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REPRESENTATION OF DISABILITY IN AKAN DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The study examines some proverbs and insults in Akan that legitimise and reinforce marginalisation and stigmatisation of people with disability (PWD) in Ghana. Analysing fifty (50) proverbs and ten (10) insults from both written and oral sources collected through interviews and library search, the findings reveal that some proverbs and insults portray PWD as weak and vulnerable, making aspects of the Akan language a perpetuator of disability. Taking into consideration the Sustainable Development Goal 10, which strives to reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting social, economic and political inclusion of all, there is the need to make indigenous languages inclusive of the needs of PWD.

Keywords: Disability, Akan Discourse, Proverbs, Insults, Critical Discourse Analysis, Marginalisation

1. Introduction

The language of disability has become a contested issue owing to its enormous power. Disability language is an important ideological and political concern as it underpins stereotypes, identity, relations and actions, and programmes targeted at People with Disability (PWD) (Corker, 2000). Language is powerfully overwhelming as it largely shapes perceptions, attitudes, behaviour, policy and practice (Corbett, 1962; Corker, 2000). Language describes people consciously and subconsciously and dictates how we treat each other. In the words of Kirkpatrick (1991) “Words can destroy” and words throughout human history have caused destruction. Concerning PWD, the terminologies used are laden with devaluing discourse (Finlon, 2001; Moasun and Mfoafo-M’Carthy, 2020). Such language defines hegemony aimed at reinforcing social power dynamics by ensuring that the marginalized remain as such and the powerful maintain their position of privilege (Darcy, 2004; Gillovic et. al., 2018). Disability language has served this purpose and has contributed to the marginalisation and exclusion of PWD. Indeed, the idea of ‘us’ and ‘them’ has been a foundational pillar of disability language and has defined the identity of PWDs.

In disability discourse, evolving terminologies and language used for marginalized and excluded people can trigger a significant change in the construction of the identity of such people and migrate

them from being ‘others’ to being part of ‘us’ (Powell, 2015). Inclusive terminologies change perception and behaviour and ultimately result in changes in policy and practice towards equal opportunity in societies (Jones, 2012; 2014; Moasun and Soltie, 2014; Gillovic et al., 2018). Moasun and Soltie (2014) for instance, found that the role of proverbs in communication is powerful and may have telling effects on certain groups of people. [Moasun and Mfoafo-M’Carthy](#) (2020) examining samples of Ghanaian Akan proverbs on mental and physical disabilities and their meanings, using critical discourse analysis and guided by labeling theory. They conclude that Akan proverbs predominantly label people with disabilities negatively, thereby leading to their stigmatisation, marginalisation, and exclusion. They conclude that, Akan proverbs in Ghana inherently label persons with disabilities, and often perpetuate stigma through the "power of the tongue". Again, [Moasun and Mfoafo-M’Carthy](#) (2020) examines the factors that contribute to the maltreatment of Children with Disability (CWDs) in Ghana, the nature and effects of such maltreatments and the implications for social work policy and practice. Their study showed that poverty, ignorance and societal perceptions, and general inadequacies of facilities for the care of CWDs contribute to their abuse and neglect. Due to the negative effects of disability language on PWD and the positive potential of adopting inclusive language, more investigations need to be done on disabling language to draw attention to the situation in cultures. While disability research has garnered interest in the last few decades, much of the attention has focused on other social and cultural contexts, including health care, social services, leisure, and tourism. These works have contributed scholarly insight into the disability discourse, created awareness and promoted inclusion. While, language constitutes the basis of socialization, it can as well disable people (Andersson, 2006; Jones, 2014) hence, it is an important dimension of disability discourse that warrants attention. Consequently, this paper aims at examining disabling language use among the dominant ethnic group in Ghana to understand how language is used to marginalize, exclude and further disable PWD systematically.

This paper is a contribution from linguistic analysis of a sub-Saharan African culture to the disability literature. It adds to works such as Devlieger (1999), Acquaviva (2020), Ebenso et al. (2012), and Moasun and Mfoafo-M’Carthy (2020) on disability discourse. Disability studies in Sub-Saharan African countries are not popular. It is engulfed by negative socio-cultural conceptions of disability, which has further enhanced the marginalisation and exclusion of PWD (Gillovic et al., 2018). In this regard, this paper further unearths the nuanced contribution of language to the negative socio-cultural conception of disability, focusing the discussion on proverbs and insults. Further, this paper is useful in driving the agenda on the need for linguistic re-orientation of Ghanaian and African societies to promote the inclusion of PWD through language.

