebere.*
you-know that you-paint place any red-clay if it-brightens
'You know very well that *wherever you paint with red clay, it will be bright*.'

In this proverb, a job done with the maximum effort is likened to *ntwoma* 'red clay', and success to the brightness of red clay. Here, the speaker is implying that no matter where the addressee works, he can be successful if he puts the maximum effort into his work.

The proverb signals to the hearer that the upcoming utterance is "difficult" or face-threatening to the speaker as well as to the addressee. The FTA potentially threatens the speaker's face since without the mitigator he would be seen as not showing any warmth toward the addressee. It threatens the addressee's face since it involves an imposition on him. The proverb therefore acts as a mitigator and thus minimizes the possibility of any offence that might be taken by KO. Although YG's opposition to the trip is apparent, he cannot be criticized as the only person ever to "caution" his child about a journey he is about to undertake. He did not create the proverb. He, like a lawyer in court, is only citing a "case" to support his point of view. Moreover, because this proverb, like other proverbs, is a cultural truism, it lends weight to the validity of YG's point.

KO tries to impress upon YG that he has the consent and blessing of his boss, thus indicating that the journey is permissible. However, although YG to some extent accepts KO's explanation, he advises him not to "overstay"—a further indication that he is still not happy about the journey.

In advising him not to overstay, YG utters a second proverb, *Se wo se akyiri nye wo de koraa a, ehɔ ara na wotafere* 'No matter how tasteless your gums are, that's the only place you lick.' In this proverb, home correlates with one's gums. The speaker appears to be saying that no matter how bad the conditions at home are, it is always "home sweet home." Being told not to overstay suggests that one probably does not know how to manage one's time properly. It therefore comes as no surprise that such a difficult utterance is prefaced with a proverb that acts as a mitigator. Uttering the proverb is therefore consistent with the facework being done here.

A critical observation of YG's utterance indicates that he links the proverb's hypothetical situation (that of gum-licking) to the social situation (that of home or one's country being the best place for an individual) that it addresses. An understanding of this proverb thus requires an understanding of the Akan perception of the relative status of an individual living in his hometown and the individual living in a foreign land as a stranger. The Akan proverbs *Jnantefo se ose asem* 'The habitual traveler is able to educate his father', *Baabi dehyee kodane baabi akoo* 'A royal personage could become a slave in a different or strange place', and *Jhɔhɔ na ɔwe akoko a n'ani abɔ* 'It's a stranger who eats a blind fowl' help explain this phenomenon. Although the Akan take great pride in traveling, they acknowledge the fact that traveling entails many dangers and inconveniences. The traveler becomes knowledgeable, but he may have to do "low" jobs that he would not normally do in his hometown. He may also be subjected to discrimination, and may even have to act stupidly like a blind fowl. It is with these thoughts in the back of his mind that YG advises KO not to travel, or if he must travel, not to overstay.

In excerpt 2, YG advises KO to take good care of his wife and never to quarrel with her.

Excerpt 2

[Context: Having been unable to impress upon KO the need to rescind his decision to emigrate, YG now inquires whether KO will travel with his family. He then advises KO to be tolerant and never engage in any confrontation with his spouse when they are in the United States.]

YG: *Wo ne Abena ne nkwadaa no na ebekoro?*
you and Abena and children the FOC will-go
Will you go with Abena and the children?

KO: *Aane*
Yes
'Yes.'

YG: *Eye. ee mpaninfo se se wohwe obi dehyee yie*
O.K. well elders say if you-look someone's royal-personage well

a, wo nso wo dehyee ye yie. Nipa a wone
if you also your royal-personage does well. person who you-with

no retu kwan ye obi dehyee. Bɔ mmɔden hwe no yie.
her travel be someone's royal-personage try hard look her well.

Wani anhu biribi a, enye wo tan. Se akasaakasa biara
your-eye not-see something if it-not-be you awful if argument any

a ede basabasa biara ba a, pue kakra. Ennu mmere
which it-with confusion any comes if leave awhile it-reach time

a wobeba no na obi ara bo adwo.
which you will-return FOC then everyone chest cool

Bɔ me na meni na anka me ee?
hit me and I'm-here how-about it-not-touch me Q

'O.K. Well, the elders say, *If you take good care of someone's royal personage, your royal personage will also prosper.* The person you're going to travel with is someone else's royal personage (i.e., from a different lineage). Try to take good care of her. *If something is out of your sight, you cannot pass judgment on it.* If there's any argument that could result in any serious confrontation, take a walk outside the house awhile. By the time you return, everybody would have calmed down. *Isn't it only when you're within your assailant's punching range that he can punch you?*

A look at excerpt 2 reveals three proverbs. The first, *Wohwe obi dehyee yie a, na wo nso wo dee reye yie* 'If you take good care of someone's royal personage, your royal personage will also prosper', is issued as a mitigator to the FTA, "Try to take good care of her." To be told to take good care of one's wife presupposes that you may not have been taking very good care of her in the past or that there might be a problem. The proverb that precedes the FTA, however, makes the FTA utterance more of an "encouragement" than a command. The addressee has as many as three sisters and would not want them to be mistreated by any man, hence the relevance of the proverb.

