Dominant Voices and Sounds of Akan Proverbs and Riddles

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ABSTRACT

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This paper studies the literary and linguistic features of some proverbs and riddles in Akan. We assembled data from oral and documented sources, with which we attempt to identify various categories of sounds through linguistic and literary means. Furthermore, we distinguish the intrinsic qualities of sounds in Akan proverbs and riddles. We also identify intrinsic structures that enrich the proverbs and give them a semblance of musicality. We contend that the sounds of various kinds of man-made musical instruments can be heard in many Akan proverbs and riddles, including sounds produced through the human organs of speech. All of these combine to give Akan proverbs and riddles a distinctive character in its oral state, which written literature can at best approximate. We conclude therefore that, in Akan proverbs and riddles, we deal with a 'symphony orchestra' made up of an array of man-made instruments, accompanied by human vocal techniques of various types.

1. Introduction

Drums are believed to talk among the Akan people of Ghana, particularly the Asantes. A particular one known as 'àtùm̀páń' (see Appendix 1), which is made up of two drums of male-female twin each of which produce a distinctive sound, is described as the 'Talking Drums'. But do 'Talking Drums' really talk? In an era of incredible and sophisticated technological advancement, it may sound strange to attempt to answer this question in the affirmative. To be able to 'talk', one obviously needs natural organs of speech; e.g. the teeth, the tongue and the lips. Being an artificial instrument, the 'Talking Drums' or any other drums do not have any natural organ of speech to enable the act of talking. However, there is no doubt about the drummer's ability to send coded messages to his immediate and neighboring communities. In the olden days, in the event of fire, attacks by wild animals, invasion by enemies etc., a state of emergency was announced by the drummer (i.e. 'ɔkyèrɛ̀má') through coded drum message, which was understood by his target. This practice continues in a few traditional Akan communities and contexts in present times. That is to say, with the emergence of modernity, drums in general seem to be losing their importance as a medium of communication. However, the drummer's ability to communicate messages, especially through proverbs, cannot be doubted. As Nkansah-Kyeremateng (2003: 62) explains, 'drummers are supposed to be able to communicate with ancestral spirits in drum language. Also through drum language they call the people to functions, or give them information'.

The term Akan refers an ethnic group (consisting of several sub-groups, with the major one being Asante, Fante and Akuapem) of Ghana. The term also refers to the language they speak, belongs to the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Some forms of Akan are also spoken in some parts of the neighbouring countries of Cote D'Ivoire and Togo. In Akan societies, the greatest exponents of proverbs are the drummer

and the linguist ('ɔkyèámé'). Both of them are also experts in the use of tone and they perform almost the same function to the people. Furthermore, although they use different mediums (i.e. drums and natural voice for the drummer and the linguist respectively), their techniques are virtually the same. Both of them use of soothing variations in tone to communicate. Here, tone captures language since, as Nkansah-Kyeremateng (2003: 62) observes, 'drumming [by the 'ɔkyerɛma'] is the art of imitating language which is tonal'. With the use of language itself, both have similar habits and tastes; they prefer obscure language to simple and easily accessible ones, hence the reasons why they are both fond of proverb use.

Instruments (or add-ons) and voices are normally associated with music; as has been noted earlier, instruments are man-made as against voices which are produced by human organs of speech. They are, however, equally associated with communicating messages as in the respective cases of the drummer and the linguist. This paper is interested in both agents only as transmitters of messages and not particularly in their musical capacity or other functions. Thus, our aim is to classify instrumental sounds and voices. As will become evident in the following sections, instrumental sounds are classified by their frequency and function. On the other hand, voices are classified according to their intrinsic qualities. In this regard, we distinguish between literary features, like onomatopoeia and ideophone on one hand and alliteration and assonance on the other. Finally we attempt to analyze the messages transmitted through both sounds and voices.

