

The Press and Political Participation: Newspapers and the Politics of  
Linguistic Exclusion and Inclusion in Ghana

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

Institute of Communications Studies

June 2014

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## **Acknowledgements**

I owe this work to the grace of God, who protected and guided me throughout the difficult journey towards this achievement.

My deep gratitude goes to the Rector, Vice Rector and staff members of the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) for granting me the scholarship and supporting my study in the UK. I am particularly indebted to the Vice Rector, Dr W. Dzisah, for his efforts toward my welfare while on this course.

I especially thank my supervisors, Dr Chris Paterson and Dr Fiona Douglas, for guiding this research to a successful end. I am particularly grateful to them for their understanding and resourceful assistance. I also extend great gratitude to Dr Katrin Voltmer for her time and the important insights she provided me in the many discussions I had with her on this project. Additionally, I thank Dr J. B. Andor and Mr Prosper Agordjor for their advice regarding the construction and validation of the survey instrument of the study.

The sacrifices of my family, both immediate and extended, cannot go without mention, particularly my mother, Caroline. They endured my absence, prayed for my success and kept the family together during those difficult times that I was away.

I am equally grateful to great friends and colleagues who in various ways inspired me toward the success of this project. I particularly mention soon-to-be Dr Rose Wangui, whom I will never forget since she has been a pillar of support. I also acknowledge David Wright of the School of English, University of Leeds, Joseph Frempong Manso and many others, all of whom I cannot mention here. My colleagues at SMC – Toussaint, Christiaan, Mandy, Yi, Ella and all ICS staff – in diverse ways contributed to the success of the study and I say a big thank you.

This research could not have succeeded without the help of ten research assistants who devoted their time and energy to help collect primary data. To Innocent Azornu, Mawuli Kporha, Humphrey Hammond, Zadok Gyesei, Isaac Batini, Enock Gyan, Senyo Gladstone, Abass Sakinatu, Ralph Dinko, and Michael Aboagye, not forgetting Mr Stanley Semarco, who trained the research assistants, I say thank you very much. Thanks to you all and others not mentioned here for your encouragement.

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the readability and comprehensibility of English language newspapers in Ghana as a developing country. It also attempts to discover the extent to which Ghanaian readers find the language of the newspapers easy or difficult to comprehend. The findings are meant to provide insights into the effectiveness of the newspaper press in providing news information to a broad readership to enhance political participation and democracy in the country.

The study employed a research design that triangulated approaches in corpus linguistics, readability and survey studies. A computer-aided Linguistic analysis was carried out on the front-page stories of four influential national newspapers of the country to assess the extent to which the language is complex. A questionnaire survey of readers was also conducted in Accra to discover readers' opinions and aptitude about how easy or difficult it was for them to comprehend the newspapers' message. In addition, views from newspaper editors and news writers were also sampled in interviews to support the discussion.

The research established that the language used to communicate socio-political news to readers is complex and difficult for a significant proportion of readers across the educational categories of the country. The significant implication is that the newspapers may be largely ineffective in transmitting information to a wide spectrum of citizens to enhance political participation and democracy. Thus, the study suggests that newspapers in Ghana largely alienate many readers from participating directly in the discourse of the press. While this may reflect the notion that political information from newspapers is generally and ideologically suited for the political elites who then monopolise political knowledge to control their societies, it means importantly that the press may not be enabling democracy in Ghana. Consequently, I argue for the press to use simple and plain language (as proposed by plain language movements in the West) to broaden access to newspaper messages in order to include the many potential readers who may hitherto be excluded from the discourse of the press because the challenging language impedes their comprehension.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

This study investigates language use in Ghanaian journalism. It interrogates an important but largely under-researched issue involving the ability of the press to communicate its message to its audience. Research in newspaper readability flourished in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century but began declining by the 1980s (see Porter and Stephens, 1989). Since then, few studies have researched newspaper-reading difficulty (see section 1.4 for a detailed review). Instead, researchers have focused largely on the social implications of the language of newspapers as it relates to power, ideology, identity, among others (see section 1.4). In the context of Ghana, not just as a developing country but also as an emerging democracy, there are vitally important issues relating to the ability of the press to communicate with its audience. The critical issue is that limitations on citizens' comprehension of news information are likely to reduce the extent of informed political participation and thereby obstruct genuine democratic function in the country.

This investigation into the readability and comprehension of Ghanaian newspapers focuses on the extent to which newspapers are understood by Ghanaian readers (comprehension), and the possible influence of newspapers on political participation in Ghana's democracy. Readability refers to the ease of comprehending a text due to the style of writing (Klare, 1963, cited in DuBay, 2004, p.3), and comprehensibility means the "potential for a text to be understood" (Rock, 2007, p.14). In this thesis, I argue that a reader who finds newspaper stories comprehensible is included directly in the discourse of the press, while such a person is excluded if he or she finds the language difficult to understand.

The fundamental hypothesis underpinning this research is that the language of most Ghanaian newspapers is complex lexically and syntactically, which could hinder the readability and comprehensibility of the newspapers. *Complexity* in this study refers to the occurrence of vocabulary and sentence-structure elements in a

text<sup>1</sup> in a manner that could undermine information transmission and thereby cause comprehension difficulties for some readers (Just and Carpenter, 1992; Hess and Biggam, 2004; McNamara *et al.*, 2010). A confirmation of the hypothesis will imply that the press could be alienating or excluding many readers from the social and political issues that are raised in news reports. Consequently, I explore the thesis that, because of the *complex* language of newspapers, there is a communication gap between Ghanaian newspapers and many of their readers, thereby narrowing direct access to newspaper messages in the country. The study therefore proposes that the Ghanaian press modify its language style, in order to reach broader audiences.

The specific objectives of this study include the following: to attempt a description of the language style of Ghanaian newspapers; to discover the extent to which the language of the newspapers is readable and comprehensible to the newspapers' readers; and to explore implications related to these objectives. To address the problem raised in these objectives, the study combines approaches and research tools from two fields: linguistics and journalism studies. This is a rare approach in communication studies since most studies on the language of news have adopted approaches in (critical) discourse analysis. The linguistic aspect of this study involves approaches in applied and corpus linguistics and readability studies. The theories behind these approaches are presented in Chapter 5, while the specific methods are explained in detail in Chapter 6. As a corpus-based study, I used computer-aided linguistic analyses of front-page newspaper stories to obtain evidence supporting or refuting the hypothesis that Ghanaian newspapers employ complex language in constructing their message. The newspapers used were *The Chronicle* (*Chronicle*), *Daily Graphic* (*Graphic*), *Daily Guide* (*Guide*), and *Ghanaian Times* (*Times*). The stories were drawn from the August to November 2008 editions. Details of these newspapers and the rationale for their selection are presented in section 1.6. I also undertook a cross-sectional survey of readers in Accra, Ghana, to discover the opinions of readers about the language of the newspapers, and the ability of the readers to comprehend news stories. Details of the procedures involving the survey are also presented in Chapter 6.

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<sup>1</sup> See section 5.3 for a detailed discussion on text complexity.

The discussion focuses on the information function of the Ghanaian press from both normative and pragmatic perspectives.<sup>2</sup> These issues are framed within arguments from global and African perspectives about the place of the press in society (in Chapter 2). Specifically, the discussion focuses on the role of the press in a democratic society and how this relates to the Ghanaian situation. Arguments on the information function of the press have proceeded mainly from Western perspectives. Thus, the normative theories that underlie them often derive their theoretical grounding from Western liberal perspectives, which may differ from existing liberal views and conditions of Ghana and other parts of Africa.<sup>3</sup> I, therefore, adopt a blend of Western-based theories with other models that reflect the peculiarities of emerging democracies. Specifically, I apply Paulo Freire's (1993) empowerment philosophy (see section 2.6.6) and development journalism (see section 2.7.6) as non-Western oriented theories. While the Western-oriented theories deal with the press as a democratic institution, Freire's ideas and development journalism respond directly to the socio-political and cultural conditions of Ghana and other similar societies by emphasising the role of the press in (socio-political) awareness creation, empowerment and socio-political participation. This blend of theories reflect the hybridised nature of democratic practice in Africa (Vltmer, 2013), and its consequent influence on press practices.

Importantly, the study also concerns the informative role of newspapers in political participation and democracy, which is discussed in Chapter 3. In this thesis, 'political participation' is understood as "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or

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<sup>2</sup> Normative roles of the press may imply the purposes or services that the press provides or is expected to provide to society. Christians *et al.* (2009) have explained that public debates about the functions of the press in any society occur along prescriptive expectations about what the press ought to do. Hence, the occurrence of this concept in this study is defined in these roles as performed by professional journalists. The pragmatic perspective is both descriptive and critical, focusing on what the press actually does or has the potential of doing.

<sup>3</sup> This study acknowledges the diversity of Africa in terms of the specific historical, cultural and political characteristics of the various countries. However, in this study, *Africa* refers generally to Anglophone countries in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly countries in West and East Africa, which share near homogeneity in broad historical, cultural, and political experiences.

implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies" (Verba *et al.*, 1995 p.38; Teorell *et al.*, 2007). It refers to processes in which citizens, as individuals and groups, get involved in voluntary and legal activities in the public domain to influence the social and political circumstances around them (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). For people to effectively participate in public debates, they require 'relevant' information on the issues being discussed in the public domain. Access to this information or lack of it, I argue, may include or exclude a person, respectively, from the socio-political processes.

### **1.1.1 The press and its informative role in Ghana**

The epistemological underpinnings of the study are located within a normative perspective of the responsibility of the press (real or imagined) in a democratic society. I applied the normative expectations while also conscious of their implied one-dimensional view that the press exists to work in the interest of democracy and society. This study acknowledges the political, cultural and capital-market environments in which the press operates and which predispose it to various interests and practices, some of which could harm democracy and/or society.

However, this study has adopted an optimistic view regarding the role of the press in the development of the Ghanaian society.<sup>4</sup> Writing on the British press, Martin Conboy, an expert in journalism studies and language of news, observes that:

More than any other media form, the newspaper has an explicitly normative role in how we see the world. Our news is our world to the extent that it contributes enormously to our understanding of what happens beyond our everyday experiences (2007, p.12).

News from newspapers in Ghana may not be as pervasive as it is in UK, but the normative picture portrayed above has relevance for the Ghanaian situation. This optimistic view is based on an understanding of the history and role of the Ghanaian press and the various changes that have occurred in the Ghanaian society and (media) economy, as discussed in Chapter 4.

This study draws on normative ideals that are used to assess the press based on functions that society expects it to serve. The expectation highlighted in this

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<sup>4</sup> *Development* is understood in this thesis, in line with Okigbo (2004, p.39), as the economic, social, political and institutional conditions that provide for the general state of well-being and an acceptable standard of living of the people.



research is that the press should reach a broad section of the Ghanaian population with social and political information. Specifically, the study interrogates the extent to which the press is effective in reaching and possibly influencing the public. The argument is that the effectiveness of the press goes beyond merely providing ‘relevant’ news information. One way in which the effectiveness of the press may be meaningfully assessed is to discover the extent to which the newspapers’ message is readable and understandable to consumers.

From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, media and democracy theories have focused on the need for the press to play roles that advance and sustain ‘democracy’. The idea was that the press could facilitate and hasten socio-economic development, especially in underdeveloped and developing democracies (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1976; Nyamnjoh, 2005; White, 2008). This need arises because of the challenging socio-economic situation in developing societies, particularly in Africa. Indeed, mass media ideologies and democracy theories on Africa have viewed the press as an important institution in the democratisation<sup>5</sup> process on the continent (Karikari, 1993, 1998, 2009; Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; Belsey, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2005). There has been general optimism that despite the weaknesses of the press, it can play a key role in the success of the continent’s democratisation experience (Karikari, 1998, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Tettey, 2006; Voltmer, 2006; White, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Researchers such as Bratton *et al.* (2005) and Teorell *et al.* (2007), agree that the press serves the interests of various sections of society by producing and disseminating relevant information and knowledge for informed debate and decisions. Through that, the press is believed to enhance political participation and good governance. Arguing from an ethical perspective on the need for free flow of “news, opinion, debate and discussion” in a democracy, Belsey (1998, p.10) notes that:

... if a government is to be accountable to the people it must know what is going on; if the people are to cast their votes wisely and rationally they too must know what is going on. Information is necessary ... for a successful democracy...

Nyamnjoh (2005, p.2), discussing the media in Africa, also shares a similar view:

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<sup>5</sup> According to Gyima-Boadi (ed) (2004, p.14), ‘democratisation’ refers to governance practices meant to reform the abuses, and make “political office a responsible, accountable and professional service to the electorate.” This is the sense in which the term occurs throughout this study.

... in order to participate meaningfully in discussions of public issues, people need both knowledge and education on how to use the information at their disposal. The media have an enormous potential to provide such knowledge and education.

In this way, the press is believed to mediate between rulers and citizens by providing information and knowledge for discursive interactions that could promote democracy (Voltmer, 2006).

The international community and international bodies such as the UN and its agencies have acknowledged the important role of the press in democratisation and development. It is common knowledge that the support for the democratisation of Africa stems from the anticipation that democracy would provide an enabling environment to empower inhabitants and democratic institutions, including the press, for development. This expectation has not materialised as expected since most African countries remain economically poor and continue to engage in governance practices that are detrimental to the welfare of their people (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; White, 2008). The press has received part of the blame for not doing enough in the face of Africa's socio-economic woes. Scholars, like Mukhongo (2010) and Opuamie-Ngoa (2010), express disappointment that the African press has contributed to the continuous illiteracy, poverty, unproductive divisions, and ethnic conflicts in the continent. The writers are optimistic, though, that the press is capable of helping to ameliorate these conditions and enhance development. Thus, much democratic and media research on the continent and in Ghana for nearly the past two decades has continued to emphasise different themes and theories about the media's responsibility (as expressed above) toward multi-party democracy (Nyamnjoh, 2005; White, 2008; Mukhongo, 2010). Assessing the extent to which the press has been effective in performing this duty forms part of this thesis.

Historically and socio-politically, the Ghanaian press is believed to be an important source of information and/or persuasion to mobilise people toward popular political actions (Gasu, 2009). The press has been celebrated not only for rallying indigenous people for the independence struggles during colonialism, but also for leading the fight for freedom of expression and democracy during the dark days of dictatorship in Ghana (Karikari, 1998, 2007; Bourgault, 1995; Asante, 1996; Anokwa, 1997; Dzisah, 2008; Akpojivi, 2012). The tendency to applaud the press in such circumstances has not been limited to such occurrences. In recent years, the

press has been seen as publicising the different contending interests, ideas, parties, social groups, and persons involved in the country's periodic general multi-party elections (Dzisah, 2008). The belief then is that the press considerably influences people's actions and behaviours.

However, this idea about the press's influence appears to come largely from a simplistic view of the relationship between the press and audiences. Most researchers and media watchers seem to share the belief that the press effectively transmits information to the people once issues are raised in publications and people are seen reading newspapers. Such a conclusion fails to consider the possible struggles, tensions and negotiations that underpin the newspaper consumption process. To appreciate these possible challenges, one needs to understand the country-specific issues concerning education and language, which are discussed from section 1.2.

### **1.1.2 Contextualising linguistic exclusion and inclusion**

*Exclusion* and *inclusion* have been used and understood in different domains and perspectives. In this study, I explore the use of the terms in social, linguistic and mass communication contexts to contextualise them in language use in the Ghanaian press. From the social perspective, inclusion and exclusion are used to describe the extent to which individuals and groups in societies have access to, and engage in, all aspects of life of their society. The terms commonly occur in the discourses of bodies, such as the UN and its affiliate agencies that are concerned about issues involving social stratification and deprivation. The issue of social exclusion is especially emphasised in such discussions, perhaps because of its perceived negative impact on individuals and society. Most definitions of social exclusion are derived from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) (2009), where it is defined as:

A process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from fully participating in all aspects of life of the society, in which they live, on the grounds of their social identities, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture or language, and/or physical, economic, social disadvantages (p.3).

In this sense, social exclusion results from a process involving circumstances such as poverty, lack of amenities (like education and electricity), human rights, and so on. People who are socially excluded may be the deprived segments of society who lack voice, recognition or the capacity for active political representation and

participation in their society. In the UN literature, people who are often identified as being excluded from political participation include women, ethnic and religious minorities, or migrants who are described as being deprived of part or all of their political and human rights (DESA, 2009, 2010). The notion of social inclusion, therefore, may be understood as a reverse of exclusion, which, arguably, should lead to social integration (DESA, 2009; UNDP, 2003, 2006).

Concerning language, exclusion has also implied a problematic situation where the language used in the whole or a section of society may not be spoken or understood by some members of that society. Post-independence Africa has witnessed arguments about the use of ‘foreign’ (European) languages in serious discourses on the continent. Particularly in post-colonial African literature, researchers and intellectuals such as Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Obi Wale have debated the historical, cultural and political implications of adopting the language of the ex-colonial masters as the national or official language in Africa – often English, French and Portuguese. For instance, in most Anglophone African countries such as Ghana and Malawi, parliamentary business is often conducted in English, a language that many of the people being represented by this institution do not understand. Matiki (2003, p.154) describes this situation as ‘linguistic exclusion’ since it amounted to “closing out the majority of Africans from the legislative process.”

Inclusion and exclusion have also been prominent in discussions concerning the extent to which various groups of people are included or alienated from media-led national and global agenda (Michelle *et al.*, 2005; Kabeer, 2006; Jo and Piron, 2008). In the first place, exclusion can relate to media language, where the media use a language that is not spoken or understood by some groups in a community. For instance, in Ghana, many people lack formal education and cannot speak, understand, read or write English. Such people are consequently excluded from the discourse of the English language press. The National Media Policy of Ghana clearly expresses this point (National Media Commission, no date, p.22):

In terms of language, the media are characterised by the domination of the English language. There is not one local language newspaper and English is the only language used by the national news agency... The marginalisation of local languages results in the exclusion of the majority of the population from participating in the national discourse.

Similarly, discussions within the UN and its agencies involving social exclusion have also focused on the lack of access to the media, particularly in rural areas (Jo and Piron, 2008). Two issues often cited include the lack of media presence in rural and less developed areas and, where media are present, the use of language that the people may not understand. Consequently, UNESCO and other concerned bodies have been spearheading efforts to promote rural journalism to spread media information to people in such environments in languages that the people can understand (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997; Thussu, 2000). The idea is for such people to benefit from the development advantages that come with such an opportunity.

Thus, based on the idea of marginalisation, the terms may be understood in this study in two ways. *Linguistic exclusion* refers to a situation where targeted readers of newspapers are partially or completely excluded from direct access to news information because they find the language difficult. On the other hand, *linguistic inclusion* is when targeted readers find the language of newspapers suitable, and they easily access the information being disseminated because of a conscious use of language to suit the intended reader. It is in these senses that the terms are understood in this study.

## **1.2 The Ghanaian context of the study: A brief country profile**

The study is a case study on Ghana, so a brief country profile should help to contextualise the issues addressed in this thesis. Ghana is situated in West Africa and shares borders with Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, Cote d'Ivoire to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south as shown in Figure 1. With a total surface area of 238,533 square kilometres, the country is known for its natural resources including gold, timber, and productive land for agriculture, among others. However, the lack of judicious management over the years has negated the economic impact of these resources in the country (BBC World Service Trust, 2006).

The latest national population Census of 2010 puts Ghana's population at about 24.7 million (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2012). The age structure indicates that 57% of the population is between 15 and 64 years with about 5% being 65 years and above (GSS, 2012). The people of Ghana are scattered across ten administrative regions with about half (51%) constituting the urban population. The capital city is Accra, which is by far the most urbanised and populous metropolis of

the country. Concerning literacy, recent 2010 Census figures indicate that about 74% of Ghanaians (people aged eleven years and above) are literate, with about 67% able to read and write in English. This shows a high increase in the literacy level in

**Figure 1: Map of Ghana**



**Source:** Nationsonline.org

the past few years since the GSS (2008) reported 51% (people aged five years and above) as a national literacy rate and 37% representing those able to read and write English nationally. These current literacy rates are relatively high (considering Ghana's socio-economic and cultural context). They also indicate prospects for further increases in the literacy levels in future because of the country's large young population and the relatively continuous improvements in education in the country (Akyeampong, 2007).

### **1.2.1 The Ghanaian political landscape**

Politically, Ghana became a sovereign state in 1957 when it gained independence from British colonial rule. To outline briefly the political situation of Ghana since independence, I divide the period into two. The first is the politically unstable period from independence to 1992, and the second period is from 1993 to current times, a period of political stability. The thirty-five years from independence to 1992 saw nine regimes ruling the country. Seven of these regimes, including Ghana's first post-independence government of Kwame Nkrumah, were autocratic. The two liberal governments within the period in 1972 and 1979 could not complete their first four-year term before they were toppled by coup d'états. Together, these liberal regimes accounted for five years of the whole period. With the re-democratisation from 1993, which has seen a progressively liberal social and political environment (Gyimah-Boadi, 2009), Ghana has had alternating governments of two political parties: the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). In the twenty-one years of democratic rule from 1993 to 2014, the NDC has been in power for 14 years (1993-2000 and 2009-date), while the NPP has ruled for eight years (2001-2008).

### **1.2.2 Sociolinguistics of Ghana**

Concerning ethnic and linguistic issues, Ghana is a very diverse country with over 60 indigenous groups and languages, excluding English<sup>6</sup> (Obeng, 1997; Guerini, 2007; Ansah, 2008). In effect, Ghana is a multilingual society, and the Akans are the biggest ethnic group, constituting almost half the country's population. Obeng (1997) and Ansah (2008) identify other groups such as the Mole-Dagbani, 15%; Ewe, 12%; Ga-Adangbe, 7%; Guan, 4%; and many others making up the rest of the population. Akan stands out as the dominant indigenous language in Ghana in terms of number of speakers since about 60% of Ghanaians speak it as a second language (Obeng, 1997; Ansah, 2008). In fact, Akan serves as a lingua franca<sup>7</sup> for the

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<sup>6</sup> There seems to be no consensus on the exact number of languages spoken in the country. Writers have recorded various figures over the years. For example, Guerini (2007) says more than 60 languages are spoken in Ghana, and Gordon (2005) has 83. Awedoba (2001) also puts the number at 70, whilst Anokwa (1997) has 75.

<sup>7</sup> Guerini (2007) explains 'Lingua franca' as a variety of language used by speakers without a common native language to communicate.

majority of Ghanaians (Guerini, 2007), and is prominently used in public communication and in the media, particularly the broadcast media, and popular culture. This linguistic picture implies that the majority of Ghanaians can speak more than one language: their mother tongue and one or more other indigenous languages and/or English.

In spite of the overwhelming dominance and influence of Akan (though not in newspaper publication) and a few other privileged indigenous languages, it is remarkable that no indigenous language functions as the country's official/national language. In addition to Akan, languages such as Daagare, Dagbane, Ewe, Ga, Dangbe, Gonja, Kasem, and Nzema are privileged because they feature prominently in the public domain, are sometimes sponsored by government to be taught in schools, and are studied as subjects at the country's universities. They also feature in public communication, particularly on radio and television, where they are used to summarise news and give announcements. The idea of an indigenous language becoming the official or national language in Ghana has come up for public discussion in the past. Nevertheless, like many African countries, the debate has often been marked by emotional attachment to ethnic linguistic ties that had threatened the cohesion and peace of the nation (Eribo, 1997). To make matters worse, little economic or political worth is attached to the indigenous languages. For instance, a high educational attainment in an indigenous language attracts little employment, social or political prospects as compared to having such a qualification in English. Thus, Ghanaians pay little attention to the indigenous languages in the country's public affairs but focus all attention on English. English consequently fits opportunely into its role as a compromise national official language, and this could remain so for a long time to come.

English,<sup>8</sup> therefore, occurs in Ghana as the official language with strategic educational and communication functions. These functions derive from the fact that

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<sup>8</sup> 'English' henceforth refers to *Standard English*. Currently, there is no established local *Standard* of English in Ghana. Being a British colony and inheriting the British educational system, Ghana applies Standard British English, although the American Standard is also accepted and used. These Standard forms currently occur as the 'target varieties', going by the language reference books endorsed by the Ghanaian education system and used in schools and other formal settings, particularly dictionaries (Oxford, Cambridge, Longman, Webster's, and Chambers', among others). Standard English in this study hence refers to these two Standard varieties.



influential information and documents of socio-political, educational and economic importance occur mostly in English. English is, therefore, a prestige language used by educated Ghanaians, about 39% of the national population (see the GSS, 2008). Guerini (2007, pp.4-5) emphasises the significance of English in Ghana thus:

Like most African countries, in Ghana the ability to speak English remains the prerogative of a minority of the population, although a certain degree of competence is an indispensable requisite for holding any public office (unlike the ability to speak a nationwide vehicular language, such as Akan) and for participating in many aspects of national life.

English consequently confers power and prestige on its users in the Ghanaian society. This, in part, explains why there is a ‘diaglossic’ (Fishman, 1971) relationship between English and the indigenous languages, where it (English) is the superior variety (Obeng, 1997; Ansah, 2008). Thus, language attitudes among Ghanaians largely favour English over the indigenous languages (Guerini, 2007; Anyidoho, 2008; Sarfo, 2012). English has continued to grow in influence in the country as the ability to speak ‘impressive’ English accords one great respect and prestige. In fact, Ghanaians appear to have a high regard for language skills and equate brilliance or intelligence with impressive fluency, particularly, in English (Hasty, 2005). Consequently, people strive to access formal education in order to be included in the dominant power category accessible to those with knowledge of and ability to use English.

### **1.2.3 Education and language issues in Ghana**

In a study on English language use in Ghanaian newspapers, educational and linguistic issues of the country cannot be ignored. This is because Ghana is a multilingual society where English (Standard and non-Standard) occurs as one of the languages used in both formal and informal contexts. Standard English is gained through formal education, and this is the variety that is used in the major newspapers in the country. Therefore, knowledge of relevant language-related issues and the formal education<sup>9</sup> system of the country will help contextualise the ideologies that inform the country’s reading culture.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘Education’ here refers to the formal type in the school environment. It is through this form of education that people acquire literacy in English, especially the type that is used in the quality press.

The basic aim of education in Ghana has been to provide the people with functional literacy skills (Owu-Ewie, 2006; Opoku-Amankwa and Brew-Hammond, 2011). Literacy is here understood within the UNESCO (2004, p.13) framework (of development) as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts." In this sense, literacy is the outcome of continuous learning in a formal setup, the overall aim being to provide individuals with knowledge and skills for them to participate actively and fruitfully in their society and beyond.

The current education system of Ghana has its roots in the country's colonial past. Education in the Gold Coast started as 'castle schools' during pre-colonial times, where indigenous children were taught literacy (reading and writing) as part of their conversion to Christianity. Education at the time yielded fruits by enhancing evangelism and producing clerks to help European traders in their businesses. The colonial administration also established some schools for the children of European settlers. When Ghana became a British colony, especially from the 1900s, the colonial administration took control of education, in conjunction with Christian missionaries. The colonial Government's first attempt to universalise education in the colony was in 1945, when a ten-year education plan was adopted for all children to go to school (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007). In 1951, an Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) was instituted to expand access to fee-free education (unlike previous years) for all children in the colony. From then until independence and beyond, successive governments and religious missions have continued making efforts to expand and improve on education in the country, especially in the areas of access and facilities.

Currently, the Ghanaian educational system has expanded significantly (as would be expected) to cover primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Nevertheless, it is still inadequate to meet the number of people requiring education in both quantitative and qualitative terms across the educational levels (Opoku-Amankwa and Brew-Hammond, 2011; Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007; Owu-Ewie, 2006). By 2010, Ghana had about 18,579 primary schools, 10,768 Junior High Schools (JHS), and

697 Senior High Schools (SHS)<sup>10</sup> (both public and private), as well as many post-JHS and post-SHS schools and other higher education<sup>11</sup> institutions (Ministry of Education and Sports (MoE&S), 2010). From independence to date, Ghana's education system has continued largely to reflect Western patterns in structure as discussed below.

#### **1.2.4 Education structure of Ghana**

The education structure over the years may be put into two categories: pre-tertiary and tertiary or higher education. Pre-tertiary involves education at the basic level to a number of post-secondary schools, while tertiary or Higher Education involves degree and diploma awarding institutions. From the colonial days through independence to 1993, Ghana ran an educational structure that covered seventeen years of pre-university education, (excluding a two-year nursery): six-year primary, four-year Middle School, five-year Secondary School and two-year Sixth Form. In 1974, Ghana began a pilot education system (alongside the then existing structure), which aimed to reduce the number of years for formal schooling and adapting education to the needs of the country by emphasising vocational and technical training. The new twelve-year pre-university system, which is currently running, has six-year primary, three-year Junior Secondary School (JSS) (now Junior High School), and three-year Senior Secondary School (SSS) (also now Senior High School) as presented in Table 1. The implementation of this new system from the mid-1980s completely phased out the old system by 1993.