The use of the source formula *Mpaninfo se . . .*, as pointed out earlier, brings into focus the venerability or credibility of the proverb's source—the elders. The elders speak nothing but the truth, so this expression helps to make the speaker's stretch of utterance easily tellable and acceptable since it is nothing but the truth.

The proverb also instills in the hearer the concept of justice or equal treatment. Syntactically, the proverb is formed as a conditional sentence. Like other conditional sentences, the proposition in the first part of the sentence must be met first before that of the second is carried out. Thus, it is if and only if KO treats his wife well (when he emigrates with her) that his sisters will also be fairly treated by their husbands.

The second proverb also embellishes the delicate upcoming difficult FTA by removing any element of force or imposition behind it. It is only when you see

something that you are likely to pass a comment or a judgment on it. Again, if YG had simply said "Don't quarrel or argue with your wife," it could have marred KO's face because of the implication that he is quarrelsome or pugnacious. Pragmatically, it makes the point made earlier more audible and substantive. The third proverb adds emphasis and refines the point being made about abstention from quarreling.

In excerpt 3, AH advises KO to send money home.

Excerpt 3

[Context: AH, KO's mother, also not happy about KO's decision to travel, now draws KO's attention to YG's ill-health and reminds KO of his obligation to send money home to be used in looking after the people there since YG is now incapable of working. KO agrees to abide by AH's suggestion.]

AH: *Mpaninfoo na ekaa se se obi hwe wo ma wo*
 elders FOC said that if someone looks-after you for your
se fifi a, ese se wo nso wo hwe no na ne se
 teeth develop if must you also wo look-after him FOC his teeth
tutu. Wonim wo papa yadee yi. Seesei ontumi nye
 uproot you-know your father illness this now he-cannot NEG-do

adwuma; asetena aye den.
 work life has-become hard

It is the elders who said, *If someone looks after you when you're teething, you should also look after him when he loses his teeth.* You're aware of your father's illness. Now he's incapable of working. Life is hard these days.'

KO: Mmm.
 mmm (i.e., O.K.)
 Mmm.

In excerpt 3, AH, in asking KO to send money home, alludes to the fact that life is hard. Asking her son to send them money directly, especially when she is unaware of the conditions her son might encounter abroad, is considered face-threatening to AH. Specifically, such a verbal behavior involves an imposition by AH on KO—an indication that AH may be uncaring. The proverb, as well as the stretch of utterance occurring before the proverb, acts as a redressive action or mitigator. The expression "It is the elders who said . . ." gives the speaker a "shield" that protects her from responsibility for any damaging interpretation on the part of the addressee, since it ascribes the proverb to the elders. Sequentially, this opening formula acts as a "preliminary to a preliminary" (c.f. Schegloff 1980). Pragmatically, it mitigates the upcoming mitigator. The speaker thus builds, for herself, a strong communicational immunity and can legitimately disclaim any offensive intent. Here, there is a disclaimer of performance.

With regard to the proverb itself, it may be said that one starts to develop teeth when one is young, and starts losing them when one becomes old. Here, AH is indirectly reminding KO that he was supported by his parents when he was young and incapable of supporting himself. Now, his parents (YG and AH) are too old to fend for themselves and should therefore be supported by KO who has the capability.

Close examination of this proverb, therefore, suggests that within the interaction situation, the generic third person *obi* 'someone' refers to YG, KO's father, and the second person singular pronoun *wo* 'you' refers to KO, the addressee.

The proverb, apart from its mitigating role, also serves to remind KO of an Akan cultural maxim, a fact of life in which the strong support the weak, and of his own responsibility. KO's response, *Mmm* 'O.K.', although a "back channel," is itself an analysis of AH's utterance. The fact that he employs a back channel that indicates agreement points to the fact that the content of AH's message (the request) and the form in which it is presented are understood. It also indicates that the proposition embedded in the utterance is acceptable to him.

In excerpt 4, KO is advised to listen to the views of his wife and children. AH begins with an acknowledgment of the wisdom of KO's wife and a proverb that is juxtaposed with an etiological tale.

Excerpt 4

[Context: AH, like YG, also inquires whether KO will be traveling with his wife and children. She then advises KO against male chauvinism and encourages him to listen to his children's suggestions.]

AH: *Wo tiri ye wo yere te asem ase. Mpaninfoo se*
 your head good your wife understands story under. elders say

eye Jhehe-tu-fo-ante na owe ntakrabo a
 it-be Chief-Never-Takes-Advice who eats feathered-animal which

onni tire Na saa ohene yi adwene ye no se onim
 it-not-have head. FOC this chief this mind be him that he-knows

nyansa sen wiase nnipa nyinaa nti na ontie ne mpaninfoo
 wisdom than world persons all so FOC he-not-listen his counselors

afotuo. Jhyee mmara maa n'abommofoo se se won ko ahayo na
 advice he-enacted law for his-hunters that if they go hunting and

wanya akyenkyena ammre no a, obetwa won ti. Da
 they not-get plantain-eater not-bring him if he-will-cut their head day

koro bi abommofoo hwehwee kwae mu ara nso wanya
 one a hunters searched forest in extensively but they-not-get

akye^{kyena} no bi. Woredwendwen asem a ato
 plantain-eater it a. while-they-were-thinking problem which befall

wɔn no ho no, wɔn mu baako huu ɔpete, kumm no ka
 them it self while them in one saw vulture, killed it say

kyere abɔmmɔfo a aka no se moma yentutu anomaaa
 show hunters who remained the that let-us we-remove bird

yi ho na yentwa ne ti na yemfa no nkɔma shene.
 this self and cut-off its head and we-take it give chief.