2. Methodology

The corpus of this study is primarily derived from documented sources. To these are added proverbs obtained from interviews with renowned traditionalists like Osei Kwadwo (curator of Manhyia Museum, which is at Manhyia, Kumasi) and Agya Koo Nimo (a renowned traditional musician at Centre for Cultural Studies, KNUST). These proverbs are classified according to types of sounds that characterized them and each category is subjected to some critical analysis.

Our approach of looking into data, and for that matter analysis, is partly linguistic and partly literary. Accordingly, selected proverbs are subjected to analysis with a view to identifying the linguistic or literary qualities that make it possible to capture them on drums and on the basis of which drum language evolves. In other words, we are particularly interested in the sound dynamics that add some spice to the proverbs. Texts from which these proverbs are gleaned include riddles, praise poems and panegyric. Particularly, our investigation or analysis is guided by the following questions:

- What are the salient features of these texts?
- What messages do they transmit?
- How do these instruments manage to talk?

Beyond the focus of observing the nature and qualities of these proverbs, we intermittently and consciously digress into looking at some cultural aspects for the benefit of a holistic approach to discussions.

3. Some insights on proverbs

Various definitions of the proverbs have been observed in the literature and, as Russo (1983) observes, the variety explains the difficulty in holistically defining the term. Freyha (1974), for instance, defines the proverbs and underscores the difficulty in capturing every aspect of it as follows:

> "*Mathal* (Proverb) … [signifies] simile or comparison. Many definitions of a proverb have been given, none of which holds true of every proverb. The difficulty lies in the nature of proverbs, which contain all manner of ideas that touch upon the whole round of human experience."

<div align="right">Freyha (1974: 13)</div>

Okpewho (1992: 236) concurs by his observation that proverbs represent a philosophical view of human existence (or the world) by means of an intimate observation of human experience and of the surrounding nature. On his part, Meider (1985: 119) defines the proverb as "a short, generally known sentence of the folk

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which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation". Situating the proverb within the context of the Akan people, Appiah *et al*. (2007) also notes the term as follows:

> "No one can appreciate the philosophy and beliefs of the Akan without studying their proverbs. Even today the use of an appropriate proverb in public oratory is deeply appreciated and is often the final word in argument. One short proverb can provide the equivalent of pages of philosophical discussion".

<div align="right">Appiah et al. (2007: xii)</div>

Nketia (1958) particularly dissect the proverb in connection with the user of the proverb in the following:

> "The value of the proverb, to us in modern Ghana does not lie only in what it reveals of thoughts of the past. For the poet today and indeed for the speaker who is some sort of artist in the use of words, the proverb is a form of complex or forceful language."

<div align="right">Nketia (1958: 21)</div>

Obiechina (1967: 144) observes that speeches of the elderly in Africa are usually spiced with proverbs and it is certainly an index of traditional wisdom to apply them appropriately in one's speech. In what seems to be an agreement with Obiechina, Asante (2002), quoting an authority in Asante-Twi, one of the languages that constitute Akan, writes "Abebuo yɛ Twi kasa mu nkyene to" (i.e., Proverbs serve as salt that spices the Twi language). On his part, Nkansah-Kyeremateng (2003) suggests that the aesthetics of the proverb cannot be overemphasized.

4. Language, Sounds and Voices

Some literary devices are employed in looking into the drum language of Akan. Also, linguistically, we discuss drum language within tonology from the suggestion that it is possible to speak of drum language only in connection with tone, which is generally believed to be (semi-) autonomous from its bearing unit. This follows from the fact that, in tone languages, each syllable (or bearing unit) in a word has a high or low tone. This makes it easy to imitate tones with drums. Dolphyne (1988: 22) defines a tone language as one in which the meaning of a word depends not only on the vowels and consonants of which a word is spoken but also on the relative pitch on which each syllable of the word is pronounced. Thus, tone is the relative pitch with which syllables are articulated. Adu-Manyah (2010: 5) for instance observes that Asante-Twi (and Akan in general) is a two-tone language (i.e., high and low) and that tone has lexical and grammatical functions. Following a generally held view that the syllable is the tone bearing unit (TBU) in Akan and that tone is phonemic, Dolphyne (1988) illustrates the two-tone order as follows with each tone melody issuing a particular meaning.

