

Philosophical Papers and Reviews

Volume 7 Number 3 April 2016

ISSN 2141-663X



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The **Philosophical Papers and Reviews (PPR)** will be published monthly (one volume per year) by Academic Journals.

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**The philosophy behind some Adinkra symbols and their communicative values
in Akan**

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J. E. T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, George Appiah and Melvin Nartey

Full Length Research Paper

The philosophy behind some Adinkra symbols and their communicative values in Akan

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Received 4 April, 2015; Accepted 24 November, 2015

This paper represents selected Adinkra symbols of the Akan and brings out the philosophical, educational, historical and moral values inherent in them. It seeks to encourage the understanding and usage of the Adinkra symbols in a more meaningful way by Ghanaians and foreigners, contemporary artists, designers, craftsmen, teachers, and all who appreciate the traditional symbols. It discusses 14 Adinkra symbols grouped into two of seven each. The first group consists of the symbols that are familiar to many Ghanaians but the philosophy, history and moral lessons behind them are not known to them and the other group also consists of symbols that are unfamiliar to many Ghanaians as well as the philosophical and historical lessons associated to them. Symbolic meanings, philosophical and historical background of these symbols have also been provided. The paper posits that the logical value of the Adinkra symbols used by Akans as a mode of communication is less important; it is their communication values that are important. The paper adds to knowledge in the disciplines of linguistics in general and semiotics in particular.

Key words: Akan language, Adinkra symbols, semiotics, linguistics, Ghanaian indigenous symbolism, communication.

INTRODUCTION

Sapir (1949) posited that just as unlettered and primitive people have an economic basis of life, however simple in its operation, such a life is strictly comparable to the economic machinery that so largely that it orders the life of a modern civilized society. He also stated that, just as they have attained a definite system of religious beliefs and practices, to traditionally conserved modes of artistic expression, to the adequate communication of thought and feeling in terms of linguistic symbols, so also they appear everywhere as rather clearly articulated into

various types of social groupings. He was of the view that no human assemblage living a life in common has ever been discovered that does not possess some form of social organization.

It is especially important to note that delineations of communities in these respects are crucial to the understanding of the place of language in culture and to understanding of the particular place of language in culture signaled by what is commonly called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. According to Hymes (1972, 269-293)

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to assume that differences in language shape or interact with differences in worldview is to assume that the functional role of language in relation to the worldview is the same everywhere. Indeed anthropological thought quite generally has tended to assume identity or equivalence of function for language throughout the world. If a language is taken as a device for categorizing experience, it is not such a device in the abstract. There remains the question of what may be the set of events in which categorization of language occurs. The set includes events in which a single person is using a language excoitatively.

Although anthropologists have sometimes talked of the use of language 'merely' as a tool of communication, and of the categorizing of experience as if it were a superior category, the role of language as a device for categorizing experience and its role as an instrument of communication cannot be separated and indeed the latter includes the former. This is the more true when a language, as it is often the case, affords alternative ways of categorizing the same experience, so that the patterns of selection among such alternatives must be determined in actual contexts of use- as must also, indeed - the degree to which language is being used as a full-fledged semantic instrument (as distinct from its use as an expressive, directive, etc, instrument) at all in a given case.

When people categorize experience with language they share the experience with other people in diverse ways which include the use of semiotics - nonverbal communication. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols of a particular language and society; and the interpretation of symbols and their impact on people, may vary from culture to culture. Language itself is a system of symbols as stated by Aristotle; 'The Great Philosopher' working in language some 2500 years ago stated that 'spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words'. Symbols are the replica of the meanings of words, things, actions, emotions, behavior, and ideas of a people within a particular culture. People's actions can be motivated and guided by symbols and their meanings (Agyekum, 2006, 122).

Gamble and Gamble (1999,132) quoted the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, "He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret, if his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore". What they mean is that our creative problem-solving abilities are often challenged as we seek to make sense out of communication situations. Thus they posited that, the term nonverbal communication designates all the kinds of human responses which are not expressed in words; nonverbal communication is more extensive than just communicating with our bodies and appearance. We can even communicate by sending messages through the environment we create and live in. The spaces we

inhabit convey information about us to others even when we are away from them.

Gamble and Gamble characterized nonverbal communication as follows: It is perpetual, frequent, and involuntary. To support this point, they quoted Paul Watzlawick, author of *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, that, "no matter how hard one may try, one cannot but communicate" (1999, 132). No one can stop sending nonverbal messages. As far as one person is observing the actions of another, it is impossible not to communicate. To Gamble and Gamble nonverbal communication, like verbal communication, can be ambiguous. Like words, nonverbal messages may not mean what we think they do. One has to be very careful when interpreting nonverbal cues. It is not possible to develop a list of nonverbal behaviors and attach a single meaning to each. All nonverbal communication must be evaluated or interpreted within the context in which it occurs.

