

Indirectness in Contemporary Ghanaian Music: A Look at Avoidance Strategies from the Speaking Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Language is a prime vehicle for communication. As language is used for communication, there is the need to avoid certain linguistic items in order not to break communication. In daily communication, speakers use language that ensures good relationships with others to avoid embarrassment, misunderstanding and friction (Zhang & You, 2009). This helps save one's face in communication (Goffman, 1955). Many contemporary Ghanaian music feature subjects that demand the use of words that the Ghanaian culture disallows to be rendered in plain language. Many of these are words related to sexual relationship. To avoid face threatening, artists employ various avoidance strategies such as the use of homophones, metaphor, pronouns and ideophones. This paper takes a look at the works of two afro pop artists; Wendy Shay and Ebony Reigns to see how they employ indirectness to communicate explicit sexual content. In the analysis, the SPEAKING Theory by Hymes (1974) is applied. We show that, the artists are successful with the use of indirectness to conceal the unmentionables in Akan. However, the intent of the artists in communicating sexual content to the listener is clearly expressed through gestures. We conclude that, communicating sexual content through gestures is easier than to communicate same using words or language.

Keywords: avoidance, face threatening, Ghanaian music, indirectness, speaking theory

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of communication among humans and it forms an integral part of a culture. As a result, language is seen as culture. This is because, all the cultural norms of a given society are taught and handed down to generations through language. Every language has its own associated culture and that, one's culture determines how language should be used (Tannen, 1983). Certain cultures do not allow certain words to be spoken in plain language. As a result, these are expressed indirectly through the use of euphemism, metaphor, circumlocution and the likes (Niraula, Dulal & Koirala, 2022). Lempert (2012) opines that, "forms of (in)directness are exploited in some discursive practices more than others, cultivated by some social groups more than others, deployed in certain interactional environments more than others". As a result, in many African countries for instance, one dares not say that a chief or a traditional ruler is dead. It should be expressed indirectly like "The chief/king has joined his ancestors" or "He has kicked the bucket". Using language this way softens the intensity of pains the incident may cause. In Ghana, issues related to sickness and death are considered as taboo and as such are not expressed in plain language. For instance, instead of saying one is sick, it is better to say, *mframa abɔ no*, literally translated as "He has been blown by the wind". Again, instead of saying, "He is dead", it is better to say, "He has passed on". Likewise, issues relating to relationship and sex are considered to be sacred and should not be expressed in plain language. It is a shame to talk about relationship, menstruation and sex to the hearing of others. As such, it is better to say *oebu ne nsa* (literally translated as *she has broken her hands*) than to say she has menstruated. In like manner, one should not say *oedzi no*, literally translated as "he has eaten her" (he has had sex with her), instead, he should say *ɔafa no* (he has picked/taken her). Using *ɔafa* (he has taken) in place of *oedzi* (he has eaten) is lexical substitution (Ciubancan, 2015) and it functions as a downtoner. All these are done as a matter of politeness considerations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This study looks at indirectness strategies employed in Ghanaian music, with a prime focus on contemporary music. Studies in Ghanaian music have focused on themes, proverbs and literary devices. This research contributes to knowledge by looking at indirectness strategies in the context of music. This work will be of enormous benefits to language teachers and students, especially in the area of pragmatics and discourse analysis.

THE INTERFACE OF POLITENESS, INDIRECTNESS AND FACE

Politeness and indirectness are closely related concepts such that, in an attempt to achieve the former, one has to employ the later. Watts (2003:19) defines politeness as “Linguistic behavior which is perceived as appropriate to the social constraints of the ongoing interaction”. The major issue in the above definition is the appropriateness of the linguistic behavior, which is subject to the social constraint of the ongoing interaction. This, in turn, calls into question the acceptableness of such behavior to the speech community. Linguistic behaviors that may be deemed appropriate in one social context may not be appropriate in another social context, hence the need to pay attention to culture in conversational analysis. Kasper (1990:1) opines that one goal of socialization is to “learn how to behave politely”. Kasper continues that: “Less competent participants, notably nonnative speakers, are vulnerable to the risk of inadvertently violating politeness norms”. This shows that culture plays a pivotal role in an attempt to achieve politeness. The more knowledgeable you are in a particular culture, the greater the propensity of achieving politeness in such a speech community through indirectness. Many scholars agree that indirectness helps achieve politeness. Ciubancan (2015: 248) affirms this by saying, “The most common types of linguistic devices of showing politeness may include making one's statement indirect, often making use of circumlocution, lexical substitution, euphemisms, tags, or conventionalized formulae”. Similar position is held by Agyekum (2004:325) that with regards to revoking *ntam* (reminiscential oath) in Akan, we make frequent use of the euphemistic expression *meka ntam* ‘I swear by the *ntam*’ as “Aspect of politeness to avoid the use of the actual forbidden referent”. This is done because *ntam* (reminiscential oath) is a taboo in Akan. Agyekum further explains that:

Ntam can refer to any experience or event that has happened to an individual, a family, or a whole state in the past. It may have occurred during a war; it may be an epidemic, a plague, a famine, a tragic accident, or an unexpected death. In ancient times, the Akans avoided referring to such events lest the spirits of their dead ancestors should rise and take revenge, because their agonies and painful experiences had been recalled (Agyekum, 2004:324)

As a result, one has to use the expression “I swear by the *ntam*” in place of the actual event to avoid uttering the unmentionable. According to Agyekum (2004), such an expression is an apology for bringing such an unpleasant past event to memory. This is usually marked by the use of the verb *srɛ* (beg), as in “I beg leave of Otumfoo’s *ntankeseɛ* and swear by his *ntankeseɛ* that this stool is ours” (Agyekum, 2004:329). According to Obeng (1999), the use of apology is face threatening to the speaker as well as face saving to the hearer. This shows that politeness is not achieved in a vacuum, instead, indirectness is the vehicle through which politeness is achieved, and in the quest to achieve politeness through indirectness, face work is accomplished. As a result, discussion of politeness in a conversational setting demands making reference to indirectness and face.

Zhang and You (2009:99) define indirectness as “The means in which one meaning is conveyed indirectly through utterances or non-verbal behaviors in order to achieve certain goal, or the means in which one’s intent is revealed in a roundabout way”. Zhang and You make it

clear that indirectness can be both verbal and non-verbal. What the interlocutor wants to say comes to the fore, however, it is delivered cleverly (through verbal or non-verbal linguistic behaviors) so as not to offend in order to save one's face. It implies that indirectness has a direct relationship with face. Goffman (1955) defines face as "Positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". This contact gives the individual either a positive face or a negative face. Negative face is "The desire to be unimpeded in one's actions" and positive face is "the desire (in some respects) to be approved of" (Brown & Levinson, 1987:312). Sometimes, one's face can only be determined after the interaction is subjected to critical analysis and interpretation.

Where indirectness needs to be employed and it is not done, it affects one's face. Tsuda (1993:65) indicates that, "Politeness necessarily involves indirectness". From the foregoing, it is eminent that in order to save one's face, there is the need to find polite ways of expressing the utterances that are considered impolite and this calls for the use of indirectness. Hence face, politeness and indirectness are interwoven and intertwined.

In interpreting an encounter to know the face one has acquired for himself, all the communicative acts are examined. Hymes (1974) formulates a theory from the word SPEAKING which becomes a tool for studying communication. He argues that understanding communication starts with ethnographic analysis of the communication conduct of a community. Communication conduct here refers to what people do when communicating with one another, which is culture specific. Concerning culture and communication, Tannen (1983) divides cultural differences in communication into eight types: (1) when to talk; (2) what to say; (3) pacing and pausing; (4) the art of listening; (5) intonation; (6) what is conventional and what is not in a language; (7) degree of indirectness and (8) cohesion and coherence. Still on culture, Hymes (1974) also proposes six items to look out for when studying the communication of a particular culture, in line with the eight principles of Tannen. These are: (1) speech community; (2) speech situation; (3) speech event; (4) communicative acts; (5) communicative style and (6) ways of speaking. These are summed up in the acronym "SPEAKING".

Ahmed and Isma'eel (2011) add that, avoidance guides speakers to say what should be said and get rid of the unsaid. This avoidance takes the form of either verbal or nonverbal. They continue that, the verbal avoidance can be morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and semantico-pragmatic. Under the semantico-pragmatic avoidance, we have the social avoidance which talks about the unsaid in the society, and that will be the major focus of this paper in the context of contemporary Ghanaian music.

THE SPEAKING THEORY

The main theory underpinning this research is the speaking theory by Hymes (1974). The theory says that, understanding communication starts with ethnographic analysis of the communication conduct of a community. Communication conduct here refers to what people do when communicating with one another, which is culture specific. This is developed into an acronym 'SPEAKING'. This acronym helps in studying communication. Every letter in this acronym carries a meaning.

S refers to the situation or the setting and scenes of the communication. It talks about the place, time, event, weather condition and even the season the communication was carried out. Here, the meaning and the import of one's speech is dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the utterance. For instance, someone might make a comment that sounds offensive superficially, but a study of the setting might reveal that it is not as offensive as such. Someone may say, "I will kill you". This may sound serious on the surface, but the setting/situation might reveal that this is a harmless remark, possibly in a play situation which might even induce laughter. However, the same "I will kill you" may need to be taken serious depending on the setting.

P stands for the participants. It talks about the speaker and the listeners and the relationship that exists between them. Are the interlocutors age mates? Is the message coming from the superior to subordinates? All these questions are answered under the P. As mentioned earlier, if a speaker says, "I will kill you" to an acquaintance, it might be on a lighter note because it is coming from a friend. However, such a statement might not be taken lightly if it came from someone considered as an enemy. Again, a comment might be a threat or a mere joke depending on whom it comes from. For instance, if a subordinate should tell his superior, "You will be fired", onlookers might be wondering what that really means because the speaker does not have the capacity to execute what he said. However, that would not hbe the case if the superior said that because he being the superior has the capacity to execute his words. This means that participants of a conversation play a very important role in understanding the communication.