1	a.	pápá	'good'	~	pàpá	'father'	~	pàpà	'fan'
	b.	da≅	'day'	~	da∃	'never'			
	c.	ɔ̀bɔ̀fóɔ́	'hunter'	~	ɔ̀bɔ́fóɔ́	'creator'			

Although tone is phonemic in Akan, it is important to note that it is not marked in the orthography of the language. It is assumed that correct pronunciation of different words of same form is facilitated in discourse. In this paper, however, we have taken the liberty to mark tone to assist the non-native reader in rendering proper forms, particularly in connection with the drum language.

Sounds and voices are two sides of the same coin; after all man-made instruments do no more than imitate natural human voices as closely as possible. With examples from Akan proverbs and riddles, we identify four literary device-based types of human voices. We note these literary devices as onomatopoeia, ideophone, alliteration and assonance. We would then proceed in 4.2 to explore types of instrumental sounds and further attempt to observe the extent to which the two – i.e. human voices and instrumental sounds – resemble each other or differ from the other.

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4.1 Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is a word that imitates or suggests the source of the sound that it describes. As Rungrojsuwan (2007) notes, this means that the meaning or referent of an onomatopoeic word is usually the sound of that referent or the sound of action of a particular thing in reality. Common occurrences of onomatopoeia include animal noises such as "meow" and "moo". These words may be described as sounds that imitate other sounds. We observe that onomatopoeia is a very frequent occurrence in African oral literature in general and in Akan oral literature in particular. In the following proverbs from Akan are some examples.

2   a.   *Káákùm̀* yɛ∃te∃ no∃ kwa∃ku≅o≅ a≅no≅m̀.   'The cry 'kaakom' is only heard from the mouth of the monkey.'

    b.   Wo≅te∃ *pu≅u≅pu≅u≅* a≅, wɔ̶∃ bí dí, e∃firi∃ sɛ́ ebi≅a≅ na≅ E∃yE∃ m∃ma∃ne≅ ti≅re≅.   'If you hear the sound 'puupuu' do not imagine your neighbour's soup is richer than yours.'

    c.   *Tɔ̀ńt̶∃ǹte≅ t̶∃ǹte≅*, yɛ́re≅no≅m̀ n∃sa≅ na≅ yE∃re∃fa∃ a∃dwe≅n.   'The sound 'tɔntɔnte tɔnte' is an indication that good thoughts/ideas emanates from drinking; i.e. we think better while we drink.'

The English saying "(the truth) from the horse's own mouth" is an equivalent of (2a). In spite of the fact that horses do not talk and therefore could share no truth, that possibility is only assumed. The saying also explains the rarity of the truth. In the Akan case, the sound 'kaakum', a replica of the rare cry of the monkey and therefore onomatopoeia, reflects this rarity; i.e. the sound is only produced by the monkey and it is also hardly made. In (2b), the sound 'puupuu' is an imitation of the sound that emanates from the pounding of fufu or grains. Fufu is typical Akan food and, in its original form, it is made by pounding boiled cassava and boiled plantain or cocoyam together. The proverb advises us not to envy our neighbours who may be worse off than we are in reality. Concerning 'tɔntɔnte tɔnte' in (2c), it is a close imitation of the sound from the pouring of traditional alcoholic beverage, particularly 'nsafufuo' (palm wine), which is supposed to capture the acts of drinking (i.e. 'tɔntɔnte') and thinking (i.e. 'tɔnte').

In our attempt to observe other data besides proverbs, we found the most interesting example of onomatopoeia in E.O. Aryeh's *Mmerehua.* In a singing competition between '̶pɛ́tɛ́' (the vulture) and 'kwààkwàádèbí' (the crow), the two competitors sing as follows.