2. Conception of disability

Throughout history, understanding of disability has shaped how society has perceived and treated PWD in all spheres of life, including language discourses. Understanding of the conception of disability is critical to any discussion on the inclusion of PWD (Harpur, 2012) since it influences society’s attitudes towards PWD and could further reinforce their stigmatisation and exclusion.

The literature generally identifies three perspectives that have dominated the discourse of disability. These are the moral, medical, and social views on disability. The moral view on disability has been prevalent through much of history and defines disability by the deficiencies of PWD (Adam, 2018).

There are two thoughts within the moral perspective on disability. One conception carves disability in a negative manner where the individual with an impairment is seen as a deviant or as a subject who is morally decadent (Rovner, 2004). Within this negative moral connotation, the place of disability in society varies and includes explanations such as disability is a manifestation of sin or God's displeasure, or as a punishment by an external force or deity (Kassah, Kassah and Agbota, 2012).

Explanations of disability within this thought can also be attributed to misdemeanors committed by the disabled person, someone in the family or community, or their forbears. People who subscribe to this view believe that birth conditions are due to actions committed in a previous reincarnation (Harpur, 2012). In other instances, the presence of evil spirits is used to explain differences in behaviour, especially in conditions such as schizophrenia (Campbell, 2009). Acts of exorcism or sacrifice may be performed to expel the negative influence, or recourse is made to persecute the person with disability (Harpur, 2012). Due to this negative connotation of disability within the moral perspective, individuals with disability are stigmatized and isolated for the fear that any association with the person may incur the displeasure of God or the spirits with the same disability (Harpur and Bales, 2010). Most African societies have traditionally viewed PWD from this negative conception and thus have coined derogatory language to describe them.

The other moral perspective to disability is carved in a sympathetic inclination towards PWD. This conception presents disability as a test or challenge for non-disabled people; an opportunity for non-disabled people to achieve salvation through serving PWD. Here, disability is conceived as an aberration in nature's harmony (Albrecht, 1992; Arneil, 2009). Nonetheless, this conception of disability cast PWD as objects of charity and pity. Their impairment signals inability so they need to live at the mercy of non-disabled people. Consequently, PWD are looked down upon. This non-inclusive conception finds its way into everyday language which portrays PWD as incapable people without any means of constructing meaningful lives for themselves.

The second lens through which disability has been defined is the medical approach. This medical perspective conceives disability as a physiological impairment due to damage or a disease in the human anatomy. The overall framework underpinning the medical perspective predisposes practitioners to think of a 'condition' within an abnormal body, which needs appropriate 'treatment' (Fitzgerald, 2005). The main focus is on 'normalization' and the adaptation of individuals with disability to society (Llewellyn and Hogan, 2000). Under the medical perspective, bodily impairment is equal to disability and thus anyone with a physiological condition is disabled and the cure lies in treating the physiological condition. Human beings are presented as being flexible and alterable while society is fixed and unalterable. The description of disability through the medical lens places the burden of participation on the PWD. The types of disability from this perspective may range from hearing, vision, mobility, intellectual to psychiatric disorders. Within each category, there is a wide variation. Persons may be considered to have a temporary, episodic, or permanent disability present at birth (congenital disability) or due to an accident or illness (acquired disability).

The social view on disability challenges the foundations of the medical view and argues that disability only exists in so far as it is socially constructed and imposed on people with impairments (Hutchison, 1995). The social perspective on disability draws attention to the distinction between

disability and impairment (Darcy, 2002). Impairment is described as the functional limitation within the individual caused by either physical, mental, or sensory dysfunction while disability is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on equal level with others due to physical, economic, social, or cultural barriers imposed on people with impairments (Arneil, 2009; Darcy, 2011). Disability then, is the barriers imposed on people with impairments, which make it impossible to participate in everyday activities as any member of society without impairment (Adam, 2018). While the social conception acknowledges that impairment is the basis for social exclusion, it also argues that impairment is part of the social diversity. This study adopts the social perspective to defining disability and refers to disability as any kind of bodily impairment(s) which serve(s) as basis for which one encounters stigmatisation or exclusion as expressed through words or language. Thus, the negative language expressions that tend to reinforce the stigmatisation and exclusion of PWD socially, can only change if the social conception is adopted and society views PWD as a segment of the population diversity.