E stands for the ends or the goals of the communication. It tells what the speaker seeks to achieve. At this point we can ask ourselves what the purpose of the communication is. Is it to give an instruction, correct a wrong behavior or action, issue a threat or to create a mere hilarious scene? Knowledge of these background information will help decipher what is being communicated. If the goal is to create a comic relief and it is interpreted as a warning, it will distort the true intent of the communication. This can be likened to someone holding a knife. If you saw someone holding a knife, what would be your interpretation? Obviously, you cannot give any interpretation unless you knew what he intends to do. It could be that he wants to cut a piece of meat, slice some oranges, or he intends to stab someone. So, to help you make a true judgment, you may possibly look at the person's dressing (wearing an apron may signal that the individual is preparing a dish), his location (brandishing a knife in the street may signal the individual is lunatic) etc. Similarly, knowing the goal of a particular communication will help you give a proper interpretation of it.

A is the acts sequence. Here, any action can be considered a communicative action if it conveys meaning to the participants. This means that in studying communication, gestures are not taken for granted. Gestures that accompany speech have communicative function, as they shed light on the speakers' unspoken thoughts (Goldin-Meadow, 1999). These gestures are interpreted in the context of the speech community. Actions and gestures may convey different meanings in culture specific contexts. For instance, in the Akan speech community, when a youth is speaking to an elderly person or someone in authority, he should have his two hands behind his back. Similarly, a person wearing a hat should have it removed when greeting an elderly person. Complying with these simple etiquettes shows that one is cultured and well brought up. These are simple communicative actions but carry a lot of meaning.

K is the key. It deals with the tone with which the utterance was made. Here, the tone with which an utterance was made is as important as the message itself. The impact of a message is dependent on how it was delivered. If an advice is given in a tender and soft tone, it is easier for the listener to accept and comply than to give the same advice in a harsh tone, which may spark outrage and resistance. On the other hand, if a warning is given in a soft tone, it might not be taken seriously. In order to achieve the purpose of communication, the tone and the message must agree.

I represents the instrumentality of the communication. It talks about the means through which the message was communicated. It tells whether the communication is a spoken or a written one. Sometimes the instrumentality of communication determines its seriousness. In many instances, people attach much importance to written communication than they do for verbal communication. For instance, verbal agreements are not taken as serious as those that are backed by documents.

N is the norms. It talks about the rules that guide communication; the speech conventions of the interlocutors. Every culture has its own speech conventions and that, one cannot impose the speech conventions of one culture on another. Understanding the speech conventions of a speech community helps interpret communications accurately, especially those that involve signs and gestures. In that case, all the dos and don'ts of the speech community are taken into consideration. This will help decipher the true intent of the speaker and as well determine if a communicative norm has been violated, and the possible impact of such violation.

G is the Genre of the communication, whether it is a music, poem, talk, advice, prayer etc. The genre helps know which interpretation to give to the communication. For instance, if the genre of communication is music, then we expect to see something that will entertain. In that case, some words used in the music might sound strong and offensive superficially, but they might have metaphorical meaning for the purpose of entertainment. In that case, literal meaning of such words will have to be ignored.

This theory is a very useful tool that helps in understanding communication. It helps know the intent of speakers in communication without having to interview them. One can just decipher what is communicated by applying the various components of the theory to the utterance. Careful application of the components of the theory as discussed above brings out the meaning behind every communication.

One weakness of the theory is that, if not carefully applied, the theory may turn to misinform other than to inform. What may turn out to be the implied meaning of the communication may not be the true intent of the speaker. This may lead to over application of the theory. Again, if one is not well abreast of the culture of the interlocutors, it becomes very difficult to apply the theory in interpreting communication.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a qualitative ethnographic study which looks at the speech acts of the Akan speakers in Ghana. The study is done in the context of some contemporary Ghanaian music. Vocabulary related to sexual relationship are regarded as taboo and that, they are not rendered in