3.   **ɔpEtE:**   *Fu∃tu∃ru∃ fu∃tu∃ru≅* ma≅nya≅ n∃tE≅m, pE≅tE∃ kwa∃kye≅ ma≅nya≅ n∃tE≅m; *fu∃tu∃ru∃ fu∃tu∃ru∃* ma≅nya∃ n∃tE≅m.   "'Futuru futuru' I have arrived early, Kwakye the vulture I have arrived early; 'futuru futuru' I have arrived early".

    K'debi: *Kya≅n kya≅n* si∃ka≅ n≅su≅o≅, kwa≅a≅kye∃rE≅ si∃ka≅ n≅su≅o≅; *kya≅n kya≅n* s∃ika≅ n≅su≅o≅.   "'Kyan kyan' is golden, golden crow; 'kyan kyan' is golden"

'Futuru futuru' is assumed to be the ugly sound produced by some crude unrefined instruments. On the other hand, "kyan kyan" evidently captures the sound of some polished metallic musical instrument like cymbals, hence its association with gold, a precious mineral. Ugliness in sound is also captured in S.K. Ampadu's folksong about two mischievous animals fighting over a buried corpse. This song contains onomatopoeic-inclusive proverbs 'SE∃ ku∃ku≅ru≅ku∃ku≅ru≅ no≅ gya≅e≅ a≅, ke∃kE≅ke∃kE≅ nó n≅so≅ be≅gya≅é' (If

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the noise 'kukurukukuru' ceases, that of 'kekEkekE' will subsequently stop), which happens to be the title of the song. Here, we observe that the 'ugliness' results from the abusive use of the sound /k/, specifically eight (8) times, which ends up symbolizing the foul deed the two villains are engaged in and showed against each other.

4.2 Ideophone

Dingemanse (2012: 655) defines ideophones as marked words that depict sensory imagery. Thus, unlike onomatopoeia, ideophones do not imitate any other sound and they are more common in oral literature than in written literature. Our first example given in (4) below is one of the commonest proverbial 'àdìǹkrá' symbols.

4.

Fùǹtùm̀ fu≅na∃fu≅
dE∃nkyE∃m *fu∃na≅fu≊,*
w□∃ǹ *a∃fu≅ru≊* yE∃
ba∃a∃ko≅ na∃ńso≅
w□∃pe≅rè a∃du∃a∃ne≅.

"The Siamese crocodiles have a common belly, yet they struggle over food".

This symbol is popularly appreciated for its rich imagery and meaning. It preaches that it is futile and indeed suicidal to engage in internecine wars. The curator of the Manhyia Palace Museum, Nana Osei Kwadwo however adds another dimension to this interpretation, which is endorsed by Kyeremateng (1965). He notes that before food enters the common belly, the tongue must first taste to enjoy it. It is, therefore, not stupid to fight over food despite the common belly. In connection to the visible relationship between these ideas and the sound 'funtum funafu', we contend that this long, heavy and clumsy word only corresponds to an ugly abstract notion. This correspondence can be appreciated only through imagination; i.e. as a play on sounds and, for that matter, a depiction of sensory imagery. In (5) below are some more examples in proverbs.

5 a. SE∃ *k□∃t□≅kɔ* k□≅ *k□∃t□∃k□∃*
    a≅ □∃mmfa≅ a∃de≅di≅e≅.

'When the porcupine visits an Asante, it does not need to carry food along'.

  b. Òbi≅ n∃ki≅ta≅ *na∃nkæ≅,*
    n∃gya∃e≅ <u>na∃nka≅</u>, n∃k□∃<u>ka≅</u>
    sE≅ me∃hu∃i∃ a≅ <u>na∃nka∃</u>.

'Had I known is always at last'.