Again, verbal and nonverbal messages are sometimes contradictory. When we say one thing but do another, we send incongruent or mixed messages. Whenever one detects an incongruity between nonverbal and verbal (word-level) messages, the person would probably benefit by paying greater attention to the nonverbal message. Researchers in communication believe that nonverbal cues are more difficult to fake than verbal cues.

Like any language, the Akan communicate through both verbal and non-verbal means. Verbal language is spoken; non-verbal language is expressed through symbols. Domestic symbolism is a surrogate language where the message is presented in the form of a traditional symbol in view of the spoken word (Yankah, 1995, 33). Some linguists (e.g., Brooks and Heath) refer to this aspect of language as "object language" and say that it comprises the display of material things – art object, clothes, the decoration of room, hairstyle, implements. Decoding of messages in any communicative situation is pictured like the diagram below:

Speaker → Visual Icon → Addressee
(Agyekum, 2006, 122).

Communication is placed in relation to communicative mediation where a message is passed from the speaker to the addressee through a third party. Agyekum (2006, 124) sees the various Akan semiotics which are embodied in artistic artifacts like wooden staffs, stools, cloth, and gold weights as a clear manifestation of general perceptions. Also, the Akans principles of behavior, co-operation, initiative, historical events and allusions, social and religious norms, political and judicial elements, which are stated quite clearly without words, are also expressed in the Akan semiotics, visually represented in popular proverbs, idioms, maxims and

phrases; and material forms of linguistic staff, stools, jewelry, gold weights, traditional cloths, umbrella tops, modern wax prints.

The Akan Language

Akan has, since the 1950s, been used in Ghana to refer to the language whose dialects include Fante, Akuapem, Asante, Bono, Wassa, Agona, Akyem, and Kwahu (Akrofi et al., 1996, iii-iv; Anane, 2010,iii). These dialects are spoken in Ashanti, Central, Brong Ahafo, and in parts of Eastern and Western Regions of Ghana. The language is spoken by about 49.1% of Ghanaians as a first language (Statistical Bulletin, 2002). Akan is also spoken as a second language by the Anyi (Aowin), Sehwi, Nzema and Ahanta to the West and by speakers of Guan languages such as Efutu/Awutu, and Anum-Kyerepong-Larteh to the South and East. In these areas (except in the Nzema-speaking area) Akan is the medium of instruction in the first few years of primary school, and it is used in church and for trade. Akan is also an important language of trade in almost all the ten regional capitals of the country especially the capital city of the country Accra.

Three Akan dialects - Akuapem, Fante, and Asante - have achieved literary status (*Kyerâw Kronkron*, BSG/UBS, 1964/2012; *Twerɛ Kronkron*, BSG/UBS, 1964/2012; NWP, 2013; *Nwoma Kronkron*, BSG/UBS, 1948; *Ahyɛmu Fofor No Mu Nwoma*, UBS, 1982). Each has a written form which reflects the peculiarities of the particular dialects so that it is difficult for a Fante speaker who does not speak Asante to read a text written in Asante and vice-versa even though the two dialects are mutually intelligible. At a time, it became useful for a unification of the orthographies of the varieties of this language. When this idea was accepted by the people concerned the unified variety was named Akan (Akrofi et al., 1996, iii). This paper answers the question, what are the philosophical, educational and moral values inherent in some Adinkra symbols of the Akan of Ghana?

METHODOLOGY

The information used for this study was obtained from two different sources. These are primary and secondary sources. The primary source involves intuitions of the researchers as a native speaker of the language, (formal and informal), from scholars of the Akan language and some elderly members in an Akan community in which most of the information gathered has been tested and proved to be authentic.

The primary source also included the various visits the researchers made to some communities in the Ashanti Region for more information about some Akan signs and symbols which are unfamiliar to them but are very useful to the study. Most of the researchers' visits were paid to some chief's spokespersons, designers, farmers and craftsmen, etc. They interacted with Owusu Sekyere, Agyei Baah, and Kwadwo Akyerem (all craftsmen) at Ahwaa, a wood carving village near Kumasi for some information

on some of their carvings or crafts. They also visited Kumasi cultural centre and interacted with Boakye Akyeamong, Adwoa Boakyewaa and Akosua Asamoah (attendants) regarding the various arts and crafts of the Akans and their representations and significance. At the Manhyia palace in Kumasi, they were fortunate to have one of the chief's spokespersons, Okyeame Boateng, there as their informant. The researchers interviewed him on things and /or symbols in the palace and other aspects of the Akan nonverbal codes that were unfamiliar to them. They visited some kente weavers and some elderly members in some kente weaving communities like Bonwire, Adanwomase, and Ntonso all in the Kwabre District of Ashanti Region of Ghana.