plain language. Instead, they are expressed indirectly through a combination of numerous avoidance strategies such as euphemism, circumlocution, metaphor, homophones etc (Hickman & Muehlenhard, 1999; Thomas, 1995; Karuri, Mbaka & Atieno, 2014). Purposive sampling technique was used to select songs of two artists; Ebony Reigns (late) and Wendy Shay. In many cases, qualitative research demands the use of a relatively smaller samples which are purposively selected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This is done with the aims and objectives of the research in mind in order to select respondents who are in the position to give the researcher the needed information. The type of purposive sampling used is quota sampling (Campbell et al., 2020). In quota sampling, the population is divided into various strata. Then, based on the relevancy to the aims and objectives of the research, a stratum is selected where interviewers are allowed to select from the population based on whether or not a person meets the requirements of the stratum (Yang & Banamah, 2014). Here, if someone is not willing to participate, he is replaced by someone who is willing to do so (Berinsky 2006). The same procedure was used in sampling the five songs used in this research. A population of Ghanaian music artist was used. These were divided into different strata as gospel music artists, hiplife music artists, highlife music artists and reggae music artists. It was realized that the hiplife music artists stratum was the most fitting for this research. This stratum is noted for featuring subject matter that boarder around love and sexual relationship and as such, being a suitable ground for the use of indirectness. In the hiplife stratum, ten songs were selected. The artists were then contacted for their readiness to participate this research, in line with Berinsky. Some of these artists were not accessible. In the end, five songs from two artists whose manager(s) was available and willing for their songs to be used were selected, two songs from Ebony Reigns (Sponsor and Date Your Father) and three songs from Wendy Shay (Masakra, Bedroom Commando and Astalavista). Four of these songs (two from each artist) were sung in code-mixing of Akan and English, but the target audience is Akan speakers. We then got one song from Wendy Shay which was sung in Akan from the beginning through to the end. This made her songs three instead of two. We could not get any song from Ebony Reigns which was sung wholly in Akan, since the artist prefers singing in code-mixing. This underscores the reason why the songs were selected in the ration of 2:3 for Ebony Reigns and Wendy Shay respectively. Secondary data was used for the study, which comprises video recordings and lyrics of the music downloaded from the internet. These are at the public space and are accessible to all. We then juxtaposed the lyrics with the videos. We analyzed the data thematically based on the kind of avoidance strategies used by the artists. We then went on to analyze the speech with the speaking theory to ascertain the true intent of the artists, with a major focus on the act sequence which shows the link between the lyrics and the visual accompaniment.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

At this point, we present some data from Ebony Reigns and Wendy Shay, which are the prime focus of this paper. The paper does not capture the full texts, instead, aspects of the texts that are of importance to the paper are featured and discussed. The full texts are captured in appendixes A – E. We present a thematic analysis of the avoidance strategies.

THE USE OF HOMOPHONES AS AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

“Homophones are units that are similar in sound, but differ in their spelling and meaning” (Mamedova, 2019: 3). Mamedova’s definition has been adopted for the purpose of this research. The definition spells out these three things: a) Similarity in sound (but not necessarily a repetition of the same sound), b) Differences in spelling and c) Differences in meaning.

Wendy Shay employs this strategy carefully in order to create ambiguity. She does this to make her music conform to the Ghanaian culture that disallows issues of sex to be spoken in plain language. Looking at the lyrics in appendix A, she uses “**Yɛkɔte**”(our penises) and “**Yɛɛkɔte**”(we are going to establish/tear/pluck). In the music, she asserts that she has been labelled as the cause of every immoral act in the society and she does not dispute that. She goes on to say that she has turned a new leaf and that, she is going to establish a church. The Akan expression she uses for “We are going to establish a church” (*yɛkɔte asɔre/yɛkɔte asɔre*) raises many questions in the minds of Akan speakers. The first expression “Yɛɛkɔte asɔre” is from the original expression, *yɛkɔte asɔre*. *Yɛkɔte* is made up of “yɛ” (we), “re” (PROG), “kɔ” (go) and “te” (tear/pluck/establish). Taking a cue from the origin of *yɛkɔte*, the writer’s claim of going to establish a church is undisputed. However, the long vowel quality “ɛɛ” that we see in *yɛkɔte* is derived from a first-person singular pronoun and a progressive marker in Akan. The long vowel quality reduces to a short vowel quality in *yɛkɔte asɔre* which is a repetition of the first expression *yɛkɔte asɔre*. *Yɛkɔte asɔre* in Akan means *our penises are erect*. This calls the intent of the artist into question. The big question here is, does the artist actually mean “I’m going to establish a church” or “Our penises are erect”? To resolve this ambiguity, we examine the music through the spectacles of the speaking theory, with a major focus on the “A” and “N” in the SPEAKING. In Hymes (1974), “A” is the acts sequence. Here, any action can be considered a communicative action if it conveys meaning to the participants. This means that in understanding this expression, we need not focus only on the lyrics, but also, the signs and gestures in the music. Many musicians resort to multimodal communicative strategy, and Wendy Shay is not an exception. This makes the sense in the music come out clear to the listeners. Again, a focus on the norm, “N” is equally important in understanding the lyrics in this music, bearing in mind the rules that guide communication in Akan.