In (5a), the first 'k□t□k□' refers to the porcupine, which is the emblem of the Asante people, and it is evidently distinguishable from the second in terms of tone structure; i.e. 'low-high-low' is different from 'low-low-low'. Thus, as noted earlier, tone enables the utterance of drum language. What is more important to observe here, however, is that neither the first nor the second 'k□t□k□' sounds like any noise ever produced either by the animal or the people who use it as a symbol. Their use is motivated by only play on sounds. Likewise, (5b) also comes with an interesting play on sounds that do not seek to imitate any other sound. That is, the often repeated nasal 'nanka' and 'ka' do not seek to imitate any other sound. For us, it is only a rhythm of emphasis; it emphasizes the painful consequences of a bad and an unreasonable action for which we have to pay dearly for. Indeed, the triple structural arrangement of the poem, which cannot fail to attract our attention, seems to drum this message home.

It is interesting to note that, the examples we elicited in this section are ugly or refined. They also seem to give the impression of a mere play on sounds. Whatever the case maybe, we have to admit that these 'technical device-based' realizations could not have been per chance. They must have evolved over the years.

4.3 Alliteration and Assonance

In the area of sounds, other technical devices that are very common are alliteration and assonance. In alliteration, we observe the frequent occurrence of a selected consonant sound(s) within a verse or a text. On

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the other hand, assonance is the repetition of a vowel within a verse. As could be observed in an earlier given proverb, i.e. 'SE∃ *ku∃ku≅ru≅ku∃ku≅ru* no≅ gya≅e≅ a≅, *ke∃kE≅ke∃kE≅* nó n≅so≅ be≅gya≅é' (If the noise 'kukurukukuru' ceases, that of 'kekEkekE' will subsequently stop), we contend that in oral or in written literature these techniques cannot come to anybody by chance. With the frequency of the consonants /k, r/ and the systematic repetition of the vowels /u, e, ɛ/ in the uttering and/or drumming of these proverbs, it is evident that painstaking planning is required in construction. The evidence also manifests in the following proverbs in (6).

6 *Ka≅ka≅* ne≅ *ka≅* ne≅ ya∃fu∃nu∃ ke≅ka≅ de∃E∃ fa∃nyi∃na∃m o∃wu≅o≅.	'It is better to die than to be faced with tooth ache, debts and stomach ache'.
FE≅fE≅ na∃ E≅yE≅ fE≅ (na∃ □∃da∃a∃ma∃ni≅ tu≅ mmi∃ri∃ka≅ a≅ □∃s□≅ ne∃ nu≅fo∃; E∃nyE≅ sE≅ E∃bE≅te≅ a≅t□∃ ńtírá).	'It is in the name of decorum (that a lady holds her breasts as she runs; it is not because they might drop)'.

In practice, alliteration and assonance cannot be treated separately because, as the examples in (6) indicate, the two intermarry harmoniously. In (6a), the consonant /k/ and the vowel /a (e)/ recur five times each (i.e. 5:5 ratio) in the underlined and, in (6b), the marriage is between the consonant /f/ and the vowel /ɛ/ in a 'three-is-to-three' (3:3) ratio. It could be suggested that these technical devices are more natural to the oral practitioner than the writer who only records on paper what achieves maximum effect when spoken aloud. One cannot help admiring the intricate and original manner in which vowels and consonants are interlaced in such a way as to remind us of the design of Kente (of the Akan people), a hand woven cloth, or the spider's web.

Alliteration and assonance occur in many of the proverbs already quoted in connection with onomatopoeia and ideophone. That is to say, in many of them, consonants and vowels are repeated to produce internal rime; see (2c), (3), (4) and (5a). From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that proverbs do not drop like manna from heaven. They are the fruits of careful and painstaking planning and design by custodians of the language. The foregoing discussion has also sought to demonstrate that the sonorous nature of Akan proverbs makes it possible for us to compare the genre to a symphony orchestra featuring both instrumental and voiced sounds in harmonious combination.

5. Atumpam and other instruments

Having observed what the proverb is and its importance to language use (among the Akan people), in this section, in connection with its drumming, we look at the 'àtùm̀pám̀' through which drum language evolves and some accompanying instruments of the it; i.e. 'fɔ̀ǹtɔ̀m̀frɔ̀m̀' (see Appendix 2) and 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń' (see Appendix 3).