3. Disability Language

Disability Language is a contested ideological and political issue as it relates to identity, stereotyping, policies and programs aimed at inclusion and social change. The terminologies pertaining to the discourse of disability is an important influencer of how PWD are treated and the approaches adopted by society and industry to include/exclude them. Consequently, two dominant language forms have dominated the disability discourse: the ‘person first’ and ‘identity first’. The ‘person first’ disability language acknowledges someone with impairment, first as a human being. This language discourse emphasizes acknowledging that the individual is a human being like any other person, the disability becomes secondary. Under this discourse, the disability is de-emphasized while the individual’s humanness is emphasized.

This is meant to ensure that PWD do not feel different and also are not projected based on their disabled identities but as human beings who are part of the normal population diversity (Darcy, 2004). Examples of person first terminologies include ‘person with disability’, ‘people with disabilities’, and ‘individual with disability’. On the contrary, ‘the identity first’ disability language discourse emphasizes the disability first before describing the person’s humanness. Here, the argument is that the disability is part of the individual’s identity including their construction of realities and life experiences and hence there is the need to acknowledge that such people have unique and special needs that society has to cater for (Darcy, 2004). Examples of identity first terminologies are ‘disabled person’, ‘disabled people’, and ‘physically challenged persons/people’.

The adoption of any of the two disability languages is ideological and political. For instance, while the identity first language is preferred as being politically correct in the UK, other countries such as Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand are inclined towards person first language as revealed by Janiszewski et al., (2025). In his view, Oliver (1990) argues that even though some (including PWD) argue that the ‘person first’ language asserts the value of the person and disability becomes a mere addition, people with disability consider disability as a critical part of the self and thus cannot be detached from the identity. It is therefore futile to describe the person and disability separately. Indeed, proponents of the ‘identity first’ language argue that the ‘person first’ language is a superficial plan to provide equality without recourse to dealing with the marginalisation suffered by PWD. For them, the ‘identify first’ language is a powerful way of conveying the

disabling nature of society and thus, awakens society's consciousness and sense of responsibility towards fostering the inclusion of PWD (Swain et. al., 1993).

In contrast, those who prefer 'the person first' language opine that it is a change in emphasis since every human being would like to be related to based on their humanness and not the basis of some preconceptions others harbor on their race, religion, gender, or disability (Darcy, 2004). Fine and Asch (1998) suggest that 'person first' language does not define disability as being a central part of people's self-concept. Thus, the use of the person first language does not prejudice people to deal with others based on their negative stereotypes on disability but rather as human beings just like any segment of society. Consequently, the person first language is considered appropriate in this paper.

3.1. Disability in Ghana

According to the Ghana's 2021 Housing and Population Census, PWD constitutes 8% which represents 2,098,137 of the Ghanaian population. These individuals have some form of impairment including visual, hearing, speech, physical, intellectual, emotional and multiple impairments (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021). People with impairments in Ghana face exclusion, marginalisation and stigmatisation in all spheres of life including language discourse. The poverty situation of PWD in Ghana is more severe compared to non-disabled persons (GSS, 2021). In terms of their economic conditions, many PWD are in extreme poverty with a high degree of unemployment and under-employment while they continue to face discrimination in the job market (Naami et al., 2012). The situation is worse for women with disability as they experience multiple disadvantages on account of gender and disability (Kassah, Kassah and Agbota, 2012).

Long time ago in Ghana, children born with deformities to some tribes were not culturally accepted (Rattray, 1952). For example, a child born with more than five fingers or signs of autism is supposed to be killed immediately after delivery or in some cases abandoned by the river bank or near the sea. It is mostly believed that such children belong to the river or sea or a deity, and, therefore, upon their birth, they should be returned to the spirit world. Most Ghanaian cultures prohibits PWD from becoming chiefs or taking up traditional leadership positions (Kassah, Kassah and Agbota, 2012). Chiefs who acquire any form of disability (epilepsy, debilitating illness) in the course of their reign are required to relinquish their positions or somebody is appointed to act under their direction while they stay at the background (Kassah, Kassah and Agbota, 2012). Peoples' attitudes towards PWDs in political/leadership positions is typified by the disapproval of some Ghanaians when a visually impaired person was appointed as the Minister of Chieftaincy and Culture in 2013 (Ocran, 2023).

Information, communication, and assistive devices that can offer PWD new possibilities to achieve independent living are rare in Ghana (Ghana Federation of Disability, 2008). The hearing impaired hardly get access to public information. Recently, though, some television stations, churches and other sociopolitical gatherings employ the services of sign language interpreters.