It has to be clarified that the average ages attached to the various educational levels for the two systems are just expected indicators. The reality (also the case in most parts of Africa) is that there is substantial fluctuation of ages at the various levels. It is common for people to enrol in school (at the various levels) when they are older than the entry ages, while some have to repeat levels for various reasons. In fact, it is not surprising even today to see, for example, a 16-year old in JHS or a

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<sup>10</sup> Until 2002, JHS was Junior Secondary School (JSS), while SHS was Senior Secondary School (SSS). The names of these levels were changed by the Government without any significant changes in the structure and content of the levels. In this study, both terms are used interchangeably.

<sup>11</sup> 'Higher education' refers to post-secondary education and training such as university, polytechnic or other recognised (by the National Accreditation Board) diploma awarding institutions.

22-year old in SHS. Moreover, many people finish secondary school but fail the final secondary school examinations. Such people attend private remedial classes to re-write the examinations in order to progress up the academic ladder.

**Table 1: A Comparative presentation of the two education systems**

Educational Structure before 1993			Educational Structure after 1993		
Stage	Number of Years	Age	Stage	Number of Years	Age
Primary School	6	12	Primary School	6	12
Middle School	4	16	Junior High School	3	15
Secondary School	5	21	Senior High School <sup>12</sup>	3	18
Sixth Form	2	23			
<b>Total</b>	17		<b>Total</b>	12	

#### 1.2.4.1 Higher education in Ghana

The structure of Higher Education has not changed radically from the colonial days after the establishment of the country's first University College of the Gold Coast in 1948, now the University of Ghana. Currently, there are nine public universities together with many other public and private professional and higher education institutions and colleges.<sup>13</sup> A few post-secondary institutions such as teacher training colleges, nursing training institutions, School of Forestry, among others, which used to award certificates and were not classified as tertiary, have recently been upgraded to the tertiary status.

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<sup>12</sup> There have been changes to the number of years for this stage. The secondary schools began as a three-year JSS and SSS, respectively. In 2002, the Government of the day increased the duration of the SHS to four years. When a new government took over in 2009, the number of years was reverted to three.

<sup>13</sup> See the National Accreditation Board (NAB) at <http://www.nab.gov.gh/> for the various institutions and the qualifications they award. NAB is the regulatory institution for higher education in Ghana.

Currently, there are a number of formal public and private journalism training institutions in Ghana. The oldest is the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), which was established in 1959. It began as a post-secondary diploma-awarding institution but was in 2009 elevated to a university status. The institution now awards degrees and diplomas in journalism and communication studies. Other prominent journalism schools in the country include the School of Communications Studies (SCS) established in 1972 at the University of Ghana, which offers Master's degrees in communication studies; the Africa University College of Communications (AUCC); and the Jayee University College (JUC), all located in Accra. These institutions train fresh secondary school graduates and offer upgrading courses for practitioners in journalism and other media-related professions. The majority of the media practitioners in Ghana today are products of these institutions (Hasty, 2005).

#### **1.2.4.2 Educational challenges**

Education in Ghana has faced challenges since the post-independence period in line with the country's developing status. These challenges provide some reasons for the relatively low educational quality and attainments in the country (Awedoba, 2001; Owu-Ewie, 2006; Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007; Akyeampong, 2009). Akyeampong *et al.* (2007) explain that efforts over the years at improving access to education did not correspond with the provision of vital educational infrastructure and personnel. Therefore, many schools, colleges, and institutions of Higher Education across the country lack classrooms and other infrastructure as well as qualified personnel. For instance, a report by the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the 2009/10 academic year stated that 18% of teachers in the SHSs were not professionally trained, that 8% of the SHSs did not have permanent classrooms, and that of the permanent classrooms, only 57.5% were in good condition. The situation is worse at the lower levels.

Additionally, the unattractive conditions of work in the teaching industry have meant that the educational sector lacks professionally qualified teachers, particularly for specialised subjects such as English, mathematics, and the sciences. About 52% and 37% of teachers in Primary and JHS schools respectively were not professionally trained (MoE&S, 2010). As a teacher and a citizen of Ghana, this researcher is aware that many schools have English teachers who did not study the language in Higher Education nor are they professionally trained to teach it.

Moreover, only 3-4% of educated Ghanaians access Higher Education (GSS, 2008). This situation has important implications for the ability of educated Ghanaians<sup>14</sup> to read texts at various levels of complexity across the educational levels.

Consequently, it is not surprising that issues concerning competence in English are often topical in Ghana. Owu-Ewie (2006) and Fosu (2009), for example, express concern that many students finish school but lack competence in English contrary to the society's expectations. A prominent university professor, Stephen Addei (July 2013), recently lamented that Ghana's educational system was in crisis because "Ghana had a basic educational system that specialised in producing functionally illiterate learners." This observation captures commonly expressed opinions of examination bodies, employers and politicians. Indeed, examination results at all levels of the country's educational structure have shown over the years that students perform poorly in English, far more than they do in other subjects (from Chief Examiner's reports, West African Examinations Council). Interestingly, the immediate yardstick for measuring the success or otherwise of education in Ghana has been students' ability in English, which in a way has made education elitist and a tool for social stratification (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007). Relating the discussion to the press, this state of affairs raises critical questions about the relationship between education, English ability, the language of newspapers, and readers' ability to read the newspapers.

### **1.2.5 Social structure of Ghana from the perspective of language (English)**

One way in which Ghanaian society is socially structured is through the extent to which people are able to use English proficiently. The scale of ability in this regard ranges from poor to proficient use of the language. For an idea of people who read or are likely to read newspapers, it is important to understand the type of English that occurs in the country. Therefore, I discuss English in Ghana by first framing it within the global occurrence of the language.

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<sup>14</sup> Defined here as people who have had a minimum of nine years of formal education (that is, up to the end of JHS 3).

### 1.2.5.1 English in Ghana

The discussion of English in Ghana is located within West Africa, which in terms of users and use, is also situated within the broad context of English worldwide. The history of the reasons, nature and manner of the global spread of English to all parts of the world, has been well-researched<sup>15</sup> (Kachru, 1985, 1992; Cheshire, 1991; McArthur, 1998; Schneider, 2007). Studies in English and its use in West Africa have largely focused on Ghana and Nigeria where the language has been studied within the context of West African English (Platt *et al.*, 1984; Huber and Dako, 2008; Omoniyi, 2009). This is perhaps because of the comparatively massive influence of the language in these countries. In this endeavour, the written aspect of English in Ghana is emphasised.

A model that has underpinned research on varieties of English around the world is the geopolitics model of global English (McArthur, 1998), which provides a practical context for the discussion of the topic in this study and its setting. The model is pluralist oriented and depends on social perspectives to explain the complex diversity of English across the world. Four models have evolved from the geopolitics paradigm, which in turn form the basis for other analytical perspectives. The models and their formulators are as follows:<sup>16</sup>

- Peter Strevens: A map-and-branch English (1980)
- Tom McArthur: A circle of World English (1987)
- Braj Kachru: three concentric circles of English (1988)
- Manfred Gorch: A circle of international English (1988/90)

These models represent various ideological interpretations of the occurrence of English in various locations across the world. The map-and-branch model adopts an approach that places British and American English as superior varieties in relation to

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<sup>15</sup> Many of the publications on the topic from 1980 to 1997 have been compiled by McArthur (1998, pp.xviii-xx). Other publications from then up to contemporary times may be found in various collections such as *The Handbook of World English* (Kachru *et al.*, eds. 2009), *Varieties of English: Africa, South and Southeast Asia* (Mesthrie, ed. 2008), etc.

<sup>16</sup> For details of the models including the diagrams, see McArthur (1998, pp.95-101).

other English varieties. The models of McArthur and Gollach employ a wheel metaphor with a World Standard English and International English respectively as the core around which a range of 'regional varieties' are represented within spokes. These two models appear to put, for example, (West) African English, British and American English on a similar status. However, in reality the 'standard' or an 'international standard' is referenced to British or American English thereby implying a kind of ordering that elevates native-speaker varieties over other varieties. Kachru's model, represented in three oval circles, explained the issue according to how territories that use English relate to it and the functions the language serves in those territories. The Inner Circle, reflects native speakers; the Outer Circle is mostly postcolonial users; and the Extending (later termed Expanding) Circle is comprised of other users who fall outside the above two groups (see Figure 2).

Kachru's Outer Circle of global English diffusion (which discusses English as a second language) appears to be a reasonable framework within which to situate English in West Africa. Apart from trying to give meaning to the spread of English generally, the Outer Circle emphasises the use of English in postcolonial territories as legitimate forms, which the people have appropriated through indigenisation to serve specific political and social goals. Above all, this research concerns Ghana, a postcolonial country where English occurs mostly as a second language and where writers, who are mainly socialised in the English of the Ghanaian socio-cultural context, write mainly for readers from the same environment. Importantly, the variety of English in the Outer Circle may display tendencies that are different from the Inner Circle without necessarily negating the function of the variety in those territories. Although the focus here is not essentially on studies in varieties of English around the world, a brief overview of Kachru's model should throw some light on the English used in Ghana.

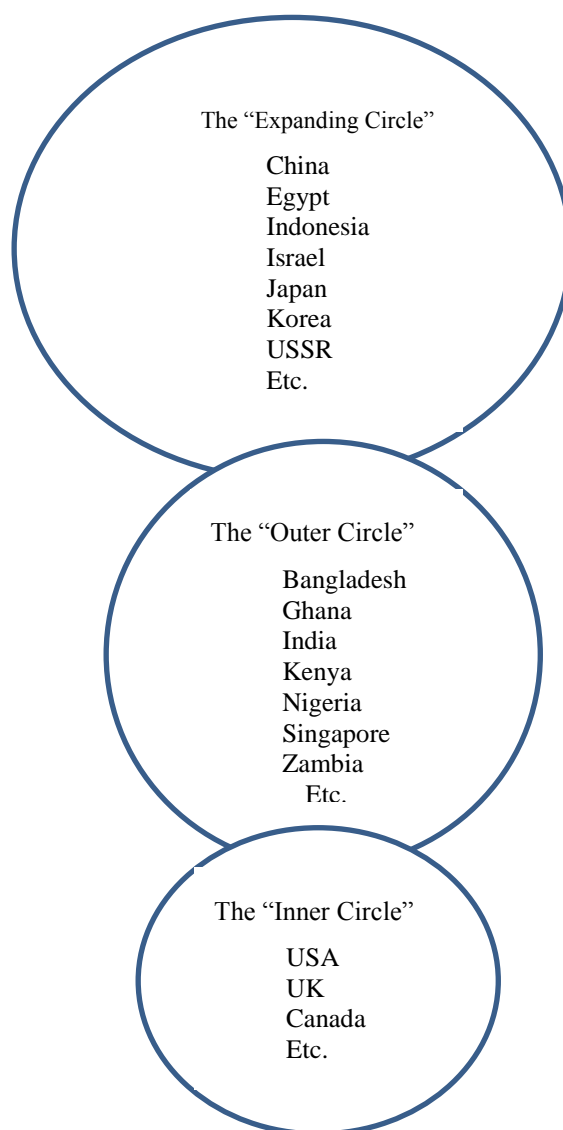
### **1.2.5.2 The Outer Circle of Kachru's Three Concentric Circles**

As indicated above, Kachru's model comes in 'three concentric circles': The Inner Circle, representing English as a Native Language (ENL); the Outer Circle, reflecting English as a Second Language (ESL); and the Expanding Circle, being English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Kachru, 1985; McArthur 1998). In terms of territorial representation, the ENL occurs in nations where English is the mother



tongue of most speakers (UK, USA, and so on). ESL countries include ex-British colonies such as Ghana, Nigeria, Singapore, among others, which have their mother tongues but use English as an official or prestige language. And English as a Foreign Language (EFL) occurs in the rest of the countries of the world where the language is used for specific purposes.<sup>17</sup> The model is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Kachru's "Three Circle" model:**



**Adapted from McArthur (1998, p.100).**

The classification of users into the second language category, in which Ghana belongs, depended on certain factors. These include the long period of exposure to English (over 150 years) and the pervasive use of the language in the life of the

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<sup>17</sup> For the full details of nations within the three circles, see McArthur (1998, p.100).

people. Also considered is the functional use of the language in a wide range of domains such as government, law, education, business, the media, and so on. The characteristic and defining aspect of ESL is that (following from the language contact situation) the language has developed ‘nativised’ or ‘indigenised’ tendencies unique to the specific countries or societies in which the language is used (Platt *et al.*, 1984; Owusu-Ansah, 1997). In such instances, the language is made to carry the “cultural burden” of the users, who may then relate to the language as their own (Bamgbose, 1997). It is thus possible to talk about Nigerian English, Indian English, Singaporean English, Ghanaian English, among others (Kachru *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, there have been debates to recognise and establish these varieties as national ‘standards’ (Bamgbose, 1997; Gyening, 1997) with a level of success for varieties such as Singaporean and Indian Englishes.

However, Ghana has not been able to establish or codify a local standard in spite of well over a century of English use (that is, reckoning conservatively from 1884 when the treaty that formally put the Gold Coast under the rule of the British monarchy was signed). Many studies have argued that the Ghanaian varieties of English are significant and stable enough for codification (Gyening, 1997; Dakubu, 1997; Dako, 2001), but the nation seems to lack the political will to do this, even as more studies continue on the lexical, phonological and grammatical aspects of ‘Ghanaian English’ (for example, Huber and Dako, 2008; Anderson, 2009).

### **1.2.5.3 Classification of English users in Ghana**

Users of English in Ghana may be classified into basilect, mesolect and acrolect.<sup>18</sup> McArthur (1998) has used the terms to describe users in terms of a continuum of competence. In ESL countries, the type of usage equivalent to Standard English is the acrolect (McArthur, 1998; Huber and Dako, 2008). In the written medium, someone who produces the acrolect may be described as being linguistically ‘competent’ or ‘proficient’. Indeed, the expression ‘competence/competent’ in the literature has been assigned to acrolectal or ‘Standard English’ producers. Platt *et al.* (1984, p.8) observe that the acrolect “would be used, at least in more formal

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<sup>18</sup> Acrolect, mesolect and basilect are technical linguistic terms that describe varieties of a language pertaining to individuals in terms of competence. These three varieties reflect a range of individual competence from very good to very poor respectively (in a language) (McArthur 1998).

situations, by those with higher levels of education.” Additionally, such users should be capable of reading and understanding relatively more complex material and be able to use the basilect and acrolect as well depending on the context. Competence in the use of the language decreases as one moves to mesolect and then to basilect (Platt *et al.*, 1984). The basilect is synonymous with what has been described in Ghana as ‘broken English’ (synonymous with Pidgin English) which is characterised by profuse ‘errors’ and linguistic over-simplifications across grammatical, lexical, syntactic, phonological and semantic domains. Basilectal users characteristically include those who have never been to school or who dropped out early in their school life. Most basilectal users can, therefore, read or write very little English and are not considered in this study.

Studies on English in Ghana began in the 1970s along lines of error analysis (Criper, 1971, cited in Gyening, 1997; Sey, 1973). These and later works focused on user-related varieties of the language mainly by stratifying users according to their competence (Criper, 1971, cited in Gyening, 1997; Sey, 1973; Pratt *et al.*, 1984). These scholars agree that the higher the user’s formal education, the more competent he/she becomes in English. The various classifications of the above scholars could be represented in Schmied’s (1991) ‘Continuum of English Varieties’ as shown in Table 2. It categorises users along lines of acrolect, mesolect and basilect, with corresponding educational attainments and expected associated jobs.

**Table 2: Schmied’s (1991) Continuum of English varieties**

<b>Cline of English Varieties</b>	<b>Cumulative length of English Education</b>	<b>Degree of formal Education</b>	<b>Characteristic jobs and occupations</b>
Acrolect	14 years and above	University in home country	Newspaper editors, Lawyers, Senior Officers in the Civil Service, etc.
Mesolect	8-14 years	Secondary School	Junior Civil Servants, Senior Nurses, Secretaries, Typists,
Basilect	7-10 years	Primary School	Shop assistants, Taxi drivers,

The information contained in Table 2 displays oversimplifications that may not correlate altogether neatly with English competence and associated jobs in practical

terms, especially today. For instance, it fails to explain linguistic ability based on the extent of exposure outside the school environment as well as intervening phases between the categorisations. Nevertheless, the Table presents a reliable approximation of a range in competence in English from simple to complex abilities. The sociolinguistic thinking behind these classifications thus presents a kind of 'Cline of Bilingualism' (Sey, 1973, p.18), which may not be the case for all individuals in the context, but indicates broad sociolinguistic trends in the correlation between education and occupation. Although the above classification suggests that education and occupation are the major criteria in an internal English variation, this study regards educational attainment as a more systematic and reliable indicator in the Ghanaian context.

### **1.2.6 Newspaper readers in Ghana**

Based on the above Ghanaian educational and socio-linguistic circumstances, competence in reading in this study will refer to the ability to read and understand Standard English. It is the variety of English used by the quality newspapers to present their message. Competent readers in this context may be found in both acrolectal and mesolectal user categories. Across the secondary and Higher Education levels, it is possible to find people who can use English competently (at varying levels of complexity) and those who cannot. This description acknowledges the reasonable notion (which may not apply in every situation) that the higher one goes in education, the more competent he or she becomes in English. Importantly, the reader who is of interest in this study is the one who, by virtue of his/her level of formal education, may be considered as able to read and understand Ghanaian newspapers. Such a person may belong to the mesolect and acrolect groups. In practical terms, we are looking at Ghanaians who have achieved a minimum of SHS education.

This background information about Ghana should help the reader to understand the linguistic and readability issues discussed in this study. The next sections of this chapter continue to discuss the critical introductory issues framing the research.

### **1.3 Ghanaian newspapers and the issue of readability and comprehension**

News narratives may appear like any other writing or narrative but are different from other texts such as novels and academic textbooks. Scholars have argued that journalistic products are unique because of the journalistic conventions and processes involved in their production and the ideologies that the products carry (Tuchman, 1972; Fowler, 1991; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998; Schudson, 1999/2002). This uniqueness, I argue, applies as well to the way readers consume newspaper stories because most people may want to obtain news information with minimal effort (Kasoma, 1985; Mwaura, 1985, Schudson, 2003). Newspapers are generally meant to provide easy access to information and may not be read as a school textbook. This point is emphasised by Kress and van Leeuwen's (1998) argument that the (newspaper) text is multimodal, so features such as font size, pictures, columns and other elements all contribute to facilitate the understanding of media texts. However, the focus on only linguistic elements in this work is because linguistic elements in newspapers appear to contribute the most to the overall information of a news story.

The relationship between the complexity level of text and the reader has engaged the attention of not only academia but also public and civil society groups, especially in Western societies. Concerns have been raised that the language of public documents such as wills, insurance, securities, among others, is often too complex for lay people to easily comprehend. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, plain language movements in the United States and Britain have identified various linguistic features such as long sentences, unfamiliar vocabulary, passive constructions, and so on, as causing reading and comprehension challenges when overused in a text.

These groups argue that using language in public communication that readers find difficult to understand is undemocratic, since it infringes their rights to such information. The groups have hence been campaigning for plain or simple language, here English,<sup>19</sup> to be used in public communication to enhance reading and comprehension. These concerns have received public legitimacy in the said

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<sup>19</sup> 'Plain or simple English,' in this context implies simple, clear and straightforward, language (Elliott, 1991).

societies. For instance in 2010, the United States Government signed the Plain Writing Act of 2010 into a law requiring that government agencies use "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use." In 2011, the US Government emphasised that "our regulatory system must ensure that regulations are accessible, consistent, written in plain language, and easy to understand."<sup>20</sup> The argument of this study is that newspapers are instances of public communication, so their language falls within the concerns about readability and comprehension.

Yet, in Ghana and most parts of Africa, concerns about the possible complexity of the language of public documents are uncommon beyond passing comments that the language of some publications is difficult. While there is little research attention on the readability of newspaper stories in Ghana and Africa as a whole, there also appears to be no movement championing the use of plain language in public discourse. As such, news producers may not be aware of the readability of the news they circulate. This study is of the view that the issue of linguistic complexity and its potential to exclude or include certain people in communication goes even beyond newspapers; it also involves general public communication.

Although reading is closely associated with writing, the study is not essentially focused on the writer (here, the journalist) and his or her activities.<sup>21</sup> The focus is on how the newspaper reader confronts the meaning-making process during the decoding process and overarching questions such as: How do readers' backgrounds influence their reading of newspapers? What are some of the language features that affect reading and comprehension? Is the press effective in providing information to readers? This study situates these questions within the general research questions guiding the study and in the role of lexical and syntactic structures in meaning making.

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<sup>20</sup> See PlainLanguage.gov. Available from: <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/pLLaw/>

<sup>21</sup> However, since insight about what informs newspaper producers' linguistic choices will enrich the discussion, I interviewed some newspaper editors and news writers about their use of language, and the information has been used where relevant to support the discussion of the study.

## 1.4 The research problem

As indicated in the previous sections, issues of language complexity in the media in general, and newspaper readability and comprehension in particular, have received little empirical research attention in Ghana and most parts of Africa. Most studies on the press have focused on the struggles of the press against political authority (Jones-Quartey, 1975; Barton, 1979; Karikari, 1993; Bourgault, 1995; Ainslie, 1996; Asante, 1996); issues of freedom of the press (Gadzekpo, 1997; Anokwa, 1997; Ansu-Kyeremeh and Karikari, 1998; Akpojivi, 2012); and the role of the press in the country's democracy (Karikari, 1996, 1998, 2007; Dzisah, 2008). Major studies on the relationship between press productions and their audiences from the linguistic perspective have been rare.

Meanwhile, the contemporary Ghanaian press and roles expected of it in the country's democracy have propped it up for critical evaluation, especially its impact on society. The media environment in Ghana in recent times has radically transformed, following the return to constitutional democracy from 1992. The rigid state controls and repressive regulations against the media during the previous autocratic regimes that dominated a greater part of post-independence Ghana gave way to continuous liberalisation of the economy and democratic institutions, including the mass media.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in the past fifteen years, especially with the repeal of the criminal libel law (see section 112 of the Criminal Code of Ghana, 1960) in 2001, the media scene has been greatly enhanced along with growth in other democratic institutions (BBC World Service Trust, 2006; Sikanku, 2011). Specifically, the Ghanaian media have continued to experience improving levels of freedom leading to massive expansion in private participation and ownership within the mass media industry (BBC World Service Trust, 2006).

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<sup>22</sup> Before 1992, the Ghanaian press was severely censored during the many dictatorial regimes that had dominated the political history of the country. For instance, various newspaper licensing laws were established to gag the press (for example, see Gadzekpo, 1997). Indeed, before the 1992 Constitution took effect, private newspapers had been banned. These experiences could have influenced the framers of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana to provide the press with significant freedom and independence. Details of the provisions are captured in Chapter 12 of the Constitution. Therefore, the performance of the press, issues of media regulations as well as discussions on the relative freedom and independence of the press since 1992 (as discussed later in this study) are best understood within this context.

Newspapers have stood out as important news producers on local and national matters in Ghana, and this has received intellectual recognition (Karikari, 1993, 1998; Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; BBC World Trust, 2006; Amankwah, 2010; Sikanku, 2011). While illiterate Ghanaians are certainly proscribed from primary information in newspapers, most educated Ghanaians who are the notional targets of the press have been found to depend on the press for local and foreign information (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; BBC World Service Trust, 2006; Amankwah, 2010; Bowen, 2010). Up to 30% of Ghanaians read newspapers and most of these readers fall within the young educated category (BBC World Trust, 2006). Considering the large segment of the country's population below 15 years in age (38%) (GSS, 2012), there appears to be a huge potential for newspaper readership in the country because the majority of these young people (of about 80% (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007)) are being educated and are potential future readers of newspapers.

The need to develop a well-informed democratic culture in Ghana continues to emphasise the press as an important information producer. For example, in its guidelines on political journalism to media practitioners, the National Media Commission of Ghana (NMC) (2008) stresses the importance of public access to information. Article 2, Section 1 of the guidelines states, “[t]he public’s right to information is a fundamental democratic right. It is, therefore, non-negotiable and cannot be circumvented.” In this sense, the duty of the press is framed in a moral ideology that emphasises the importance attached to society’s need for information and the press’s duty to provide the information.

However, the extent to which the press, through its use of language, is helping audiences to access information is yet to be empirically known. I consider this a serious research gap because scholars have noted that newspaper language is the type “the Ghanaian reading public is most extensively and consistently exposed to” (Denkabe and Gadzekpo, 1996, p.5). In fact, language is central to the effective functioning of the press since the press makes information available to society through language. It is for all these reasons that studying the language of the press is a critical issue especially in Ghana. This is particularly because the language of the Ghanaian press is said to be difficult. Writing on the democratisation of the media in Africa and focusing on the Ghanaian media, Bofo (1987, p.27) observed that:



In terms of readability, the content of the newspapers is generally presented in style and language, which are much above the reading and comprehension levels of the average literate Ghanaian, the elementary school-educated reader. [The elementary school is equivalent and similar to the JHS of today.]

This observation was made more than two decades ago, but it appears that the belief has persisted. In a recent ethnographically focused study, Hasty (2005, p.58) re-echoes the problem that the Ghanaian press uses “Big English”. The writer’s further description of the vocabulary of the press as *unwieldy*, *bulky*, *official*, *authoritarian*, and so on, suggests that the language of the press could pose meaning problems, not only to people with low education, but also across the entire educational system of Ghana. However, without any specific empirical support, these observations have remained anecdotal opinions leaving many questions unanswered.

Yet, little research attention has been focused on newspaper readability and comprehension in recent times, even from global perspectives. In 1989, Porter and Stephens (1989, p.87) reported a review of newspaper readability studies and noted that:

Few studies have dealt with newspaper reading difficulty. The most recent doctoral dissertation related to readability was written in 1985. *Journalism Quarterly’s* index reveals only a handful of articles related directly to newspaper readability.

A computer search by the above authors also yielded few publications on the topic implying that research was overlooking the role that readability plays in the ability of newspapers to communicate with their readers. Before the late 1980s, most of the studies had focused on the newspaper text. The studies often used readability formula tools (see section 5.3.4.2) to evaluate the reading level of portions of newspapers, different types of newspapers, newspapers of different regions, among others ( see Porter and Stephens, 1989, pp.90-92). For instance, Porter and Stephens’ study tested how effectively newspaper editors of some daily newspapers of Utah estimated the readability of their newspapers. The study found that the editors had inaccurate knowledge of the difficulty level of the language of their newspapers because the editors gave levels that were much lower than the study discovered. Bjornsson (1983) used readability formula tools to examine the complexity levels of eleven European language newspapers including Danish, English, French, and German. The study found English newspapers as among the most complex.

Moznette and Rarick (1968) also compared readability of news stories and editorial comments in US West coast metropolitan newspapers and discovered that editorials were easier to read than front-page stories (cited in Porter and Stephens, 1989, p.90). Razik (1969) also employed the Dale-Chall formula to assess the readability of American metropolitan and non-metropolitan newspapers. He discovered that most stories read at the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> education grades.

The lack of studies in newspaper readability and comprehension seems to have persisted to contemporary times. Hulden (2004, p.6), in a major study on the linguistic complexity of two American newspapers (*New York Times* and *Washington Post*) and the Associated Press Newswire, also notes the unavailability of many studies on readability studies. Extensive literature searches online and in libraries by this researcher appear to confirm Hulden's claim. Only a few studies published before 1990 were found to relate directly to newspaper readability. Hulden's study focused on linguistic features to compare the complexity levels of news stories from 1900 to 2000. The writer found that the news stories published before the 1990s were less complex but turned more difficult after the 1990s to reflect the continuous complication of today's society and politics. Although the author asserts that attention is shifting from text complexity measures involving words and sentences, the literature review of Chapter 5 in applied linguistics suggests otherwise. The review of literature shows that the vast majority of the studies in the field have focused on the text and ignored the reader. Minus the angle of the reader, it could be difficult to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues underpinning readability.

In recent times, general and cross-cultural studies on the language of journalism have proceeded mostly from the perspective of (critical) discourse studies, linguistics, sociology, among others and the focus has largely been on the language of news media and its social implications (van Dijk, 1989, 1991; Bell, 1991; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995b; Cotter, 2001; Wodak and Myers, 2001; Geraghty, 2005; Matheson, 2005; Conboy, 2007; Johnson and Ensslin, 2007; Richardson, 2007). These studies have mostly been interested in news narratives as a

discourse genre,<sup>23</sup> and have focused on issues relating to framing, representation, ideology, and so on.