Wɔpene so enti wɔde ɔpete no kɔmaa shene yere na ɔno
 they-agreed so they-with vulture the go-give chief wife and she

nso esiane se ɔnnim nti ɔde yee nkwan maa
 also because of she-not-know because she-with made soup for

shene no. Saa asem yi beyee ebe. Se ɔbaa no ka
 chief the this story this become proverb if woman the says

anyansasem bi ara a, fa waso kɔ fam. Enye Ntikuma
 sensible-story a any if take your-ears go down it-not-be Ntikuma

na skyere ne se ananse kwan a ese se ɔde nyansa
 FOC he-teach his father Ananse way which must he-with wisdom

kukuo no foro dua no. Se mmɔfra no mpo de nyansadwen
 pot the climb tree the if children the even with wisdom-mind

ba a, fa.
 come if take

'You're lucky your wife is understanding. The elders say, *It is Chief-Never-Takes-Advice who eats a headless bird*. This chief thought he was wiser than everybody else in the world so he never listened to the advice of his counselors. He enacted a law making it an offense punishable by beheading if his hunters were unable to bring him a plantain-eater whenever they went to hunt in the forest. It so happened that one day after a thorough search through the forest, the hunters were unable to get a plantain-eater for the chief. As they lamented over their ill-luck and imminent execution, one of them saw a vulture, took aim, shot and killed it, and said to the others, 'Why don't we just remove the plumes from this bird, cut its head off, and take it to the chief?' The others agreed, so the vulture was given to the chief's wife who, out of ignorance, prepared soup with it for the chief. This incident then became a proverb. If the woman (your wife) makes any sensible suggestion, (lit., accept it, send your ears down). Isn't it Ntikuma who suggested to his father, Ananse, a sensible way to carry the pot of wisdom to the top of the tree? Even if it is the children who suggest something good, take their advice.'

KO: Hahaha.
 (laughter)
 Ha ha ha.

In excerpt 4, AH advises KO against male chauvinism and impresses upon him the need to be tolerant. The preproverbial utterance, the proverb itself, and the etiological tale all contribute to drive home the FTA "listen to your wife and children."

As pointed out earlier, the opening formula "The elders say . . ." is a disclaimer of performance. The speaker (AH) employs this strategy to show her respect and humility toward the addressee and thereby disclaims any offensive intention of teaching a moral to a child who in this case is an adult. It ought to be noted that had the direction of communication been reversed (i.e., from child to parent), the politeness and mitigation would have been even more elaborated since the Akan, like many other societies, demand that subordinates show considerable deference to superiors.

Returning to excerpt 4, it may be noted that the opening formula, *Wo tiri ye wo yere te asem ase. Mpaninfo se . . .* 'You're lucky, your wife is understanding. The elders say . . .', acts as a mitigator and hence a politeness strategy. The proverb and the associated tale also soften the locution of the admonition "Listen to your wife." Moreover, the tale told after the proverb also helps sow, in the brain of the addressee, the moral being indirectly imparted by the speaker. This communicational strategy creates a very conducive environment and lowers or totally eliminates the advisee's anxieties, since it is less obvious that advice is being given.

The query, "Isn't it Ntikuma who suggested to his father, Ananse, a sensible way to carry the pot of wisdom to the top of the tree?" refers to another Akan folktale. In this context, however, it is acting as an *ebe* 'proverb'. In that tale, Ananse (Spider) is alleged to have collected all the wisdom in the world, put it in a pot, and decided to hang it in the top of a tree, in order to deprive everyone else of wisdom. To conceal what he is doing, he climbs the tree with the pot in front of him, instead of putting it on his back, and thus he is unable to climb well. His son Ntikuma, hiding in the woods, sees his father's foolishness and advises him to put the pot on his back. Realizing that his son had some wisdom in his head, Ananse, out of anger, throws the pot down, and it crashes. Everyone who hears this folktale thus learns the moral of the story.

To tell an Akan parent directly to listen to the advice of his own children is to suggest that they are probably wiser than he is or that he is a dictator who listens to no one. However, by prefacing this FTA with a proverb, AH makes it tellable since the proverb makes the utterance less face-threatening.

In excerpt 5, AH continues to talk about KO's children.

Excerpt 5

[Context: AH continues to advise KO about his children. In particular, she advises KO to handle his son (who is named after AH) carefully. She begins by raising the five fingers of her right hand to demonstrate the unequal abilities of humans, and then goes on to ask for special privileges for the boy.]