In order to improve access and quality of life of PWD in Ghana, the Persons with Disability Law (Act 715) was passed in 2009 to give legal backing to the rights of PWD in the country. The Law covers a wide range of issues relating to the well-being of PWD, including access to medical care,

education, transportation, and employment. Under the law, public places and services such as pubs, entertainment facilities, attraction sites and all places of public gathering are to be made accessible to PWD to ensure their inclusion. The Persons with Disability Act 715 (2009) gives power to individuals and organizations to prosecute people and organizations that fail to implement the law. However, there are many aspects of the life of PWD that need to improve through proper implementation of the law (GSS, 2015).

4. The Akans of Ghana

The Akan language belongs to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger Congo family of West Africa, spoken in Ghana. It is the largest indigenous language in Ghana with the largest number of speakers, constituting about 47.5% of the total population of Ghana. Per Ghana's 2021 Housing and Population Census, Akan has over nine million speakers (GSS, 2021). In terms of its area of domicile, the Akan population occupies the south and south west (covering the coastal and the forest zones, between the rivers Tano and Volta) of Ghana. Akan speakers constitute almost eight out of the sixteen regions of Ghana. These are Brong, Brong-East, Ahafo, Ashanti, Western, Western-North, Central and Eastern regions. Indeed, Akan speakers are scattered all over the country.

In education, Akan is taught as a subject from primary to the university level, and used as a language of instruction in some lower primary schools. In trade, Akan is used as a language for business transactions. This is revealed by Essegbey (2009) that most non-Akan traders in Accra, a Ga speaking area, could speak, use and understand Akan for trading and communication purposes. Also, Akan is the most dominant language used in the media and for religious activities in Ghana. In sum, Akan could be said to be a default national language, used side by side with English in Ghana. Thus, employing a data from Akan is representative of the Ghanaian society.

5. Proverbs

Proverbs have been argued by many scholars as a universal phenomenon (Diabah and Amfo, 2015; Finnegan, 1970; Mieder, 2004). This makes proverbs relevant in most traditional societies in diverse ways. According Mieder (2004), proverbs are the repository of wisdom that guides people in their social interaction. That is, it is a formulaic language that makes it easier for people to remember and use them for effective communication.

In Africa, proverbs have proven to be a rich source of knowledge in communication, which is made up of profound principles of wisdom embedded in them. Jenjekwa (2006) writes that in African societies, proverbs are representations of the cultural beliefs that serve as a guide for the old and young, the ruler and the ruled to make appropriate choices in different situations. Similarly, Orwenjo (2009) argues that proverbs are a genre of oral tradition that preserves the people's collective wisdom, philosophy of life, experience, fears and aspirations. This means that Proverbs are not a preserve of any individual in the society; on the contrary, "it is considered the collective view of the community which is reflective of communal thought and takes precedence over individual preferences and opinions" (Diabah and Amfo, 2015:6). Therefore, in order to decipher the meaning of a proverb, the context, particularly the society it was produced for, as well as the

circumstances surrounding its use must be considered. Kemper (1980) outlines two ways to understanding the meaning of proverbs; taking into consideration inferences from the literal meaning of the proverb and using contextually-based expectations to establish their meaning.

Even though Akan proverbs carry a lot of wisdom and indigenous philosophy (Moasun and Mfoafo-M'Carthy, 2020), there are some that are socially constructed to perpetuate stigmatisation of PWDs which need the attention of scholars. This study therefore, examines how some proverbs and insults legitimise the marginalisation of PWD, with particular focus on the connotations of these linguistic elements.

6. Insults

Insults could be seen as another domain through which people with disability are marginalized. According to Ofori (2015:22) insults can be recognized as

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

This shows how insults denigrate, humiliate and condemn the target. The comparative use of insults to marginalize and disrespect people with disability runs through Akan discourse. As suggested by Agyekum (2010), the context of use of insults ranges from animal names, ethnic and tribal, personality and behavior occupation, sex and religion as well as spiritual.

Related to this study are insults that use one's personality or physical structure to attempt to compare it with the addressee with the intention of reducing him/her and demeaning his personality (Agyekum, 2010; Ofori, 2015). Thus, the addresser employs simile as a strategy to insult the addressee. Simile is a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind, to make a description more emphatic and vivid. In the data gathered, we observed a common pattern of the insults which were simile in nature. That is, the 'supposed normal' was compared with the physical structure or features of a PWD.