A few studies have departed from the above trend, though. Douglas (2009), for example, used corpus linguistics to study the link between the language of Scottish newspapers and national identity in Scotland. Conboy (2010) adopts a socio-historical perspective to discuss how newspapers in some Western societies exploit the social, political, economic, and technological transformations of the day through language to relate to their environments and audiences and to remain relevant and viable. Yet, although these studies examine the language of newspapers and its dynamic relationship with its environment, they do not focus on the specific and direct linguistic relationship between journalists, texts and audiences in terms of reading and comprehension. The lack of attention in Western-based studies on this aspect of the interaction between newspapers and their audiences may be explained by possible differences in specific educational, linguistic and readership factors in newspaper production and consumption between Ghana and the research areas of such works. However, in a developing country like Ghana with multi-faceted challenges involving education, language and literacy, issues relating to the readability and comprehension of newspapers cannot be ignored.

In Africa, little research exists on news reception and interpretation within which is located newspaper readability and comprehension. This reflects the fact that journalism research has not been extensive in most African countries. An African Council research found that, “[a] perusal of *Africa Media Review* published by the African Council for Communication Education suggests that studies of content, representation and reception/interpretation have been few and far between” (cited by Tomaselli, 2009, p.12).

Research in Ghana on the comprehension of (English) language in the press is almost an unexplored terrain. Extensive library and online searches by this researcher show that research to date on the issue has focused largely on error analyses, sensational use of language and house style in studies such as Denkabe and Gadzekpo (1996) and Denkabe *et al.* (1997), among others. The closest these

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<sup>23</sup> Following from Biber (1998, p.68), *genre* occurs in this thesis as “text categorisations made on the basis of external criteria relating to author/speaker purpose.”

studies have come to dealing with readability is Denkabe *et al.*, (1997) who found that Ghanaian newspapers are full of “technicalese and officialese, verbosity, long winded sentences” (p.291). However, these works and others did not investigate the language of the newspapers in terms of its linguistic features and its relatedness to the reader. As Porter and Stephens (*ibid.*) argue, the neglect of readability studies all this while could limit news producers’ understanding of the concept, which could result in alienating targeted and potential readers. Such an occurrence could have especially dire consequences for democracy.

Therefore, this study intends to investigate the language of Ghanaian newspapers to find out the extent to which the language is complex as well as the extent to which readers find the newspapers easy or difficult to understand. Findings from this research should help to assess empirically the effectiveness of the press as far as readers’ access to information is concerned. This is particularly important in a transitional democracy where news information is needed to enhance not only the democratisation process, but personal development as well. If the critical issue of whether readers of newspapers are able to comprehend news text is not empirically investigated, language-based issues such as ideology, hegemony, framing and representation, power, as well as notions of the role of the press in society would be largely assumed and uninformed.

## **1.5 Research questions**

Based on the above rationale, this study attempts to answer the following key questions:

- a) How can the language of Ghanaian newspaper front-page stories be described based on some of its lexical and syntactic features, and to what extent do these features enhance or impede the readability and comprehension of front-page stories?
- b) To what extent are the front-page stories of Ghanaian newspapers understandable to readers?
- c) Based on the above two questions, to what extent do the Ghanaian newspapers, by virtue of their language style, alienate or include their audiences in the media discourse of front-page stories?

- d) Would Ghanaian readers prefer that newspapers be written in complex or simple English?

## **1.6 Justification of research focus**

The language of four national daily newspapers provided data for the study (see Appendix 1 for samples of the four newspapers). This implies that the newspaper has been privileged for study over other mass communication platforms such as radio and TV, which also use (English) language and deserve research attention. The focus on the newspaper in this instance is because it is said to serve as a more superior source of learning and knowledge for political participation than any other traditional mass media platform (McLeod *et al.*, 1999). Research in transitional societies has found the newspaper to be highly associated with political participation (Nisbet, 2008). Hence, attention is focused on the newspapers to find out how the newspaper relates to readers for political participation to pave way for similar studies with other media.

Additionally, the language of the quality newspapers was used to represent the language of the Ghanaian press. Almost all the quality newspapers in the country are published in English. English is Ghana's official language, and it is used in almost all formal contexts: it is the language of instruction in schools, parliament, and law courts, business, among others. Thus, most social and political issues that are taken seriously, discussed, and which inform local and national policy and implementation, occur in English. These issues are mostly published in the quality newspapers and debated in the public domain before they eventually become policy issues.

Newspapers also function as a major agenda setter for debate in public spaces of the Ghanaian society (Sikanku, 2011). Hasty (2005, p.2) has observed that newspapers are the fulcrum or centre of news discourse in Ghana. The writer stressed that, "while newsworthy events are also covered by radio and television, newspapers constitute the very terms of local news discourse: identifying the main characters, the important local events, and recurring themes—subsuming all in an on-going narrative frame of national news." Indeed, many of the social and political issues that are hotly debated on radio and TV in Ghana are based on newspaper stories. This indicates that newspapers are critical to the effective functioning of

democracy and governance in the country. Therefore, without implying that the language of other mass media outlets in Ghana is without problems, the study has just privileged newspapers, hoping that other studies will focus on other mediums.

Additionally, Ghana has a promising newspaper reading culture. Although the circulation figures of newspapers in Ghana today are relatively low (between 50,000 and 60,000 being the highest circulated daily (see section 4.4.1), Dzisah (2008) notes that more people appear to read newspapers than are circulated in the country. The writer refers to a situation where a newspaper bought by a person is shared and read by about six other people. This is common in both urban and rural settings. The implication is that newspapers still command substantial attention in the country.

The choice of the four newspapers for this research was based on their influence based on circulation and the attention they attract. The spread of a newspaper largely indicates the extent to which people are exposed to its information. Similarly, discussions that a newspaper generates in public and private spaces show the extent of attention it receives in society. In terms of spread, Temin and Smith (2002), Kafewo (2006), Dzisah (2008), Yankson *et al.* (2010), among others have identified the *Daily Graphic*, *Daily Guide*, *Ghanaian Times* and *The Chronicle* notionally as the most circulated (in that order) and popular daily newspapers in Ghana. Collectively, the four newspapers comprise of about 70% (see section 4.4.1) of the national daily newspapers in circulation in Ghana and could be regarded as representative of the country's quality national newspapers. Therefore, these newspapers (that readers are regularly exposed to), individually and collectively, were well placed to affect the majority of readers in the country.

Beyond considerations of circulation, other factors accounted for the use of the four newspapers. Many studies on the print media in Ghana since the 1990s have used these four newspapers either individually or in various combinations, particularly the *Graphic* and the *Chronicle* (see for instance, Karikari and Gadzekpo, 1996; Easmon, 1999; Temin and Smith, 2002; Dzisah, 2008; Yankson *et al.*, 2010; Amponsah, 2012). In many cases, at least one of these newspapers is cited as an example of newspapers in Ghana whenever reference is made to the printed press. These newspapers evenly reflect the state/privately owned dichotomy in terms of ownership and are a major reference point in political and social discussions both within and outside media circles because they are major sources of information on

topical issues of the country. These attributes imply that these newspapers were the leading and credible quality newspapers in Ghana at the time of the research, making them representative of the traditional printed press. Presented below are brief overviews of the four newspapers, whose editors claim, during my interactions with them, that the newspapers target every educated Ghanaian.

### ***1.6.1 Daily Graphic***

The *Daily Graphic* (*Graphic*) is a state-owned newspaper that was established in Ghana during the colonial era in 1950 by the Daily Mirror Group Limited, headed by Cecil King. The newspaper began as a non-partisan and business-focused enterprise unlike many of the government and indigenous African newspapers that existed at the time. The interest in profit making influenced the company's operations as it invested heavily in machinery and personnel (Anokwa, 1997). Mytton (1983) and Bourgault (1995) described the newspaper as the most professional and circulated publication at the time. In 1962, the Government of Ghana bought the company and incorporated it in 1965, thereby bringing it under the control of the state. State control of the *Graphic* slackened with the coming into force of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, which provided for the insulation of the press against state controls. In 1999, the company's name was changed to the Graphic Communications Group Limited, and it continued to be the most resourceful press in terms of facilities and personnel. The *Graphic* has since been a daily publication and remains the most widely circulated and read newspaper in the country.

### ***1.6.2 Ghanaian Times***

The *Ghanaian Times* (*Times*) began as a political party newspaper of Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah in 1958. It was published by The Guinea Press Limited, which Nkrumah established in 1957 for his political party, the Convention People's Party (CPP). After the overthrow of Nkrumah's Government in 1966, the Guinea Press became state property. In 1971, the company became the New Times Corporation under legal incorporation and has since continued to be a state establishment publishing the *Times* as their main daily publication.

### ***1.6.3 Daily Guide***

The *Daily Guide* (*Guide*) is a major publication by the Western Publications Limited, a private printing press located in Accra. It is a daily newspaper, which

started as a weekly sports newspaper in 1983 during the military era of Jerry Rawlings. It later became a general news publication after the ban on the establishment of private newspapers was lifted after 1992. Currently, it is the highest circulated and read private newspaper in Ghana and the second after the *Graphic*. This newspaper has been known to be the only newspaper competing with the *Graphic* in terms of circulation and readership (Kafewo, 2006, p.21). The newspaper operates as a business entity with a commercial aim of making profit.

#### **1.6.4 *The Chronicle***

*The Chronicle (Chronicle)* is a privately owned daily newspaper, which started in 1990 under the title *The Ghanaian Chronicle*. The newspaper was founded and published by a journalist and businessperson, Nana Kofi Koomson. This newspaper became famous in the 1990s because of the investigative stories it mostly published (Dzisah, 2008) that provided an alternative voice to the state-controlled press at that time. The newspaper is now a daily publication that emphasises social and political news.

### **1.7 Structure of the Thesis**

The study is organised in ten chapters. This current chapter is the main introduction to the study. It has discussed the background to the research, the objectives, the research setting, research problem and questions, justification, and significance. The chapter provides a brief demographic description of Ghana and situates the study within its educational, literacy, and socio-linguistic contexts. It also locates English in Ghana within the second language model of global English to inform the English of Ghanaian newspapers.

The various theoretical underpinnings guiding the study are grounded in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 2 discusses the history, development and roles of the African press as well as normative theories underpinning the study. The chapter begins by framing the African press and its role within the dominant global ideology of mass media, communication, and the press's democratic function as an information provider. It also provides an account of the historical development of the press in Africa and emphasises a blend of normative theories and perspectives on the Ghanaian press and its functions from both Western and African perspectives. Chapter 3 focuses on issues of democracy and political participation, emphasising



the indispensable informative role of the press in these practices. It also covers issues of journalism, emphasising news as a journalistic product and effective news writing as an important aspect of the news production process. Chapter 4 discusses the Ghanaian press from a historical and political perspective and highlights the critical role the press has played and continue to play in mobilising people for various actions from colonial to contemporary times. Chapter 5 then discusses the various linguistic concepts and theories framing the research. It covers issues and approaches such as reading comprehension, text complexity and difficulty, corpus linguistics, readability studies and formulae, among others, which prepare the grounds for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 6 presents the mixed methods research design of the project, which explains the general and specific steps taken to gather and analyse data for the research. It discusses the specific quantitative (textual) and qualitatively (survey) data collection methods that were employed, the study's analytical design and other vital methodological issues such as ethical considerations and challenges of the research. Chapters 7 and 8 present analyses, findings and discussions of the data for the linguistic and survey inquiries respectively. The linguistic analysis demonstrates the readability of the Ghanaian newspapers while the survey focuses on the extent to which Ghanaian readers find the newspapers user-friendly. Chapter 9 is a general discussion that first interprets and integrates the findings of the two previous chapters after which it explores wider implications of the results. Chapter 10 concludes the study with a summary of salient points, major contributions of the study, recommendations and topics for further studies. Specifically, the study recommends that news writers, editors, and the media industry as a whole should strive toward the use of comprehensible language in news reports.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Communication and Normative Foundations of the African and Ghanaian Press**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

After establishing the study's aim, main hypothesis, Ghanaian background, research problem and questions in the previous chapter, this chapter discusses some of the conceptual issues underpinning this study. The discussion focuses on the press and its institutional and social functions. The chapter situates issues of language, communication, the press and normative roles of the Ghanaian press within both the Western and especially African contexts. Discussing the issues from a broad perspective before narrowing to Ghana, I hope, will help make the specific Ghanaian situation clearer. This is because the perspective of communication, press and related issues adopted in this work has roots in Western traditions and their manifestation or otherwise in, particularly, East and West Africa is relatively homogeneous. Hence, references to Africa will continue to imply such Anglophone sub-Saharan African countries. Additionally, this study's focus is mainly on the traditional media, especially the newspaper. Therefore, terms such as 'news media' and 'press' refer mainly to newspapers. The chapter begins by connecting language, communication and information flow with their ideological and meaning implications to the functions of the press. Thereafter, the discussion focuses on the press and its normative roles from the Western perspectives before narrowing to the African (and hence, Ghanaian) press and its normative roles.

#### **2.2 Language, communication and information transmission**

Language is a social tool whose primary function is to enable people to communicate. Through language, people express, define and share their feelings, opinion, values, and experiences. Yule (1996, p.6) refers to these uses of language as its "transactional function ... to communicate knowledge, skills and information." Most of these activities are consciously done for practical purposes, such as expressing a need for something and expecting a reaction in return. Thus, meaning or understanding is central to language and its use. A major contributor to meaning in language use is the ability of those involved in the interaction to understand

linguistic elements and other socio-cultural cues employed in communication (Halliday, 1978). As Bloor and Bloor (2004, p.6) argue, “[c]ommunication is an interactive process through which meaning is negotiated in real time. Writers communicate with their readers and normally expect them to respond emotionally or intellectually.” Meaning therefore connects those involved in the communication process.

Importantly, although language is central to communication, the occurrence of a mutually intelligible language does not, in reality, always guarantee meaning, nor does meaning always follow information transmission. There are often instances where people do not understand what they read or hear. This may happen when the content is too complex for the audience. Voltmer (2006, p.3), for instance, relates this problem to “information quality” in political communication and explains that it results from the complexity of the political issues reported in news, which reflects the increasingly complex nature of today’s political world. However, such scholarly explanations often focus on the content of news information and ignore the linguistic dimension, which is also crucially important in the communication process. The argument of this study is that the linguistic choices (words and expressions, sentence patterns, and so on) used to carry the message could be complex enough to be a barrier to communication. This is applicable to any linguistic situation, including mass media communication, which this study interrogates.

Researchers have noted the importance of language in the overall structure and role of news in society (Bell, 1991; Conboy, 2007, 2010). According to Conboy (2007, p.12), news carries social and political power and is crucial in helping to construct a normative view that regulates the interaction of people in society. Thus, an understanding of the language of newspapers is important, since it is through this that the social implications of news, particularly its ability to ‘construct social reality’ (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), may be comprehensively interrogated.

Conboy (2007) proposes and discusses the language of newspapers and its meaning implications within a broad socio-historical context. He explains that the language of news occurs as a “set of conventions which carry traces of their historical development,” and that “language continues to vary in its content and structure to adapt to the variety of social and cultural demands made upon it” (Conboy, 2007, p.5). This view reflects a Western perspective where newspapers

have had a long history (dating back to the seventeenth century). The language of newspapers in such societies has evolved over time to respond to the social, cultural, political and economic transformations of society and its demands. Within the historical and sociological view of the language of news may be located a linguistic view about the contribution of linguistic units to meaning.

However, the comparatively short history of Ghanaian newspapers has meant that the language of newspapers has lacked any major development to allow discussions along lines suggested above. Hence, this study foregrounds a linguistic view concerning the language used to construct hard news, particularly front-page news stories. This is to help focus the research on its specific objective.

### **2.3 The press and communication**

The attempt to understand the human communication problem underlying this study begins from how audiences negotiate meaning of press messages, whether written or spoken. I use Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model of communication in this regard as a basis for an understanding of meaning, as interrogated in the study. Hall's model itself drew on the weaknesses of the transmission model that was inspired by Harold Lasswell.

Lasswell (2007, p.216) had theorised that a "convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the questions: Who, Says What, In Which Channel, To Whom, With What Effect?" For instance, a journalist (sender) writes about the economic situation of a country (message) in a newspaper (channel) to the audience, who may then decide whether to vote for the party in government (effect). This simplistic view of the complex nature of human communication may be excused because the model was one of the earliest attempts at theorising mass communication. Such a view prevents a proper understanding of the complex process of human communication because it reduces texts and their readers to one-dimensional entities and does not consider the social context in which people interact (Rock, 2007). This means relying solely on this view would not allow for a holistic insight into what human and public communication is all about. Nevertheless, McQuail (2005, p.69) explains that the model set the tone for the "information transmission circle," whose achievement was the recognition that:

... mass communication involves the interpolation of a new 'communicator role' (such as that of the professional journalist in a formal media organization between 'society' and 'audience'. The sequence is thus not simply (1) sender, (2) message, (3) channel, (4) many potential receivers, but rather (1) events and 'voices' in society, (2) channel/communicator role, (3) messages, (4) receiver.

Importantly, the model contributed to subsequent development of more reflective models of audience and cultural effects (McQuail, 2005).

Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, for example, is a critical reference in reception studies and worthy of discussion. The model used semiology to define language as a polysemous sign that is open to different and multiple interpretations and meanings. The suggestion is that media producers 'encode' 'preferred' meanings in their text for the audience to decode, while audiences may in turn 'decode' the message according to their assumptions and socio-cultural contexts. In the process, the audience may sometimes derive meanings not intended by the 'encoder'. Hall ascribed this possibility to the different cultural contexts in which encoding and decoding take place (1980, p.128). In other words, audiences can use their social and cultural backgrounds to filter media messages for different and multiple meanings sometimes not intended by the sender. Hall explained that the meaning of a message is not open to infinite interpretations and that the possible meanings of a message are constructed around, and not far from, the ideology of the original message. Although this model focuses on constructed meaning, it takes into account the importance of words, expressions and grammatical structure in the overall meaning of media language (Stevenson, 2002, p.41). Hall's model relates to television news, but it is applicable to newspaper stories as well, since both involve public communication processes.

With reference to newspapers, I build on the model's explanation of 'misreading' or 'distortion' of media messages by highlighting language complexity as a possible cause of the problem in the decoding process. In the model, 'misreading' or 'distortion' of messages apply to (multiple) interpretations that fall outside the context of the encoded message. However, the language of a text may be so complex that it may lead to no interpretations or to interpretations that partially or completely differ from the intentions of the encoded message. For example, a reader may lack the language ability to decode ideological information represented in the lexical and syntactic features of a message, thereby leading to a misunderstanding of

the message. This perspective has been largely ignored in the discourse on Hall's *encoding/decoding* concept, although it is central in any meaning-making process, as demonstrated in this current study.

## **2.4 The role of language in ideological manifestations in the press**

Language is an important carrier of ideology. Researchers, for example, Fowler (1991), have noted that language does not just reflect reality but that it essentially creates a perspective of reality. Words bear the power that structures society; they impose differences and reflect the interest of speakers or writers (Fowler, 1991; Fiske, 1994). Thus, language is far from being a neutral system of signs since it carries ideologically laden information that is transmitted to audiences during communication.

Ideology is inherently associated with the press as an institution of information dissemination. *Ideology* is a highly contested concept and is often defined and understood from different perspectives and fields. However, since this study is essentially about the press's function in information transmission, I adopt Schirato and Yell's (2000, p.73) definition of *Ideology* as "discourses and narratives that circulate in a culture and largely influence what can and can't be thought, and what can and can't be done." In this sense, ideology is a process whereby discourses become established belief systems that are taken as common sense (Conboy, 2007). *Discourses* in this context imply the social function of language concerning the communication activities and practices of social institutions, which variously constructs those involved in a particular dialogue. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Conboy (2010, p.9) explains that discourses are inherently tied to issues of "power because they give expression to the meanings and values of institutions or practices and, in so doing, claim authority for themselves." This means that information from the press constitutes discourses that have serious implications socially and politically.

It follows that the press and its language represent one of the major means by which ideologies are disseminated. Fowler (1991, p.122) is of the view that, "[n]ewspapers are part of the mass media, and their ideological power stems from their ability to say the same thing to millions of people simultaneously." News information is, therefore, a form of ideology, which is transmitted often to persuade

and control audiences (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993). Opinion leaders, government officials, newspaper editors and others who occupy positions of authority may speak in the press either for themselves or on behalf of others. In this way, such people play a critical role in determining both what circulates in society and the boundaries and meanings of public discussions (Bourdieu, 1998a).

Some scholars have also taken a more radical view of the ideological role of the press beyond the innocent reproduction of power and dominance. Conboy (2010, p.10) argues that the press has not been an unwilling tool in the hands of elites but “has been deeply involved in the creation of power structures.” Thus, news is not just a linguistic representation of the world, but also a ‘biased’ construction of reality contrary to journalists’ claim that they are objective and factual in their reportage (Fowler, 1991; Schudson, 2003). The argument then is that the press consciously or unconsciously provides the discourses that maintain the status quo by framing and perpetuating relations of power, dominance, and social inequality (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993, 1998; Fairclough, 1995a, 2003; Matheson, 2005).

This view about the role of the press and its language in upholding social control and restricting social and political change (Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 2002) has motivated studies in critical linguistics or critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995a and b). As an analytical paradigm, CDA is concerned with social change. Through the examination, understanding and exposure of how the dominant class in society use language to marginalise the underprivileged and entrench inequality, researchers draw attention to victims of power imbalances and call for change. CDA has been used, for example, to expose issues of ethnicity and racism in news reports and to study how news is constructed to serve the interest of dominant sections of society (van Dijk, 1993; Taiwo, 2007).

The discussions so far seem to accord the press a great deal of power while appearing to present audiences as passive consumers of ideological messages. Questions remain about whether issues reported in the press are always passively imbibed. We have seen with Hall (1980) that audiences have the ability and, in fact, do apply their own ideologies to mediate messages that they receive from the press. Thus, the underprivileged sometimes resist ideology and dominance through, for example, demonstrations (as recently seen in some parts of the Arab world), strike actions, and letters to editors. Contemporary society continues to be varied,

representing opposing discourses. This diversity, also represented in the press, offers a forum for divergent ideologies to struggle or compete for social attention. Audiences continue to have alternatives from which to choose particular presses and ignore others, an action that indicates an active decision to consume certain ideologies and not others.

This study is not directly focused on language issues concerning ideology, power relations and marginalisation. However, the symbolic and persuasive power of news (van Dijk, 1995) and the perspective of CDA regarding social change provide analytical relevance for the analysis. The understanding is that accessing information from the press has the potential to confer power on readers because knowledge is a source of power and may influence those exposed to such information. The ability to understand the message of the press has direct implications for the extent to which people are exposed to and may be influenced ideologically by information from the press. It also implies that the ability or inability to understand the message of the press may have implications for social inclusion or marginalisation. To understand these possibilities, one also needs to understand why and how the press positions itself with and constructs its audiences.

## **2.5 Ideology and the construction of readership in Ghanaian Newspapers**

As Douglas (2009, p.50) observes, newspapers survive on the active patronage of their “core loyal readership”, that is, the regular buyers of newspapers. Logically, this implies that newspapers also adopt political and ideological viewpoints, as well as language, that sit well with their readers. Thus, through the positions championed by the newspaper that a person regularly reads, his or her political and ideological views may be known (Douglas, 2009). This way, newspapers consciously construct their “ideal or implied” readers (Fowler, 1991, p.232) by writing with the readers in mind and seeking their comfort. Douglas explains, for example, that (Scottish) newspapers ensure the comfort of their readers by aligning the newspapers with the readers in order to keep them. For instance, the typical reader of the *Guardian* will possibly be politically “left-of-centre, middle class and employed in education,” while the *Sun* reader is likely to be fairly young, male and working-class (Douglas, 2009, pp.53-4).



However, the situation may be different in Ghana and some other countries in Africa. The press in Ghana, for instance, has projected different ideologies at different times in the country's history. As discussed in Chapter 4, the press was used by various past governments of Ghana to reflect the ideologies and interests of the existing power structures. Currently, Ghana's relatively liberalised economy and press practices reflect diverse ideologies, opinions and interests that compete for attention and consumer choices. However, not much research has focused on this aspect of the role of the press, for which reason, it cannot be said with certainty the extent to which the Ghanaian press and its linguistic practices foster ideological tendencies and implications.

Nevertheless, while the Ghanaian press has been known to champion different ideologies and political positions, readership has not exactly reflected segmentation or the 'ideal or implied reader' around newspapers and their positions. For instance, about 80% of Ghanaian readers consume the *Graphic*, which is state-funded and perceived to be pro-government, although it is clear from national elections results that many of the readers might not be sympathetic to the political ideology of the government of the day. The same situation applies to many of the national newspapers. Thus, it is not surprising that the national newspapers claimed (during interviews with the editors as part of this study) that they target every possible reader. If so, it is expected that the readers of each Ghanaian newspaper are likely to be a heterogeneous collection with different characteristics, especially educationally. Consequently, I argue that one of the ways in which Ghanaian newspapers can construct their readers and ensure their comfort is in the use of language, in addition to political and ideological positioning. It is hence reasonable to hypothesise that newspapers will employ language that their readers are familiar with and can relate to. Douglas (2009, p.61) argues that newspapers might want to use language that is agreeable to their readers, but it does not "necessarily mean that the newspaper language will be exactly the same as that used by its readers." However, it is argued in this study that such language should at least be readable and comprehensible to the targeted readers. In the context of Ghana, this may be an important way of ensuring the comfort of readers.

All things considered, I argue that the language of newspapers in Ghana is itself an ideological issue. English, especially the formal type used by newspapers, is

a prestigious linguistic form, so the fact that nearly all the newspapers are published in English and the complex nature of the language (as discovered in this study: see section 7.2) contributes to constructing the readers as the elites of the society. Such readers are, therefore, likely to gain knowledge and power through the political and ideological information coded in the newspaper messages to become advantaged in the society. This current study, consequently, provides clues about the extent to which ideologies may be consumed by readers in Ghana.

The next sections focus on the press in general, and the African press in particular, as a democratic institution with an important information function in society.

## **2.6 The global context of the African press**

The mass media began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with newspaper organisations, which engage in “communicating openly, at a distance, and to many in a short space of time” (McQuail, 2005, p.4). This description is limited to the modern technologically based methods of public communication such as newspapers, radio and television. It is the periodic transmission of the same information to many dispersed people, over a wide territory, and in a fast manner. This ability accords the press symbolic power, that is, the ability to give or withhold publicity and the potential to influence and persuade people directly or indirectly through the information that it circulates in society (van Dijk, 1995, pp.10-11).

The mass media emerged at a time their role became crucial in a world that was experiencing tension and changes in various aspects of social relationships at societal, national and global levels (McQuail, 2005). The tension particularly concerned leadership, and this situation seems to have remained until today. The significance of mass media in contemporary society cannot be overlooked in the domain of “politics, culture, everyday social life and economics.” As McQuail eloquently explains:

In respect of *politics*, the mass media provide an arena of debate and a set of channels for making policies, candidates, relevant facts, and ideas more widely known as well as providing politicians, interest groups and agents of government with a means of publicity and influence. In the realm of *culture*, the mass media are the main channel of cultural representation and expression and the primary source images of social reality and materials for forming and maintaining social identity. Everyday *social life* is strongly patterned by the routines of media use and infused by its contents through the way

leisure time is spent, lifestyles are influenced, conversation is given its topics and models of behaviour are offered for all contingencies. Gradually, the media have grown in economic value, food and clothing industries, and with interconnections with telecommunications and all information-based economic sectors.

The above extract clearly indicates how the mass media have been intricately involved in every aspect of society. It is not surprising that the media have become objects of public and scholarly interest. Under the broad discipline of 'communication science', scholarly attention has focused on mass communications in an attempt to understand the role and effects of the press in society (McQuail, 2005). The ever-changing socio-economic, political and technological contexts in which the mass media exist at national and global levels have influenced their nature, development and function leading to efforts to theorise and understand the mass media across time and space.

The news media's journalistic role in democratic governance has been one of their crucial contributions in society. Since this study is essentially concerned with the language of newspapers, the discussion emphasises journalism as a professional practice carried out by traditional media organisations. In this sense, Schudson's (2003, p.11) comprehensive definition provides the basis of our understanding of the concept and the work of journalists in this study:

Journalism is the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance. It is the business of a set of institutions that publicises periodically (usually daily) information and commentary on contemporary affairs, normally presented as true and sincere, to a dispersed and anonymous audience so as to publicly include the audience in a discourse taken to be publicly important.