The secondary sources included library materials from the Departments of Ghanaian Languages, University of Education, Winneba (UEW), The Osagyefo Library (UEW), the Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics - University of Ghana and the University of Education, Winneba, respectively.. A lot of the materials for this study were sourced from B.S Akuffo's *Ahemfie Adesua* (1976); Glover's *Adinkra Symbolism* (1992); Fianu's *Ghana Kente and Adinkra: History and socio-cultural significance in a contemporary Global Economy* (2007); Yanka's *Speaking for the chief: Okyeame and the politics of Akan Royal Oratory* (1995); Agbo's *Values of Adinkra Symbols* (2011). Wills' *Adinkra Dictionary: a Visual primer on the language of Adinkra* (1998) was used extensively. Some materials for this study were also sourced from the internet. We discussed the information gathered with lecturers and other people who are well versed in the topic for them to confirm the reliability of the data. For information concerning a particular mode of nonverbal communication, we visited three different places and crosschecked the information received from the different places to ensure the reliability of the data.

The researchers discussed the information gathered with lecturers and other people who are well versed in the topic for them to confirm the reliability of the data. For information concerning a particular mode of nonverbal communication, they visited three different places and crosschecked the information received from the different places to ensure the reliability of the data.

Communicative competence

Whereas linguistics competence covers the speaker's ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, communicative competence describes his/her ability to select, from the totality of grammatically correct expressions available to him/her, forms which appropriately reflect the social norms governing behavior in specific encounters.

It is one thing learning the Akan language, but quite another, learning how to ask for a drink in Akan. To do the first one needs a certain linguistics competence; to do the latter one needs communicative competence. More is involved in achieving communicative competence than learning how to construct sentences. Hymes (1972, 279) has argued that, in learning a language, children acquire knowledge of a set of ways in which sentences are used. From a finite experience of speech acts and their interdependence with sociocultural features, they develop a general theory of the speaking appropriate in their community, which they employ, like other forms of tacit cultural knowledge competence, in conducting and interpreting social life.

According to Hymes (1972), there are several sectors of communicative competence, of which the grammatical

is one. There is behavior, and, underlying it, there are several systems of rules reflected in the judgments and abilities of those on whose messages the behavior manifests. In the linguistic theory under discussion, judgments are said to be of two kinds; of grammaticality, with respect to competence and of acceptability, with respect to performance. Each pair of terms is strictly matched. It therefore requires that explicit distinctions be made within the notion of 'acceptability' to make the distinctions of kinds of 'performance', and at the same time, the entire set of terms must be examined and recast with respect to the communicative competence as a whole. Hymes (1972) then suggests, that for language and for other forms of communication (culture), four questions arise:

- a) Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
- b) Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- c) Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- d) Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

The Akan concept of communicative competence

Communicative competence is a communicative situation where a speaker knows what to say, where to say what he wants to say, whom to say what he wants to say to and how to say what he wants to say. Actions, they say, speak louder than words, so in the Akan-speaking communities, a person who uses a lot of nonverbal cues and few words is considered a competent communicator. The Akans have a conviction which is shared by many speech communities that when a person uses few words and a lot of nonverbal cues or codes when communicating, the person avoids a lot of problems. The more a person uses words to communicate, the more he directly or indirectly offends people. The Akan nonverbal communication, both in the bush and at home and during wars, in silence, in emblems and gestures, is an aspect of Akan communicative competence. If one understands the Akan symbols he or she avoids accidents and therefore many problems.

The Akan proverb *ɔbanyansaniyeɔbu no benaysnkanoo asɛm* (a word to a wise is enough) portrays the Akans admiration of using fewer words when communicating. The Akans see the use of nonverbal communication as an aspect of communicative competence because it reduces conflict between members of a family and even a speech community as a whole. Two rivals in a family or a community can express their rivalry through the cloth they wear, the way they walk and even the style of the cloth they sew. Someone who feels rejected in a family or

community can communicate his or her feelings by putting on cloths with names like, *duakorɔgyemframa a ɛbu*, (one tree cannot serve as a wind break) *abuburokosua*, (the egg of a dove) *Nyamebskyerɛ*, (God will provide) etc. In marriage, co-wives express their rivalry through the clothes they wear with names like *ɔbaa pa* (ideal woman), *ahwene pa nkasa* (valuable beads do not make noise - empty barrels make the most noise), *okunu pa yɛahodeɛ* (a good husband is wealth), etc. When people communicate to each other through such means there is always sanity and peace in the family and the community as a whole.