AH: *Yen nyinaa nim se nipa nsateaa nnum no nyinaa nye pe.*
we all know that human fingers five the all not-be equal

Wo maame Kwabi sua ne ho nye den se Gyasiwaa
your mother Kwabi small him self not-be strong like Gyasiwaa

a ne ho ye den se nea yede no too no no.
who her self be strong like one we-with her named him the

Me nana no de ne mma beto me enti hwe no yie
my grandchild the with his children will-name me so look him well

ma me.
for me

'We all know that *the human five fingers are of unequal length*. Your mother Kwabi (i.e., your son named after me) is young. He's not as strong as Gyasiwa who is as strong as the one after whom she was named. My grandson will name his children after me so handle him carefully and gently for me.'

In excerpt 5, AH seeks preferential treatment for KO's son named after her. To ask for this favor directly would automatically raise several questions as to whether she loves her grandchildren equally or whether she has evidence that the boy is not being properly looked after. The premise from which she starts, however, recognizes the unequal abilities of humans. Specifically, the proverb first and foremost helps to demonstrate the inequalities in the abilities of humans. Consequently, it removes any FTA in her plea. If it is a truism that humans are of unequal abilities, then a plea for preferential treatment for people with weak abilities is in order. Moreover, the preproverbial utterance "We all know that . . ." reminds the addressee that knowledge of the proverb is shared by both of them. This suggests equality of power and protects AH from taking any absolute responsibility for the upcoming FTA. As with the excerpts cited earlier, this proverb, together with its preproverbial modifier, acts as a "downtoner" for the FTA. The proverb also helps to strengthen the speaker's point of view.

It must also be pointed out that the performance strategy of raising her fingers to demonstrate the unequal potential of humans serves as a very effective attention-getting device. Not only did the action and the analogy make the listener (the author) more alert, it provided a significant learning experience as well.

I end this section by considering three more excerpts.

Excerpt 6

[Context: Having given her advice on how she wants KO to handle his children, AH now turns her attention to KO himself. She advises KO to be humble, respectful, and not to do anything without consulting his bosses (at his new place).]

AH: *Senea wo papa tae ka no, ahobrasee wie nkunim. Na*
as your father usually say humility leads-to victory and

wonim se se wohuri tra wo panin a, wusa ne mmen
you-know that if you-jump over your elder if you-stuck his horns

mu. Mante asem bone biara wo wo adwuma mu wo
inside I-not-hear story bad any about your work in in

Nkran; di wo ho ni wo baabi a woreko no nso.
Accra behave your self neatly at place where you-are-going the also
'As your father usually says, *Humility begets victory*. And you know that *if you jump over your elder, you get entangled in his horns*. I didn't hear any bad news from your work place in Accra; behave the same way when you go there.'

In excerpt 6, AH talks about humility. She attributes the initial proverb to YG (KO's father) and therefore minimizes praise for herself. Here, one sees Leech's (1983) modesty maxim at work. An examination of the first proverb reveals that the fact that KO is being advised to be humble is implied but not explicitly stated. The preproverbial utterance "And you know that . . ." of the second proverb also serves as a mitigator for the second proverb. Here, AH acknowledges the linguistic sophistication of the addressee (KO). It also points to the fact that the proverb cited is conventional knowledge and is thus true. The second proverb in turn mitigates the utterance "Behave the same way when you go there," which carries the FTA. Although KO is AH's son, telling him directly to behave well threatens KO's negative face (freedom from imposition) and AH's positive face (the addressee's positive self-image of feeling good, appreciated, or approved of by other people).

Excerpt 7

[Context: YG, after a long silence, now advises KO against excessive drinking or alcoholism. He acknowledges the fact that he (YG) drinks a little, and that AN, KO's elder brother, drinks a lot. He then "warns" KO not to be deceived by the "tasty" nature of alcohol.]

YG: *Jbarima dee, nea ebeye biara, sebe wobetwa*
man as-for whatever it-be-happen any apologies wo-will-drink

kakra. Menom kakra; AN nom dodo. Enni adwen de
little I-drink little AN drinks too-much do-not-follow mudfish tasty

akyi nhwe Bremuu.
back dam Birim

'Being a man, whatever happens; apologies, you'll taste a little (alcohol). I drink a little; AN drinks too much. *Do not let the tasty nature of mudfish force you to fish in the Birim River.*'

The theme of excerpt 7 is "caution against alcoholism." In this excerpt, YG talks about the fact that he drinks a little, criticizes AN (KO's elder brother who is not present at the scene of the discourse) for drinking too much, and then issues a proverb to convey his message. The dangerous nature of alcohol is correlated with the Birim River, which is the biggest river in Akyem County (where Asuom is). The fear of being swept away by the swift tide of the river, and thus being drowned, is indirectly likened to the damaging effect of alcohol. Alcohol, like mudfish, may be tasty, but like the swift-flowing Birim River, it can also kill. In this excerpt, unlike the others, the FTA is embedded in the proverb, which is very interesting because it allows YG a degree of "boldness" in warning KO of something that he himself indulges in, but which, he acknowledges, is bad. A critical observation of this excerpt also reveals that the tone of forcefulness is rather mild compared with the other excerpts involving YG.