The definition raises conflicting issues such as what journalism is, its function, the institutions involved, and what 'public interest' refers to, among others. These issues are open to varied understanding and interpretations from society to society, a detailed discussion of which space cannot allow in this work. What is crucial is the information function of journalism in a democracy, which makes the press a democratic institution (Veltmer, 2006). This, I discuss from three perspectives: the press as a source of diverse opinions, as watchdog or Fourth Estate, and as source of information and enlightened citizenship. These functions provide the justification for normative functions of the press in Western liberal societies. The discussion of these

roles and critical perspectives on them should help us understand similar views in the African and Ghanaian contexts.

### **2.6.1 The press as a platform for diverse views**

From the inception of modern democratic thought, political theorists have recognised the value of free speech or expression and uninhibited public debate in a democracy (Voltmer, 2006, p.2). This recognition was extended to the press (Keane, 1991), and arguments were advanced to support the need for press freedom. The English poet, John Milton and the British philosopher, John Stuart Mill were two such advocates. Milton, in the *Areopagitica*, justified the need for intellectual and press freedom. His argument led to the consolidation of a critical (political) journalistic culture in England (Newth, 2001). Milton's intervention provided an ideological support for the early "public sphere" that emerged at the time. Mill (2002, orig. 1859), on the other hand, emphasised society's benefit from freedom of expression, explaining in his concept of the "market place of ideas" that diverse and competing opinions would lead to 'truth'. These views identified the press as a platform for different ideas to contest for attention and choice.

Yet, questions remain about whether the "market place of ideas" is the best way to 'truth'. The issue is whether such a platform can provide a harmonious environment for all sides to be heard and for the 'best' argument to triumph. Hearn-Branaman (2011, p.41) argues that the 'range' of views in the marketplace may not represent the totality of ideas that can be expressed by all, "but of the ones who have the power (i.e. education, economic, discursive), the loudest, clearest, best trained, most persuasive voices, to get them noticed." Voltmer (2006, p.3) also observes that a confrontation between compelling opinions could lead to confusion, even conflict and a lack of consensus. The 'marketplace of ideas' concept is also challenged by other issues such as the extent to which the press becomes actively involved in championing a particular partisan position (if it should at all) (Voltmer, 2006). Nevertheless, arguments for the 'marketplace of ideas' greatly influenced the institutionalisation of press freedom in media and democratic practices in liberal democracies (Newth, 2001).

### **2.6.2 The press as the Fourth Estate**

The emergence of the newspaper press as a form of mediated news in the 17<sup>th</sup> century brought many possibilities, one being its moderating influence on political

authority. This is the Fourth Estate or *watchdog* role of the press. It is a normative position that extended directly from the concept of separation of powers and checks and balances (Montesquieu, 1750). The idea underlying the concept was the need to diffuse political power in order to check or moderate the powers of the various individuals and institutions wielding government power in the interest of the whole society. Liberal democracies operate a system in which government power is diffused among the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The press was later to feature prominently in this arrangement as the Fourth Estate (Edmund Burke, 1729-97, cited in McQuail, 2005) to strengthen the democratic arrangement further.

The press's role in the above governance system is an extension of its information function: as the Fourth pillar of government and a 'watchdog' of government power. McNair (2009b, p.239), like Bennett and Serrin, (2007) gives this function a wider interpretation as "critical scrutiny over the powerful, be they in government, business or other influential spheres of society." In other words, the press is meant to keep political leaders accountable to the people by monitoring how government exercise power and exposing power abuses. This *watchdog* function is undertaken on behalf of the citizenry, implying that the press mediates between the people and their rulers (McNair, *ibid.*). In this way, the press represents the people and ensures that 'public voice' is heard. This role of the press in democratic governance provides legitimacy for its Fourth Estate status as well as the motivation by political authority to influence it.

### **2.6.3 The press as source of information and enlightened citizenship**

An extension of the *watchdog* function of the press finds expression in the relationship between the press and democracy. The press, in this relationship, performs two roles. Firstly, it provides a platform for citizens to discuss issues of public concern in the spirit of the *marketplace of ideas*. Secondly, the press disseminates information in society for citizens to exercise formal (through elections) and informal (through 'public opinion') control of government. The press is thought to target the individual citizen with information to enable him/her make informed political decisions. Yet, as drawn from Voltmer's (2006, p.3) argument, without sufficient, relevant and comprehensive information, citizens may not be able to adequately assess alternatives in the democratic environment and the implications of their actions. The legitimacy of democratic actions has been benchmarked on the

extent to which the press succeeds in performing this information function (Dahl, 1989). Therefore, if the press fails to reach and be understood by a significant number of audiences, it could negatively affect the effective practice of democracy.

For the press to promote enlightened citizenship, it has to provide a public participatory platform for different people and opinions to interact in the political public space. A popular model that has often been used to illustrate this situation is the concept of the 'bourgeois public sphere' by Habermas (1962/1989). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas drew on ideas of press freedom and *market of ideas* to conceptualise a social or public space that produced an atmosphere and a platform for citizens to leave their private interests, congregate and freely engage in rational debates on issues of public interest. The goal of the interaction is to build consensus for the public good. Habermas emphasised the newspaper as "the public sphere's most preeminent institution" (Habermas, 1989, p.181), and in contemporary times, the newspaper and other mass media institutions have been the vehicle that constitute and feed the public sphere (Schudson, 2003).

Although Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere' has been held up as a "normative model of exemplary civic life" (Schudson, 2003, p.67), its universal application has been challenged. The idea of consensus as the ultimate aim of the debates appears to be an illusion, especially in new democracies. This is because individual and group interests make it difficult to forgo private or sectional interests for consensus in the public interest. In fact, political and civic organisations in most democratic societies are often characterised by a strong attachment to partisan differentiation, which make it almost impossible for groups to see anything good in the opinions and ideas of one another. Therefore, much as the ideal is towards a consensus, this is often impracticable to achieve in reality.

Additionally, Habermas's concept appears to focus on an elitist and enlightened debate, thereby leaving out people who do not belong to this privileged class. Thus, the model is not inclusive and liberal, especially as it excluded some other sections of society, such as women (Fraser, 1990). In this way, Habermas's theory appears inapplicable in societies, like those in most parts Africa, with a small, dominant elite class. This is because such a situation would continue to create a bourgeois public space in which a few elites continue to monopolise the system to their advantage (Negt and Kluge, 1993, orig. 1972; Kellner, 2000).

Such critical perspectives have led to proposals for a reconstitution of the ‘public sphere’ into public spheres (Fraser, 1990; Willems, 2011). This means the public space may be understood as constituting varied groups, each with broadly similar interests and abilities. The different groups can then engage with political authority and other groups to contribute to the political process. For example, trade unions or women’s groups may become ‘public spheres’ to represent their perspectives and interests in public debates. Such a reconceptualisation may work for emerging societies, where already spaces in popular culture are being analysed as public spheres that are contributing to democracy (Gadzekpo, 2011; Willems, 2011). Gadzekpo (2011), for instance, discusses the role of posters in democratic participation in Ghana, indicating how posters provide political communication opportunities in the country’s political public space. In this sense, newspaper readers in a society can constitute ‘a public sphere’ to contribute to the general political discourse alongside other ‘public spheres’ to enhance political participation in the ‘joint project’ of democratic governance. Nevertheless, there is the need for clearer conceptualisation and analytical frameworks, especially as they apply to different socio-cultural societies.

#### **2.6.4 Critical perspectives on the Fourth Estate and its information function**

Despite its potential as a vital enabler of a democratic society, many critics of contemporary journalism adopt the radical position that the Fourth Estate idea is a dangerous illusion. While there are instances in which journalism has performed its *watchdog* role, its ability “to act systematically and routinely” in this role (Bennett and Serrin, 2007, p.327) has been doubted. For instance, Bennett and Serrin identify the run-up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq as a failure of the American press in its critical role. Critiques from the Marxian perspective dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century claiming that ‘freedom of the press’ is an ideological fallacy still remains influential in critical discourse on the press (McNair, 2009b, p.240). According to this view, the idea of press freedom is a form of false consciousness, which just legitimises the existing power structures that disadvantage and distract ordinary people from the real causes of their oppression (Althusser, 1970/71; Gramsci, 1971). Hearn-Branaman (2011, pp.4-12) adopts a radical position and draws on theories from Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek and other researchers to argue that the *watchdog* role is an ideal, which the press *should*, but often fails to reach. In this sense, the press

functions as *lapdog*, *attackdog* or agents of *system maintenance*. As lapdog, the press serves the interest of authority by defending them, while it functions as attackdog for political elites by attacking their opponents. In system maintenance, while apparently exposing wrongdoing, the press protects and entrenches the wrong or bad system. A case in point is the Watergate scandal where President Nixon was exposed, yet the system that perpetrated that scandal was left intact.

The above critiques connect with other views from neo-liberal capitalist market perspectives expressing the concern that the press is not properly performing its information role. Media critics have noted that journalism is uniting politics and business through government policies, competition and market exchange (McChesney, 1999; Bourdieu, 1998a). In their propaganda model, for example, Herman and Chomsky (1998) indicate how the mass media serve as propagandists for elites and their interests. The authors explain that commercial media owned or controlled by a few multinational corporations through conglomeration have monopolised the press and rendered it undemocratic. In this way, the press largely provides information that satisfies the status quo and their interests, with little attention on issues that directly concern ordinary people (Keane, 1991; Herman and Chomsky, 1998; McChesney, 1999, 2003). Therefore, the press may not (wholly) serve the interest of society, thereby weakening democracy. Following from these concerns, there have been calls to reform the press. McChesney (no date), among others, has proposed that the degree of media concentration be reduced to mitigate its negative effect on democracy.

In spite of the value of these critiques, I adopt the normative position that even a flawed press serves democracy. The limitations of the press do not undermine the continuous relevance of the press in contemporary society, particularly, its democratic functions. The news media's information function has generally been accepted in principle in communication scholarship, and few contrary arguments exist on the matter, even in the context of new democracies (Hearns-Branaman, 2011). Researchers such as Barnett (2005) and others have noted how essential the *watchdog* function is to society, irrespective of how flawed it is in practice. Indeed, there have been many instances around the world in which the press has exposed wrongdoing in society: the various US service members' war atrocities against prisoners in, for instance, Vietnam, Iraq and other places are illustrations, even if



half-heartedly reported, as Nick Turse revealed.<sup>24</sup> In an exploration of the gaps between normative conceptions and actual performance of the press, Bennett and Serrin, (2007, pp.327-238) conclude: “Without journalists acting as watchdogs, American democracy ... would not exist.” Such thinking reinforces the press’s indispensable role in a democracy, at least from the perspective of mainstream journalism. This basis for the normative *watchdog* functions has important implications for press practices in Africa as well, which I discuss shortly.

### **2.6.5 Normative views of the press**

The functions of the press as discussed above underlie the many normative theories of journalism in advanced democracies. Normative theories of journalism attempt to establish the ideals or beliefs that define the relationships between the press, state and society as well as the functions that the press is expected to play in democratic societies (McQuail, 2005; Christians *et al.*, 2009). These issues are best understood in relation to larger claims about a ‘good’ society. In principle, there are many normative theories of journalism, which scholars have tried to classify (Benson, 2008, p.2592).

Western-based normative theories have been classified from democratic and non-democratic perspectives (*ibid.*), based on the extent to which the press is free and how it relates to the state. Most studies, following the severely limited and analytically weak (Ostini and Fung, 2002) concept of Siebert *et al.* (1956), categorised the press into authoritarian and Soviet communist (non-democratic), and libertarian and social responsibility (democratic) models (Hachten, 1981; McQuail, 1983; Picard, 1985; Ostini and Fung, 2002). Among other limitations, most of the theories did not depart much from the ethnocentric Western perspective that severely undermined the analysis of Siebert *et al.* An overview by Christians *et al.* (2009) indicates that the trend has remained largely unchanged, thereby largely leaving unaccounted for the press of other societies, such as that of Africa.

Since the discussion of this study is on a democratic society, I focus on democratic normative theories. In a comprehensive discussion on normative media theories, Christians *et al.* (2009, pp.29-32) identify four broad normative functions as characteristic of the press in a liberal-market democracy. These include

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<sup>24</sup> See Nick Turse (2004) at: [http://www.nickturse.com/articles/vietnam\\_voice2.html](http://www.nickturse.com/articles/vietnam_voice2.html)

monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative functions. Within these roles may arguably be found the eight normative functions suggested by Gurevitch and Blumler (1990, pp.269-270). These are surveillance of socio-political developments, reporting the most relevant issues, offering a platform for debate across a diversity of views, holding authority accountable, provide opportunities for citizens to learn, be involved in the political process, and resist efforts to be controlled by forces outside the media.

These functions and those described earlier are captured in McQuail's (2005, pp185-186) four normative media theories. These are liberal-pluralist market, social responsibility or public interest, professional and alternative media models. This useful classification broadly captures the various normative issues of relevance to this study. Although the normative functions and theories may not have a universal application, they could be used selectively to provide analytical opportunities for public communication in any contemporary democratic society, such as Ghana.

The liberal-pluralist market model and the social responsibility models emphasise the interest of the public as well as the requirement that the press should be accountable to society. The models, however, make a nominal demand for the press to exercise self-regulation, just as it also makes room for the state to play a negligible role in the press industry. The professional and alternative models are almost similar in orientation. The professional model is based on the guardianship role of the press and its journalistic profession as a whole. The model argues that the press is the best institution to safeguard the interest of the public, since its (the press's) main function is "serving the public's need for information and comment and providing platforms for the expression of diverse views" (McQuail, 2005, p.187). Other guardianship roles of the press include keeping watch over people in authority and ensuring social harmony. The last model, that is, the alternative model, signifies a number of non-traditional media with a focus on seeking the interests and shared interaction of various splintered sections of society such as the grassroots, media producers, and audiences, among others. This study argues that, in addition to producing and circulating information in society generally, the press has an additional responsibility of making its messages linguistically accessible to its audiences.

The discussion so far on the press and its normative roles has proceeded mainly from Western perspectives. Although the issues discussed may relate to the African and Ghanaian situation, they do not directly reflect the historical, social, cultural, and political situation of the African context. Hence, in the next section, I discuss Paulo Freire's empowerment theory (derived from his educational philosophy) as one of this study's analytical frameworks because of its direct relevance to the informative function of the press in the developing African setting.

### **2.6.6 Paulo Freire's Empowerment theory**

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, in *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1993/1970) theorised two types of education. The first he described as the 'banking system' in which the teacher selects problems irrespective of their relevance to the actual and perceived reality of the learners and uses a top-down teaching method in the learning process. The second is the 'problem-posing' approach, which challenges students to think critically about issues in relation to their natural, cultural and historical circumstances.

The problem-posing approach, which Freire privileged, is an educational model that is based on dialogical and participatory approaches in the teaching and learning enterprise. In this approach, the participants (the teacher and learners) engage in interactive activities making them both learners and teachers at the same time. Thus, learners become 'subjects' who act, rather than objects who are acted upon, which leads to the empowerment of learners. Freire presented the 'problem-posing' approach as processes leading to change. It links up the state of 'knowing' to the desire to 'intervene' in the world to solve problems, and Freire identified this as a key motivation for learning.

Although Freire's theory deals with mainstream education and appears idealistic, it has relevance for the analysis of this thesis. Having used Africa (Ethiopia) as the basis for most of his educational work that intended to create socio-political awareness in ordinary people (Odhiambo, 2004, p.16), Freire argued that the problem-posing approach is best suited to Africa and other developing societies of the world. It is about critical consciousness, which information from newspapers can stimulate. It implies learning to perceive socio-political and economic contradictions in the people's environment, to be able to understand their world and to take action against the oppressive elements around them (Thomas, 1992). Freire

considers the awakening of critical consciousness in ordinary people a vital step toward their emancipation. According to Freire (1993, p.47), this could be achieved in four ways: the people must realise their situation; they must analyse the basis of their circumstances; they must explore solutions as individuals and groups; and they must act to change the situation following norms of social justice.

The Freirean theory, especially his ideas on empowerment and participation, connects with communication generally, and the news media in particular. The model is relevant to participatory communication (Waisbord, 2001; Servaes, 1996, 2004), which emphasises the importance of cultural identity and participation of a people in communication processes that lead to development goals (Servaes, 2004, p.61). The theory has found relevance in development-related studies and practices in developing environments of particularly Africa because of its relevance to participatory communication and learning. For instance, Brazilian dramatist and politician, Augusto Boal, extended Freire's ideas into the domain of theatre for development. His writings, especially his book, *Theatre of the oppressed* (1979), have been used as the basis for many studies on theatre for development in Africa and other similar societies (see Odhiambo, 2004; Kamlongera, 2005; Plastow 2009).

Concerning the news media, one of the key roles of the press has been its potential to provide a platform for public 'education'. Education is here understood in terms of 'public pedagogy', which Anderson (2012, no pagination) describes as a type that goes beyond formal schooling and is without a clear and distinct curriculum. Anderson (*ibid.*) sums up the educational capacity of the press:

Unequivocally, the mass media plays a crucial role in how people come to perceive underlying causes related to recurring economic patterns, how the public interprets different social phenomenon and how they understand the world in which they live. The media serve an undeniably important educational function. Moreover, mass media can be considered a form of public pedagogy – that is, an institutional system of large-scale public education through which power is exercised and ideologies are propagated.

The notion that the news media serve educational purposes is arguably a controversial matter, but the above extract helps to clarify the specific perspective of education and learning applicable in this research. That is, the news media provides information and serves as a platform for conscious or unconscious learning.

Anderson thus argues for the Freirean analytical approach to be applied to the news media. The press's role in public education may arguably be inferred in some media-related contexts although the term may not be overtly used. Examples include the "public sphere" concept as a discursive platform for free and open public debate on matters of public importance (Habermas, 1989); communication for development (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1983); public service broadcasting such as that under the auspices of UNESCO aiming at informing, educating and entertaining citizens, among others. These domains involve public education but with a different focus which space and time may not allow for a detailed discussion here. In fact, studies in media effects have shown that people in both advanced and new democracies learn in varying degrees from the press (Graber, 1984; Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; d'Haenens and Jankowski, 2004; Nisbet, 2008; Santana *et al.*, 2011).

Freire's ideas, especially his principles of dialogue, participatory learning and action, and awareness creation, are integral to normative views concerning the function of the African press (as I discuss shortly). Although the ideas relates to group dialogue, Servaes (1996, p.73) argues that it can "apply to any aspect of human communication." It means the news media can initiate dialogue at various social levels to create critical consciousness among people for them to understand and, therefore, resist the conditions of their oppression (whether political, economic or cultural). In this way, the press can enhance the democratic space and the development of African societies.

However, this thesis argues that the ability of the press to empower people depends largely on the people's ability to access and comprehend the information from the press. The next subsections continue the discussion by focusing on the African press.

## **2.7 The African press and its normative functions**

Contemporary African societies have witnessed a significant transformation in both their political and economic circumstances from what obtained about two decades ago. The largely dictatorial regimes and the state-controlled economies of the countries before the 1990s have given way to relatively democratic and liberalised economies. Today's mass media scene in Africa has also transformed radically. The

largely state-monopolised media and telecommunications systems before the mid-1990s have given way to both state and private participation in the media market. The Ghanaian media scene today, for instance, has become very vibrant, pluralist and diversified in terms of organisations, ownership and audiences. Specifically, there has been a proliferation of newspapers, radio and television stations, telecommunication networks, online and new media opportunities (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion). The Ghanaian media landscape nearly reflects general trends in most parts of Africa (see section 2.7.4). Ugangu (2012) reports a similar trend for Kenya, while Akpojivi (2012) presents almost the same scenario for Nigeria.

This mass media situation raises questions about the changing roles of the African press and how these roles are carried out. As discussed regarding the Western press, the quest to understand these critical changes and their implications for the press and its functions today require research attention. The relative freedom of the press in contemporary times has placed the press in a position to offer a public forum in which different people and ideas can interact. Thus, the need for the press to enhance diversity of views in the public spaces continues to be the emphasis of researchers (Nyamnjoh, 2005; White, 2008).

The news media's information role in new democracies, like the press elsewhere, has remained generally unchallenged, despite its limitations. The challenges identified with the effective functioning of the press in its political information role (section 2.6.4) apply to the African press as well. For instance, evidence of an emerging media conglomeration and affiliation culture in Ghana (see Chapter 4) applies to the press of most Africa countries. Additionally, most African journalists are said to be influenced by bribe (brown envelopes) because of their poor remuneration and conditions of work (BBC World Service Trust, 2006, p.79). African scholars, such as Mukhongo (2010) and Nyamnjoh (2005) have expressed concern about whether the African press can foster peace and harmony in the face of the many ethnic conflicts in the continent.

These limitations notwithstanding, the relevance of the African press in the continent's democratic and developmental agenda has hardly been contested. The press is believed to have the potential to influence society through the information it produces and circulates. The history of Africa's independence struggles supports the ability of the press to motivate social action for the 'good' of society. The need for

the press to champion various contested and represented positions remains crucially important in a society that is growing out of the shell of authoritarian structure (that had largely circumscribed diversity of ‘truths’) and needs development badly. Voltmer’s call for an active civil society and alternative views in the public domain of new democracies (2006, p.2) is also a call for a functioning press. This would not only make it possible to contest the autocratic dominance of political authority, but also broaden issues concerning many more people in the political public space. This study’s investigation into the language of the Ghanaian press seeks to contribute knowledge about the extent to which the press fulfils the responsibility for which it enjoys the relative freedom accorded it as the *Fourth Estate* in its developing environment. The next subsection discusses these matters, beginning with the history and development of the African press.

### **2.7.1 History of the African press: A socio-political perspective**

The origin of the African press may be traced to four sources: “[T]he colonial state, the European settler colonists, the Christian missionary institutions, and the early African educated elites” (Karikari, 2007, p.13). The first newspapers came through the first three sources and occurred between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Mytton, 1983; Kasoma, 1986; Bourgault, 1995). The first Anglophone newspapers in sub-Saharan Africa were *The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* (1801) in Sierra Leone, *The Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer* (1822) in Ghana (called Gold Coast at the time) and *Liberia Herald* (1826) in Liberia.

These British colonial initiatives could have led some scholars to assert that mass communications are inherently alien to Africa (Salawu, 2009; Hachten, 1971). Salawu (2009, p.83) states emphatically, “[m]ass communication is not traditional to Africa. European colonial powers brought into Africa the techniques of reaching large numbers of people scattered over large areas.” This is a contentious claim if the emphasis is on *reaching large numbers of people*. The fact is that Africans had an advanced mass communication structure where information was effectively disseminated through *runners, talking drums, gong gong, fire*, among others, within and between villages before the arrival of Europeans (Mytton, 1983). However, it is fair to point out that the introduction of (Western-type) literacy and the technology of printing and broadcasting in the continent by the British transformed mass communication in Africa as it is today.

The evolution of Africa's press in West Africa continued in 1828 when, according to Mytton (1983), the *Liberian Herald* was founded by Charles Force, an ex-slave from America. Bourgault (1995, p.154) and Nyamnjoh (2005, p.40) also record that missionaries began Nigeria's premiere newspaper, the *Iwe Iorin*, first in the Yoruba language and later in both Yoruba and English, which paved the way for other newspapers to follow. The press in Cameroon also traces its inception to the colonial period when in 1903 German missionaries established the first newspaper to convert the natives to Christianity (Ndombo Kale II, 1997). Other newspapers by the English and French followed (*ibid.*), although little information exists in the literature on them. It seems that interest in newspaper circulation at that time was motivated by the desire for information dissemination for colonial Government propaganda purposes and not for profit.

Writers are unanimous that the role of the colonial government press was to provide information, education and entertainment for the European settlers in the colonies and naturally to serve the interest of the colonial administrators and missionaries (Ainslie, 1966; Jones-Quartey, 1975; Nyamnjoh, 2005). These newspapers mainly carried the views of the European community and missionaries and were largely uncritical of their respective governments (Jones-Quartey, 1975). African views and interests were also not highlighted in the colonial government newspapers (Bourgault, 1995; Nyamnjoh, 2005), implying that the Africans were largely excluded from the socio-political discourses of the press, and hence from the governance process. Thus, the need to be heard and to participate in the political space could have led indigenous Africans into the press industry.

From the mid-1800s, educated indigenous Africans from West Africa, mainly Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, also waded into the pre-independence press industry targeting (educated) African readers (Hasty, 2005, p.9). Charles Bannerman is reported to be the first indigenous African editor and publisher (Bourgault, 1995; Barton, 1979). He started *The Accra Herald* in 1857 and later established the *West African Herald* as well. Many other native-owned newspapers followed, particularly in Nigeria and Ghana. Nyamnjoh (2005, p.41) writes that "...it was mostly in the English colonies of the region that the press played an important role in the struggle against colonialism, providing nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe with a platform to articulate their claims for independence." The development of the press in other



parts of Africa followed a similar trend. Nyamnjoh (2005, p.40) again notes that the press set up initially in most parts of Africa were “largely a European creation to serve the information, education and entertainment needs of the large settler communities, leaving the black readership at the mercy of an irrelevant content and/or in search of alternative channels of communication.”

Carter (1968) reported that there was a flurry of press activity in East Africa from the late 1800s. According to Mytton (1983), Germans first introduced a newspaper in Tanganyika in 1885. In Kenya, the *East Africa and Uganda Mail* began circulation in 1899 in Mombasa to serve the European settlers in the region. The newspaper and other colonial publications that followed were founded to promote European farming and business interests (Carter, 1968, p.85). The first native involvement in the press in Kenya began with the *Muigwithania*, which was established in 1928 and published in the Kikuyu language by the Kenyan Central Association (KCA) (*ibid.*). The newspaper, which opposed the colonial administration of Kenya, might have encouraged other newspapers along the same editorial lines in that region. Mytton (1983) acknowledged that these newspapers provided a way of unifying the African nationalists to fight for independence. For Zambia, Kasoma (1986) noted that the first newspaper of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) was the *Livingston Pioneer* (1909). It was followed by the *Livingston mail*, the *Northern Rhodesian Advertiser*, the *Northern News*, the *Central African Post*, among others, all of which supported the colonial Government and were aimed principally at European settlers. Predictably, the indigenous Africans started their own publications to champion African aspirations. One such paper was the *Africa Post*, a militant but short-lived anti-government newspaper (*ibid.*).

The press situation described above provides clear signals about the eventual conflict that occurred between the private African indigenous press and the colonial Governments. This was mainly due to the nationalist and anti-colonial positioning of the African newspapers and their push for political independence. To ensure political stability and control of their territories, the colonial administrations instituted various censorship regimes (Nyamnjoh, 2005). For example, the *Muigwithania* of Kenya was banned in 1940, while most of Ghana’s repressive post-independence press laws date back to the colonial era, a typical example being the Criminal Code Ordinance of 1934 (Asante, 1996, p.4). However, the indigenous African press managed to survive through various strategies such as the use of

leaflets to carry on with their nationalistic activities (Nyamnjoh, 2005), which eventually led to political independence in many territories between the mid-1950s and early 1960s.

From the above discussion, I draw attention to the politics of language, showing that each press owner published in a language that reflected the purpose and targeted readership of each press. The government newspapers were published in European languages to reflect the purpose and readership discussed earlier. Interestingly, however, most of the indigenous newspapers were published in colonial languages, languages spoken by a few indigenous (educated) Africans. This raises questions about the much-acclaimed influence of the press in mobilising the indigenous people for independence. It could be that the few African elites who were spearheading the independence struggle read the newspapers and, as intermediaries, engaged in interpersonal discussion on the issues with others who could not understand the language of the press. The few political newspapers that were published in the indigenous language such as *Muigwithania* (published in Kikuyu) directly addressed African audiences and created a conversation of identity for them. Nevertheless, extensive library and internet searches carried out by this researcher have yielded little information about the nature and influence of the language of, especially, the indigenous African newspapers that were published in English.

Most of the indigenous newspapers of this time were largely amateur journalistic efforts with a 'propaganda' aim, their main purpose being to contribute to the independence struggle (Anyidoho, 2008). Thus, most of the newspapers were not profit oriented, so were non-commercial and ran into losses (Carter, 1968, p.85). Although some of the newspapers were established by people who had received training or were experienced in journalism, such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria and Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, the majority of the owners and writers were people with little training or knowledge as professional journalists<sup>25</sup> (Bourgault, 1995). It is, therefore, clear that the journalistic practices of the indigenous press at the time were informed mostly by the zeal of achieving political independence. This explains the ease with which such newspapers folded

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<sup>25</sup> That is, being trained to follow journalistic conventions and practices of the industry (for example, Tuchman, 1978) in newsgathering and production.

up after independence was attained, implying that once their goal was achieved, the newspapers lost their *raison d'être*.