Ghanaian indigenous symbolism

Traditional symbols are the forms in indigenous Ghanaian art that are primarily a usual translation of thought and ideas, expressing and symbolizing the values and beliefs of the people among whom they occur. In a number of cases, these images have become symbolic by having certain ideas or proverbs arbitrarily imposed on them. Several traditional symbols have definite explanations, however, the significance of others is a matter of opinion, while of quite, nothing at all seems to be known. The objects that are represented in symbolic art forms among the traditional ethnic groups in Ghana are the textiles, pottery, stools, umbrella tops, linguist staff, etc.

The origin of Adinkra symbols

The evolution of symbols dates back to the prehistoric periods when men drew images on walls in caves for visual communication. In Ghana, the most prominent among traditional symbols are the Adinkra symbols. There are many stories as to the origin of the Adinkra symbols. It is unfortunate that the exact date and origin of the symbols cannot be traced because it dates back many generations. There is strong evidence to suggest that the more abstract ones may have been of the Islamic religion, hence older than Ashanti state. The crescent moon and star symbol which means faithfulness is classic example and this came as a result of the contact with Islamic traders by the Asantes (Agbo, 2011). Another account suggests that the symbols had their names from Nana Kofi Adinkra, a king of a traditional area called Gyaman in the Ivory Coast in the Nineteenth Century. According to this account, Kofi Adinkra provoked the then Asantehene, Nana Osei Bonsu Panyin by making a copy of the Golden Stool. This resulted in war between the Asantes and the Gyamans. The Gyamans were later defeated and taken captives. It is believed that there were some craftsmen among these captives who introduced the art of making a kind of cloth with patterns stamped in them. These patterns were later adopted and developed by the Asantes to be known as

the Adinkra symbols (Agbo, 2011).

The Akan word Adinkra simply means ‘saying good-bye to one another when parting.’ However, in human association, saying good-bye brings mixed feelings; in most instances optimism of meeting again; and in others, despair of indefinite time of re-union, as in case of death. The dread of death was therefore expressed philosophically and poetically through abstract symbols and messages. These are represented with various abstract motives cut from pieces of calabash and stamped or printed onto various colours of mourning cloths worn at the various stages of the funeral ceremonies of the departed (Agbo, 2011).

Gyekye (2002, 125-133) says that the preliterate cultural context of artistic creations necessitated symbolism – meanings and ideas expressed through art. Sarpong (1974, 101-108) discusses designs on cloths among the Asante. Nkansah-Obrempong says that “Akan artistic symbols, especially, the *Adinkra* symbols, reflect religious, aesthetic and cultural values” (2002, 39). To him, there is something unique about these symbols that are interpretative of Akan faith and tradition.

SOME FAMILIAR ADINKRA SYMBOLS OF THE AKANS AND THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THEM

SANKOFA

Literal meaning: “Go back for it”.

Symbolic meaning: There is wisdom in learning from the past.

Background: This symbol shows the Akans admiration of their history (Figure 1). Akans believe that the way their ancestors and forefathers led their life is worthy of emulation and need continuity so if the current generation will admit this fact and go back to their roots for the good things their ancestors did to succeed in life, it will help them a lot. The philosophy behind the Akans trust in the aged as consultants of wisdom is found in many Akan proverbs and folktales.

Philosophical lesson: the symbol teaches the wisdom in learning from the past to help improve the future. It also teaches people to cherish and value their culture and avoid its negative adulteration. This is the symbol of positive reversion and revival.

Application to contemporary living: Sometimes people frown, ignore and neglect their cultural heritage. These traditions have been abandoned for foreign cultures due to the stigma attached to them. Some people however, have recognized the importance of taking up relevant cultural values useful for contemporary living. It is believed that progress is based on the right application of positive aspects of the past values. Most of the basic

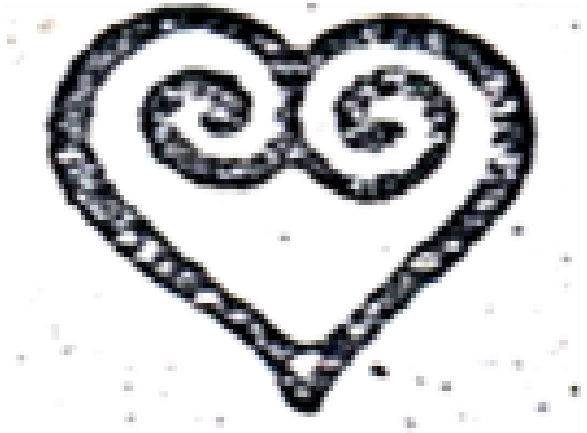


Figure 1. SANKOFA.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+sankofa>.

schools in Ghana beat traditional drums to pass information to the pupils, also some people are calling for reinstatement of puberty rite (a traditional rite which was performed in the past to usher a girl into adulthood). During state functions, Traditional Priests are often invited to pray for the state.