7. Theoretical framework

The framework grounding this work is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Marginalisation. The main aim of critical discourse analysis, according to Wodak (2001:2), is to investigate critically social inequalities as they are expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimised and so on by language (or in discourse). She further argues that CDA analyzes opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination and power control as manifest in language. In addition, it looks at social problems and the fundamental role discourses play in terms of the production and reproduction of power, abuse and domination (van Dijk, 2001; Addy and Ofori, 2020). That is, language could be used to create unequal social relations as succinctly articulated by Habermas (1977:259) that "language is also a medium of domination and social force which serves to legitimise relations of organized power." For Foucault (1984), discourse is a certain vocabulary which is created to maintain certain forms of social domination. That is to say, vocabulary is not

only a list of words but a complex combination of language uses and practices, professional qualification and practices, which concurrently sustain a system of social control and can marginalize the less powerful in the society.

Taking the Akan into consideration, the deeply rooted negative socio-cultural conception of disability ingrained in their proverbs and insults have created dominant structures that seek to stabilize these conventions and normalize them. Therefore, any attempt or resistance is taking as “breaking of conventions, of stable discursive practices” (Fairclough 1993:4). In effect, CDA seeks to expose social practices and relationships that are manifested on the relationships of disempowerment, dominance, prejudice and/or discrimination (Titscher et al., 2000; Richardson, 2007).

According to Rao (2006:223), “marginalization occurs when people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus are denied the opportunity to fulfill themselves as human beings.” The tag of being disabled places PWD within a certain bracket in their communities, that is, the characteristics and behaviours that someone with that tag should exhibit. These expectations limit opportunities in terms of acceptable actions and experiences of PWD. Marginalisation to some extent creates a polarized society where some people become privileged whilst others are disadvantaged and demeaned. This is reflective in Akan discourses where proverbs and insults are meticulously ingrained in everyday conversation in order to marginalize PWD.

8. Data and Method

Data for this study is based on both written and oral sources. In all, a total of fifty (50) proverbs and ten (10) insults were collated. Specifically, proverbs that were related to and explicitly mentioned any form of disability such as *akyakya* ‘hunchback’, *onifrani* ‘blind person’, and among others were extracted from Appiah et al.’s (2007) extensive collection of 7015 Akan proverbs: *Bu me be: proverbs of the Akans* while ten (10) insults were obtained from oral sources from Ghanaian Language Students offering Twi at the University of Cape Coast and other native speakers through interview. The extracted proverbs were categorized based on the consistent patterns identified and were put into three main themes: Weak/Vulnerable, Demeaning and Tease/Mockery. Furthermore, the meaning of the proverbs and themes were triangulated through interviews with chiefs and some elderly people to ascertain their veracity.

9. Analysis And discussions

The data showed three recurring themes that represent disability in Akan discourse which are analyzed and discussed below. In terms of the interpretation of the proverb, we considered literal interpretation for the analysis.

9.1. Weak/Vulnerable

There are proverbs which present people with disability as the most vulnerable in society, and as liabilities to their family and their society. In Akan communities, women, children, and persons

with disabilities are often relatively positioned at lower levels within social hierarchies, though their exact status varies across context and social roles. Likening disability to vulnerability (although uncalled for) is explainable by this class distinction. As a norm, those put on the lowest rank of the dominance hierarchy are supposed to depend on their higher ranked counterparts for survival. As Cummins (2019) notes, the most powerful individuals on the dominance hierarchy of society are essentially authorities, and they control the behavior of subordinates in order to maintain priority of access to competitive resources (such as food and mating opportunities). When people with disabilities are convinced, through proverbs, to see themselves as vulnerable, they end up being liabilities to society as they need the support of others in order to function or move about freely. The following proverbs exemplify how PWD are represented as weak/vulnerable.

1. *Onyame na ɔ-wɔ basin fufuo ma no.*
 God FOC 3SG-pound amputee fufuo give 3SG.
 ‘It is God who pounds fufu for the armless one’. (p. 215, no. 4786)

2. *Onyankopɔn bɔ-ɔ onifirafoɔ a, ɔ-bɔ-ɔ deɛ*
 God create-PST blind REL, 3SG-creat-PST REL
ɔ-bɛ-sɔ ne poma mu.
 3SG-FUT-hold POSS stick inside.