### **2.7.2 The post-independence press in Africa**

The development and press practices of post-independence Africa were largely shaped by the political and economic circumstances of the various countries. The development and fortunes of the press from then have depended on the political regime of the day, economic circumstances as well as the relationship that existed between the press and the state. The period may be discussed in two phases: independence up to the end of the 1980s, and then from the 1990s to date.

Just after independence, the new African Governments took steps to consolidate their hold on power and to define their political ideology. In so doing, they saw the press as an opportune ally and nationalised it. Their reasoning was that the state needed to concentrate on 'important' development issues such as national unity, protection of traditional culture, education, among others, which require unity of purpose and no room for distractions (from the press) (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Eribo, and Jong-Ebot, 1997; Hachten, 1971, 1993). Similar justifications were given for the so-called one-party and military regimes that characterised most parts of Africa such as Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, among others, up to the late 1980s. The autocratic tendency of the leaders, particularly the suppression of the press, is surprising because a number of the leaders themselves were journalists or had used the press in the independence struggle. As indicated in the previous subsection, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania either owned newspapers or were editors of newspapers before becoming rulers of their countries. These leaders used every means from arbitrary imprisonment, media laws (most of which they criticised during the colonial period), the outright banning of private newspapers, and other measures, to control the press.

Therefore, the African press before the 1990s did not have a favourable environment to develop commercially and professionally. This is mainly because the African press did not have what can pass for a free independent press during that period of its history (Anokwa, 1997). Thus, the period from independence to the latter part of the 1990s did not see any major impact of commercial media in most parts of Africa.

### **2.7.3 Press practice in Africa after independence**

In terms of journalistic practice, the post-independence press, mainly under the ownership and control of the governments, adopted ‘development communication/journalism’. Bourgault (1995, p.229), a respected voice on the history of the African press, had unkind words for this journalistic model. She quickly described it as “naive”, without appreciating its potential to empower citizens and enhance unity, confidence and development in nation-states that had emerged from colonisation. This could be because of the way the press was appropriated and used to serve the interests of the political leaders of the time (Bourgault, 1995; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Scholars such as Dzisah (2008, p.54) have explained that the adoption of this communication strategy reflected peculiar political and social circumstances that demanded rapid development at the time, and this required a system that focused on internal reporting. I have presented a detailed discussion of this journalistic practice in section 2.7.6 because of its continuous relevance in Africa. Although the African press began showing signs of a commercial and professional tendency, the serious controls it suffered did not make it any different from the circumstances of the press of the colonial period. This was the situation until the “second liberation” (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997) of the 1990s.

### **2.7.4 The African Press from the 1990s**

The 1990s marked a major improvement in the fortunes of the press and its culture in most parts of Africa. It is from this period that the African press could be justifiably assessed from a professional perspective. Changes in global politics, the dominance of capitalist market economy worldwide and the influence of international collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) compelled many hitherto authoritarian states to democratise, and with it came press “liberation”. Importantly, the ban on the private press was lifted in many countries leading to press pluralism, which broadened the spheres of press ownership and diversity of views. Additionally, Paterson (1998) observes how from the 1990s, Africa began opening up to take advantage of the information and development opportunities offered by new communication technologies like TV reception satellite dishes. Bourgault (1995) had reported the same trend, referring to computer technology and mobile telephony, which had started emerging in Africa

during the late 1980s. These conditions were complemented by a proliferation of newspapers, which may be categorised as the state press (owned and financed by the state) and the private press (established and operated by private individuals). The majority of these media organisations have been commercial and have emphasised professionalism of journalists in both training and performance (BBC World Service Trust, 2006). The number of newspapers and other mass media forms has continued to increase up to contemporary times.

Discussions involving the press and its roles in Africa have generally focused little attention on language and its contribution to the story of the press. The overview presented above indicates that most of the political newspapers that appeared on the continent have been published in English or other European languages. The language of the African press, therefore, deserves critical study to provide an empirical understanding of issues relating to the communicative effectiveness of the press on the continent.

### **2.7.5 The African press and its normative roles**

Normative expectations that have framed the African press since independence have often been discussed from Anglo-American perspectives (see Anokwa, 1977; Heath 1977; Dzisah, 2008). This is mainly because of the lack of ‘home-grown’ African theories on the issue. While African scholars have argued for specific and unique ‘Afro-centric’ normative conceptions and theories that may address the roles of the press in African societies (see Okigbo and Eribo, eds. 2004), there appears to be no consensus on such theories and their implementation. In a major study that sampled views on the expected functions of the press in the Kenyan society, Ugangu (2012, pp.202-209) discovered that the media were expected, among others, to:

- be peace makers
- suggest solutions to society’s problems
- serve as change agents
- guard democracy
- be custodians of public good
- provide information and educate the people
- homogenise society
- mobilise people against social ills
- promote public participation

- help solve society's problems of poverty, social injustice, poor governance, etc.

Newspaper editors<sup>26</sup> I interviewed as part of this research expressed similar views on the normative expectations of the Ghanaian press. Two such views are reproduced verbatim below:

- a. Apart from informing the public about issues of national interest and concern, they also serve as watchdog role over government. And in that respect, they demand accountability from government and public officers. They also educate the masses about the policies and programmes of the government and various organizations and groups within the society. The press has a role to expose wrongdoing in the society and also ensures that the people are not left out in the decision-making process. It is also the responsibility of the media to fight against injustice in the system (verbatim from interview transcripts of a news editor: interview date, 7th September 2012).
- b. The media now sets the agenda for our social and political affairs in the country... to serve as a means of mobilizing the people to advance the course of society (verbatim from interview transcripts of a news editor: interview date, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012).

These editors highlight the role of the media in providing information, educating the people, demanding accountability from those in authority, seeking justice for people, showing the people the way and persuading them accordingly for society's wellbeing. The need to develop and practise the liberal and democratic ideals of a 'good society' has meant that normative perspectives attuned to African needs have remained a strong basis upon which most scholars have argued for a free press in African democratic societies (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; Tettey, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2005; White, 2008; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009; Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010). It is clear from the perspective of media practitioners and researchers that the African press is expected to champion human rights, ensure peace and harmony of society, provide a platform for debates and citizens' engagement in public affairs and through these enhance the democratisation process and the development of society.

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<sup>26</sup> I have explained in the research design (Chapter 6) that it was agreed between the editors (interviewees) and me that their personal names are not included in the report. This, I have respected throughout this study. Nevertheless, I have the records and can make the names available to the university if I am required to do so.

These expectations concerning the African press may be located broadly within the various Western-oriented normative theories discussed earlier. Normative theories of the press are understood as also providing the basis to assess the positive or negative impact of the press in a given society at a particular time (Voltmer, 2006). It is with this understanding that the Western-based normative models may selectively apply in the Africa context since, arguably, they do not have a universal application. Additionally, this study also argues that language, in terms of its readability and comprehension, is a crucial factor in the overall effectiveness of the press and ought to inform normative thinking about the press in Africa and, particularly, Ghana.

Since the Western-based normative theories may not exactly reflect the African and Ghanaian context, I complement them with development journalism, which I discuss in the next subsection. Similar to Paulo Freire's theory, development journalism (DJ) is a normative theory whose formulation, conceptualisation and focus relate to conditions of emerging democracies. It should therefore provide a useful analytical support for the study.

#### **2.7.6 Development journalism (DJ)**

DJ was mooted at a workshop of journalists at the Press Foundation of Asia in Manila, Philippines, in the 1960s (Shah, 1996, p.143). The theory was based on the well-intentioned but poorly conceptualised notion of development communication (Lerner, 1958; Schramm, 1964; Rogers, 1976, 1983), which was proposed as a solution to the lack of development in the Third World. The model theorised that the development of under-developed societies, especially countries emerging from colonisation, could be achieved through the transfer of technology and civilised culture from developed societies. However, DJ departed from this ethnocentric Western perspective on pathways to development by proposing concepts and practices that respond directly to the peculiar conditions and requirements of the Third World.

DJ was conceptualised as a form of independent journalism and presumes that national development is an inevitable social goal, and that the press has a critical role to play in the development process (Domatob and Hall, 1983; Kunczik, 1995). As Shah (1996, p.143) explains, the press, within this model, "provided constructive criticism of government and its agencies, informed readers how the development

process was affecting them, and highlighted local self-help projects.” Thus, the journalist was expected to facilitate and foster national development by reporting and interpreting ideas, programmes and events that relate to the improvement of the living standards and general well-being of citizens. This role means that the press may not necessarily emphasise ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ as enshrined in some Western-based press models (for example, the ‘watchdog’). From the concept, it is clear that DJ aims to educate citizens for them to be aware of and understand their circumstances. Through this approach, citizens can play meaningful roles in their social and political welfare and in national development, given the environment and opportunity to do so.

Referring to literature in the field, Xiaoge (2009, p.358) summarises five key aspects of development journalism as follows:

1. to report the difference between what has been planned to do and what in reality has been achieved as well as the difference between its claimed and actual impact on people (Aggarwala, 1978);
2. to focus not “on day-to-day news but on long term development process” (Kunczik, 1988, p.83);
3. to be independent from government and to provide constructive criticisms of government (Aggarwala, 1978; Shah, 1992; Ogan, 1982);
4. to shift “journalistic focus to news of economic and social development” while “working constructively with the government” (Richstad, 2000, p.279) in nation building;
5. and to empower the ordinary people to improve their own lives and communities (Romano & Hippocrates, 2001).

Based on aspects that are emphasised in practice, Kunczik (1995, pp.90-94) has identified three forms of DJ. The first is similar to the Western-style investigative journalism in that it emphasises development projects while at the same time monitoring government activities. However, this form importantly requires a free and independent press to be effective. Benevolent-authoritarian is another form that systematically manipulates information for the sake of the ‘common good’ and ‘development’. This implies a form of DJ where there is an active collaboration between the press and state. The third approach, the socio-technological DJ, follows the notion and requirement that citizens should participate in the national



development activities. This idea is for journalism to involve citizens in decision making toward nation building. In this model, the journalist provides information on development issues and activities to the populace.

The theory was initially accepted and practised in many Third World countries from the 1960s. Xiaoge (2009, p.358) observes that DJ occurred with variations in different countries because its practice was influenced by the unique social, economic, cultural and political conditions of the respective countries. The deplorable socio-economic situations and the desperate need for national development and nation building in countries in Africa created a favourable environment for the adoption of DJ (Domatob and Hall, 1983). Under the circumstances, most journalists were often committed to the national development cause and were initially willing to support the state because they saw it as a patriotic contribution to the unity and development of their society (Domatob and Hall, 1983, p.10; Odhiambo, 1991, p.23).

Nevertheless, DJ soon lost favour and did not make any significant impact as expected. Researchers, for instance Domatob and Hall (1983), write how the aim of DJ was undermined by many political rulers of the Third World to serve their interests. As discussed shortly with reference to Africa and in reference to Shah (1996, p.143), the political leaders used the DJ concept as a rationale to annex the press and use it to enforce authoritarianism.

Following this history, newer forms of DJ generally de-emphasise the support for state-press collaboration and instead highlight the importance of a press that stimulates and enhances citizen participation in activities of social change. For instance, Shah's (*ibid.*) proposes a normative "model of journalism and national development" that emphasises emancipation. The new model, *Emancipatory Journalism*, highlights the marginalising effects of modernity as well as the emancipatory aspects of communication. The model argues for people who are marginalised in their communities to be given voice by journalists to articulate alternative visions in their society.

#### **2.7.6.1 Development journalism in Africa**

In Africa, the majority of the new states adopted and practised the benevolent-authoritarian form of DJ from the 1960s to the 1980s. By practising this form of journalism, the new states indicated their underdevelopment conditions and the

urgent need for socio-economic transformation. The new states also realised the need to counter the dependency relationship between them and their colonial past and to promote their traditions and culture (Domatob and Hall, 1983). The press was thus seen as a revolutionary tool of African liberation from the fetters of colonialism and imperialism. For instance, Ghana's first President, Kwame Nkrumah, believed that the African press should play the role of a political activist and be "a collective organiser, a collective instrument of mobilisation and a collective educator, a weapon first and foremost for the overthrow of colonialism and imperialism and to assist total African independence and unity" (cited in Odhiambo, 1991, p.24). The press was also meant to help forge unity among the multi-ethnic populations of the countries in order to harness efforts toward social, economic and cultural development.

Indeed, the political leaders initially appeared to be committed to the ideals of DJ. Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, for example, advised the press to:

... positively promote national development and growing self-respect since in Africa it can have a tremendous influence on nation building. It may constantly inspire or could set out to frustrate the spirit of ... national unity which every young country needs as the fundamental of its progress (Cited by Domatob and Hall, 1983, p.10).

The African press was, therefore, expected to support governments and be an agent of societal mobilisation. It was to educate the people on development issues and help to consolidate the political independence of the states. The stakes were so high that most journalists easily accepted to support the governments in the belief that national interest at the time superseded any other interests. For example, a Nigerian newspaper editor, Mamman Daura; Tanzanian journalist, Ng'wanakilala; and Kenyan news editor, Hilary Ng'weno all argued for the African press to cede their independence for the national cause (Domatob and Hall, 1993, p.10; Odhiambo, 1991, p.23). The belief was that the politicians would play their traditional leadership roles, while the press performed its informative roles.

However, most of the post-independence African leaders gave DJ a different interpretation that suited their personal ideological purposes and interests (Bourgault, 1995; Heath, 1997). Leaders in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, and others, under the guise of DJ, appropriated the press and used it to paint a rosy picture of national conditions and happenings and to praise the political

elites about (sometimes non-existent) development projects (Domatob and Hall, 1983; Anokwa, 1997). They adopted what Haynes (2001, p.142) describes as ‘state-led development’, in which development initiatives were often imposed on the people irrespective of the people’s actual circumstances or needs. This implies arguably that news flow in the states proceeded in a top-down manner, mainly from the viewpoint of the states. Knowledge and ‘truth’ resided with only the political authority; therefore, there was no room for any dissenting or alternative voice or view. As such, there was little chance for citizens’ participation in the development process as they were largely alienated from the governance process. The situation is captured in President Nyerere’s saying: “No government tells the people everything, but every government must reach the people so as to tell them what they should be told” (cited in Domatob and Hall, 1983, p.14). In this way, the political leaders subverted the understanding with which journalists accepted to collaborate with the state.

Nevertheless, DJ still has importance for the press and journalistic practice in Africa today. This is especially because of the radical political and economic transformation of most African countries compared to the situation before the 1990s. The development issues that motivated the argument for DJ remain largely the same in most parts of contemporary Africa. The deplorable economic conditions of most African countries and issues of socio-political and economic marginalisation as well as bad governance practices continue to receive prominence in scholarly discussions and research findings (see Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; Odhiambo, 1991; Bratton *et al.*, 2005; White, 2008). The need to focus on citizens, create awareness about development activities and projects in communities, expose citizens to the problems and conditions of their environment, and empower and involve them in the solution of their problems makes DJ useful in the continent. DJ, as originally conceptualised, shares common tenets with contemporary participatory communication approaches (Waisbord, 2001; Servaes, 1996, 2004). These theories emphasise the direct and active involvement of the people, who are the beneficiaries of the development interventions, in the development process, from planning and decision-making to implementation (Hyden *et al.*, 2002). The idea of ‘participation’ involves the act of sharing “information, knowledge, trust, commitment, and the right attitude in development planning and implementation” (Servaes, 2004, p.61). DJ is also open, to some extent, to journalistic practices in

which the press has an obligation to be responsible to society and perform a traditional surveillance role as society's 'watchdog'. These practices, in the pluralist environment today, may benefit different sections of society in different ways, thereby enhancing participation and national development.

There is evidence of the potential usefulness of DJ in promoting citizens' awareness of their social, cultural and economic circumstances. For instance, ideologically, DJ in Africa and other parts of the developing world was closely associated with the movements of the New International Economic Order (a 1974 UN declaration) and the New World Information and Communication Order (called for in 1980 by the MacBride Commission) (Xiaoge, 2009). These movements aimed to empower people in developing societies through communication for citizens to participate meaningfully in their own welfare and development. Thus, UNESCO-sponsored projects like Radio Rural Forums in India, Ghana and Costa Rica (Xiaoge, 2009, p.360) are instances of this initiative and which provided further ideological support for DJ. There is also evidence of some successes with media-led educational programmes in Ghana and other similar African countries in agricultural extension, health issues (such as family planning), adult literacy, and so on (Paterson, no date).

In Ghana, press practices are greatly informed by the concepts underlying DJ even at the policy level. For instance, Ghana's media policy that guides journalistic practices enjoins journalists to be guided by issues of national unity, development and political stability in their practices (NMC, no date, p.26). This is because the media are regarded as a 'public trust' to ensure 'public interest' above everything else, whether the media are public, commercial or community (*ibid.*). Consequently, most Ghanaian journalists hold the view that journalism practice must aim to enhance peaceful co-existence of the people, to help alleviate poverty and illiteracy, restore the lost confidence of the people, among other goals, for which reason journalists cannot avoid self-censorship (Haruna, 2009). There have also been efforts by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and the UN and its affiliates to encourage the practice of DJ. For example, the UNDP has a standing yearly award for best development journalism story in Ghana. In 2013, a news story on 'challenges of pregnant women in rural Ghana' by Efua Acquah Harrison won the award, which was presented by the Country Director of the United Nations

Development Programme in Ghana.<sup>27</sup> There is, therefore, evidence of the practice of DJ in Ghana today, although it is difficult to ascertain the extent of its success. Stories on political, economic and cultural issues involving ordinary people are regularly spotlighted in newspapers, on radio and television in the relatively diversified and pluralist mass media system of Ghana. Thus, DJ ties in with Freire's empowerment theory and can boost citizens' consciousness of their circumstances and involve them in their own development (Freire, 1993).

The argument of this study is that reporting development news is not an end in itself. It is expected to contribute to people's participation in the affairs of their society to promote democracy. This may largely be achieved if the language of the news is comprehensible for audiences to engage with information provided and through that achieve emancipation from conditions that oppress them.

### **2.7.7 Limitations of the normative argument**

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the normative claims suffer from some inconsistencies and challenges. Apart from the fact that the core ideas of the normative theories are prescriptive, they may also be difficult to practise in exact and absolute terms. The normative views are advocated although the press, as a human institution, may not always act in the interest of society. The limitations of the African press in its information function in general, as discussed in section 2.7, also challenge its normative roles. Additionally, Voltmer (2006) has pointed out that normative ideals are weakened by contradictions that could cause conflicts in processes of democratising the media. For example, economic interests, which could lead to bad press practices, are often ignored in normative discussions about Africa. Moreover, the privileged advantage that the press accords the powerful in society and the way the press ideologically frames certain categories of people in its representations clearly impinge on the normative ideals about the press.

In spite of these weaknesses, the roles of the press in society in general, and Ghana in particular, have remained rooted in normative thinking, which provides a basis for specific societies to assess the performance of the press. Normative views, as prescriptive requirements and ideals, are expectations that guide society and its

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<sup>27</sup>See UNDP in Ghana at:

<http://www.gh.undp.org/content/ghana/en/home/presscenter/articles/2013/11/05/undp-presents-best-development-journalism-award/>

various institutions toward practices held to be desirable by the majority in a society. Thus, the normative views discussed above may frame expectations that African societies may have of the press, especially the need for it to provide information to its readers and through that contribute positively to good governance. This current study specifically draws on these normative ideals to assess the extent to which the Ghanaian press effectively transmits messages to audiences.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed major issues concerning the relationship between language, communication and especially the information functions of the press and its normative roles in democratic societies. It has also discussed the historical and political development of the African press and its roles. The discussion has revealed that from its beginnings to current times, the African press has been used by various sections of society and governments to mobilise people and impart ideologies on audiences for different purposes and interests. Although faced with challenges, the contemporary African press is still believed to have a critical informative role to play in the democratisation process of Africa. Importantly, the discussion draws attention to the issue of language as a subject that must attract attention in discussions of the development, successes and problems of the African press. The issues discussed in this chapter should underpin the detailed description of the Ghanaian press in Chapter 4.

The chapter also reviewed normative theories pertaining to the role of the African press, arguing importantly that normative theories of the press from Western perspectives may not completely and accurately reflect the African situation because of socio-political and cultural differences. Paulo Freire's educational theory and development journalism, which relate more directly to the historical, cultural and socio-political conditions of the African context, have therefore been proposed and used to complement the Western-based theories. While the Western-based normative theories capture the liberal, democratic and information functions of the press, Freire's model and DJ emphasise and situate the discussion more closely to the African context. It is within this blend of frameworks that other theories and discussions concerning democratisation, political participation and the linguistic issues are understood in this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Democracy, News and Political Participation in Ghana**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter continues the discussion on the study's conceptual frameworks, focusing on news information and political participation in Ghana in the context of democracy and democratisation. The aim is to establish the relationship between the press, news information and political participation. Similar to the previous chapter, these issues can best be understood within a wider framework from both global and African perspectives. Many African countries, including Ghana, have followed a similar path in their political development after independence, that is, from authoritarian toward democratic consolidation. Therefore, throughout this chapter the discussions project the general experience of Africa before narrowing down to the Ghanaian situation.

#### **3.2 Democracy and participatory society**

The view of democracy underpinning the discussion derives from the liberal-market model (hereafter, democracy) which many sub-Saharan African countries claim to practise. Democracy is currently the most popular form of governance, perhaps because of its core values, which aim at safeguarding human dignity. The liberal-market model, also known as constitutional democracy, is based on the North American concept of democracy as governance by, for, and of the people (Christians *et al.*, 2009).

As a working definition, I adopt the American scholar, Fukuyama's (1992, p.43), description of democracy as a government in which citizens freely "choose their own governments through periodic, free and fair, secret-ballot, multiparty elections, on the basis of universal and equal adult suffrage." The writer cites some of the key principles of democracy as pluralism, participation, human rights, rule of law, and equality. The system emphasises accountability of rulers to their people and provides for citizens to participate in governance through individual and collective action to influence their leaders and their lives. This system of governance is also tied to the free market and movement of goods and services. From the normative

perspective, the democratic ideal rests much on informed choice, to which productions of political journalism are important contributors. Typical examples of this form of democracy are found in North America and Britain as the Presidential and Westminster models, respectively.

However, the practical realisation and exercise of the democratic ideal and the extent to which they are achieved may differ from one democratic society to another. Most mainstream definitions of democracy, such as the one above, often appear to project practices in Europe and North America as normative models of 'good' democracy. It is when such an essentialist implication is avoided that the practice of democracy would be understood as being informed by peculiar historical, cultural and political circumstances of particular societies (Vltmer, 2013). For instance, most democracies in Africa are in a transitional process from political dictatorships and the societies are organised around collectives and not individuals. Thus, the concepts of liberty and equality, which are cardinal principles of liberal democracy, may have different implications in African societies from what they represent in advanced democracies. As Vltmer (2006, p.16) notes, the values of democracy have been fraught with paradoxes and controversies and that the principles of democracy have different meanings in different cultural and political environments.

The mass media are said to be a critical pillar in a democracy. Barber (1984) has argued that the press is a facilitator of the governance process and that the survival of democracy depends largely on the consistent flow of information and communication in society. Writing on stable democracies like the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada, and others, Bennett and Serrin (2007) point out the indispensable role of the press in sustaining those democracies. This belief supports the widely held view that a free and functioning press legitimates democracy since the press is a major contributor of the information required in the public domain for an effective and functioning democracy. Such a press is expected to represent the diversity and plurality of its society to provide a fruitful participatory environment for policy formulation and implementation.

Democratic practice has generally been challenged in various ways. Much has already been said in the previous chapter about the democratic function of the press and how the limitations of political journalism are undermining democracy. McNair



(2009b, p.238) explains that merely holding periodic elections may not adequately reflect democracy if the democratic process is not informed by reasoned and rational actions through reliable and accurate information. Yet, most democratic processes hardly benefit from reliable and accurate information or reasoned and informed actions. Additionally, corruption and dishonesty have been associated with national elections, even in developed democracies. For instance, in *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, the investigative journalist, Greg Palast, revealed how political corruption characterised the famous 2000 presidential elections in the United States. Many Black and Democratic voters are said to have been prevented from registering prior to the presidential election, thereby disenfranchising them in order to favour one of the presidential candidates, Mr George W. Bush. These limitations, and many more factors which space cannot allow here, imply that democratic rule may not be perfect even in the most advanced democracies.

Despite these criticisms and challenges, and in the absence of an alternative, democracy remains the most popular form of government in the world. Democracy is generally viewed as a system that best guarantees development because of the relatively transparent and participatory environment it offers. This appears to be supported by experiences of advanced democracies in, for instance, the UK and North America, who have practised the governance system for many years. The relative successes of such countries with democracy provided the justification for democracy, as practised in the West to be 'exported' to developing countries. However, democracy in developing countries has so far largely failed to yield the expected results. The world has been slow to come to terms with the fact that the practice of democracy must reflect specific society's historical and socio-cultural realities, instead of being made to mimic practices in other (established) democracies (see Voltmer, 2013).

### **3.3 Democracy in Africa**

The re-democratisation of the continent in the 1990s saw most African countries adopting and practising democracy. Most of the countries have organised their democratic engagements along the lines of established democracies (Ogbondah, 2004). The ideology behind the push for the largely underdeveloped African countries to practise democracy was that it could guarantee development (White, 2008). The belief has been that adhering to the principles of democracy could

produce the social, political and economic environment required to uplift the countries from their economic stagnations and deplorable living conditions of the inhabitants. It is believed that this governance model has the potential to create a relatively open and participatory socio-political society that has human dignity at the core of political decisions, actions and relationships.

However, opposing views have been expressed about the viability of liberal democracy in Africa. This follows from the inconsistent experiences of African countries with democracy since independence. While one school of thought feels democracy cannot work in Africa, others think that it is workable. Chabal (1998, p.299) captures some of the reasons presented by the two camps. Those who are doubtful about democracy in Africa argue that it is a foreign system, which may not agree with the cultural peculiarities of Africa. They argue further that many of the nations that are practising democracy have not differed radically from past undemocratic regimes, and that they have failed to exhibit the political characteristics of democracy. And, those who are positive about democracy in Africa feel that, despite its weaknesses, democracy has brought about changes in two critical ways. Firstly, the practice of competitive politics involving elections and press freedom has established precedence for continuous democratisation. Secondly, democracy has changed the idea of the political 'good', making it difficult for non-democratic regimes to have legitimacy (a rather controversial point, though). As Chabal (*ibid.*) explains, the opposing views stem from the different and sometimes narrow perspectives on the issue.

In recent times, there appears to be consensus that democracy has taken root in Africa, and the concern has shifted to a search for a type or practice that suits the socio-cultural dynamics of the continent. In this case, too, while scholars like Ake (2000) argue strongly that liberal democracy is unsuitable for Africa and that social democracy<sup>28</sup> is best, others like Ouwaseyi (2009) think that the problem is not with 'democracy' itself as a practice but rather, the lack of effective political leadership in the continent. Others agree with Nyamnjoh's (2005, p.26) argument below for a blend of the best characteristics of both liberal democracy and African political thought and culture:

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<sup>28</sup> According to Ake (2000), social democracy stresses an "activist role for the state and a strong commitment to social welfare."

The future direction of democracy may well be in a marriage or coexistence between individual aspirations and community interests, since Africans continue to emphasise relationships and solidarities over the illusion of autonomy. For democracy to succeed in this context, it must recognise the fact that most Africans are primarily patriotic to their home village, to which state and country in the modern sense are only secondary. It is in acknowledging and providing for the reality of individuals who straddle different forms of identity and belonging, and who are willing or forced to be both 'citizens' and 'subjects', that democracy stands its greatest chance in Africa (*ibid*, p.26).

The position represented by Nyamnjoh seems to reflect popular opinion even in current research. Voltmer (2013), for instance, argues for democracy in transitional democracies to be informed by the local, political and cultural dynamics of the societies. Owusu (1997, p.121) had referred to this perspective as "domestication of democracy," which Voltmer (2013, p.21), clarifies as "a process by which democratic institutions are adapted to local value systems and customs, thereby instilling a sense of familiarity and ownership in ordinary citizens." However, questions remain about the exact conceptual and practical characterisation of this hybridised form since, in both theory and practice, it may not reflect exactly the principles of the (liberal) democracy on which it is based. While these debates are beyond the scope of this study's objectives and, therefore, will not be continued here, they indicate clearly that democracy in Africa has not lived up to expectation.