5.1 Atumpam, the talking drum
As noted earlier, 'atumpan' is male-female twin drum, which produces two distinct sounds (see Fig. 1 in the appendix). Taken from Nketia's (1976) 'Ayan', the following riddles in (7) feature the 'atumpan' in its characteristic two-tone delivery.

7	a. Ko∃r□∃ a∃kyi≅ri≅kyi≅ri≅kyi≅ri≅	He who travelled far-far away
	Ko∃r□∃ da∃da∃a∃da∃	He who left long-long ago
	Ko∃r□∃ a∃nsa≅ na∃ o∃bi≅ re≅ba∃	He who left before another departed
	Ɔ̀pa∃ni≅ń ne≅ hwa≅ń?	Who is most senior?

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b.	Ɔkwa∃n a≅twa∃re∃	The path has crossed the river
	a∃su≅o≅	
	Àsu≅o≅ a≅twa∃re∃	The river has crossed the path
	□∃kwáń	
	Ɔ̀pa∃ni≅ń ne≅ hwa≅ń?	Which of them is older?

It is interesting to note that language repetition serves to emphasize and exaggerate in drum. This is intended to make the message memorable. Of particular interest in (7) is the repetition of 'Kor□' at the beginning of the first three lines in (7a); saturated with sounds echoing endlessly, the audience cannot afford to miss, ignore or forget the message being transmitted. The repetition also occurs both vertically and horizontally like in the design of '*Kente*', as could be observed (7b) in particular.

The meaning that is captured by these patterns is equally interesting. In (7a), the first verse, an unlimited geographical distance is pictured to us in the first line. The second also talks of unlimited time frame, and so does the third line. The question then is who is the oldest of them. Is it the path (ɔkwan) or the river (asuo)? The puzzle is resolved philosophically; the river is the work of nature, whereas the path is man-made and therefore younger. This is emphasized by the ending words *'tete'* and '□*domankoma*'; words whose echo travels far and wide. Let us discuss another drum language captured by Adu Gyamfi (2000) and Asante (2002) as follows.

8	a.	Tra∃da∃ tra∃da∃ a∃nyE≅ ma∃, ko≅ko≅ ko≅ko≅ na∃ E∃bE≅yE≅ dE≅n?	'If the heavy down pour was not enough, what would tiny droplets do?'
	b.	SE∃ wo≅b□≅ Ɔ̀ku∃tu∃ Kwa∃ku≅ mmra≅n na≅ wo≅de∃ twe∃ne≅ a≅ E∃mu≅ yE≅ du≅ru≅ so∃a≅ no≅ a≅ □∃tu≅mi≅.	'If you shower praises on the gorilla, he would readily carry a heavy drum.'

The first proverb, (8a), fits into what Cauvin (1981) describes as 'binary structure'; here, two opposing sounds capturing two contents. (8b), which illustrates the sounds of 'kete', a kind of traditional music genre and dancing style of the Akan people of Ghana, is also remarkable for imagery; i.e. the face of the gorilla sweating under the weight of a heavy drum may evoke either laughter or sympathy or both. Allegedly born on Wednesday (according to Akan people), the gorilla is given an Akan name 'Okutu Kwaku', which is a faithful echo of the sound of the 'kete' drum he is carrying. (8a) is characterized by onomatopoeic sounds. (8a) is characterised by onomatopoeic sounds. As discussed in detail in section 4, this means it catches attention because of 'trada, trada' and 'koko, koko', which are both followed by expressions which reinforce their individual meaning. (8b) has a complex structure. It has three segments and the alliteration and the assonance of the first are meant to fascinate us. Within the second and third segments are specified the task that the gorilla undertakes when it is fired up in praises. At this juncture, we are in a position to determine if the talking drums really talk.