In excerpt 8, AH concludes her advice by reminding KO to always remember his roots.

Excerpt 8

[Context: AH wraps up her advice by reminding KO about the need to visit home frequently. She also tells KO to inform his siblings, who also live abroad, about their father's illness and the need for them to visit him.]

AH: *Wonim se anomaa wu dua so a, ne ntakra nka dua*
you-know that bird dies tree on if its plumes not-remain tree

no so. Se wokɔ a, twa w'ani hwe wo nkyi na taa
the on if you-go if turn your-eyes look your back and frequently

bra fie. Aso pa nkyere asem te. Merenkasa nkye.
come home ears good not-keep-long story hear I-will-not-talk long

Ka kyere Yaw Tawia na ɔmmehwe ne papa anye saa
tell show Yaw Tawia so-that he-comes-attend-to his father else

kurom hafoɔ beye no. Se wo ne Ataa ne Akosua Panin
town-folks here will-insult him if you and Ataa and Akosua Panin

kasa a, ma won nte wo papa yadeɛ no. Ma yente wo
talks if let them hear your father illness the let us-hear you

nka se woduru a. oryame mfa wo nka.
about if you-arrive if God should-take you go

'You know that *when a bird dies up in a tree, its plumes do not remain in the tree.* When you go, turn your eyes toward your roots and come home frequently. *Good*

ears are quick to hear a message. I won't make a lengthy speech. Tell Yaw Tawia to come and attend to your (pl.) father or else the village folks will criticize him. Whenever you talk with Ataa and Akosua Panin, let them hear of your father's ill-health. Let us hear from you when you arrive at your destination. May God accompany you.'

KO: *Meda wo ase. Meka akyere Yaw ama no aba. Mebo mmɔden*
I-thank you I-will-tell show Yaw let him come I-will-try hard

afre sistanom
call sister

'Thanks. I'll tell Yaw to come over. I'll also try and call my sisters.'

The first proverb, *Wonim se anomaa wu dua so a, ne ntakra nka dua no so* 'You know that when a bird dies up in a tree, its plumes do not remain in the tree', mitigates the FTA. It is immediately followed by *Se wokɔ a, twa w'ani hwe wo nkyi na taa bra fie* 'When you go, turn your eyes toward your roots and come home frequently'. Any Akan who travels and does not return home or does not visit home regularly is considered *kwaseampanin* 'irresponsible, eldest-of-fools'. To be reminded to return home is face-threatening since it suggests you probably are not organized. The proverb absorbs this potential face-threat and makes AH's utterance consistent with face. The expression "You know that . . ." validates the truth in the proverb. The speaker appears to be saying something like "It is a cultural truism that a bird's plumes do not remain in a tree even when the bird dies on the tree. I am not making up something new, I am only reminding you of something you already know." In effect, AH uses this opening formula to confirm her awareness of KO's communicative skills.

The second proverb, *Aso pa nkyere asem te* 'Good ears are quick to hear a message', is a complimentary remark. KO is a good communicator, one who takes advice, so it is unnecessary to make a lengthy speech to him. This proverb confirms the confidence AH has in KO, an indication that the communication will prove successful.

5.2. The role of proverbs in conversational sequencing and organization. Apart from Seitel's (1977) work on the use of proverbs among the Haya of Tanzania, very little has been done on the role of indirectly authored speech forms like proverbs in interactional sequencing and organization. Based on their interactional functions and their place of occurrence in a conversational sequence, Seitel discusses two kinds of proverbs: *enfumo* and *omwizo*.

Enfumo proverbs are almost always accompanied by a literal (nonfigurative) statement of the speaker's view of the social situation in question. Such proverbs, according to Seitel, may come after an expression of the speaker's view of the social situation to strengthen it, and to convince the hearer that the speaker's view is correct, thus obviating the discussion of alternate views.

Concluding an explanation with an *enfumo* is therefore an attempt to close the discussion of a topic by achieving general agreement (Seitel 1977:91).

Seitel (1977) notes further that an *enfumo* may be introduced before the actual expression of the situation to which it is being applied, to serve as a conversational opening, or, in his own words, to serve as a "way in" to a discussion. Here, the proverb introduces the topic of a conversation about which the speaker expects the hearer to voice an opinion. "Introducing the proverb first shows that the speaker is very sure of the correctness of his view of the social situation. He is so sure, in fact, that he invites discussion" (1977:92). Use of *enfumo*, Seitel concludes, often invites laughter from the addressee, and leads to participation by all interactants.

In contrast, an *omwizo* proverb is usually expressed without explaining its application. When used with an explanation, the speaker is required "to make further specification in regard to the sequential position of the proverb relative to its explanation and relative to the terminal parts of the conversation" (1977:92).

Sequentially, an *omwizo* may function as either a conversational opening or a closing. When an *omwizo* precedes an explanation, it functions as a conversational opening. Here, the speaker issues a preproverbial string to key in the proverb. The context situation usually involves a wrongdoing by the addressee. An *omwizo* used in such a context is meant to invite reconciliation.

Seitel (1977:93) notes that when an *omwizo* is spoken at the end of a discussion following an explanation of its application, it is intended to close off verbal interaction.