‘When the Almighty created the blind, he also created the person who would guide his stick’. (p. 216, no 4811)

3. *Onifirani m-fa abufuo wɔ kwaɛɛ ase.*
 Blind NEG-take anger in bush under.
 ‘A blind person should not become angry whilst in the bush’. (p. 197, no. 4337)

4. *Mmarima n-ni kurom a, na akyakya tu*
 Men NEG-there town REL, FOC hunchback run
mmirika kyere mmaa.
 race show women.

‘If there are no (real) men in town, the hunchback runs to show off before women’. (p. 23, no. 237)

Proverbs (1) to (4) suggest PWDs’ dependence on society and their family for survival. In order to get their basic needs such as food, it is God, who provides and aids that. Again, they depend on others for guidance (as in 2). Proverb (3) breeds subjugation, that people with disabilities are expected to condone to any treatment given to them however unfavorable it may be. Thus, even if a blind person’s anger is triggered, they must not express it because doing so will take away the help they get from others.

In example (1), the armless person is represented as someone who basically relies on God for their daily sustenance, making God the source of human survival. Apart from God, humans become the middle level of support between God and the disabled. The responsibility bestowed on the ‘supposed normal’ to cater for the needs of PWD makes them powerful thereby using language to belittle them. Similarly, the example (2) confirms the point that PWD, such as blind persons always

need the support of God and others to go about their daily activities. In this case, the assistance of the ‘supposed normal’ is required for the blind to move around. These representations in the Akan proverbs show the level of marginalisation of PWD within Akan discourse.

Examples (3) and (4) also indicate that PWD cannot show certain tantrums or involve in some activities with women when men are present. We see in example (3) that the blind cannot get angry while in the forest. When they become angry, especially at the person offering them the support, they may lose that support. The blind person may either hurt himself or become a prey for wild animals because he/she may not see or notice any danger in the forest. However, the abled or the ‘supposed normal’ person can be angry at any place without any problem. Therefore, society determines when, where and how the blind (PWD) can become angry as they are seen as people who are weak. Additionally, example 4, also portrays how men with hunchback are represented as people who cannot demonstrate their God given talent in the presence of their ‘co-abled men.’ They can only demonstrate their athletic skills in the midst of women. This portrays them as people who cannot compete with their fellow men.

Apparently, some people with disabilities are not as weak as these proverbs portray them. There are some who are breadwinners of their families. However, since proverbs are considered as wise sayings and believed to express unique and sacred information, people totally conform to the connotations of these proverbs rather than interrogating them (Gyan, Abbey and Baffoe, 2020). Thus, the independence and hard work of persons with disabilities are sometimes not recognized.

9.2.Demeaning

Demeaning was another central theme identified in the dataset. Some proverbs cause a severe loss of dignity and respect for PWD. Such proverbs present PWD as persons who have nothing good to offer themselves and the society. It criticizes their physical appearance, their intellectual prowess and their sense of hygiene.

Proverbs (5) to (7) below interlock with the presentation of PWD as the lowest ranked class of society. Since they are subordinates, their ‘authorities’ can humiliate them without any resistance.

In example (5), it is very clear that lepers have challenges with respect to cleaning their anus after easing themselves because most of them have deformed fingers. The leper’s deformed fingers are equated to their inability to keep personal hygiene. Naturally, the fingers aid a person to clean their anus after using the toilet. It is, therefore, demeaning to ask the leper whether his/her anus is clean, knowing very well that their fingers are withered. This feeds into the general negative perception about lepers, that, they are considered to be unclean.

Relatedly, in example (6), within Akan discourse, the abled perceives the cripple to be pretending by not walking in order to put their mother in trouble, but in actual fact, that is his/her state. Indeed, cripples cannot walk. It is not the case that cripples would intentionally remain on the ground knowing very well that doing so will destroy their own physique. The proverb only portrays that PWD are prone to taking decisions that will put them at risk.

The perception that the cripple is deliberately refusing to walk is a negative attitude towards PWD. In fact, the extent of explicitly uttering to the cripple that his/her pretense will lead to the damage of his/her back reinforces how PWD are demeaned within the context of Akan proverbs.

The mention of women (mothers of people with disabilities) is also significant to our discussion of demeaning feature of proverbs. In Akan communities, the humiliation of people with disabilities is shared with their mothers. In most cases, mothers are blamed for the disability of their children, especially because mothers are givers of life. When women bring forth disabled children, they are scorned and sometimes it can cost them their marriages. This is why it is said of the cripple that he/she is putting his/her mother in trouble in example (6).