NKYIMKYIM: “ZIGZAG”

Literal meaning: Twists and Turns

Symbolic meaning: Dynamism or versatility is the soul of life.

Background: Some people are sometimes reluctant to take any form of initiative for fear of failure

Philosophical lesson: Life is not a straight line. Prudent living is a balance between a zig and a zag. The ‘zigzag’ design in the cloth is a symbol of prudence, vigilance and balance. The symbol encourages people to face difficult challenges and overcome them and also take up bad situations and make them better. It also urges people to be optimistic in life. This is a symbol of initiative, dynamism and versatility (Figure 2).

Application to contemporary Living: The unemployment problem in Ghana can be minimized if the university graduates are made to understand the philosophy behind this symbol set up their own small businesses and manage them. If these small businesses are well managed they will grow up to become big businesses and this will also the other unemployed youth to get employment. The situation where people complete school and search for the non-existing jobs rather worsened the plight of these graduates.



Figure 2. NKYIMKYIM: "ZIGZAG".
Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+nkyinkyim>

BESE SAKA

Literal meaning: a bunch of kola-nut

Symbolic meaning: It symbolizes economic well-being, affluence and authority over other people and nations.

Background: Cola is a very important economic crop which grows in the equatorial rainforest. It is traded among the people of West Africa. The demand for colanuts is very popular among the people of the Northern part of West Africa, who buy them from the Southern part where it grows. The Colanut trade brought about economic well-being and high standard of living, especially for the Ashanti Kingdom and also among people who traded in it. Colanut is chewed by people for its medicinal value, stimulating effect, and its ability to keep people awake (Figure 3).

Philosophical Lesson: This adinkra symbol symbolizes affluence, power, abundance, togetherness and unity. The bunch refers to unity because separate pods each with a number of seeds have been brought together. Here, one can mention the philosophy of unity in diversity. The symbol encourages agriculture, trade and industry among nations and people because it brings about economic progress. It also stresses the need to evaluate ones status in life, through genuine commercial activities. This is a symbol of economic power and affluence.

Application to contemporary living: It is very unfortunate to note that, agriculture which is the backbone of Ghana's economy is not receiving much attention from the Government. There has been a decrease in cocoa production recently; our fertile agricultural land is being destroyed by small scale miners and most of our Ghanaian youth are also not willing to enter into farming due to the stigma attached to farming in the country today.

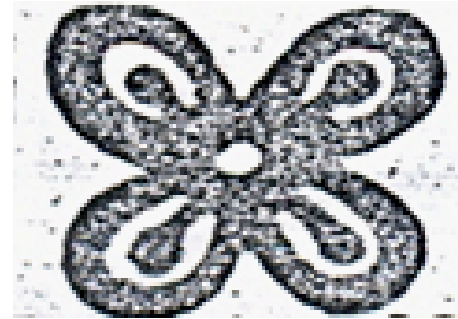


Figure 3. BESE SAKA.
Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+bese+saka>.



Figure 4. NYAME BEWU NA MAWU.
Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+nyame+nnwu+na+mawu>.

The symbol and its philosophical lessons should be made known to Ghanaians to help change their habit for the betterment of Ghana.

NYAME BEWU NA MAWU

Literal meaning: I will die only when God is dead.

Symbolic meaning: Immortality and perpetual existence of God.

Background: It is believed that the okra (soul) is part of God's soul giving to mankind. This gives man life; and at death, the okra which is immortal returns to God. Because the okra is part of God, it can only die when God himself is dead. However, since God does not die, the okra cannot also die (Figure 4).

Philosophical Lesson: This Adinkra symbol is said to have direct association with belief in the Supreme Being, the cult of the ancestors and life after death in the Akan



Figure 5. NYAMEDUA.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+nyame+dua>.



Figure 6. ÔHENE TUO.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+ohene+tuo>.

society. The symbol signifies spiritual protection and perpetual existence. This translates the optimism of users who may feel invincible and possibly derived from such optimism the courage and resilience required in the face of the hardships and dangers faced in life.

Application to contemporary living: People's belief in the Supreme Being (God) is still intact today. Christians, Muslims, and Traditional Worshipers are convinced that there is an immortal Supreme Being somewhere who punishes wrong doers, blesses those who do good, and provides people with all their needs and therefore He should be worship and revered.

NYAMEDUA

Literal meaning: God's Tree

Symbolic meaning: Acknowledgment of the presence of God

Background: 'Nyamedua' is a three- pronged stake which is erected in courtyards and in front of homes. A small earthenware pot, calabash or a brass basin filled with water and herbs is placed between the forked stake for purification and cleansing rites (Figure 5).

Prayer is occasionally said; using actual words, and also through libation pouring with alcoholic drink, water or the sprinkling of food. This serves as a re-union with God and the ancestors. In the past every household had Nyamedua which protected the family, warded off bad omen and evil forces. It serves as place of worship or an altar of God. It also signifies the presence and the protection of God.