In this section, I demonstrate that Akan proverbs, like Haya proverbs, play a valuable "presequencing" role in the sequential organization of various facets of interaction. In particular, I demonstrate that proverbs are employed to prefigure potentially difficult upcoming utterances. Specifically, a speaker, in advising a hearer, may use a proverb to warn the hearer that a face-threatening utterance is upcoming. The proverb thus acts as a *predifficult* or a *pre-FTA* string, and thereby functions as a "downtoner."

I also demonstrate that proverbs may be employed as *preclosings*. Thus, they may be used to prefigure the closing of a particular topic, theme, or discourse. By so doing, they invite either a collaboration in the closing of the topic, theme, or discourse, or a collaboration in avoiding such action.

Finally, I demonstrate that proverbs may act as closings. A speaker may thus end his or her turn at speaking by citing a proverb.

The term *presequence*, according to Levinson, is "used with a systematic ambiguity, to refer both to a certain kind of turn and a certain kind of sequence containing that type of turn. Most pre-sequences," Levinson continues, "are built to prefigure the specific kind of action that they potentially precede" (1983:346). Terasaki (1976), Labov and Fanshel (1977), Schegloff (1979), and many other conversational analysts, have all discussed in some detail the distinctive pro-

erties of such presequences as preannouncements, pre-self-identifications, pre-invitations, prerequisites, etc. With prerequisites, for example, Levinson remarks that "what is checked in the pre-request is what is most likely to be the grounds for refusal; and if those grounds are present, then the request sequence is aborted" (1983:358).

5.2.1. Predifficult. In Akan, any utterance that hinders one's image from being approved by others or that places an imposition on other discourse participants may be described as "difficult." Utterances that communicate difficulty may thus include those uttered in such communicative contexts as credit soliciting, advising, trading insults, and requesting favors. The ages, as well as the socioeconomic statuses of the interactants, may also place some difficulty on an interaction. It is, for example, not proper for a younger person to advise an older person, even if the older person is of a lower socioeconomic status. If it becomes inevitable for a younger person to advise an older person, then the difficulty becomes enhanced. Such a person will need to use more mitigators than would have been necessary had the direction of advice-giving been from the older to the younger person.

Obeng (in press) discusses how FTAs may be mitigated by indirectly authored speech forms, such as proverbs, riddles, and tales, as well as by other strategies, including the use of apologetic expressions, acknowledgments of imposition, hedges, and hints. I indicate that the FTA may either be prefaced or followed by the mitigator, or may be "woven" into the mitigator.

Proverb speakers thus recognize the mitigating potential of proverbs and place them in discourse positions where the need to soften the "blow" of an upcoming utterance is required. The disclaimer of performance, which may be claimed by a proverb speaker, as well as the potential of the proverb to function as a cultural truism, make proverbs the strongest candidates for mitigation in Akan.

In excerpt 1, *Wo dee wonim nyansa enti merenkasa nkye. Wo ara wo nim se wokwa baabiara ntwoma a, ebere*. 'As for you, you're wise so I won't make a lengthy speech. You know very well that wherever you paint with red clay, it will be bright' is a *predifficult* utterance. Specifically, it serves as a presequence utterance prefaced to a face-threatening action (FTA). The action prefigured by this utterance is "Left to me alone, I would have said, 'Stay here'" (i.e., don't travel). YG would have been considered rude, authoritarian, and even uncaring if he had not used this proverb as a redressive utterance to mitigate the difficult or face-threatening utterance that follows.

This proverb from excerpt 1, in one way or the other, performs an interactional function similar to a Haya *omwizo* (Seitel 1977). Specifically, it precedes an explanation of the speaker's view of the social situation in question—the need not to travel since hard work done anywhere brings success—and is used in opening the conversation. As with *omwizos* performing the same function

(opening a conversation), the speaker of this proverb provides a preproverbial expression, "You're wise so I won't make a lengthy speech. You know that . . ." to key in the proverb.

Structurally, the proverb *Wo se akyi nnye wo de a, ehɔ ara na wotafere* 'No matter how tasteless your gums are, that's the only place you lick', like the previous one, performs a predifficult task. In particular, it warns the listener that the upcoming utterance *Bɔ mmɔden na bra efie ntem. Emma biribi ara ngye wo nka hɔ mmere tenten baiara* 'Try as much as you can to return home in the nearest future. Don't let anything keep you there for a long period of time' is "difficult" or a FTA, since, as was suggested in the previous section, it indicates that the addressee (KO) probably has a tendency to overstay.

In excerpt 2, the following sequence acts as a "preliminary to a preliminary" (Schegloff 1980): YG: *Wo ne Abena ne nkwadaa no na ebekorɔ?* 'Will you go with Abena and the children?' KO: *Aane* 'Yes'. It is performed as a preproverb. Specifically, YG's first question, *Wo ne Abena ne nkwadaa no na ebekorɔ?* 'Will you go with Abena and the children?' tests whether the prefigured action, the proverb, is tellable or possible. KO's response offers YG the go-ahead. Thus, it gives YG the green light to utter the prefigured proverb *Eye. Ee mpaninfoɔ se se wohwe obi dehyee wo nso wo dehyee ye yie* 'O.K. Well, the elders say if you take good care of someone's royal personage, your royal personage will also prosper', which is in turn performed as a predifficult utterance to the FTA *Nipa a wo ne no retu kwan ye obi dehyee bɔ mmɔden hwe no yie* 'The person you're going to travel with is someone else's royal personage (i.e., from a different lineage). Try to take good care of her.'