Indeed, democratic practice in Africa has faced serious challenges. African countries generally lack adequate and/or effective democratic institutions, the structures, and the liberal culture required of a democracy (Bratton *et al.*, 2000). The African press, for instance, is largely not democratised nor does it enjoy the kind of freedom and independence expected in a democracy (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Sections of the mass media have also been criticised for taking undue advantage of the relative freedom accorded them to be "irresponsible, self-serving, unaccountable and a threat to the credibility and sustenance of the democratic process" (Tettey, 2006, p.230). The previous chapter has discussed other limitations of the African press that have the potential of undermining democracy in the continent. Concerning political elections in certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Bratton *et al.* (2005, p.18) note that, "elections are nominally competitive but are seriously flawed by ethnic conflict, political intimidation, vote buying, and questionable vote counts." As such and as seen above, most African democracies

have continued to exhibit authoritarian tendencies, and engaging in practices that are inimical to the welfare of their citizens.

Therefore, “Africa’s democracies remain few and fragile” (Bratton *et al.*, 2005, p.19). The worst symptom of the challenge to democracy in Africa is the unbridled political and administrative mismanagement through corruption, nepotism, abuse of power, and so on, which continue to stifle African countries economically (Eribo and Jong-Ebot, 1997; White, 2008). For instance, the famous Goldenberg and Anglo-Leasing scandals in Kenya in the 1990s (and spilling over to current times) and Ghana Government’s fraudulent payment of 51.2 million Ghana cedis (about 12 million pounds) to Alfred Woyome between 2010 are cases in point. The Anglo-Leasing case is about how the Kenyan taxpayers’ money was fraudulently syphoned by persons connected with the Kenyan political authority through non-delivery of services and overpricing. In the Ghanaian case, the Government paid Woyome the huge amount for no work done. Woyome was a known sympathiser and financier of the ruling government of the day and the fraud was planned and executed under the guise of respecting a ‘court ruling’. Ironically, the same government that paid the money is currently in court ostensibly to retrieve the illegal payment. Meanwhile, the government officials who facilitated the payments are walking free. Such occurrences are common in many African countries.

Thus, despite the appreciable resources in Africa as well as the significant financial inflows into the continent from the diaspora over the years, most African countries have remained poor and continued to survive on financial and logistical aid from other countries and international bodies (Bratton *et al.*, 2005; White, 2008). It is therefore not surprising that African nations, including Ghana, have achieved marginal success with democracy (White, 2008) and are viewed rightly as ‘emerging’, ‘transitioning’ or ‘democratising’. This means they are developing democratically toward a level that guarantees relatively acceptable political principles and practices comparable to established democracies as in the United Kingdom or North America.

### **3.4 Democratisation and democratic consolidation in Africa**

Democratisation and democratic consolidation are interrelated concepts that are associated with emerging democracies. Democratisation, as a process, is expected to lead to 'democratic consolidation'. According to Bratton *et al.* (2005, p.26), following Liz and Stepan (1996), 'democratic consolidation' is "when the procedures for electing leaders and holding them accountable become 'the only game in town.' It means democracy is consolidated when rules that govern the democratic processes are established and when there is a normative consent among individuals and political actors to respect the rules. In this sense, Ghana, like many other African countries like Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and others, is in the process of democratisation.

Information and participation of inhabitants are crucial requirements for the success of democratic consolidation. According to Nisbet (2008 p.458), "... democratic consolidation requires that mass publics have at least a minimum amount of information on democratic political practices, participate in political decision-making, and adhere to democratic norms, values and culture." Voltmer (2006, p.4) also argues that in a transitional society, the traditional watchdog function of the press cannot be ignored since democratisation is to institute mechanisms that make political authority accountable and responsive to the governed. Indeed, the key tenets of democracy such as "a well-informed citizenry, freedom to participation in the decision-making process, and accountability to the citizens by those who on their behalf exercise power" (Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010, p.132) are put into practice through consistent information flow in a society.

#### **3.4.1 The role of information in democratisation**

An ideology underlying this study is that if many Africans, and Ghanaians for that matter, have access to relevant political information and knowledge on governance issues, it would serve democratic practice well. The crucial role of information in democracy generally, and in Africa's democratisation process in particular, continues to be emphasised by scholars. Voltmer, (2006), for instance, has argued that democratisation requires democratic beings, that is, informed citizens, since unformed citizenry is a danger to democracy.

Nevertheless, scholars have maintained that most African societies lack the type and quality of information that will enhance enlightened political decisions and

actions (Karikari, 1998; White, 2008). The lack of political information appears to be a major impediment to citizens' participation in democracy in Africa. The implication of this situation is that when a society consists of largely unenlightened citizens, the political elites turn to be guardians of the society instead of being accountable to the people (Dahl, 1989). Dahl explained that the main problem of weak democracies lies in the gap between the knowledge of the rulers and the knowledge of ordinary citizens. As Eveland and Scheufele (2000, p.216) have noted concerning differences in information acquisition in United States (which may apply in the Ghanaian and African situation as well), "when there are disparities across social groups in political knowledge and participation, democracy is at least a little less democratic, regardless of the underlying reason for these inequalities."

To narrow the gap, Dahl (1989, p.338) suggested the following information-based interventions, which may be located within the overall function of the press in Africa, and particularly in Ghana.

- to ensure that information about the political agenda, appropriate in level and form, and accurately reflecting the best knowledge available, is easily and universally accessible to all citizens,
- to create easily available and universally accessible opportunities to all citizens,
- to influence the subjects on which the information above is available, and
- to participate in a relevant way in political discussions.

While it is idealistic to assume that everybody with political knowledge would actively participate in the process, the central role of information in democratisation cannot be overemphasised.

### **3.5 Political participation in Africa**

One of the central concepts underlying both democracy and democratisation is *political participation*. The concept of *political participation* applied in this work derives from Barber's (1984) theory that *politics* entails action done by, and not to, citizens in the political realm, and *participation* refers to 'action' that leads to inclusion in an event or activity. From the above emerges the idea of *citizens' action*, which in the political domain has been referred to variously as 'citizens'

participation, 'public' participation, 'political' participation, and so on (Barber 1984). However, *political participation* has often been used in the literature to imply all such terminologies (see Barber, 1984; Verba *et al.*, 1995; Bratton *et al.*, 2005), and it occurs as such in this study. To describe and situate the term, this study draws on Teorell *et al.*'s (2007) five dimensions in their mapping of definitions and modifications in the field which, Ekman and Amna (2009, p.7) describe as "a more extensive typology." These include:

- electoral participation (all actions geared towards electing political leaders of one's choice);
- consumer participation (involves donations towards a cause, boycotting and political consumption, signing petitions, among others);
- party activity (being a member of party, engaging in campaign activity, doing any other unpaid work for or donating money to a political party);
- protest activity (getting involved in demonstrations, strikes, and other protest acts); and
- contact activity (contacting institutions, politicians, civil servants for social or political purposes).

From the above, political participation may generally be contextualised in Africa as any interaction of citizens in the political public space aimed at influencing political outcomes. Specifically, participation emphasises the actions of ordinary people that are geared towards legally influencing political happenings. Effective participation unites the press and its roles with the people and their democratic and democratisation aspirations.

Accordingly, *political participation* in this study applies to action or involvement of citizens in the political life of a society in a bid to influence the political processes from grassroots to national levels. This may be achieved through opportunities that the principles and requirements of democracy and democratisation offer. Bratton *et al.* (2005, p.54) provides a practical understanding of political participation that applies to the unique socio-political and cultural conditions of Ghana and other similar societies of the continent. The writers described the concept as the extent to which ordinary people join in development efforts, obey laws of the land, vote during elections, contact elected representatives and attend communal meetings. This understanding covers any adult, literate or illiterate, with low or high

literacy, whether male or women, and so on. Thus, political participation here implies both being active in influencing policy (for instance through media debates) and being involved in political activities that may not necessarily directly influence policy (such as obeying laws).

Political participation has been found to be weak in emerging democracies, particularly in Africa (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). The main causes could be traced to the challenges facing democracy in such societies, especially the problem of lack of information and political knowledge. Thus, although studies have found that exposure of people to mass media information in Africa leads to political participation, this has largely worked with voting and less with other forms of participation such as advocacy and public debates (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). This means that citizens' demand for accountability from political elites in Ghana and elsewhere is weak and not good for the journey toward democratic consolidation. This may explain why during national elections, most African inhabitants continue to vote for leaders who seem not to have the welfare of their people at heart. This is because of the worsening economic conditions of the countries (see White, 2008), while the political elites (are perceived to) become wealthier by the day. The more pointed question then is why electorates continue to elect leaders who lack the capability, determination and goodwill to help transform the economic fortunes of their people. It appears that most African societies lack the critical discernment that would empower them to participate meaningfully in the political and economic liberation of themselves and their countries.

It is based on the above that this study emphasises the importance of access to information from the press for people to be politically informed. The argument is that when citizens acquire the necessary information and understand the vital governance issues concerning their lives and their role in safeguarding the democratic process, they could become informed and develop a positive attitude towards their circumstances. Such an attitude would then put them in an empowered position to decide to participate or be involved in the political process.

### **3.5.1 The press, information and knowledge**

The press is believed to play an educational role through which people acquire political knowledge for participation in the socio-political space of their society. Various studies have found that people learn and retain information relatively from



the press (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Graber, 1984; Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000). The news structure of the mass media, particularly, the inverted pyramid of newspapers, provides evidence that news producers consciously guide audiences to certain information. For instance, Tewksbury and Althaus (2000, p.457) note that in “the process of packaging and presenting news, the major media communicate to audiences what it is they should know about their world.” Graber (1984, p.78) also explained that, “[o]ver time the media do turn out to be effective producers of most of the information people need,” and that “people develop a broad-base knowledge drawn to a large extent from the ample media information available to them.” Nevertheless, audiences’ interest in the issues raised also plays an important role in the desire to consume, learn about and keep mass media information (d’Haenens and Jankowski, 2004).

The above discussion positions the press as an important source of political knowledge since research has found a strong relationship between mass media use and knowledge gains as explained by the knowledge gap hypothesis (Tichenor *et al.*, 1970). The hypothesis connects news information to education and knowledge. As the press churns out information daily into the public domain, people with higher socio-economic status are better placed to acquire more of the media information than those of lower socio-economic status. As a result, differences in the level of knowledge gained through the media increase between the two groups with time (Graber, 1984; Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Santana *et al.*, 2011). ‘Socio-economic status’, as Jenssen (2012, p.20) explains, refers to a collective term for some distinctive arguments and variables regarding social structure, key among which are income and educational levels. The belief is that people with such characteristics have the means and ability to access (by buying) and understand news from especially newspapers. The hypothesis does not mean that people of lower socio-economic status do not access information or knowledge from the mass media; they do, but the information they gain is on a relatively lower scale compared to people with higher socio-economic status.

The theory later evolved into communication effect gaps focusing on differential gains across various social groups and news sources. For instance, Shingi and Mody, (1979) showed differences in knowledge gained from the mass media within the same social groups. It means that, even within the higher educational and socio-economic class, there could be differences in knowledge gain

from equal exposure to news information. Other studies have investigated differential knowledge gains between news sources, particularly between newspapers and television (Robinson and Davis, 1990; Graber, 1990; Neuman *et al.*, 1992) and amount of knowledge retained between online and hardcopy versions of newspapers (Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000; d'Haenens *et al.*, 2004; Yang and Grabe, 2011). Findings from these studies have not been homogenous but are characterised by controversies in terms of the variables (both dependent and independent), their relationships and effects. The variables involve channel or sources, content, human characteristics such as age, sex and so on. For example, while Robinson and Davis (1990) and many others found that audiences gained more knowledge from newspapers than from television, Graber (1990) discovered the opposite. Voltmer and Schmitt (2006) explain that the different findings could be due to the use of different variables in those studies. These findings and explanations indicate that people do learn and gain knowledge relatively from the mass media.

In a study on differential effects of the newspaper and television as sources of knowledge, Neuman *et al.* (1992) provided a rationalisation that in some way ties in with the perspective of this current research. The scholars argued that the extent to which audiences learn from either the printed or broadcast media depends largely on some factors, an important one being *complexity*. By complexity, the authors meant news on 'complicated' subjects such as governance, legal, and scientific issues, among others. This current study is of the view that the language of the press can also make an otherwise simple subject matter complex in news, just as it can simplify a complex topic. In this way, the language of the press becomes an important factor in the knowledge gap debate.

Conclusions from knowledge gap studies, as discussed above, have been variously confirmed in similar studies that focused on emerging democracies in some parts of Africa (Bratton *et al.*, 2005; Nisbet, 2008). This implies that news information serves as a source of education for people in Africa, too. Nisbet's work, in particular, focuses on Mali, and it employed secondary data from the Afrobarometer survey<sup>29</sup> of Mali, 2001, to investigate the relationship between socio-

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<sup>29</sup> The Afrobarometer survey is a project involving an ongoing series of cross-national surveys conducted in 15 African countries to measure issues relating to democracy and good governance.

structural features (education, urban/rural residency, ethnic/language groups, gender and income) and radio, television and newspaper news. The study demonstrated a general association between media use and political knowledge with the newspaper being the most highly associated medium with knowledge, although it was found to have a contingent association with political knowledge (due to literacy issues). The study also found that education and gender produced the most effect in communication gaps concerning political knowledge and political participation. It is believed, consequently, that the mass media in Africa could contribute to the overall knowledge that people acquire and use in their lives. Based on these findings, this study argues that the language of the press in an emerging society has important implications for knowledge acquisition and communication/knowledge gaps in African democratic societies. This is because people must first understand the language that carries the information in order to gain the knowledge involved. The crucial issue is that this depends largely on educational levels since the language of the press is often the people's second language (L2).

Importantly, the issue of differential knowledge gains between audiences of high and low status reinforces the perspectives of critical linguistics and Marxism concerning the role of the press in social domination and control (as discussed in Chapter 2). Since audiences of higher status acquire more of the complex information and in bigger amounts, they would continue to wield more social and political power to dominate society. Additionally, the press is largely controlled externally (in terms of ownership) by people of a higher socio-economic status. This complements the internal hierarchical organisation, which as well has editors and editorial members being highly placed people in society. Thus, the institutional and organisational structure of the press and the conventions of news production mean that the press may consciously or unconsciously produce complex information that reflects the status of those who control the press, and people like them.

### **3.5.2 Relating information and knowledge to political participation**

Studies in both Western and transitional democracies show that exposure to news information influences political participation (Eveland and Scheufele, 2000; Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck, 2006; Bratton *et al*, 2005; Nisbet, 2008). Recent "revolutionary" media-induced happenings in some parts of the Arab world (particularly in Algeria, Egypt and elsewhere) seem to support the idea that the press

has the ability to produce actions and reactions from people. While whether the press provides enthusiasm or creates apathy toward democratic culture of civic involvement remains controversial, some studies have found a positive relationship between political knowledge and participation (Bratton *et al.* 2005; Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck, 2006). Deplorable socio-economic conditions in most societies in Africa seem to suggest that many people are ignorant of the political process that can enhance their welfare. Thus, African scholars have urged the press to be more proactive in enhancing information dissemination to improve democratic awareness among the people.

Consequently, the mass media are expected to provide the type of socio-political information that empowers audiences to effectively participate in the political and social life of their societies. This normative demand enjoins the press not only to select news stories that meet expected criteria, but also to make the news understandable to their audiences. These concerns are especially important in developing countries, most of which are clearly faced with dire political and socio-economic problems and in need of good governance and development. Mediated news provides a source as well as a public space for the type of citizen engagements that could influence policy at local and national levels to enhance the governance and development processes.

The view of this current study agrees with popular and scholarly belief that the more people have access to news information, the better the prospects are for democracy (Dahl, 1989; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; Yang and Grabe, 2011). These scholars agree that knowledge of political issues and participation in political decision-making is good for democracy. However, studies such as de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) and Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006) that have attempted to empirically investigate the relationship between media use, knowledge and political participation (as dependent and/or independent variables) have been few, especially in Africa. Thus, not much is known about the exact nature of the relationship between these variables and their exact individual and collective (positive) influence on democracy, a situation that calls for more studies on the issue.

### **3.6 The press and political participation in Ghana**

Ghana's democracy may be described as a hybrid between North America's Presidential system and Britain's Westminster model. In principle, the Ghanaian political system combines constitutionalism, participation and representation at all levels of the governance structure, locally and nationally. The Ghanaian Government is composed of an executive president and his/her ministers and are supported by parliament and the judiciary. Parliament is composed of elected representatives of 270 constituencies scattered throughout the country. The press is integral in the democratic arrangement where it is recognised as a facilitator in mobilising citizens toward political action and decision-making.

One of the greatest benefits of democracy for Ghana has been the burgeoning of a pluralist, diversified and relatively independent mass media (see Chapter 4). The Ghanaian press scene since 2000 has been fertile for and supportive of different perspectives and shades of opinions on issues of local and national interest. Researchers believe that the Ghanaian press, especially newspapers, has contributed immensely to the democracy of the country (Temin and Smith, 2002; Dzisah, 2008; Amponsah, 2012). These writers argue that the newspapers' reports of political news have contributed to the various successful democratic elections of the country since 1993. This may suggest that the press provides education and knowledge to audiences and through that influences their behaviour. Yet the fact that most of these scholars have based their studies exclusively on voting and elections means that their conclusions may not reflect a fair assessment of the situation. The extent to which such elections reflect free-minded political action also remains inconclusively explored. This is because of claims of irregularities with voting in which political elites, for instance, 'buy' votes during elections in Ghana (Tettey, 2006). Additionally, research on other political activities in-between elections in the country has been rare for a comprehensive assessment of political participation in the country.

However, the point has to be made that Ghana has a motivated social, political and economic atmosphere for political participation. Many interest groups and institutions exist in the Ghanaian political public space and interact among themselves. These interest groups, together with political parties and their activists,

engage in political activities within the formal structures of elections. Some of these groups include:

- trade union groups such as, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and Association of Ghana Industries (AGI);
- professional bodies, such as Ghana Association of Teachers (GNAT), University Teacher Association of Ghana (UTAG), Ghana Medical Association (GMA), Ghana Bar Association (GBA), etc.; and
- students' group, such as the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS).

The above illustration of a strong associational culture in the Ghanaian society is complemented by a vibrant civil society groups. These groups have been functioning in the country's economic, social and political spheres where they have helped in various ways, such as through demonstrations, to empower people (Ibrahim, 2003, p.15). There are also a number of policy think-tanks, human rights groups, women's rights associations and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have been active in the country in the past two decades. These organisations have assisted grassroots people in different ways such as contributing to debates on government policy initiatives on the economy, poverty alleviation, domestic violence legislation, disability rights, among others.

The above creates an impression of a fluid and rooted participatory culture of free-minded citizens in the country, which as I have argued, may not be the case. This is because of the excessive dominance and influence of the few political and social elites in the country (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). The elite dominance could be attributed to a lack of the empowerment on the part of most 'ordinary' people to contest the views and interests of the elites.

### **3.7 The Ghanaian press and news production**

The focus on news and its informative, educational and knowledge implications in society makes the source of news a relevant issue. Likewise, a research on the comprehensibility of the newspaper text and readers' ability to comprehend the text cannot ignore the creation of the text. Therefore, although the focus of the research is not essentially on the news producer, it is necessary to provide an idea of the structure of news and the news writing process.

‘News’ is becoming complicated and difficult to define in specific terms with the passing of day. Present-day revolutionary opportunities in communication technologies have enhanced the gathering, dissemination, and ways of accessing news, thereby transforming the conception of news. Nevertheless, in this study, news refers to a product of journalistic activities and conventions (Tuchman, 1972; Schudson, 2005) regarding the periodic publication of mediated events and issues by the mass media within the rubric of journalism. The specific focus in this context is on hard news, the type that usually covers social and political events that are selected by news producers and published because they are thought to be newsworthy or are seen to be so (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; McNair, 1998; Schudson, 2005). The social, ideological and political power of news and its language, the symbolic and persuasive power of news, as well as the fact that news is a potential source of information, education and knowledge for readers have been discussed in Chapter 2 and earlier sections of this chapter.

Research within the uses and gratification studies indicates that readers consume news for various but specific purposes, one of which is to learn from information from the press and through that gain political and social knowledge (Graber 1984; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). A study by Kantar Media (2012) reinforces earlier evidence that audiences access news stories to learn about local and foreign happenings, to be entertained, to form opinions, to search for jobs, among others. The purpose for which news is consumed is achieved when audiences understand the news. It is, therefore, from the perspective of comprehending news in newspapers that the language of newspapers is interrogated in this study. Consequently, it is important to have an idea of the structure and writing of news in newspapers to help us understand better the issues discussed in this thesis.

### **3.7.1 Newspapers and news structure**

The form of news found in newspapers has a unique but varied structure. It is a common practice for most news structures, such as the ‘tree or branch’ structure (Bell, 1994), to begin with the most important information and narrow down to the less important bits (Stenvall, 2011). A typical representation of this structure is the inverted pyramid (Schudson, 2003; Conboy, 2007), which most news agencies such as Reuters and other media houses across the world use. Beginning a story with a summary of the main points is to facilitate understanding (Conboy, 2007) even if the

reader does not finish reading. According to Conboy (2007, p.7), the format evolved from United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to indicate a shift from a “record to interpretation”. There are other aspects of news presentation such as the use of pictures to support a story, the prominence accorded a story in terms of placement, or how big the font of a particular headline is. These add to the structure to make a particular news story appealing and meaningful. However, a detailed discussion of the multimodal implications of news does not fall within the scope of this study; the emphasis is instead on news writing which I discuss subsequently.

### **3.7.2 Newspapers and news writing**

The practical act of writing news stories is an important part of news production although it is not much emphasised in discussions of news and its production. The literature on news production appears to devote little attention to the linguistic aspect of news writing. When attention is focused on specific choices of words, sentences and other structural elements used in constructing news messages, it is done to highlight the ideological implication in those linguistic structures (see for instance, Stenvall, 2011) rather than on the important issues of readability and comprehension.

In terms of journalistic writing, news writing may be analysed within the general context of the writing process, known as the ‘rhetorical situation’ (Troyka, 1993). The writing process concerns five key elements, which a writer must consider during the writing process. According to Troyka, (1993), these include *writer*, *topic*, *audience*, *purpose*, and *context*. The process highlights the *reader* as a key element that the other factors have to satisfy. From a linguistic perspective, the writer has to consider the reader during the writing process and use language or writing style (here the words, sentences, tone, etc.) that suits the ability of the reader for the message to be easily read and understood.

News writing, therefore, requires that news writers and producers consider the reader during the news writing and production processes for the language to reflect a version of the language of its readers. In this way, the language will suit the direct and instant context of news consumption (Schudson, 2003; Richardson, 2008). Schudson (2003, p.168) has argued that news is read in a unique manner and that people do not consume news the way they do textbooks and other narratives. It is the



view of this study that the need to connect news messages directly to their readers is an important issue that must underlie the news writing process of the press.

In line with the above and concerning hard news, writers have advised that simple language be used in news writing to enhance easy understanding (Hicks, 1999; Stovall, 1990). News producers are often urged to present news in simple straightforward language for easy reading and understanding, just as communication textbooks for schools and journalism guidebooks do (Machin and Niblock, 2006). McKane (2006) notes that linguistic units used individually and collectively to construct news are important factors that influence the extent to which news messages filter to audiences. African scholars such as Kasoma (1958) and Mwaura (1985) also share the same view about news writings by Africans for African readers. The writers argue that news should be written to communicate and not to impress. The extent to which news writers and producers adhere to such concerns is a major issue that this research addresses.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The discussion of this chapter has indicated the dominance of democracy in contemporary governance and that it is the governance model of many African countries. The preference for this system, in spite of its weaknesses, is because it provides a good environment for citizens to be directly involved in the governance process. The press has been held up as a key institution in this arrangement because of its ability to provide a platform for political authority to be held accountable and for citizens to engage in political participation. Most African countries currently practise this form of government with varying levels of success. However, the discussion suggests that most of the countries are challenged by their citizens' lack of access to the participatory field to engage meaningfully in the political process. That is why the effective functioning of the press in its information role continues to be a critical issue in Africa's political discourse.

Ghana is an example of a thriving emerging democracy. Scholars such as Gyimah-Boadi (2009) believe that the Ghanaian press has the potential to empower citizens and through that help sustain and consolidate the democracy of the country. Thus, it is important for the language of especially newspapers to be understandable to many readers and not just a few political elites. Society's interest is served if

many people have access to and understand the important political issues in the public domain so that they could take advantage of their empowerment for political participation (Dahl, 1987).

The discussion has also established a strong connection between the press and knowledge acquisition, showing importantly that information from the press has some influence on audiences. Therefore, news writing, news structure conventions and the language of the press generally are expected to reflect the audiences that are targeted. The next chapter continue the discussions of this research by presenting the Ghanaian press from a historical and political context.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Ghanaian Press: A Historical and Political Perspective**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

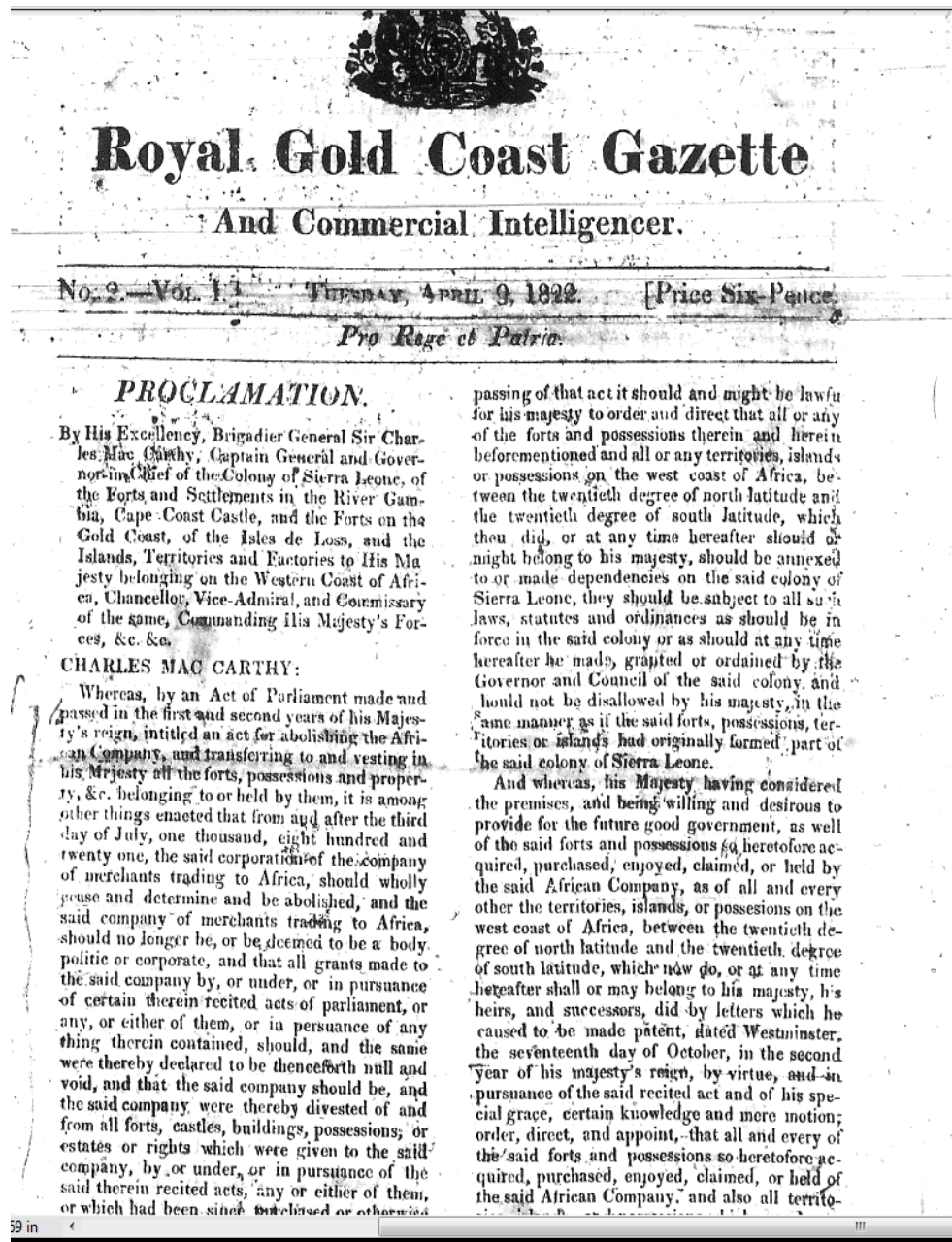
In this chapter, I focus on the Ghanaian media scene from inception to contemporary times. The Ghanaian press today, together with its nature and activities, is traceable to British press traditions. The history of the development of the press from its colonial inception in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 20<sup>st</sup> century has been well documented, (Ainslie, 1966; Hachten, 1971; Jones-Quartey, 1975; Barton, 1979; Bourgault, 1995; Asante, 1996 Anokwa, 1997). While research on the period before the 1992 has mainly been narratives of the struggles of the press against suppression and muzzling by various political regimes, the period after 1992 has focused on the role of the press in Ghana's democratic experience. Scholars have discussed the Ghanaian press along political timelines of colonial (1822 to independence in 1957), post-independence (1957 to 1992, the period of mostly authoritarian regimes), and re-democratisation (1993 to present) eras. The three phases correspond with significant political developments in the country's history, and since the fortunes and activities of the press are tied to political regimes, it makes sense to adopt these phases. Hence, I adopt these phases to discuss the indigenous Ghanaian press (and its language, where possible) and its role in society.