In the video that accompanies the music, we see that a certain gesture stands out. The dancers put their left palm under the elbow of the right palm while holding the right hand in an upright position with the fingers folded into a fist. The fist of the right arm is then thrown back and forth, swinging the fist repeatedly. This is the action that accompanies the chorus “Yɛɛkɔte asɔre” and “Yɛkɔte asɔre”. The question is, when it comes to dancing, what is the norm in Akan? Akan is one ethnic group that uses gestures in dancing to tell a lot of stories. For instance, if a Chief or a King is dancing on Akan land and he throws his arms from the sideways to the front and puts the two arms on his chest, it means all the lands and the people belong to him. This dance can only be done by a paramount chief who owns the land. A sub-chief cannot use such gestures when dancing in the presence of the paramount chief. If he does that, he will be in trouble. Similarly, in Akan, when a woman is dancing in public and she puts her palm under the elbow of the other hand and stretches the fist up throwing it back and forth just as we see in the music video, it

means she is looking for a potent man with strong penis who can satisfy her sexually. This is exactly what we see in the music video, in conformity to the acts sequence in the SPEAKING theory. This helps us unravel the mystery behind the expression, “Yekote asore”. Making inference to the gestures, we conclude that the artist refers to an erected penis. She uses this word just to spark controversy among her listeners. This makes the music go viral and gain popularity.

Similar words are used by Ebony Reigns as avoidance strategy, however, instead of “Yekote versus Yekote”, she uses “Menkote” (if I may here) which is similar in sounds to “Mekote” (my penis). This creates a sort of lexical ambiguity. To know the exact word that the artist refers to, there is the need to examine the whole text to see how the words collocate. This calls for the application of the speaking theory to interpret the message contained in the music. The message in the music captured in Appendix D reveals that, a young lady has two boyfriends, one is a young guy and the other is an old man. The young guy is broke but the old man is wealthy. The wealthy old man is not able to satisfy the young lady sexually but the young guy who finds it difficult even to make ends meet is able to satisfy her well in bed. This has left the young lady in dilemma as to who to choose among the two.

She tells her story by referring to the old man as a “sponsor” because he buys her everything she needs. However, the old man leaves her very lonely in the night. Whenever he is around and she wants him to make love to her, he gives excuses. Because he cannot stand the strength of the young lady, when the sexual activity begins, he used to say, “Cool for me, slow down, ‘mesisi ye me ya’ (I have developed waist pains)”. She re-echoes the old man’s words in parallelism as a way of ridiculing him by saying “Cool for me, slow down, *menkote a eye me ya*” (if I may hear, I feel pains). To know what this word really means, two things are taken into consideration. (1) The “S” in the SPEAKING theory that looks at the situation as portrayed in the music and (2) The “A” that looks at the actions in the music that are considered as communicative actions.

The “S” talks about the setting or the situation of the communication. Considering the lyrics in the music, we see that the prevailing situation in the music is that of an intimate relationship between lovers. The artist talks about the financial status of her two partners as well as their sexual abilities. As a result, since sex involves swinging of the waist, one of her sexual partners who happens to be an old man complains of waist pains. When it comes to sex, the waist, the penis, the vagina and the breast are some of the active organs. As a matter of collocation, waist collocates with “mekote” (my penis) than “menkote” (if I may hear) when it comes to sexual exploits. It is therefore sound to argue that, after mentioning “mesisi” (my waist), the artist intends to mention “mekote” (my penis), but she uses “menkote” to conceal mentioning “mekote” which is considered sacred among Ghanaians as a matter of politeness considerations (Wiafe-Akenten, 2017).

Another argument that supports our claim that the artist’s intention of using “menkote” (if I may hear) is to find a polite way of saying “mekote” (my penis) is through the application of “A”, the acts or actions, as the speaking theory proposes. Here, any action is considered as a communicative action if it conveys meaning to the participants. Juxtaposing the lyrics of the music with the video that accompanies the music, we see something interesting. We see that, as the artist sings the part, “Menkote a eye me ya”, all the six female dancers in the music video throw their fists back and forth repeatedly, demonstrating how the penis goes back and forth during sexual intercourse. This affirms the fact that the intention of the artist is to find a more

polite way of expressing “mekote” (my penis), which is considered as sacred in the Ghanaian culture and as such, it is not mentioned in plain language. The artist makes things clearer getting to the end of the music when she uses a rhetorical question to inquire from her audience if she should stop all that “Gucci prada”. The term “Gucci prada” refers to a situation where a lady engages in a sexual relationship with two men, one is broke and the other is wealthy. In examining the full text, the artist does not deny the fact that she is sleeping with two men. All the message in the music is about relationship and sex.

THE USE OF METAPHOR AS AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

The Appendix B features a music titled “Bedroom Commando”. In the music, the artist makes a request to her lover to satisfy her sexually. Here, she refers to her lover as Commando. A commando is a soldier specially trained to carry out raids. Such a character normally features as a protagonist in action movies. He is noted for his heroic deeds, strength and vigor. He is very strong and able to subdue opponents. The artist therefore praises her lover by alluding to this protagonist, “Commando”. She also refers to the act of lovemaking as “fire”. This is a modern vocabulary that many Ghanaians use, especially the youth and the media. For instance, it is common to hear in the media such expressions as, “Wɔafire no” (He has fired her), which means “He has had sex with her”. “Anadwe yi ɔbefire no”, (tonight he will fire her), meaning “Tonight he will have sex with her”. The use of “fire” to signify sex in the music is *metaphorical*.