Close attention to the transcripts reveals that, like the *enfumo* proverbs of the Haya (Seitel 1977), some of the Akan proverbs are used before the literal explanation of their application in order to serve as an "opening" to a discussion. Such proverbs, as pointed out earlier, introduce the topic of a conversation in which the speaker expects the hearer to voice an opinion. Such uses of the proverb involve a peaceful interaction and may even invite laughter from the addressee, as shown in excerpt 4.

In excerpt 4, the speaker, AH, cites a proverb, explains it with an etiological tale, before issuing the difficult utterance or FTA "Listen to the advice of your wife and children." The predifficult utterance is composed of a proverb and an explication of the proverb.

In excerpt 5, the FTA "Handle my grandson carefully" is prefaced by the proverb "We all know that human fingers are of unequal length," which is followed by an explication of the proverb.

From the above we see how the need for mitigation encourages creativity on the part of the proverb speakers. Not only are there countless occasions where proverbs and tales cited in declarative forms are rendered as interrogatives (as in excerpt 4), they are also subjected to structural expansion and elaboration.

Introducing the proverb first, before providing its literal explanation, and following it with the "difficulty," shows that the speaker, AH, is very sure of the correctness of her view of the social situation.

5.2.2. Preclosing. Close attention to the data indicates that proverbs may be employed to **signal** a speaker's intention to engage in one form or another in closing. In excerpt 2, the proverbs *Wani anhu biribi a, enye wo tan* 'If something is out of your sight, you cannot pass judgment on it' and *Se akasaakasa biara a ede basabasa biara ba a pue kakra. Ennu mmere a wobeba no na obi ara bo adwo* 'If there's any argument that could result in any serious confrontation, take a walk outside the house for awhile' are performed as preclosings to the theme on quarreling.

In excerpt 8, the proverb *Aso pa nkyere asem te* 'Good ears are quick to hear a message' functions as a preclosing by inviting a collaboration from KO to close the discourse. Its use prefigured the speaker's action of closing. Thus, it signaled to KO that AH was getting ready to end her advice-giving and the advice-giving session, and it therefore came as no surprise when KO joined in the closing action.

5.2.3. Closing. From the sequential point of view, a proverb may be employed as a closing. In excerpt 1, the proverb *Wo se akyi nnye wo de a, ehɔ ara na wotafere* 'No matter how tasteless your gums are, that's the only place you lick' is used by the speaker (YG) in an attempt to close the discussion of the topic on whether or not KO should travel.

In excerpt 2, the proverb *Bɔ me na menni, na anka me e?* 'Isn't it only when you're within your assailant's punching range that he can punch you?' acts as a closing to the theme on quarreling. Here, it is not acting as a predifficult, but as an indirect strategy for repeating the FTA, "Don't quarrel with your wife." From the transcripts, it may be noted that immediately after using this proverb, the speaker changed the topic of the conversation.

In excerpt 7, the proverb *Enni adwen de akyi nhwe Bremuu* 'Do not let the tasty nature of mudfish force you to fish in the Birim River' acts as a closing. It conveys the main message "abstain from alcohol" and closes the topic. As was pointed out in the previous section, it is evident that in terms of sequence, unlike in several other excerpts, this proverb does not precede the FTA. The FTA is embedded in the proverb and its illocutionary force is softened by the proverb.

6. Discussion and conclusions. In this paper, the pragmatic significance of the proverb in the context of advice-giving has been explicated. Among other things, I have demonstrated that the proverb plays a tremendous role in the management of face in Akan communication. The proverb, it has been demonstrated, acts as a mitigator that redresses the offensive intent of an upcoming FTA. I explored how the proverb is employed in performing this important role.

Specifically, I showed how the proverb may be issued conjointly with redressive preproverbial utterances, and with or without a postproverbial etiological tale (which further softens the locution of the following FTA). Some preproverbial utterances identified in my transcripts include what Yankah (1986:204) refers to as "source formula," "factive formula," and what I call "deferential" formula. Among the source formulas found in my data are "The elders say . . .," "It is the elders who said . . .," and "As your father always says . . ." These source formulas attribute the proverb to the elders, the ancestors, an important personage, or to a person respected by both the speaker and addressee. The speaker thus depersonalizes the proverb, shows his or her humility, and makes it attributable to an acknowledged and respectable linguistically sophisticated source (Yankah 1989). This preproverbial utterance, then, excuses the speaker from responsibility for the words (within and without the proverb), although he or she will still be held accountable for the appropriateness of the proverb.