#### **4.2 The colonial press of Ghana**

The press in Ghana (previously called the Gold Coast) began in 1822 when the British Governor of the Gold Coast, Charles MacCarthy established the first newspaper of the colony (Anokwa, 1997; Bourgault, 1995). The newspaper, the *Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*, was founded largely to serve the information needs and interests of the European community and the colonial Government. Figure 3 presents an illustration of the newspaper. The publication circulated for three years and went out of print. A few other government publications with a similar orientation circulated around the time: *Gold Coast Assize* (1883), *Gold Coast News* (1884), and *Gold Coast Pioneer* (1921) (Jones-Quartey, 1975). However, most of them cease circulation not long after their establishment,

and little can be said about them besides that, they had the same editorial position as the first newspaper.

Figure 3: The government-owned *Royal Gold Coast Gazette* of 9 April 1822



The indigenous press of the Gold Coast began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and may be described as an “amateur press”. This is because those who engaged in it were mostly non-professionals who were largely motivated by a nationalist agenda (Anyidoho, 2008). In 1857, Charles Bannerman began the publication of the *West African Herald* (1857-1873), the first indigenous African (and privately owned) newspaper. Not much is said in the literature about this newspaper. However, Jones-Quartey (1975, pp.1-5) refers to a section of a report from the Acting Governor of

the Gold Coast, Colonel Bird, to the Colonial Secretary of State which described the *West African Herald*, as "... a paper which more generally cavils at than acquiesces in the proceedings of the Government..." This suggests that the newspaper was critical of the government, leading predictably to it being censored by the colonial Government (Dzisah, 2008). The friction between the Government and this private press set the stage for subsequent antagonism between political order and a critical press during colonialism and after independence to current times.

Many other native-owned newspapers followed the *West African Herald* during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of these publications, which were nationalist mouthpieces that agitated for independence and so adopted anti-government editorial stance, included *Gold Coast Times*, *Western Echo*, *Gold Coast Aborigines*, *Gold Coast Chronicle*, *Gold Coast People*, among other publications (Asante, 1996; Dzisah, 2008; Pressreference.com). To contain the indigenous press, the Government instituted and enforced various censorship regimes, one of which was the Newspaper Registration Ordinance of 1893 (Asante, 1996, p.3). The majority of these publications went out of circulation not long after they had appeared. Political censorship could have played a role in the collapse of the newspapers. It is also possible that since the newspapers were established to agitate for independence and less for commercial purposes, they could have lacked the business orientation needed for their survival beyond the nationalist agenda.

The period from 1930 to 1950 has been described as an "exceptional period of press fertility" (Bourgault, 1995, p.155) due to the flurry of newspapers that circulated at the time and the political excitement they generated. The most critical nationalist newspapers of this period belonged to indigenous political parties led by Western-educated indigenous politicians. Two such newspapers were *The Times of West Africa* and the *Accra Evening News*. The first was established in 1931 by J. B. Danquah, who also founded the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), the first Ghanaian political party. The second was established by Kwame Nkrumah in 1948 as the official voice of the Convention People's Party (CPP). Although *The Times of West Africa* covered world news, which it obtained from Reuters, these newspapers essentially served as the voice of their respective political parties and were, therefore, very political. It has to be stated that being the mouthpiece of two opposing political traditions – UGCC being capitalist-oriented and less insistent on

independence 'now', while CPP, pro-socialist and demanding self-rule 'now' – the two newspapers also opposed and attacked each other and their political traditions. For instance, Figure 4 shows the September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1952 edition of the Accra Evening News in a blistering attack that describes opponents of Kwame Nkrumah as 'imperialists' and 'reactionary African politicians.'

Figure 4: *The Accra Evening News* of 22 September 1952



Other indigenous newspapers with anti-colonial editorial stance included the *Ashanti Pioneer* of Kumasi, established in 1939; *Ashanti Times* of 1947, a newspaper by a mining firm in Obuasi; the *Morning Telegraph* of Secondi, also established by Nkrumah in 1947, among others (Ainslie, 1966). The Gold Coast hence witnessed a vibrant press activity just before independence even if limited to a few urban centres and among a few elites. Within the same period, a few other inconsequential business, local language and religious publications circulated (Anokwa, 1997) signalling the future diversity of mass communication media in Ghana.

In the 1950s, two newspapers, the *Daily Graphic* (a daily) and the *Sunday Mirror* (a weekly), were introduced by Cecil King of the London Daily Mirror

Group. These newspapers contributed immensely to the development of the press as a whole in Ghana, and the commercial press in particular, and are still prominent publications in the country. According to Barton (1979) and Bourgault (1995), these newspapers inspired interest and competition in the newspaper industry because of their professionalism, innovation (in design and human-interest stories) and commercial focus. Being profit-oriented, the newspapers adopted a 'neutral' editorial stance in relation to the pro-government and anti-government newspapers, thereby attracting a wider readership among both indigenous people and European settlers more than the rest of the indigenous newspapers (Bourgault, 1995; Anokwa, 1997). Anokwa (1997, p.10) ascribes the successes of the two publications to "financial security, modern equipment, good management and a well-trained local editorial staff." Nevertheless, their success could also be attributed to the fact that they were not politically harassed, as was the case with the other indigenous publications.

Although this study is focused on politically oriented English language newspapers, it is worthwhile to acknowledge that some Christian groups created newspapers to help spread the Christian faith. The Methodist Mission published the *Christian Messenger* in 1857, the *Christian Report* in 1857, and the *Gold Coast Methodist* in 1886, while The Catholic Mission's also published *Gold Coast Catholic* in 1926 (Anyidoho, 2008). However, these were mostly short-lived perhaps because of challenges with readership due to literacy problems.

The many indigenous publications that circulated during the colonial period could have informed the overwhelming perception in the literature that the indigenous colonial press contributed significantly to the eventual political independence of the Gold Coast. Many writers agree that the nationalist press served as the source of action that mobilised the people around Nkrumah for Ghana's independence in 1957. For instance, Nyamnjoh (2005) recounts vividly how even in the face of government suppression, the nationalist press and other indigenous political elites used covert means to spread printed material among the indigenous people of Gold Coast and Nigeria in the struggle for independence. These publications are said to have led to the sometimes violent demonstrations and agitations among the indigenous people during the late 1940s. This compelled the colonial Government to first cede political power partially to the indigenous people



when Nkrumah became the political head of government business in 1951 (Anokwa, 1997).

The above sums up the major press map until Ghana gained independence in 1957. From the discussions, it is clear that the roles of the colonial press were clearly marked according to ownership and intended readership. The colonial government newspapers reported the economic and administrative activities of both the colony and Great Britain mainly for the consumption of the British and other European settlers in the Gold Coast. As observed in Figure 3, information in the newspapers usually included records of proclamations about the formation or cessation of (European) businesses and matters arising from them, addresses of various European-settler groups to the governor, felicitations to and from the British Queen, colonial administration meetings, among others. One cannot rule out the propaganda role of the European newspapers, that is, to 'civilise' the indigenous people by influencing the few educated indigenous elites. However, there is little evidence about the impact of the newspapers in this direction.

On the other hand, the indigenous newspapers provided an alternative voice that countered the government newspapers and opposed the political administration to champion the cause of political independence. In this way, the indigenous press tried to enhance participation of the indigenous people in politics. The nationalistic content of the indigenous newspapers explains why the colonial Government had to introduce press laws such as The Criminal Code (Amendment) Ordinance or the Sedition Ordinance in 1934 (Bourgault, 1995) to censor the indigenous press. However, the direct contribution of the printed press in the political life of the indigenous people, especially in the independence struggle, remains to be assessed and known. This is because the literature on the Ghanaian press and its history has focused little attention on issues relating to the language of newspapers and readability.

### **4.3 The post-independence press of Ghana before 1993**

Discussions of the post-independence press of Ghana from 1957 to 1993 have often been narratives of the suppression and struggles of the press against authoritarian regimes (Ainslie, 1966; Hachten, 1971, 1993; Jones-Quartey, 1975; Bourgault, 1995; Anokwa, 1997; Karikari, 1998). Most authors discuss the press alongside the



prevailing political regimes noting the interplay between the press and state and the effect of this relationship on the former. The major topics concern issues of press laws, regulations, policies, control and censorship and how these have influenced the press, its evolution, and practices over the years.

The issue of press freedom and the socio-political environment in which the press operates must engage attention in discussions involving press practices and normative expectations of the roles of the press in any society. The various constitutions of Ghana from independence directly or indirectly provided for press freedom. The 1960 republican constitution did not contain an explicit provision for the press but Article 13(1) provided for 'freedom of religion and speech' within which freedom of the press may be located. The 1969, 1979 and 1992 constitutions contained explicit provisions that guaranteed freedom of the press. The provisions were also supported by other independent bodies, such as the Press Commission of 1979 and the National Media Commission of 1993 (NMC) which were established to insulate journalists, the press and citizens alike against external interference (Karikari, 1998).

Politically, writers generally agree that apart from Nkrumah's era, the democratic political regimes of the period, which ruled by constitutions, provided a much more congenial atmosphere for press activities than the military regimes (Anokwa, 1997; Gadzekpo, 1997; Karikari, 1998; Hasty, 2005). The period saw three democratically elected and four military governments. The democratic periods and their leaders included Kwame Nkrumah (1960-1966), Kofi Abrefa Busia (1969-1972), and Hilla Limann (1979-1981). The military regimes were led by Joseph Ankrah and Akwasi Afrifa (1966-1969), Kutu Acheampong (1972-1978), Fred Akuffo (1978-1979), and Jerry Rawlings (1981-1992). Together with Nkrumah's one-party Government, these authoritarian regimes openly controlled and suppressed the press. The combined duration of the liberal regimes was insignificant to have any impact on the fortunes of the press. As such, I briefly discuss first these democratic regimes and their relationship with the press after which I provide a much more detailed account of the autocratic ones since they greatly influenced the press.

### **4.3.1 The press under post-independence liberal regimes**

Kofi Busia's Progress Party's (PP) of the Second Republic took over power from the military regime that overthrew Nkrumah's Government. Before becoming leader of Government, Busia had openly proclaimed a liberal ideology, and once in power, he tried to pave way for a truly liberal society and began with the press. He is best remembered for repealing Nkrumah's Newspaper Licensing Act of 1963 in 1970 (Dzisah, 2008; Anokwa, 1997) and encouraged the proliferation of private and independent newspapers, some of which became critical of his Government. Nevertheless, the press was not completely free from state interference. For instance, the civilian government once dismissed the editor of the state-owned *Daily Graphic* for opposing the Government's position (for dialogue rather than violence) on apartheid in South Africa (Asante, 1996; Dzisah, 2008). This action reinforces the trend from the First Republic that government interference in press affairs in Ghana was not a practice exclusive to only military regimes.

The other liberal period under Hilla Limann's People National Party (PNP) marked an important landmark in the liberation of the press. Many writers describe this period as the most liberal press environments Ghana ever had before 1992 (Jones-Quartey 1975; Asante, 1996; Gadzekpo, 1997). Limann's overall attitude to the press is captured in an address to Parliament in 1979. He advised the press to take advantage of the protection granted by the Constitution and the Press Commission to perform the "essential functions of educating and keeping the public properly informed and serving as a watchdog of the people's rights and liberties" (Cited by Gadzekpo, 1997, p.37). Chapter 22 (Article 192-195) of the 1979 Constitution contained elaborate provisions for the place and role of the press, to which the Government largely committed itself. The attention accorded the press suggested the gradual recognition of the role of the press in Ghanaian political culture. However, the suppressive press laws on criminal libel and sedition remained in the statute books (though they were not used) until another coup returned the country to military dictatorship in 1981.

### **4.3.2 The press under post-independence authoritarian regimes**

The influence of authoritarian rule on the press and its role and development began with the Government of Nkrumah. At the time of independence, only four

newspapers that provided political information were active. These were the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Accra Evening News* (which were already under the control of the President), the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ashanti Pioneer* (the *Pioneer* was based in Kumasi). Being a journalist and having used the press for political gains during the anti-colonial struggles, Nkrumah understood the potential of a critical press. Hence, upon assuming power, he moved to dominate the press and before his overthrow in 1966, he had absolute control over the entire press in Ghana. Nkrumah made known his ideology regarding the role of the press as captured in these two references:

- a. It is part of our revolutionary credo that within the competitive system of capitalism, the press cannot function in accordance with a strict regard for the sacredness of the facts and that the press, therefore should not remain in private hands ... (cited in Gadzekpo, 1997, p.35).
- b. The truly African press does not exist for the purpose of enriching its proprietors or entertaining its readers. It is an integral part of our society ... must carry forward our revolutionary purpose (Nkrumah, 1963).

The desire to put the press under state control provides the reason why he openly discouraged private ownership and participation in the press.

Nkrumah also took other steps to ensure absolute control of the press. For example, he established the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to oversee government communication strategies and publicity. By then, Nkrumah and the CPP had acquired the Guinea Press, which published the CPP's *Accra Evening News* and together with the *Ghanaian Times*, they formed the core of CPP's ideological voice (Gadzekpo, 1997; Anokwa, 1997). Additionally, he established other institutions including the Ghana News Agency (GNA), the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) (a school that trained journalists) to further his socialist-based ideology of journalism in not only Ghana but also in Africa. He also strengthened the colonial censorship policy by upgrading the Criminal Code to empower the Minister of Information to censor all news gathered by both local and foreign correspondents before they were published. In 1963, by an amendment of the Newspaper Licensing Act 189, Nkrumah made newspaper-licensing mandatory, the first time in independent Ghana. This obviously weakened the development of journalism professionally. Democratic practice was also affected

at that time since free speech and press pluralism were criminalised until Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966.

The era of military dictatorship in Ghana began with the National Liberation Council (NLC) (1966 to 1969), which overthrew the Nkrumah regime. The period ended with the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) (1982-1992), led by Jerry Rawlings. Military regimes lack the “informed consent” of their people (Dzisah, 2008, p.89) since they are self-imposed. As such, once in the saddle, these regimes abolished constitutional bodies like parliament and a free press to pave way for them to rule unopposed. This was the common routine during Ghana’s experiences with military rulers during the alternating periods of military/civilian governments until 1993. Thus, I will discuss the last regime since it captures all the characteristics of the other military regimes and had the biggest influence on the press prior to the return to a stable democratic rule.

The PNDC was the longest-serving military Government in Ghana’s history. Writers refer to this period as the worst in the life of the Ghanaian press and describe the period as a time Ghanaians experienced a “culture of silence” (Gadzekpo, 1997; Hasty, 2005; Dzisah, 2008). This is because the regime was very harsh against not only the press but also against free speech (Asante, 1996; Anokwa, 1997; Gadzekpo, 1997).

The PNDC practically reversed almost all the tolerant press policies established by the civilian government they had overthrown and instituted laws that were more coercive. The Government, for instance, abolished the Press Commission put in place to insulate the press, and rather urged the press to be crusaders of the junta’s “revolutionary ideals” (Gadzekpo, 1997). The quotation below, an excerpt from a speech by the then PNDC Secretary for Education, Joyce Aryee, expresses the role the regime expected and manipulated the press to play:

I do not see the press as lying outside the political institutions that we have. This is where I see that people ought to realise the role of the media differs from country to country. In a situation like ours when we need to conscientise people and where we have an illiteracy problem, you use institutions like the media to do the conscientisation (*African Contemporary Report*, 1983 – 84, cited by Gadzekpo, 1997 p.41).

Following on the above ideology, the PNDC Government displayed their aversion for an 'independent' press by systematically proscribing private newspapers, the common accusation being for 'distorting news' (Gadzekpo, 1997). Anokwa (1997, pp.20–22) narrates vividly how Rawlings sacked the editors of the state-owned press and appointed his cronies as replacements, as well as how several private newspaper editors were imprisoned without trial. Consequently, many journalists fled into self-imposed exile. To cap it all, in 1989, the PNDC introduced the Newspaper Licensing Law (PNDC Law 211), which asked those who wanted to run newspapers to apply to the Ministry of Information for registration, a move that succeeded in imposing loud silence on the land.

It must be said that the press did not always succumb to suppression without resistance or an alternative voice. The history of the press in Ghana right from colonial times indicates that journalists and newspapers have always braved the odds in the face of authoritarianism to keep an alternative voice alive. For instance, in 1978, a group opposed to the Acheampong regime covertly began a number of student-led radical newspapers on the country's university campuses. These publications incited sentiments against military rule in sections of the Ghanaian society and led to the overthrow of Acheampong's government in the same year (Anokwa, 1997). Similarly, during the peak of Rawlings' repressive rule in the late 1980s when political newspapers had been banned, some journalists started sports newspapers, such as *The Guide*, in which they secretly published critical political views. The alternative voice that these 'foolhardy' newspapers promoted contributed to the internal pressure that led to a return to constitutional democracy in the 1990s. This may not be an isolated situation in world history. It reinforces the fact that no matter how repressive the rulers of a society are, a form of dissent often emerges to challenge the oppressor.

Therefore, the nature of the press and its functions over the period from independence to the 1990s were shaped largely by the political order of the day. Since most of the period was under authoritarian rule, the press, both state and private, did not experience any radical transformation for it to contribute meaningfully to a pluralist and liberal atmosphere. The state-owned press was made to be a 'lapdog' to popularise the Government and its activities under the guise of 'development journalism' (Bourgault, 1995). The private press on its part was so

intimidated that it never had the chance to contribute much to society. Additionally, professionalism suffered as the press had little peace and time to grow because of the constant changes in government and their negative effects on the press.

Additionally, until the mid-1990s, the Ghanaian press did not have an enabling environment to develop defining and lasting trends. For instance, by 1990, only a few publications were traceable to the independence period. Those that survived were mostly government owned and included the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times* and their weeklies. These surviving newspapers suffered severe political censorship. Therefore, they could not have the liberal environment to develop and nurture any identifiable traditions and trends, such as language use, as may be the case with the press elsewhere.

#### **4.4 The Ghanaian press after 1992**

The discussion so far provides the political, social and cultural contexts within which the contemporary press in Ghana has developed. The historical account shows that the press has featured prominently in the political life of Ghana right from the colonial era. Hence, it is anticipated that the nature of the press, as well as the dynamics of the press/state relations today have been moulded and nurtured by its colonial and post-colonial political experiences.

From 1993, Ghana began yet another political journey into multi-party democracy. This democratisation process, so far uninterrupted, has seen six general presidential and parliamentary elections in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012. The first elections were won by the National Democratic Congress (NDC), a party formed from the then ruling military government. Throughout this fourth republic, only two parties have won general elections and ruled Ghana. The NDC won again in 1996 but lost to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2000. The NPP also had two terms to 2008 and the NDC won again. Currently, the NDC is the party in power after winning the last elections of 2012. Therefore, Ghana's democracy seems to be making strides, at least instrumentally and institutionally. National elections seems to have been accepted as the only way to determining who wields popular power in the country. Thus, even the 2008 general elections, which was won by less than 1% votes and led to the removal of an incumbent government, did not lead to instability. This contrasts with the political situation in other African countries such as Kenya in

2007 and Malawi in 2014, where disputes over national polls led to conflicts and deaths. Ghana is consequently a typical example of an emerging democracy in Africa, and the press is believed to be central in this success story (see Temin and Smith, 2002; Dzisah, 2008; Amponsah, 2012).

From 1993, the circumstances of the press have seen progressive improvement, as the governments have tried to apply the provisions of the 1992 constitution, which accords the press significant freedom. The stable democracy of the country has meant that the issue of the (changing) role of the Ghanaian press in the democratic dispensation has remained topical. The roles of the Ghanaian press have been clearly marked to respond to the dynamics of the social, economic and political changes and requirements of the country's current liberalised market system. The roles, as outlined in the 1992 Constitution, reflect a blend of normative Anglo-American thinking and Ghanaian values regarding the relationship between the press, society and state, as discussed in the previous chapters.

Chapter 12 of the Constitution provides an elaborate normative framework for press freedom and free expression in Ghana. Under the heading, "Freedom and Independence of the Media," the following are given elaborate and prominent articulation: freedom and responsibility of the media, duties of the state-owned media, boundaries of rights and freedoms, and media rights and freedoms besides the general fundamental human rights for all. Subsection 4 of Article 162 forbids any form of censorship:

Editors and publishers of newspapers and other institutions of the mass media shall not be subject to control or interference by Government, nor shall they be penalised or harassed for their editorial opinions and views, or the content of their publications.

Additionally, the Constitution makes provision for the establishment of a National Media Commission (NMC), a statutory body to oversee the affairs of the press including professionalism, training, standards, and appointments of directors. The NMC is also to insulate, especially the state press, against undue government control. The Constitution goes further to guard against unethical practices on the part of the media by specifying guidelines for responsible journalism. The Ghanaian press is, therefore, expected to perform normative roles of informing the public, report and interpret events, act as a watchdog and ensure accountability in public life, bring societies together through cultural harmonisation, and ensure the rule of

law (Anokwa, 1997; Dzisah, 2008). According to Dzisah (2008, p.43), “[i]t is the ability to play this role fully which will confer legitimacy and authority on it (i.e. the press). Thus, these social roles serve largely as the yardstick against which the performance of the contemporary Ghanaian press is judged.

From the onset of the new democratic order in 1993, the press has continued to see progressive improvements in its circumstances. The Newspaper Licensing Law was repealed, allowing for private participation in the newspaper industry again. The main private newspaper during the early 1990s was *The Chronicle*, which started in 1990 and provided an alternative voice to the few state-owned ones, which were, as noted by Anokwa (1997), more often than not pro-government. When the opposition NPP took over the governance of the country from Rawlings’s NDC in 2001, they continued to extend the frontiers of press freedom. One of the first things the new government did was to repeal the Criminal Libel Law that had been used to imprison journalists and which the previous NDC Government refused to expunge. The Government also constructed and donated a press centre to the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) to enhance the media environment in the country (although this could also have the implication of subverting the independence of the press). The trend has continued beyond 2009 when governments changed hands again into contemporary times.

#### **4.4.1 The press in contemporary Ghana**

The contemporary Ghanaian press is broadly diffused, having benefited from the liberalisation policy that began manifesting itself by the end of the 1990s. In terms of ownership, the many newspapers in the country cut across government, private and political party lines. The newspapers are mostly commercial publications, aiming, as businesses, to make profit. This contrasts with the colonial era and the period before 1992 when the press was mainly for non-profit purposes but existed largely to serve the political interests of its owners or controllers. Currently, it is difficult to give the exact number of newspapers in the country because of the ease with which newspapers appear and then fade out of circulation. The NMC, when contacted by this researcher during this research, indicated that over a hundred daily and weekly newspapers had been registered, but that not all were active.



There are four state quality newspapers: the *Daily Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times*, *The Mirror*, and the *Weekly Spectator*. The first two are dailies while the remaining two are weeklies. The weeklies usually carry social and entertainment news and give only a little space for summaries of political events of the week. The *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* add to many privately owned quality newspapers that provide political information. Some of the influential privately owned newspapers based on circulation and attention they receive in public spaces include *Daily Guide*, *The Chronicle*, *The Daily Dispatch*, *The New Crusading Guide*, *The Finder*, *The Statesman*, *The Searchlight*, *Informer*, *Daily Post*, among others. These cut across both pro-government and pro-opposition ownership lines. The circulation, readership structure and influence of these publications are presented in the next paragraph and in sections 1.6. Other newspapers that used to be dailies but presently circulate as weeklies and by-weeklies include *The Mail* (previously, *Accra Daily Mail*), *The Heritage*, *The Lens*, *The Independent*, *National Democrat*, among others. Almost all these newspapers are based in Accra and circulate predominantly in the urban centres of the country. The cities, in particular Accra, usually have more of the infrastructural, political, business, educational, entertainment, and status-marking features, which attract most of the educated, wealthy and affluent in the country. Thus, these centres appear to provide fertile grounds for newspapers to thrive. Most of these newspapers have online versions or websites, which display some of the stories. The online stories usually maintain the same writing styles as their hard copy versions and the readability and comprehension implication have been discussed in section 9.4.

In terms of circulation, it has been difficult to obtain accurate circulation figures of the various newspapers in the country. Even the NMC could not provide information about the precise circulation figures of the various newspapers. The absence of a bureau for national auditing in Ghana has meant that scholars have simply used circulation figures from the newspaper organisations, which, for strategic marketing reasons, may not reflect the actual situation. For instance, Yankson *et al.* (2010) reported that the *Graphic*, the *Times*, the *Guide*, and the *Chronicle* were the most circulated newspapers with 100,000, 35,000, 45,000 and 30,000 circulation figures respectively. However, crosschecks by this researcher beyond the figures given out by the media houses indicated that the figures could not

have been accurate. Dr Wilberforce Dzisah (2013), the Board Chairman of one of the newspapers, observed that:

I serve on the board of News Time Corporation and know that it (that is, *Times*) is around 13,500-15,000. The *Daily Graphic* from my discreet investigations is not doing more than 50,000 while the *Daily Guide*, the second largest circulating newspaper is hovering around 18,000.

This researcher's further investigations found that the *Graphic* had the highest circulation of between 50,000 and 60,000, followed by the *Guide* with between 18,000 and 25,000, the *Times*, between 13,000 and 18,000, and the *Chronicle*, between 5,000 and 10,000. This trend in newspaper circulation has been supported notionally by other researchers (Temin and Smith, 2002; Kafewo, 2006; Dzisah, 2008). These scholars agree that the *Graphic*, the *Guide* and the *Times* (in that order) were the most circulated quality newspapers. The rest of the daily newspapers in Ghana had negligible circulation and their continuous existence as business entities is interesting. Therefore, as indicated in Chapter 1, the four leading newspapers constitute about 70% of the country's newspaper circulation.

The newspapers interact with other Ghanaian media platforms, particularly radio and television (TV). FM radio stations cutting across public broadcasting, commercial and community stations, are almost everywhere. There are currently over 220 (National Communications Authority (NCA), 2011) radio stations scattered across the country and many of those in the countryside are syndicated to big ones in the cities. In this way, the affiliated stations transmit the same news as well as some popular programmes from those in the cities. In addition, free-to-air TV is now a common thing in the country. Every part of Ghana currently receives at least one TV channel, though there are no dependable statistics on number of television sets because of the proliferation of second-hand sets from developed countries. These broadcast media have evolved popular talk shows in which topical issues in newspapers are discussed extensively each day. Such platforms feature different sections of society including government officials and appointees, other politicians, newspaper editors, civil society members, among other participants. Ordinary people are also included through phone-ins and text messaging including new media platforms such as Facebook. In this way, newspapers are central agenda setters in many of the topical issues that are debated and contested in the socio-political space of Ghana.

In spite of the proliferation and central agenda-setting role of newspapers in the country, there appears to be very little research concerning their organisation and philosophical orientation. Thus, most classifications and descriptions of the newspapers proceed from perceptions and assumptions. In terms of ownership and control, the newspapers are classified into three categories based on perceived political affiliation: those that oppose the government of the day, those that support the government of the day, and those that are 'neutral'. These assumptions are based on some perceived factors. For example, it is observed that owners of a "pro-government" press have a kind of association with the government through family, party affiliation, friendship, ethnicity, among others. In the same way, newspapers "against the government" are mainly owned by political opponents of the ruling government, or are owned by people who appear to sympathise with the opposition. The neutral ones, such as *The Finder* and *Public Agenda*, are those whose ownership and contents do not consistently reflect sympathy for or association with any political group, although these are very few. This scenario raises questions about the independence of the newspapers since their owners could influence them (as the classification is already suggesting). The state-owned papers are generally perceived as pro-government perhaps because of their past role as government mouthpieces, especially during authoritarian periods or because they are financed by the government.

#### **4.5 The Ghanaian press and language**

The issue of language of the press cannot be ignored in a study that concerns the extent to which the press is effective in its information function. This is particularly important when the language used is a L2 for the targeted society. As discussed in Chapter 2, language is central to communication and meaning making. Thus, since most Ghanaian newspapers, from pre-independence to current times, have been published in English, I interrogate this linguistic dimension of newspaper production culture in Ghana.