In proverb (7), people with disabilities are distinguished from those without disabilities by their physical appearance. Thus, no matter how beautiful a hunchback may be, the shape of their buttocks will always betray them. Proverb (7) therefore takes from PWD, the confidence any individual may have in their looks. Generally, individuals have different body shapes. However, unlike hunchbacks, their condition makes it difficult to differentiate between their backs and buttocks, so they all tend to have the same shape and size. People use the hunch to demean their body shape, making them feel uncomfortable. This has a negative effect on them not only physically, but also emotionally, as they feel dehumanized at times.

5. *Obi* *m-misa* *ɔkwatani* *se:* “*ɛbini* *wɔ* *wo* *to?*”
 Person NEG-ask lepper that: feces at 2SG anus.
 ‘One does not ask a leper if his anus is dirty’. (p. 30, no. 396)

6. *Bafan* *se* *ɔ-re-ye* *o-ni* *abrɔ,* *ɔ-n-nim* *se*
 Cripple say 3SG-PROG-do 3SG-mother spite 3SG-NEG-know that
ɔ-re-sɛɛ *ne* *to.*
 3SG-PROG-destroy POSS buttocks.
 ‘The cripple says he is deceiving his mother; he does not realize he is spoiling his own back’. (p. 21, no. 189)

7. *Akyakyafɔ* *nam* *apem* *a,* *wɔn* *nyina*
 Hunchbacks walk thousand CONJ, 3PLU all
to *ye* *pe.*
 buttocks do same.
 ‘If thousand hunchbacks are lined up, they will have the same shape of buttocks’. (p. 181, 3972).

9.3. Tease/Mockery

An individual with a hunchback is considered as disabled in society because certain activities necessitate the use of various body parts, which a person with a hunchback is unable to do. As a result of their failure to perform some activities such as running, jumping, skipping, and many others, people make fun of them. The hunchback is depicted in proverb (8) as someone who is not swift, so it will be easier to catch him if he is being chased. That is, if one wants to chase a hunchback, the chaser will turn out laughing behind the hunchback while watching him race, due to the manner the hunchback runs. Hence, people with hunchbacks are often mocked or teased. In

effect, people with hunchback have low self-esteem and are often emotionally injured because of their condition. This also makes them unable to participate in most physical activities that cause them to use their backs or other body parts that are not functioning properly. While their condition does not prevent them from improving their health by participating in active physical activities, most of them tend to hide their potentials, leading to lose of self-confidence.

8. *Sε wopamo* *akyakyani* *na* *wo-a-n-to* *no* *a,* *na* *εnyε*
 If 2SG-chase hunchback and 2SG-PERF-NEG-meet 3SG CONJ., FOC NEG-do
ne *mmirikatuo* *ntira* *na* *mmom* *ne*
 POSS race because and but POSS
ho *sere* *ntira.*
 self funny reason

‘If you chase a hunchback and you don’t succeed, it is not because of his swiftness but because of his laughable figure’. (p. 68, no. 1290)

Persons with a broken nose are perceived to be disabled since they are unable to produce clear sounds through the nose. In proverb (9), a broken-nosed person is prohibited from singing joyfully because the sound s/he will make, is perceived to be awful to listen to. Most people laugh at persons with broken noses because when they talk, they make funny sounds. Consequently, they find it difficult to verbally communicate their emotions. They are therefore unable to express their thoughts and, as a direct consequence, conceal majority of their feelings. Voicing their feelings could help those around them to understand what they may be going through, but because people would mock them, most of them would remain silent to avoid ridicule.

9. *Hwen-to* *m-mɔ* *ose.*
 Nose-empty NEG-kick jubilation
 ‘A broken-nosed person should not sing in jubilation’. (p.134, no. 2895)

9.4.Insults

The data gathered showed that the structure of the insults used on PWD is in the form of a simile. The part of a “supposed normal person” is compared to the deformed part of the PWD. This is illustrated below:

SUPPOSED NORMAL	Sε (like)	DISABILITY
[PART OF THE BODY]	Sε (like)	[DISABLE PART OF THE BODY]

Example (10) typifies insult rained on people with disability. Since dumb persons are unable to speak, it becomes difficult for them to complain if they choke on the food they have ingested. Since they are unable to open their mouths to express their frustration, they rely on sign language to communicate. This, on the other hand, makes their speech repulsive. The fact that the insult below uses the word “dumb” negatively indicates a disdain for the dumb person, as the dumb person would not have chosen to be dumb, but it is a situation that they must accept. Thus, within the context of this insult, the face of the supposed normal person is compared to a dumb person

struggling to swallow a mashed plantain. This dehumanizes the dumb person and portrays how PWD are represented and marginalized in Akan discourse.