The factivity formulas identified in my transcripts include "You know that . . .," "You know very well that . . .," and "We all know that . . ." These factives presuppose the truth of the following complement (Kiparsky and Kiparsky 1979). As used in these formulas, the factives presuppose the truth of the proverb. They help remind the addressee that the proverb itself and the truth in it are shared by both interactants. I argued earlier that this helps maintain equality of power and protects the speaker from taking absolute responsibility for the FTA that follows the proverb.

I also demonstrated how a post-proverbial etiological tale may be used to further soften the force of a FTA. It was argued that such tales act as a catalyst to help put important messages across. Specifically, I pointed out that they create a conducive communicational environment by either lowering or totally eliminating the addressee's anxieties.

With regard to discourse structure, I argued that proverbs act as predifficult utterances. Thus, in a communicative context such as advice-giving, the proverb may be employed to prefigure an upcoming "difficult" utterance. We also saw how an interactant uses a proverb to act as a topical transition. In effect, the speaker employs a proverb to complete a current topic or theme and to begin the next topic. I have also shown how the proverb may function structurally either as a preclosing or a closing. Moreover, I indicated that a proverb may be deployed as a preclosing to prefigure the closing of a particular topic, theme, or discourse. By so doing, the proverb speaker invites collaboration in closing or a collaboration in avoiding closing. Furthermore, I explained that a speaker uses a proverb as a closing to indicate that he or she has come to the end of his or her turn, talk, or topic. This is not meant to suggest that whenever a speaker issues a proverb he or she has ended his or her turn. What is suggested is that the proverb is one of the many communicative genres with which a speaker may end a particular social interaction.¹

If politeness is characterized in terms of the use of disclaimers and factive formulas that do not impose on the sensibilities of the addressee but make him part of the "speaking process," then AH, the female speaker, is more polite than YG, the male speaker, since she uses more disclaimers and factives. Moreover, any Akan would argue that YG spoke with "boldness." He did not need to be very polite before his own son.

AH also shows a tendency to embark on structural expansion and elaboration of proverbs more than YG. In fact, in one instance, she explicated the proverb metaphor with an etiological tale. Moreover, AH sometimes renders a proverb in an interrogative form whereas YG does not. Such uses of the proverb show how comfortable one is with the genre. It also depicts one's creative potential.

Another difference in proverb usage between YG and AH is that AH uses proverbs more frequently than YG. There are several instances, as in excerpts 6 and 8, where, within a short period of time, AH uses two or more proverbs.

From the sequential point of view, it is only YG who uses proverbs in closing. In excerpts 2 and 7, the proverbs *Bɔ me na menni, na anka me e?* 'Isn't it only when you're within your assailant's punching range that he can punch you?' and *Enni adwen de akyi nhwe Bremuu* 'Do not let the tasty nature of mudfish force you to fish in the Birim River' are used to close the advice-giving on quarreling and on alcoholism, respectively.

Finally, observation of the transcripts indicates that there was only one instance, in excerpt 7, where a face-threatening act was issued before a proverb was used; this was done by YG. Interestingly, this advice seems to have a different tone or forcefulness. In particular, YG does not condemn drinking; neither does he tell KO not to drink. He only impresses upon KO not to overindulge in excessive drinking. A critical observation of the rendition of the proverb in this excerpt also yields a considerable insight into the correlation between form and function in proverb speaking (cf. Seitel 1981). The proverb in question is normally rendered as a declarative sentence: *Wodi adwen de akyi a, wobehwe Bremuu* 'If you're not careful, the tasty nature of mudfish will tempt you to dam and fish in the Birim River.' In discourse discussed here, however, it is syntactically subjected to negative and imperative transformations.

I would like to reemphasize the fact that Akan proverbs function much the same way as proverbs in other sub-Saharan African cultures. As was pointed out in the previous section, Haya proverbs also perform various sequential roles in interactions similar to those performed by Akan proverbs. Like proverbs in Yoruba and those of other African peoples, Akan proverbs act as the palm oil with which the Yoruba prepare soup (Achebe 1958).

I will conclude by quoting two Akan proverbs, as examples (7) and (8).

- (7) *Se wode kokurobeti kɔ ayie a, yede sotorɔ na egya*
if you-with thumb go funeral if they-with slaps FOC leave

wo kwan.

you road

'If you go to a funeral with your thumb raised, you are bid farewell with slaps' (i.e., "if you misbehave at a funeral you're given a sound beating," implying that if you misbehave in an inappropriate place you will be sternly punished).

(8) *Ano brebre ma abaa to.*

lips soft-soft lets stick fall

'Apologetic lips let an angry stick fall' (i.e., polite or apologetic speech will bail one out of debts).

In view of the vulnerability of face, interactants take special steps to prevent their faces from being marred. An interactant's positive or negative face may be threatened by various face-threatening acts. Such FTAs, if unmitigated, can easily result in social conflict. With appropriate mitigators and redressive actions, however, the crises can be resolved tactfully.

Notes

Abbreviations. The following grammatical abbreviations are used: EMP = emphatic; FOC = focus; NEG = negative; pl. = plural; Q = question marker.

1. Close attention to my transcripts also reveals some gender differences in proverb usage and, although the small amount of data may not warrant any significant generalizations, it points to the fact that future research is needed into the relationship of gender and proverb usage.

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