The name 'Nyamedua' is evidence of the claim of most Ghanaians, including Akans, that they knew God before the introduction of Christianity by the Europeans.

Philosophical lesson: The symbol urges people to

acknowledge the presence and protection of God, and also worship and venerate him in sincerity. This is a symbol of worship and veneration.

Application to contemporary living: Nyamedua is no more erected in courtyards. With the introduction of Christianity, the act of erecting 'Nyamedua' in front of a house is considered idol worship by Christians but there are few traditionalists who erect them in their places of worship.

ÔHENE TUO

Literal meaning: The king's gun

Symbolic meaning: Martial capabilities and defense

Background: Guns were introduced into West Africa by the Europeans slave traders. The power of the guns fascinated the chiefs. The guns were then bartered for, by the chiefs to protect themselves and their tribes against enemy attacks and also against other insurgents. The king's personal gun is adorned with gold and silver decorations on the butt. These were used by their personal bodyguards. Guns were later used for hunting and also for firing during funerals of chiefs, festivals and dances like the Asafo dance (Figure 6).

Philosophical lesson: The symbol signifies warding off and fighting against enemy attacks. It encourages citizens to support, protect and defend their leaders in authority and their nation's sovereignty. This is a symbol of defence and the king's martial capabilities.

Application to contemporary living: Recently, the kings do not use gun to fight their enemies or to protect their territories against enemy attacks. Guns are fired during funerals and festivals to show the martial capabilities of

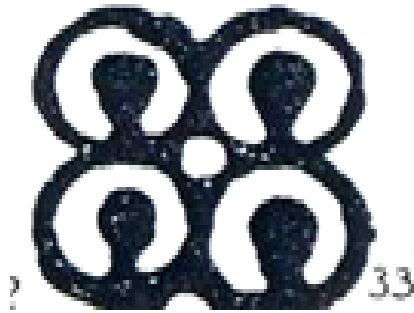


Figure 7. MATE MASIE.
 Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+mate+masie>.

the departed chiefs. Chiefs recently wage war against poor sanitation, and the things that will prevent them from providing quality education, portable water, quality health care, etc., and this kind of war needs wisdom and knowledge rather than guns.

MATE MASIE

Literal meaning: I have head and kept it.

Symbolic meaning: It pays to imbibe knowledge prudently.

Background: Some information when put in the public domain can cause fear and panic. Loose talk, gossip and rumour mongering show immaturity. People who indulge in them are frowned upon among the Akans of Ghana. People who have short memories are also not cherished (Figure 7).

Philosophical lesson: This adinkra symbol symbolizes wisdom and knowledge. Akans consider someone who hears something and keeps it for future remembrance as intelligent and wise. When one is given advice, information or message of any kind, that person is expected to keep them and use them at the time they are needed. The symbol teaches the importance of meditating on information received prudently to gain wisdom and knowledge. It stresses the importance of keeping secrets and also advises people to ponder over issues before taking decisions on them.

Application to contemporary living: Loose talk, gossip and rumour mongering are the order of the day with the introduction of radio stations. Notwithstanding the education, information and entertainment that this mass medium gives to the people, some of the information it gives is very outrageous and this does not promote national development. Journalists are advised to do

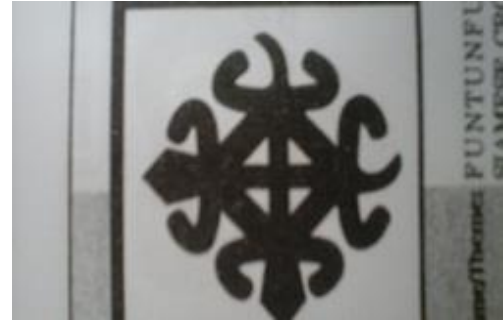


Figure 8. FUNTUNFUNAFU.
 Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbols&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8#q=adinkra+symbols+funtunfrafu+denkyemfunefu>

further check on the information they get before it is put on public domain.

Some unfamiliar Adinkra Symbols and the Philosophy behind them

FUNTUNFUNAFU

Theme: Funtunfunafu-Denkyemfunafu (Siamese Crocodile)

Proverb: Funtunfunafu, denkyemfunafu, wonafuruyebaakonansoworedidi a naworefom.

Literal meaning: The Siamese crocodiles have one stomach yet they fight over food when eating.

Symbolic meaning: Unity in diversity

Background: The stomach of the crocodiles is likened to a common purpose and goal, as in democratic governance, where divergent views are expressed and well debated to formulate good policies. The principle of people ‘disagreeing to agree’ applies in this sense. This symbol signifies the unification of people of different cultural settings for achieving common objectives despite their divergent views and opinions about the way of life (Figure 8).