Wendy Shay uses another metaphor, “Squeeze my tomato”. Tomato here refers to the breasts. How do we know that? Our argument is based on two principles. (1) Cohesion and coherence by Tannen (1983) and (2) The acts sequence in the SPEAKING theory by Hymes (1974). In studying and understanding cultural differences in communication, Tannen says that one should look at cohesion and coherence in the message. Applying this principle to “Bedroom Commando” and “Squeeze my tomato”, we see that there is lack of cohesion between bedroom and tomato. Bedroom does not collocate with tomato, hence, the word tomato here is metaphorical. Again, applying the acts sequence in the speaking theory to the lyrics of the music and the video that accompanies the music, the intent of the artist becomes clearer. Whilst singing the part, “Squeeze my tomato”, the artist who also happens to be the dancer in the music puts her hands around her breasts, affirming our claim that tomato as used in the music is metaphorical, referring to the breasts.

Another use of metaphor as avoidance strategy is seen in Appendix C which contains a music titled “Astalavista”. This is captured in the lines below.

Aduane no aben besen kodi	The food is cooked go and eat
ɔse onndi oo!	He says he will not eat oo!
Aduaba no abere besen kodi	The fruit is ripe go and eat
ɔse ɔmmpe oo!	He says he doesn't like it oo!
Let's take a ride on my sofa	Let's take a ride on my sofa.....

Here, the use of “Aduane”, “Aduaba” and “Ride” are metaphorical. “Aduane” and “Aduaba” are used to represent the vagina. In Akan, the verb “di” (eat) that shows consumption of food is also used to show consummation in marriage or relationship so it is not a surprise that in this setting, there is an invitation to the man to eat “Aduane/Aduaba” (vagina) in a metaphoric sense. Here, there is a use of parallelism featuring “Aduane” and “Aduaba” to convey the same sense. Again, coming back to the visuals, when singing this part, a lady dancer lies down on her back and raises the right leg upward. This also creates an imagery of a sexual encounter. “Ride” also signifies sex, just as sex involves an activity that could be likened to riding a bicycle or a motorbike.

The Appendix E also gives some other instances of metaphor as avoidance strategies. Two aspects of the speaking theory were employed to decipher the message contained in the music, thereby concluding that there was a use of metaphor as avoidance strategy. These are the “E” which talks about the goals of the communication and the “K” which also stands for the key or the tone of the communication. We will first talk about the key or the tone of the music. We see that the tone with which the music is sung is that of a harsh one. The message is from a woman to her lover, and for her to say that, “If you break my heart, I go date your father”, it is very harsh. The end or goal of the music is to sound a strong warning to her partner. This gives a glimpse of the kind of words we are likely to encounter in the music.

In the music, the artist starts by saying that her partner is a player. The word “player” is used to describe a man who is a Casanova; a man who gives amorous attention to women. Since such a man is referred to as a player (ordinarily, players play football), the artist goes further to talk about her lover’s sexual exploit with different women by alluding to some famous footballers like Messi, Kaka and Wakaso. These footballers are very skillful. Comparing her lover to these players shows how her lover is prone to having sex with different women. She shows that her lover loves changing women. She does this by using different teams like Barcelona, Real Madrid, Arsenal, Manchester United and Chelsea to represent the women. In elaboration, we assume that the fact that these teams are not located in one country and that, the teams are of different strength and glory shows how diverse the women are. Some of them may be fat while others may be slim. Some may have big buttocks and big breasts while others may have flat chest.

She then draws attention to herself, describing her body parts that should be attractive to her partner. She says, “I go give you my heart, give you body, do anything for you”. She gives him reasons why he should stick to her alone. She does this through the use of *metaphor*. She starts by saying, “ Bakasi you know sey I get am oo. Bibbie stand you know say I own am oo. And no style dey wey I no go fit do am oo”. *Bakasi* and *bobbie stand* are used in metaphoric sense. In Ghana, *bobbie stand* is sometimes used to represent the breast (an example is seen in a song by A. B. Crentsil entitled “Moses”). The artist is therefore telling her lover that if it is big breasts that make women attractive to him, she has them. She also mentions that she has “Bakasi”. Bakasi is a peninsula on the Gulf of Guinea. It lies between the Cross River estuary and the Rio del Ray estuary between Nigeria and Cameroon. Peninsula is a piece of land projecting out into a body of water. In the music, it is used to describe the part of the body that is projecting or protruding out of the body, and that is the buttocks. The artist is telling her partner that, she has big buttocks as well so he should find comfort in enjoying them than to be running after other

women. All these are body parts that have to do with sexuality and the Ghanaian culture disallows these being spoken of in plain language, so the best way to talk about them is through metaphor, as we see in the music. This provides an avenue for expressing the unmentionables in public speech.

