

Chapter 19

Indigenous Communication: A Narrative of Selected Indigenous Practices of the Akan Group of Ghana

Adelaide Owusu Agyepong
University of South Africa, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Communication can be defined as a way of sharing ideas, information, opinions and feelings. This can also be described as a process through which information could be transferred from one entity to the other either verbally through speech or non-verbally through writing or signs. Indigenous communication can therefore be defined as the informal way of transmitting indigenous practices, entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements, and social exchanges of every type. The aim of this chapter is to document selected indigenous practices of the Akan tribe of Ghana. Narratives of the selected indigenous practices were obtained through interviews and participant observation. This study found out that indigenous practices of the Akan tribe of Ghana is gradually being lost through oral transmission of cultural practices between generations. The study therefore recommends the documentation of these indigenous practices to promote access, preservation and dissemination of valuable indigenous information for both present generation and generations to come.

INTRODUCTION

Communication can be defined as a way of transferring information, sharing ideas, opinions and feelings through speech, writing or signs. Indigenous communication can therefore be defined as the informal way of transmitting entertainment, news, persuasion, announcements, and social exchanges of every type (Mundy & Llyod-Laney, 1992). This type of communication is either expressed in verbal or non-verbal mode. Verbal mode of indigenous communication includes oral storytelling and narrations at various community gatherings including gathering around fires for story telling in the evenings, durbars and festivals during the year. Non-verbal mode of indigenous communication is a process of sending and receiving wordless messages such as gestures, postures, body language and facial expression. Object such as clothing, hairstyles or symbols can also be used as a non-verbal form of indigenous communication.

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The Akan ethnic group uses both verbal and non-verbal modes of indigenous communication to portray their rich culture which is inclusive of the selected practices documented in this chapter.

The aim of the study is to document the selected practices of the Akans which are gradually being lost through:

1. Being handed down from generation to generation orally, and
2. The adoption of Christian principles which has replaced some of the indigenous practices.

Documenting the selected practices will promote access, preservation and dissemination of valuable indigenous information for both present and future generations.

BACKGROUND

Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. The Akans occupy five of the ten Regions in Ghana. These are: Ashanti Region, Brong Ahafo Region, Central Region, Eastern Region and Western Region (Agyekum, 2006). This constitutes the total population of Akans in Ghana to be about 57.9% according to the population census of 2010 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The Akan language comprises of a group of dialects which when grouped together forms Twi (Asante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Kwahu, Brong and Akyem) and Fanti (Agona, Wassa, Anomabo, Abura, Gomua and Fante) (Robert, 1973; Agyekum, 2006). Subgroups of the Akan ethnic group are Sehwi, Nzema and Ahanta. The groups and subgroups of the Akan dialects are also known as ethnic tribes. The Akan ethnic groups have similar cultural attributes. Of notable recognition are the tracing of descent, inheritance of property, and succession to royalty which will be highlighted in the next sections.

Tracing of Descent

The Akan tribes trace their descent through traditional matrilineal lineage. Matrilineal lineage is tracing one's descent from the female line in the family. In view of this, both economic and political statuses are based on matrilineal lineage. Being involved in matrilineal lineage means the relation between one's mother's brother (*wɔfa*) takes a dominant position than that of 'father – child' relationship.

Inheritance of Property

The basis of inheritance is also an important attribute to the matrilineal lineage. Matrilineal inheritance sees to it that land and other lineage properties are controlled and inherited only by matrilineal kinfolds (De Witte, 2001). As a result, a man's brother and/or nephew (*wɔfase*) is likely to inherit lands and properties of his uncle instead of the man's own child.

Succession to High Political Office

Just as inheritance of property is strictly matrilineal, so is succession to high political office such as chieftaincy. In a community, several of these matrilineal lineages are grouped together to form a political unit (*abusua*) which is headed by a council of elders. The political units are then grouped together

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