Philosophical lesson: The symbol stresses the importance of democracy in all aspects of life. It also encourages oneness of purpose. It therefore discourages selfishness and represents democracy and unity and unity in diversity.

Application to contemporary living: Corruption in the country is in ascendancy. Political leaders, chiefs, pastors, heads of Departments, and Institutions like police, armed forces etc., who are supposed to have known better as



Figure 9. BI-NNKA-BI. Source: <https://www.tumblr.com/search/adinkra,%20sy mbols>.

far as the effects of corruption is concerned are rather indulging themselves in this bad practice recently. Ironically, monies that the people get from their corrupt practices is used to build private schools, hospitals, hotels, filing stations, etc. in the country which in turn benefit all Ghanaians.

BI-NNKA-BI

Literal meaning: Bite not one another.

Symbolic meaning: Let's not offend each other. People should have their freedom in the course of discharging their duties.

Background: The wise-saying came about as a result of the evil intensions and deeds perpetrated by people against other people. These vices provoke people and the provoked ones usually try to retaliate (Figure 9).

Philosophical lesson: The symbol cautions against gossiping, blackmailing, backbiting, provocation, cheating, bribery and corruption and other social vices which can retard societal growth and generate conflict.

Application to contemporary Living: This also cautions politicians, administrators and heads of Departments and institutions who take advantage of their positions to make gains at the expense of the other people in the country which normally retards national development and sometimes create tension in the country.

It also cautions people whose tribal sentiments cause them to look down upon people who are not members of their tribes and tend to insult them with slightest provocation.

ôWô-FORO-ADOBε

Literal meaning: A snake climbs the raffia

Symbolic meaning: One needs great effort and



Figure 10. ôWô-FORO-ADOBε. Source: https://www.google.com.gh/search?q=adinkra+symbol+owo+foro+adobe&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=wC1WVbXmBYPsUv6Ngc gP

determination to accomplish set goals and overcome all challenges.

Background: It is very difficult for snakes to climb very smooth baked trees, more so thorny trees. However, snakes are able to climb the thorny raffia palm tree with tack, patience and diligence (Figure 10).

Philosophical lesson: This represents admiration for people who accomplish unusual and impossible feats. One needs to be diligent and hardworking to achieve success. The symbol also represents prudence and the practical application of wisdom.

Application to contemporary Living: Hitherto, it was rare to see physically challenged people performing tasks that are usually performed by physically balanced people. Surprisingly, we have national amputee football team, and musical band which comprises of blind men and women.

Also, driving which requires bravery, diligence and vigilance was reserved for men only, since women were believed to be cowards, timid and careless. But it has now revealed that women are more diligent, careful and vigilant when driving than their men counterparts and they involve themselves in few accidents as compare to their men counterparts. Women now drive commercial vehicles in Ghana today.

Also, occupations like police, fire service, army, etc. were reserved for men only. It was very rare to see a woman in any of these occupations. But now it is not uncommon to see women doctors, lawyers, soldiers and police. Women in these occupations usually earn much admiration from people.

HWεMUDUA

Literal meaning: 'Hwεmudua' means stick which is used in looking into something.



Figure 11. HWEMUDUA.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbol+hwemudua&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

Symbolic meaning: When something is well examined, its content is well known.

Background: This symbol represents the need to do critical examination in all aspects of one's life. Unfortunately, high quality standards have given way to mediocrity in all aspects of life. 'Hwemudua' indicates the defects inherent in the way of people do things and suggest corrective measures to take for perfection (Figure 11).

Philosophical lessons: The symbol serves as a check on mediocrity of things and also in the abilities of people. It actually evaluates the way things are done to raise standards. The symbol insists on thorough examination of all aspect of human life in order to achieve perfection. The symbol represents means through which quality standards are achieved.

Application to contemporary Living: Recent breakdown of marriages in Ghana is attributed to lack of due diligence and poor examination conducted by couples before they get married. In the past, there were proper checks and balances and adequate examination by the family members of the couples before marriage was contracted. This helped those who matter in the marriage to know much about the two families and this helped in the sustenance of the marriage.

In governance, people are usually given positions because of their political affiliation; no adequate examination is done on the person to check his background academically, morally, socially and intellectually to know his prominence in the area before the appointment is given to the person. When people are given positions where they have little or no knowledge in that area, it affects productivity and national income for that matter. This is what people usually call putting square pegs in round holes.

Also students should be examined to know their strengths and weakness on the courses they offer in school so as to encourage them to pursue those courses



Figure 12. MMARA KRADO.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbol+mmara+krado&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

which they can excel in them. The recent poor performance by students in higher learning institutions is attributed to the parents' inability to examine their wards to know where they can excel. The parents usually push their wards to areas of their interest and the children perform poorly in the end and this usually causes graduate unemployment in the society.