THE USE OF PRONOUN AS AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

Listening to the lyrics in the music in Appendix C, the artist uses the song to mock her lover who performed poorly in bed that night. She thought her lover could perform well in bed but after the encounter that night, she saw that she even performed better than he did. It was the first time they had sex and due to the poor performance of the man, she says good bye to him, hence the use of the term “Astalavista”. The etymology of the term “Astalavista” is traced to Spanish expression “Hasta la vista”. It is a farewell expression that is literary translated “until the next sighting”. It means “See you later” and “Goodbye”. Concerning this music, the aspect of the SPEAKING theory that was used is the “S” which represents the setting or situation. Looking at the lyrics, many of the events in the music happen in the night. We see this from the artist’s choice of words. She starts the music by saying.

“You say you are a gangster
Tonight you meet your meter
I have really shocked you”.

In the music video, the artist is first seen in a casino where she encounters a man who takes her home in his car, after which they come back to the casino that night. All these visuals appear before the song starts. The inference we can make here is that, the music gives an account of what transpired between the man and the artist when they drove home. The artist praises herself in her sexual exploit by saying that the lover thought he was good but she has shocked him. She continues to mock her newly found sexual partner by saying “So Astalavista, Boy I’ll see you later. I hope you go do am better”. She accuses the partner of not lasting longer in bed. She does this by saying, “One minute bang and it’s over, tweaa”. It is common in Ghana to call a man with sexual weakness as “One minute man”, and that is what the artist does. The use of “tweaa” at the end of the expression also shows that the woman does not value her partner’s sexual performance. In Akan, *tweaa* is an interjection. One uses it to show that he does not value what someone is doing. It is an idiophone derived from how we chuckle to show disapproval. She then makes it emphatic that it is her partner’s duty to satisfy her sexually whenever she needs it; in the morning, afternoon and evening. As a result, she advises her partner to find a cure for his sexual weakness by drinking a locally manufacture drink called “Alomo”. It is believed in Ghana that Alomo boosts men’s sexuality.

The artist uses an avoidance strategy that is totally different from the usual use of metaphor, euphemism, circumlocution and the like. Here, the artist resort to the use of *Pronouns* as avoidance strategy. Instead of mentioning the word sex, the artist uses pronouns like “it” and the broken English form of the pronoun “it” (*am*). We see these in expressions like “If I need *it* in the morning give it to me”, “I hope you go do *am* better”. The Acts sequence in the speaking theory by Hymes (1974) helps us unravel the meaning of these expressions by examining the gestures that accompany the lyrics. As she sings “I hope you go do am better”, the artist throws

her right fist back and forth repeatedly, creating an imagery of a sexual encounter as has already been explained.

THE USE OF IDEOPHONE AS AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

In the Appendix B, the artist uses the *idiophones*, “kpu” and “kpa” to convey a message of lovemaking to the listeners. Here, she alludes to the noise that the bed makes when people are making love on a wooden bed. The message is made clearer when the singer *personifies* the bed by saying, “Enne yɛbɛma mpa akasa”, (today we will make the bed talk). How does the bed talk? The bed talks by making the sounds “kpu” and “kpa”, especially when the bed is weak. All these are used by the artist to hide behind talking about sex in plain language. It is worth mentioning that even though the music is sung in English language, it is fully imbued in the Ghanaian culture and that, issues of sex in this music are not communicated in plain language.

DISCUSSION

After applying the SPEAKING theory to five contemporary Ghanaian music, we found out that even though people differ in terms of whether to express meanings directly or indirectly (Holtgraves, 1997), most music from Wendy Shay and Ebony Reigns tow the same line. In most cases, they feature subjects related to sex. However, in conformity to the Ghanaian culture, they find polite ways of talking about these issues. To achieve this, they resort to a number of verbal avoidance strategies such as the use of homophones, metaphor, idiophone, and pronouns.

Again, the songs of these artists are attuned to the Ghanaian culture. The use of indirectness by these artists show that they are well accustomed to norms of communication in the Ghanaian culture which disallows public expression of explicit content. However, indirectness used in contemporary Ghanaian music are for the purpose of mere verbal avoidance. The artists end up communicating the sexual contents hidden in words explicitly through non-verbal communication such as signs and gestures. This shows clearly that communicating sexual contents through visuals is easier achieved in the Ghanaian context than to do same using words.

CONCLUSION

This paper has looked at indirectness in five contemporary Ghanaian music selected from two artist. We saw that all the five music communicate explicit sexual content and rendering them in plain language is not in congruence with the Ghanaian culture and Akan for that matter. As a result, the artists employed various avoidance strategies to hide the sexual contents verbally. This was achieved through the use of various avoidance strategies such as the use of homophone, metaphor, ideophone and pronouns. Ironically, the sexual contents that were hidden verbally in the music were communicated explicitly through gestures. This shows that the meaning of the message contained in such music can be drawn by making inferences to the gestures and other visual accompaniments. To achieve this, the SPEAKING theory was applied and is proved to be a very vital tool in unearthing the hidden meanings in music. When carefully applied, the theory helps to unearth messages that are not overtly expressed in words.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Masakra (TED, 2018)