It has earlier been noted that, linguistically, it is important to observe that it is possible to talk of talking drums and drum language only in connection with tone languages; e.g. Akan and Igbo. Accordingly, in English and French, for example, talking drums would not make much sense. By itself, the talking drums cannot talk and has no initiative. However, they may be described as a medium through which the drummer (ɔ̀kyèrɛ̀má) and his counterparts talk. In principle the drummer himself, like the linguist (ɔ̀kyèámé) or spokesman, has little or no initiative of his own. He tells the people what the chief wants him to say and he

has no right to modify text, which has been generally accepted by the chief or king and the notables (Niangoran-Bouah 1987). Thus, the drummer's claim to being omniscient and the creator's own spokesman (i.e. Ɔdomankoma KyerEma) becomes questionable to some extent. However, the fact is that, despite his loyalty to the king, he sometimes hides behind his expertise to camouflage scathing criticisms of his master who in all probabilities might not detect the attack on him. By virtue of his margin of independence and freedom, therefore, the drummer can be said to be superior to all mortals. The drummer is often arrogant. He arrogates to himself the power to interpret the language of God and the lesser gods. But before these superior powers, the divine drummer never forgets to pray for permission and to plead for knowledge; hence, the line 'Mèrèsùá, mómmá ménhú' meaning "I am learning, help/permit me to know". Anyidoho (1987: xx) endorses this role of the drummer as follows.

> "The Ɔdomankoma KyerEma is a highly accomplished poet-musician with heavy social burdens. He is historian and custodian of sacred truths of life and death; he is myth maker and translator of the will of the gods, he is ritual and prayer specialist through whose performances society's fears and prayers arrive at the doorstep of the gods."

Another reason why the drummer may be said to be arrogant is that he frowns upon any request to translate his message for the benefit of lesser mortals. He does not play to the gallery. His esoteric language is elitist; not for the ordinary people or anybody at all.

5.2 The Wailing Fɔntɔmfrɔm

The 'fɔnt□mfr□m', which is bigger than the 'atumpan', is also eloquent (see Fig. 2 in appendix) The difference between it and the 'atumpan' lies essentially in the voluminous sound of it as captured in the following examples.

9	a.	FE∃ǹtE∃m̀frE∃m̀ □∃me≅ne∃ so≅no≅.	'The quagmire that swallows the elephant'.
	b.	Pr□∃m̀pr□∃m̀ n∃te≅ h□≅ da≅a≅.	'No condition is permanent.'

On the drum, 'fEntEmfrEm' and 'fɔnt□mfr□m', which are good example of alliteration and assonance, are identical words or could be described as one word since the instrument cannot distinguish between the speech sounds that set the two apart; /E/ and /□/. However, 'fEntEmfrEm' – an onomatopoeic appellation often given to a chief – is an attempt to imitate the noise made when a person unsuspectingly plunges into a marshy area. It explains that, if the apparently harmless marsh can swallow an elephant, then one must beware of the chief who goes by that appellation. The onomatopoeia in the proverb in (b), 'prɔmprɔm', is equally remarkable in connection with the 'fɔnt□mfr□m' drum; specifically, the repetition of sounds, the voiceless nature of the initial consonants and the use of /ɔ/. The meaning of the proverb is admirably philosophical; that the luxurious life-style one enjoys today may not last forever.

It could be observed that, as a general order, the drummer communicates effectively through repetition (of sounds and syllables), hence the use of alliteration and assonance. Structurally, we also observe sonorously onomatopoeic prelude to the proverb; i.e. each proverb starts with the bellowing sounds of the huge tall 'fɔnt□mfr□m' drums. This is then followed by the 'atumpan' which recites the rest of the proverb, thus producing a symphony of disparate and unequal sounds. Okai (1971: 53) attempts to capture in English, not only the sounds of the 'fɔnt□mfr□m' drums, but also the diverse functions of it as in (10).

10.   "The vigilant fɔnt□mfr□m peals forth ...
        And the living are awakened...
        The fɔnt□mfr□m keeps on pealing and weeping and wailing!
        The fɔnt□mfr□m keeps on booming!
                And moaning!

And booming!"