MMARA KRADO

Literal Meaning: 'The padlock of the law'

Symbolic Meaning: Statutes of the nation/community

Background: Every community is guided by laws and regulations. This is done to protect and shape the conduct of its citizens to bring about sanity. The Akan practice of 'oath swearing' gives credence to the concept of law and justice (Figure 12).

Philosophical Lessons: The symbol signifies supreme authority, justice and equality of everybody before the law. The symbol stresses the importance of enforcing and abiding by rules and regulations in order to bring sanity in all communities. This is a symbol of authority and justice.

Application to Contemporary Living: Laws they say are no respecter of people. But what happens today in Ghana is that, some politicians, Heads of Departments and Institutions usually put up some behaviors that go contrary to the rules and regulations in the country. There have been some instances where some politicians have involved themselves in corruption but because of their political affiliations to the government in power they are allowed to go unpunished. Just last year, some headmasters of certain senior high schools were caught charging school fees above government recommended ones. Those heads were just given warnings, no



Figure 13. DUAFE.

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbol+duafe&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

are in contrast with the laws of the country, yet no punishment is given to them.

The symbol, 'Mmarakrado' and its significance in the society should be made known to all Ghanaians.

DUAFE

Literal meaning: Wooden comb.

Symbolic meaning: Fondness for cleanliness and natural beauty.

Background: Wooden combs were mostly used by women for combing and plaiting their hair. It is one of the most cherished household items. One important item or required for puberty rites of a girl, is the wooden comb- 'Duafe' (a gift provided by the fiancé) including other items such as beads, cloth, sandals, stools, mirror, shea butter, perfume etc (Figure 13).

The 'Dansinkran' is a hair-style that leaves a perceptible hair line dividing the blackened hair from the rest of the body. This is peculiar to the Asante adult women, especially the queen-mother and a puberty neophyte. It distinguishes the women from the girls. The 'Duafe' helps in combing this hair style which adds to the beauty of the woman.

Philosophical lessons: The symbol encourages people to look their best all the time and also make personal hygiene part of them. People are also encouraged to appreciate their culture.

Application to contemporary living: Many Ghanaians have neglected their cultural heritage and have now adopted Western culture. This has gone a long way to change their attitude and lifestyle in general. Many Ghanaian women prefer creams that can bleach their body to sheabutter which is known to be skin protector. The recent increase in skin diseases these days is



Figure 14. ôSRANE (MOON).

Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=adinkra+symbol+osrane&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8>.

attributed to the new creams with the bleaching agents that most women and some men apply on their bodies. The significance of 'Duafe' (wooden comb) should be made known to them so that they will appreciate the natural beauty and also their cultural heritage.

ôSRANE (MOON)

Literal meaning: The moon.

Symbolic meaning: Patience, steadiness and confidence.

Background: The Akans believe in the femininity of the ôsrane (moon), which bears with all the bounty of faithfulness, peacefulness, grace and serenity. Motherliness therefore requires a woman to provide food and shelter for her own children, and for others and strangers. It is believed that most Akan states were originally founded, and headed and actually ruled by women. It should also be noted that the matrilineage depends upon its 'fertile' female members.

Philosophical lesson: The symbol reminds women to influence society with their qualities of benevolence, faithfulness, generosity, hospitality and sympathy. It also signifies feminine protection and charm (Figure 14).

Application to contemporary living. People now have the conviction that, one critical measure to put in place to check corruption in the country is to put women in leadership positions. Women are known to be decent, vigilant and morally upright. Women who have been given leadership positions in the country are really giving good accounts of themselves as far as bribery and corruption are concerned.

Also, Ghanaians have now recognized the need to protect women in our communities. Agencies like Domestic

Violence And Victims Support Unit 'DOVVSU' of police and Women And Juvenile Unit 'WAJU' have been put in place to see to the protection of women and children who are believed to be vulnerable in our communities.

Conclusion

The authors of this paper have brought to readers, the many beautiful and varied facets of the Adinkra symbols. The symbols have been clearly explained. In going through the discussions on the communication values and the philosophies inherent in the adinkra symbols above, we noted that even though, Akan nonverbal communication manifests itself in diverse ways, the adinkra symbols are among the few most recognized nonverbal communication modes in Akan. One should also bear in mind that the logical value of the adinkra symbols used by Akans as a mode or channel of communication is less important; Akans rather value their communication values.

It is hoped that readers will teach the philosophical and moral lessons inherent in the adinkra symbols to contemporary Akan youths and encourage the usage of the adinkra symbols in a more meaningful way among contemporary artists, designers, craftsmen, teachers and all who appreciate the traditional symbols. The paper adds to knowledge in the disciplines of linguistics in general and semiotics in particular.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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