10. *W'anim se mumu a eto a-twi no.*
 2SG-POSS-face like dumb that mashed plantain/yam PERF-choke 3SG.
 'Your face like a dumb person struggling to swallow mashed plantain/yam/cocoyam'.

Similarly, in example (11), the cripple is portrayed as a person who 'literally walks' on his buttocks, so the cripple's buttocks apparently will be flat. This comment portrays the cripple as unattractive and if a woman, not worthy of a man's attention and vice versa. Generally, among Ghanaians, a person's body shape contributes to his/her beauty. As a result, in most cases, Akans consider cripple with flat buttocks as unattractive. Similar to example (10), the comparison between the buttocks size of a supposed normal and a cripple, is very offensive to PWD as it lowers their self-esteem as a result of seeing themselves as unattractive.

11. *Wo to a a-sa se akyakya to.*
 POSS buttocks SUB PERF-finish like hunchback buttocks.
 'Your flat buttocks look like that of a cripple'.

12. *Wo-a-n-ya barima biara a-n-ware se apakye?*
 2SG-PERF-NEG-get man any PERF-NEG-marry like cripple?
 'You could not marry any man than a cripple'?

In contemporary times, a complete man is supposed to be stable, self-sufficient, active, physically attractive to others, and capable of long hours of work. The cripple is someone who, due to his impairment, relies on others for support. Therefore, it is believed that if a woman marries such a person, she is inviting trouble for herself since the woman will be forced to assume most of the responsibilities that come with marriage, including some masculine roles. Thus, marrying a cripple is not recommended for a complete woman as exemplified in (12). Again, since the disabled are a disadvantaged group, they are exposed to the possibility of being harmed emotionally as most people treat them with disrespect. This affects their personhood as they are stripped off their emotional rights, including choosing who to marry becomes a problem. The people the cripples love may reject them because society sees PWD as not complete and therefore, do not deserve to be loved. On the other hand, for those who are lucky to find love, their partners are mocked, disrespected and stigmatized.

10. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the data, the following conclusions are drawn. First, some Akan proverbs dehumanize PWD and therefore serve as the basis for marginalisation and exclusion of PWD. From this perspective, PWD are projected as people who are less of non-disabled people. This view as expressed in the various proverbs equally reinforces the disabling mindsets of individuals. This study confirms the findings by Moasun and Mfofo-M'Carthy (2020) that Akan proverbs has a negative effect on disabilities, thereby leading to their stigmatisation, marginalisation, and exclusion.

Second, PWDs are presented as weak and vulnerable. The proverbs connote PWD as second-class citizens with less qualities and abilities as non-disabled people. Such views provide the basis for the denial of opportunities to PWD since they are considered as weak and therefore incapable of being productive.

Third, the proverbs project PWD in demeaning manner and therefore legitimise the stereotyping and stigma against PWD. This has negative effect on their self-confidence, therefore, condemning them to lives of dejection. To prevent this, proverbs with negative connotations for people with disabilities should be avoided so as not to normalize the experiences of disability. In that, the language used to make reference to PWDs define the causes, treatment, and social standing of people with disabilities, Devlieger (1999). Thus, proverbs and insults with negative connotations can reinforce stigmatisation against persons with disability.

Fourth, some of the proverbs have the tendency to mock PWD. The proverbs are meant to tease the PWD for lacking certain body parts, that might come through no fault of theirs. The medical conception of disability characterizes PWD based on their lack of functioning body parts and makes that a legitimate concern and emphasis in disability discourse. By teasing the PWD for lacking certain body parts, the proverbs are simply reinforcing the medical conception of disability.

Fifth, the similes provide impetus for the insult of PWD. Here, the insults are structured in ways that suggest that PWD are second class citizens and can be disrespected without repercussions.

Thus, some Akan proverbs and insults institutionalize and normalize the disrespect of PWD, a situation that ultimately promotes their marginalisation and exclusion. By extension, the wellbeing of PWD is marked with negative representations and in most cases, PWD are left in deplorable and unfortunate social condition.

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List of Abbreviations

2	Second person
3	Third person
CONJ	Conjunction
FOC	Focus
FUT	Future
NEG	Negation
PERF	Perfect
POSS	Possessive
PST	Past
PROG	Progressive
PLU	Plural
REL	Relativizer
SG	Singular
SUB	Subordinate clause