We observe that the sounds of pealing, wailing, weeping, moaning and booming share certain common properties; they rhyme (in the last syllable), they are all very loud, and they disturb the peace. There is a little shade of difference between 'wailing' and 'weeping' and between 'booming' and 'moaning' which should not escape our attention. Significantly, however, the pealing awakens those who are metaphorically dead; the wailing is for the dead or living dead; and the booming announces imminent danger for those who cannot see beyond their nose. All three sounds therefore announce doom and disaster, which the 'fɔ̀ntɔ̀m̀frɔ̀m̀' is often associated with. Also, very conspicuous is the unusual irregular arrangement of the verses; i.e. the sentences seem incomplete and meaningless until we read on to the third and/or fourth verse. This is an attempt to imitate the rhythm of 'fɔ̀ntɔ̀m̀frɔ̀m̀'.

5.3 Metals as heralds

Hard metals give distinctively strident 'voices' as compared to those of membraphones. This category is best represented by the twin gong called by its onomatopoeic name 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń' (see Fig. 3 in appendix). Tonally, the name itself has little difficulty in "talking"; it is loud and clear. In collaboration with the gong-gong beater, we observe the loudness and clarity of 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń' as in (11).

11. Ti∃n ko≅n ko≅n ko≅n!
    Ti∃n ti∃n ko≅n!
    Ti∃n ko≅n!'
    "Listen all citizens of Asunafo!
    Nana sends his greetings.
    He says all the men in this village should assemble in front of his palace this evening.
    Anyone who fails to attend this all-important meeting will be severely punished according to customary law."

The gong (i.e. 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń') plays its characteristic role of herald, while the human voice (i.e. the gong-gong beater) makes the all-important announcement from the chief. This kind of collaboration could also be obtained between the 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń' and the 'àtùm̀páń'. In all the examined cases, the most important discovery is that the 'fɔ̀ntɔ̀m̀frɔ̀m̀' and the 'to∃ǹto∃ǹ-sa≅ńsa≅ń' are like fore-runners who prepare the way for the main message to be delivered by the omnipresent 'àtùm̀páń' or the gong-gong beater. That is to say, they do not stand alone; they are accompaniments to the 'àtùm̀páń'.

6. Conclusion

Our classification and discussions of the sounds and riddles of Akan proverbs has been based on the type of instruments used to produce the sounds and also the nature of the sounds produced. Through technical devices that go a long way to enrich proverbs and riddles, some classification and analysis of the 'voices' of Akan proverbs have been done. Through categorization, a distinction has been made between onomatopoeia and ideophone. Furthermore, we have set apart alliteration and assonance. With proverbs, in particular, it has been evident that they do not drop like manna from heaven. Rather, they are the fruits of careful and painstaking planning and design by custodians of the language. The sonorous nature of Akan proverbs has been demonstrated and has been as an 'entity' that makes it possible for us to compare the genre to a symphony orchestra featuring both instrumental and voiced sounds in harmonious combination.

The sounds of membraphones, specifically 'atumpan' (talking drums) and fↄntↄmfrↄm, and the metallic 'tontonsansan' have been identified. These are, undoubtedly, the instruments that feature prominently in communication within Akan proverbs. We have observed that, per their intrinsic qualities, they make sounds sweet and soothing or crude and ugly. With drums – i.e. 'atumpan' and 'fↄntↄmfrↄm' – in particular, it has been observed that they do not talk by themselves and that they are only a medium through which the drummer communicates messages within the context of tone languages.

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The dominance of (some) consonants and vowels have also been identified as having some inherent qualities, which are very important in Akan oral literature. In context, they explain sounds as sweet and soothing or crude and ugly. Because of these inherent qualities, oral literature as a whole is difficult, if not impossible, to translate into another language except through transliteration.

Appendix

1. Atumpam   2. Fɔntɔmfrɔm   3. Tontonsansan

Credit: http://www.bristoldrumming.com (retrived on Nov. 25, 2015)

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