Twɪ

Bɔne biaa a ebɛsi biaa yɛsɛ ɛyɛ mɛ a,

Yɛsɛ ɛyɛ mɛ a, mɛ a nso na ɛsɛ mɛ

Akɔdaa biaa a ɛbɛsɛɛ biaa yɛsɛ ɛyɛ mɛ a
cause

Yɛsɛ ɛyɛ mɛ a, mɛ a nso na ɛsɛ mɛ

Afei deɛ masakra, oo masakra

Wendy masakra,

Meekɔyɛ Onyame edwuma

Mɛpɛ bɛɛma a ne gyɛdie so paa

Ne gyɛdie mu yɛ duru paa

Na mɛne no abɔmu na yaakɔtɛ asɔrɛ

Enti yeekɔtɛ asɔrɛ o

Yɛkɔtɛ asɔrɛ o

Yɛkɔtɛ asɔrɛ

Afei deɛ masakra

English gloss

Any bad thing that happens, they say I am the cause

They say I am the cause, and I deserve it

Any child that goes wayward, they say I am the

They say I am the cause, and I deserve it

Now I have changed, oh I have changed

Wendy I have changed

I am going to do God's work

I need a man of great faith

One whose faith is very heavy

And join hands with him to establish a church

So we are going to establish a church o

We are going to establish a church o

We are going to establish a church

Now I have changed

Appendix B

Bedroom Commando (TED, 2018)

Bedroom Commando

Fire baby fire

Squeeze my tomato

Fire baby fire

Call you my hero

Fire baby fire

My tank hit zero

Fire baby fire

Anadwe yi wobete kpa (Tonight you will hear kpa)

Wobete kpu na wobete kpa (You will hear kpu and hear kpa)

Mene wo mienu yebebu mpa (You and I will break the bed)

Enne yebema mpa akasa (Today we will make the bed talk)

Appendix C

Astalavista (TED, 2018)

Twi

You say you are a gangster

Tonight you meet your meter

Make you call me your master

Mashocke woo o papa bi

Enti Astalavista ei

Boy I'll see you later

I hope you go do am better

Mehia no anopa a fame me

Mehia no ewia a fama me

Mehia no anadwo a fama me

Mefeeli oo papa bi

Aduane no aben besen kodi

ose onndi oo

Aduaba no abere besen kodi

ose ommpɛ oo

Wose wope oo

Day nothing happen

English Gloss

You say you are a gangster

Tonight you meet your meter

Make you call me your master

I have really shocked you

So Astalavista ei

Boy I'll see you later

I hope you go do am better.....

If I need it in the morning give it to me

If I need it in the afternoon give it to me

If I need it in the night give it to me

I really feel it.....

The food is cooked go and eat

He says he will not eat oo

The fruit is ripe go and eat

He says he doesn't like it oo

You say you like it oo

Day nothing happen

Tonight nothing happen	Tonight nothing happen
Tomorrow nothing happen	Tomorrow nothing happen
Everyday nothing happen	Everyday nothing happen
Come over	Come over
Let's take a ride on my sofa	Let's take a ride on my sofa
Afeyi na yahye aseε	This is just the beginning
One minute bang and it's over, tweaa	One minute bang and it's over, tweaa
Sε woyare a pε aduro	If you are sick go and get a medicine
Wo sisi ye wo ya a nom alomo	If you have waist pain take in alomo

Appendix D

Sponsor (TED, 2017)

See I've got myself a sponsor
Anything me I dey ask he dey buy buy
Even though he is older
But I got to survive in this life
Another one who is younger
When I ask for something he dey cry cry
Mese papa yi a menya no yi deε oma me biibiaa (I say, this man I've got give me everything)
Nanso edu anadwo a wobehwe na aka me nkoaa (But in the night I am left alone)
Eda a obεba me nkyεn (Whenever he is around)
Miso ne mu a asεm a oka ne sε (And I grab him he used to say)
Cool it for me, slow down
Me sisi ye me ya (I have waist pains)
Cool it for me, slow down
Menkote a eye me ya (If I may hear it pains me)
Cool it for me, slow down

Me sisi yε me ya (I have waist pains)

Cool it for me, slow down

Mekote a eye me ya (I have pains in my penis)

O Lord have mercy mercy mercy

These broke guys have lot of energy.....

Should I leave all these gucci prada?

Appendix E

Date Your Father (TED, 2017)

See I heard them say, herd them say boy you are a player

You they score like Messi, play like Kaka, dribble like Wakaso

You they like Barcelona, Real Madrid, Arsenal, Man U, Chelsea

I go give you my heart, give you body, do anything for you

Sacrifice my life to be your wife, I'm gonna be there for you

But if you break my heart I go date your father

You gonna be my son you go call me your mother.....

See the love I have for you, it's for nobody but you

Bakasi you know say I get am oo

Bobbie stand you know say I own am oo

And no style dey wey I no sabi do am oo

Me I no like Versace and I no like designer

Me I no like Ferrari

And I no like Bugatti