The predominant use of English in Ghanaian newspapers over the years has implications for readability and comprehension. The use of English highlights publishers' belief that targeted readers are able to consume such publications. As indicated in Chapter 1, the ability to read and understand English in Ghana depends

solely on having benefited from formal education. In fact, the issue of education is not just a matter of school attendance; it is also the acquisition of the level of English ability required to read and understand a particular text. In this specific case, it is the ability to read and comprehend the specific level of English of the newspapers. This raises questions about the relationship between newspaper circulation and readers' ability to comprehend the message. The case is particularly striking during the colonial era.

The issue is that by the time newspapers began to circulate during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the vast majority of the indigenous people could not possibly read and write since not many of the people had benefited from formal education. The fact is that, apart from the very few Western-educated elites at that time, literacy for the indigenous people began formally and systematically during the colonial period, specifically early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007). That is why criticisms by writers such as Asante (1996), Nyamnjoh (2005), Dzisah (2008), and others that the colonial government newspapers disregarded issues concerning the indigenous people in news reports during the colonial period appear to be misplaced. This is because by then most of the indigenous people largely lacked the ability to read the English language newspapers.

The last point of the above paragraph makes it necessary to still bring up the impression created in the literature that the indigenous press directly reached and influenced the 'masses'. For instance, Nyamnjoh (2005, p.41) writes that in spite of impediments put in their way, the "threatened African elites eager to communicate their liberation agenda among themselves and with the **African masses** (emphasis mine) adopted various strategies, including the following: publish and perish from the repressive axe of the colonial administration..." History also speaks of massive support for the independence struggle, which many writers have ascribed largely to the role of the indigenous press (Hachten, 1971; Bourgault, 1995). However, the language factor appears not to support the idea that the 'mass' audiences directly read and understood the English language newspapers. Possibly, the newspapers made their impact through intermediaries as explained by the two-step flow communication model (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; McQuail and Windahl, 1993). Similar to other African countries at the time, it could be that only a few elites, indigenous teachers, clerks and other leaders read the newspapers and transmitted

their 'version of the message' to the masses possibly through other traditional leaders such as chiefs and elders. This appears to be a more reasonable understanding since, during that period, the press was largely not diversified in terms of editorial opinion; it had one main objective and ideology, which was to oust the colonial administration.

Yet, the critical question is the extent to which the news from the intermediaries reflected a true account of mediated news of press productions. In other words, it is difficult to tell whose news the masses imbibed, whether it was the news from the press or 'news' from the intermediaries. It is possible that the intermediaries could have related their own 'news', which may have little to do with news from the press, and ascribe it to the press. Such a situation could occur if, for instance, the intermediary did not understand the news or did not share the ideology of the press. This is a highly possible situation when there is a mismatch between text and reader.

The language situation during the post-independence era has been no different from the preceding colonial period. Until the 1990s, the government newspapers and the few privately owned ones were published mainly in English. Therefore, it is clear that the Ghanaian press, from colonial to contemporary times, has targeted mainly educated readers. Meanwhile, concerns about the English ability of educated Ghanaians, as discussed in Chapter 1, have remained throughout the country's history. In these current times with a diversified Ghanaian socio-political and economic environment, it is important for the success of democracy if a wide spectrum of readers receive the diverse issues and views in the press rather than leaving this source of empowerment in the hands of a few highly educated elites of the educated class. To assess the extent to which the press is engaging with this expectation, writers such as Dzisah (2008), Gasu (2009), Karikari (2009), and others appear to have used mainly content analysis, opinions of media personnel and experts, ownership of newspapers and mass action to evaluate the role of the press. Thus, little research has focused on the extent to which audiences actually read and benefit directly from the newspapers. Similarly, there is little information in the literature about the language of the Ghanaian press in terms of the style of writing. As such, there is little evidence about whether newspaper producers consciously use language to suit the ability of their readers. A thorough literature search in libraries

in Ghana and the UK, as well as on various internet search engines by this researcher has not yielded much information on the linguistic style of Ghanaian newspapers.

Additionally, one wonders why indigenous language newspapers are rare in Ghana. Most Anglophone countries in West Africa, including Nigeria, hardly have a thriving press in the indigenous language (Eribo, 1997). The literature indicates attempts from colonial times to establish indigenous language press in Ghana. According to Anyidoho (2008), the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society began an Akan newspaper, *Sika Nsona Sanegbalo* (the Christian Messenger for the Gold Coast) in 1859. The Basel Mission also published *Nutifafa nami* (peace be with you) in 1903, while the Catholic Mission produced *Miaholo (Our Friend)* all in the Ewe language (Anyidoho, 2008 citing Gérard 1981). However, these newspapers were not successful and attempts to run a local language newspaper continued even until the 2000s but none succeeded (Boafo, 1987; Anyidoho, 2008).

Not much exists in the literature to explain why local language newspapers did not succeed as compared to English language ones. Literacy challenges (even for educated Ghanaians) in the indigenous languages as well as lack of substantial readership to sustain the newspapers could be the problem. Anyidoho (2008) has also discovered that language ideologies in Ghana favour English against indigenous languages thereby creating an attitudinal taste for publications in English. It seems that the sensitive ethnic attachment which has so far prevented the adoption of one of the indigenous languages as the national language could also be a cause of the absence of a thriving indigenous language press. Hence, as Eribo (1997, p.53) notes about Nigeria, English has continued to be used pervasively, including in the press because “English is the unifying language in all parts of the country.”

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an insight into the nature of the Ghanaian press and the effects the historical experiences has had on the contemporary press. The chapter has revealed the Ghanaian press as vibrant and promising. The discussion shows that scholarly discussions of the Ghanaian press throughout its history have accorded little consideration to the role of language in the functions of the press. Neither have they done so in assessing the performance of the press. This study argues that the

language used by the press to communicate its message is one of the key determinants of the extent to which it is successful in its duty to society.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Linguistic Dimension of the Study: Readability, Text Complexity and Text Difficulty**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

From the 1940s, the need for public documents to communicate effectively has focused attention on the need for newspapers, magazines, businesses and writers in general to produce documents in clear writing (Gunning, 1952). For this reason, factors that influence text quality or make text readable or difficult have received huge research attention from different perspectives and fields such as applied linguistics, readability and legal studies. These fields provide relevant theories and practical references for this study's inquiry into text complexity and readability. In this chapter, I review issues relating to text complexity and difficulty from which to develop a linguistic theory to underpin the research. The discussion begins with an introduction to reading comprehension since it is central to the topic of this thesis.

#### **5.2 Reading and comprehension**

The understanding of reading comprehension in this study derives from the much-referenced definition by the RAND Research Study Group (RRSG)<sup>30</sup> (Snow, 2002) and discussions generated from it. The group defines *reading comprehension* as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (Snow, 2002, p.11). Pardo (2004) added ‘navigation’ and ‘critique’ to the RSSG definition explaining that readers move through the material, evaluating how the text fits their agenda and gaining an understanding that fits them. Reading includes or requires decoding skills, higher-level cognitive skills, and interactional skills (Kintsch, 1988; Snow, 2002; Hudson, 2007). While decoding skills enable the reader to identify letters, words and other

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<sup>30</sup> The RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG) is a research group, which was commissioned by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education in 1999 to develop a research agenda to address the pressing problem of reading and comprehension across the education system of the US.



grammatical implications of linguistic structure, higher-level cognitive skills enable the reader to infer meaning from words and context, and interactional skills, help to identify the writer's tone and viewpoints. These make reading and comprehension a complex process and not a one-dimensional activity (Hudson, 2007; Yildirim *et al.*, 2011).

The RRSg identifies three interactive factors of reading and comprehension, and aspects of each provide a specific guide for the analysis (Snow, 2002, p.11):

- the reader who is doing the comprehension;
- the text that is to be comprehended; and
- the activity and context in which the comprehension is a part.

These factors interrelate in a larger sociocultural context during the reading process to shape and be shaped by the reader for successful reading outcomes. Scholars, for example Baumann (2009) and Yildirim *et al.*, (2011), have also identified vocabulary as an independent contribution to the reading process and have included it as another factor of reading comprehension. These four factors are briefly contextualised in the discussion.

Every *reader* of a text brings along some personal characteristics that research has shown (Snow, 2002) affect reading and comprehension. The reader characteristics relevant to this study are the reader's linguistic skills (Hess and Biggam, 2004; Rimmer, 2006; McNamara *et al.*, 2010), which are needed to decode linguistic elements for the meaning of a text. *Text* refers to the reading material and its extra-linguistic composition. Snow (2002, p.14) argues that, "[t]he features of any text have a large impact on comprehension." The RRSg identify style as one of the key features of a text. Style refers to the manner of writing, the way lexical and syntactic units are selected and structured in a text. *Activity* (sometimes referred to as context) implies the specific purpose for reading and the situation in which this happens (Hudson, 2007; Israel and Duffy, 2009; Yildirim *et al.*, 2011). For vocabulary, much research has found word knowledge to be a crucial factor in reading and meaning making (Mezynski, 1983; Carver, 1994; Read, 2000; Stahl, 2003; Hess and Biggam, 2004; Baumann, 2009; Guo *et al.*, 2011). According to Pardo (2004, p.273), "[i]n order to comprehend, readers must be able to read the words." The argument then is that knowledge or familiarity with the words of a text

largely determines the extent to which a reader may comprehend a text since it (vocabulary) affects all the other factors in the reading process.

The above framework leads us into an understanding of the specific position of this study regarding the reading and comprehension of newspapers stories. From the outset, the study has indicated interest in the purely linguistic aspect of reading and comprehension of text. Therefore, the framework applies to aspects of the meaning making process that concerns the understanding of words, phrases and sentence structure elements of text during reading and comprehension (Kintsch, 1988, 1998; Snow, 2002; Hudson, 2007; McNamara *et al.*, 2011). This particular perspective is based on the argument of this thesis that the representation of lexis and syntax plays an important role in the overall success or otherwise of reading comprehension.

### **5.3 Contextualising text complexity, difficulty, and readability**

From the discussion on reading comprehension, it is clear that a text may be easy or difficult for specific readers. The RRSg (Snow, 2002) has identified some factors that influence the readability of a text. These factors, which include text characteristics, the relationship between text and readers' knowledge and abilities, and the activity in which the reading takes place, provide a basis for the specific conceptual and analytical perspectives underpinning this study. Consequently, this section discusses text complexity, text difficulty and readability to develop specific variables to guide the inquiry. Firstly, I attempt a definition of the terms to contextualise them in the discussions.

Many works have discussed *text complexity* and *difficulty* in terms of textual factors and other situations that aid or challenge reading. In most of such works, *text complexity* and *text difficulty* are discussed as interchangeable variables, often using 'complexity' in that respect, although (as I demonstrate later) they may also occur as two distinct constructs. Before discussing the relationship between the concepts and drawing a line between them, I provide a general understanding of the sense in which the two terms occur as substitutes.

Works claiming to address *text complexity* have found it difficult to define or describe it in specific terms. Housen and Kuiken, (2009, p.463), writing on Complexity, Accuracy and Fluency (CAF) in L2 observe that, "[a]s befits the term,

*complexity* is the most complex, ambitious, and least understood dimension of the CAF triad.” As such, descriptions of ‘text complexity’ have often been vague or general. However, a description by Hess and Biggam (2004, no pagination) provides a practical view that applies generally in this study: “The complexity of a text, or the degree of challenge of a particular text, is the result of specific combination and interaction of these [that is, lexical and syntactic] factors”. Accordingly, ***text complexity in this study refers to the significant occurrence of lexical and syntactic elements that possess characteristics that make them typically difficult (individually and collectively), thereby making a text in which they occur potentially difficult for a given reader.*** This description represents both text complexity and text difficulty, and this could lead to a simplistic understanding that once a text is perceived as complex, it must necessarily be difficult to read. This may not always be the case since the ability to read a supposedly complex text depends on the reader and the degree of complexity of the text. For instance, a complex text may be easy for a university undergraduate but difficult for a JHS student. Thus, text complexity and difficulty may not always be interchangeable.

From the above generic description and drawing on Jensen (2009 and Mesmer *et al.* (2012), I narrow the conceptualisation on the two terms individually as distinct but closely related variables. According to Mesmer *et al.* (2012, p.236) “complexity of a text, or text feature ... implies independent or predictor variables: textual elements or factors that can be analysed, studied, or manipulated,” while text difficulty “implies a dependent or criterion variable: the actual or predicted performance of multiple readers on a task based on that text or feature.” This means that *text complexity* refers to the objective, verifiable and manipulative variables such as vocabulary and syntactic aspects of text, while *difficulty* means the subjective aspect of meaning making whose manifestation resides with the reader. Put together, the terms imply what is in a text and what the reader brings to it in the comprehension process.

*Readability* in this study is grounded in readability studies and derives its reference from Klare (1963) and Dale and Chall’s (1949)<sup>31</sup> comprehensive and much referenced definition (see DuBay, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir, 2006;

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<sup>31</sup> DuBay (2004, p.3ff) presents some of the other definitions.

Heydari, 2012). While Klare defines it as “the ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing,” Dale and Chall states that it is “the sum total (including all the interactions) of all those elements within a piece of printed material that affect the success a group of readers have with it (cited in DuBay, 2004, p.3). Klare’s definition emphasises writing style as a key factor in readability in line with the linguistic perspective of this study. Dale and Chall’s description highlights the interaction between text features and a reader’s ability and interest as important factors in readability.

Readability has been studied from various disciplines and for different purposes. Linguistic factors such as vocabulary, syntax, cohesion, discourse relations, entity coherence, and so on (Pitler and Nenkova, no date) have been used across different research fields to study the readability of text. Nevertheless, as demonstrated subsequently, many of such studies have concentrated on lexical, grammatical and syntactic occurrences as important linguistic factors that influence readability. These studies have mainly aimed at discovering what factors cause text complexity, predicting the readability of documents for specific readers, and finding out the extent to which an existing document is readable to its readers. These studies are largely interventionist, trying to help make text easier to read and comprehend.

The subsequent subsections will focus on readability studies from four perspectives to provide insights to help develop a specific theory to underpin the study. These fields are applied linguistics, legal and plain English studies, corpus linguistics and readability studies. While discussions in the first two fields will help to discover specific linguistic variables of text complexity, the remaining two fields will help to evolve linguistic methods of inquiry for the study.

### **5.3.1 Applied linguistics and text complexity**

The field of applied linguistics has produced extensive studies on language or text complexity and readability in English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Kletzien, 1991; Just and Carpenter, 1992; Verhoeven, 1994; Nation and Coady, 1998; Read, 2000; Hudson, 2007; McNamara *et al.*, 2010; Lu, 2011; Guo *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 2012). There have been many publications as well on the topic. Israel and Duffy (2009) and Hudson (2007) have provided separate

important compilations of research works on reading and comprehension from the 1930s to recent times. Substantial studies have also occurred on the topic in journals such as *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *International Reading Association*, among others. These works investigate a wide range of issues concerning reading problems in both L1 and L2 and causes of text complexity.

The majority of studies in the field have identified different aspects of lexical and syntactic elements as potential causes of text complexity and difficulty. Most of the studies have established a strong relationship between vocabulary and readability. Baumann (2009, p.335) notes that, “[t]he relationship between word knowledge and text understanding has been demonstrated empirically in many ways and along multiple dimensions both historically and contemporarily.” Other studies that have theorised and emphasised lexical complexity or vocabulary difficulty as a major obstacle to reading and comprehension include Norris and Ortega (2009), Hudson (2007), Al-Issa (2006), Nation and Coady (1988), among many others. The general suggestion from these studies is that limited vocabulary knowledge, the inability to understand words in the context of a sentence and text, is connected with difficulty in reading and comprehension. The writers have identified, specifically, lexical diversity, lexical frequency, abstract words, and specialised/technical vocabulary (jargon) as potential causes of text complexity and reading difficulties.

Writers argue that syntactic elements blend with lexis in various ways to make a text difficult. Factors such as the occurrence and nature of clauses and subordination in a sentence and text, passive constructions, number of words before the main verb, embedded structures within clauses, and length of linguistic structures are potential causes of text complexity (McNamara *et al.*, 2010; Norris and Ortega, 2009). McNamara *et al.* (2010, p.62) explain that, “if the syntax of a sentence is complex, higher demands are placed on working memory processing,” thereby causing readability challenges.

After establishing that lexis and syntax are possible causes of text complexity, I turn now to specific aspects of the linguistic elements most likely to cause the challenge. Some studies have identified nominalisations and Latinate expressions as vocabulary items whose overuse may cause language complexity as they carry abstract ideas and are largely unfamiliar (Biber *et al.*, 1999; Russell, 2001). These

scholars add that the use of impersonal tone in the form of passive constructions and jargon, among others, could make a text formal and relatively complex. Dagut and Laufer (1985), Laufer and Eliasson (1993), and Liao and Fukuya (2002) have identified phrasal verbs as a potential source of reading difficulty especially in L2 environments. They argue that the problem lies with the idiomatic tendencies of this type of lexical item.

Although the works above have contributed immensely to our understanding of the linguistic sources of text complexity, I remain conscious of some shortcomings. In the first place, writers have indicated the linguistic markers of text complexity, but identifying general measurement criteria has been difficult. The difficulty has arisen because of the lack of systematic or unified criteria of measurement such as the number of clauses, the number of unfamiliar vocabulary, and so on, that will constitute text complexity for any particular readers (Hudson, 2007; Israel and Duffy, 2009). The possible source of this problem could lie in the fact that researchers have used different human and contextual variables such as age groups, setting, reading contexts, and educational attainments, among others. It appears that researchers have adopted their own workable elements and measurement criteria. In this regard, Lu (2010, 2011) and Norris and Ortega (2009) have suggested some linguistic variables and their averages that may be adopted and used in analysis. The variables include sentences length in words, clauses, subordination, among others, and these provide relevant insights for this study. Secondly, coming from the applied linguistic tradition, the majority of the studies mostly aim at solving classroom problems in language teaching and learning. Therefore, the writers mostly use schoolchildren and students in controlled environments as data sources. These differ from the perspective of this study, which targeted heterogeneous participants (in terms of education, school levels, age, among others) of newspaper readers in their natural environment.

In Ghana, studies in reading and comprehension have mostly been School-based. These fall within the general assessment of educational performance and achievement and have focused on reading aptitude in education generally and the improvement of classroom achievement in reading (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007; Ampiah, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2010; USAID, 2011). The assessment often employs various tools such as School Education Assessment (SEA), National

Education Assessment (NEA), and Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) and requires pupils to read and answer questions on passages.

### **5.3.2 Legal English, plain language and readability**

Studies in the legal field have relevance for newspaper publications and other public documents in terms of language complexity. Newspapers often report on court and other legal issues involving wills, insurances, as well as government activities and voices. The language of these domains displays legal jargon in the use of specialised/technical and formal linguistic forms, which may (and often does) end up in the language of newspapers as well. In this section, I explore how written legal language connects with the linguistic issues underpinning this study to enhance our understanding of the text complexity issues under investigation.

The written text of legal language has been known to be obscure (Williams, 2004; Stanojevic, 2011). According to Williams (2004), legal English exhibits characteristics that identify it as very exclusionary and often incomprehensible to many people who are not legal experts. Crystal and Davies (1969) were convinced that legal English is, “the least communicative of all uses of language” (cited in Williams, 2004, p.112). Empirical studies in the field confirm these positions (see Greene *et al.*, 2012). An example of such a language is a section of a life assurance policies Act:

If, after informing the supervisory authority concerned under subsection (3), any measures taken by the supervisory authority against the insurance undertaking concerned are, in the opinion of the regulatory authority, not adequate and the undertaking continues to contravene the Act, the regulatory authority may, after informing the supervisory authority of its intentions, apply to the High Court for such order as the Court may deem fit, in order to prevent further infringements of the Act, including, insofar as is necessary and in accordance with the insurance Acts 1909 to 2000, regulations made under those Acts and regulations relating to insurance made under the European Communities Act 1972, the prevention of that insurance undertaking from continuing to conclude new insurance contracts within the state (Section 21(4) of Ireland’s Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003, cited in Williams, 2004, p.121).

This type of sentence structure obviously makes the language relatively difficult. For instance, by the time a reader ends this 123-word sentence, he or she would have forgotten how it started. The list below contains lexical and syntactic features that scholars have identified as characterising legal English and predisposing it to

complexity. I use the above extract and other examples from writers to illustrate the features (Williams, 2004, pp.112-115; Stanojevic, 2011, pp.69-74):

- Technical terms
- Foreign words and expressions, especially from French and Latin
- Highly impersonal writing style through, especially the use of passive forms
- The tendency to use many nominalisations
- Long complex sentences, with complicated coordination and subordination patterns

*Technical* terms refer to purely legal jargon such as *Act*, *undertaking*, (others not in the passage include *patent*, *bailment*, *interlocutory injunction*), and so on. Stanojevic (2011) notes that some of the jargon may be familiar to laypersons, but that the majority are known by only lawyers. Writers have cited expressions such as *caveat*, *dictum*, *interlocutory injunction*, *arbiter*, *Amicus Curiae*, which relate to Latin and have specific meanings in legal English as particularly opaque to readers. Words in the extract with Latin origin include *regulatory*, *contravene*, *authority*, and so on. Other examples of Latinate expressions that writers cite that may not strictly be technical vocabulary but nonetheless potentially complex include *negligence*, *subscribe*, *frustrate*, *inferior*, among others. *Passive* constructions are used to create an impersonal tone because users are able to remove themselves from what is being said. An example from the extract is “... *regulations made under those Acts and regulations relating to insurance made under the European Communities Act 1972* ...” The impersonal aspect is the silence about the person who “made” the “regulations”. *Nominalisations* are nouns derived mostly from verbs and adjectives (see section 7.1.2). Their use, instead of using the verbs from which they are derived, imposes an abstract quality on the words, thereby making the language of a text with a number of such items complex and possibly difficult for some readers. For instance, expressions such as “infringements”, “prevention” and “regulations” are said to be abstract and vague (Biber *et al.*, 1999) instead of their verb forms, *to infringe on*, *to prevent*, and *to regulate*, respectively, which depict more clearly the action implied in the words. The syntactic and grammatical arrangement of the extract, for instance the length of the sentence and the use of the passives form, further adds to the complexity of the long sentence.



Due to the meaning problems people might face with complex legal documents, there have been calls for the use of *plain English* in public discourse. Elliott (1991) refers to Robert Eagleson as describing *plain language* as language that is clear, direct and straightforward, language that allows the reader to focus on the message rather than on the difficulty of the language. Scholars have proposed that legal documents can be made more readable by sparingly using linguistic features that make legal English unique and complex (Stanojevic, 2011; Williams, 2004). In other words, Latinate words, nominalisations, passive constructions, long and verbose sentences, among others, could be avoided as much as possible, while technical and other difficult expressions that must be used on practical grounds are to be explained (Greene *et al.*, 2012).

The above position reflects the sentiments of some concerned groups, particularly, the *Plain English movement*. This group emerged during the 1970s in certain parts of the Western world and share similar linguistic concerns as scholars who advocate plain language. The group suggest that documents for public consumption ought to contain mainly Anglo-Saxon words because they are short and make the language simple, plain and easily understandable. A handbook, *A Plain English Handbook* (1998), has accordingly been published to guide good writing as envisaged by advocates of plain English.

The Plain English movement and their social agenda are exclusively a Western occurrence and are currently found in the United States, United Kingdom and Canada (Elliott, 1994; Williams, 2004). The aim of the movement has been to sensitise society about the usefulness of writing public documents in clear or plain language so that they can be easily read and understood. The goal of the movement in these countries has gone beyond merely making documents readable; it has become a human rights and democratic issue. The argument is for documents to be simple so that everybody (including ordinary people) would understand and be “familiar with the rights and obligations that affected them” (Stanojevic, 2011, p.65). According to Elliott and Stanojevic, efforts by the Plain English movement have resulted in the need to use simple English in national affairs becoming a national matter in, for example, the UK and the US. Elliott recounts how the former Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, ran a plain English campaign that transformed and simplified government documents and communication. I have

indicated elsewhere that the US Government has passed a law mandating public documents to be written in plain language.

In Ghana, legal proceedings are regularly featured in news reports. Such stories and others often come with legal jargon and other complexity markers in the language. For instance, this excerpt is from one of the newspapers under study in this research:

They are claiming against Defendants jointly and severally, a declaration that the ex-refinery differential component of the ex-refinery price imposed by the first Defendant on June 5, 2009, was illegal and that the ex-pump prices announced by the first Defendant on June 5, 2009, on the basis of the ex-refinery prices referred to, were not in accordance with prescribed petroleum pricing formula and therefore unlawful (*The Ghanaian Chronicle*, September 30, 2009, p.1).

The use of ‘foreign’ and technical words such as *defendants*, *declaration*, *first defendant*, *severally*, *component*, among others, are typically legal jargon that could render the language confusing for many. Similarly, the long, winding nature of the sentence (of 65 words) could make the text difficult for some readers, especially considering the educational implications underlying the setting of the study.

Thus, I explored the occurrence of linguistic features associated with legal language in the analysis, since legal matters, as well as aspects of legal language, feature regularly in Ghanaian newspapers, as discovered in the data of this study (see section 7.2.3.1). Unlike in other societies where individuals and groups are taking proactive steps to sensitise society about making public documents readable, Ghana is yet to explore the option of calling for the use of plain English in public communication. The motivation for a call to use plain English feeds into the position of this study to create awareness concerning language use in Ghanaian newspapers.

### **5.3.3 Corpus linguistics and the corpus-based method**

This study has applied corpus linguistics as a theory and methodology (McEnery *et al.*, 2006) to help provide linguistic data for the study. McEnery and Wilson (2001, p.1) define corpus linguistics as “the study of language based on examples of ‘real life’ language use.” The definition importantly emphasises actual or natural language use and this provides one of the defining reasons for the suitability of this method in this investigation since this study focuses on contemporary newspaper

language. Advancement in computer technology has meant that studies in corpus linguistics have become more popular in recent years, to enhance the objective study of both written and spoken texts.

Concerning a specific method of inquiry, I find the corpus-based approach (Biber *et al.*, 1998; McEnery *et al.*, 2006) useful for this study. This approach provides a framework to computationally investigate the linguistic structure of “the language of a text of a group of speakers /writers” (Biber *et al.*, 1998, p.2). Biber *et al.* (*ibid.*, p.4) provide the following essential characteristics of this approach:

- it is empirical, analyzing the actual patterns of use in natural texts;
- it utilizes a large and principled collection of natural texts, known as “corpus,” as the basis of analysis;
- it makes extensive use of computers for analysis, using both automatic and interactive techniques;
- it depends on both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques.

These characteristics collectively enhance the reliability of the approach and its analysis.

The corpus-based approach (and corpus linguistics as a whole) is based on the notion, ‘corpus’, which according to McEnery and Wilson (2001, p.29) is any collection of more than one text. Scholars have argued that any credible corpus should satisfy some characteristics as discussed below (Biber, 1993a; Biber *et al.*, 1998; Adolphs, 2006; McEnery *et al.*, 2006):

1. **Sampling and representativeness:** In constructing a corpus, sampling is needed to ensure that “maximally representative” texts of the language variety under study are used. This is to make the corpus reasonably representative of the language variety it is meant to represent, especially where there are huge text populations all of which cannot be included in a particular study. In this way, in addition to providing a reasonably true picture of the language population under study, the corpus and findings based on its contents could also be generalised to that language variety (Biber, 1993a; McEnery *et al.*, 2006).
2. **Finite size:** Another characteristic of a *corpus* is that it is expected to have a finite size, for instance, 1,000,000 words. Scholars, however, concede

that there is no universal prescription for size. For instance, monitor corpora such as the COBUILD, are open-ended and keep growing, while others, such as the British National Corpus (BNC) with about 100 million running words, are complete, having stopped growing.

3. **Machine-readable form:** Presently, *corpus* is understood to imply “machine-readable” contents. The electronic format enables the corpus to be analysed with computer software. Scholars have acknowledged and enumerated several advantages of using machine-readable corpora in language study, the most referenced advantage being that such corpora can be searched and manipulated in ways not possible with corpora in other formats. Additionally, such a corpus can be enriched with other useful information in the analytical process through, for instance, annotation.<sup>32</sup> Other advantages in using machines in language study and analyses include their speed, accuracy, ability to store large data, and their scientific or objective quality in relation to manual processing and researchers’ intuition. This explains why machine-readable text forms are now tied to the understanding of *corpus*. Some existing computer software that has been used in corpora analyses includes Wordsmith Tools, MicroConcord, Oxford Concordance Program (OCP), TACT, among others.

These are general but important characteristics that should guide the building of any corpus within a specific practical circumstances and intended purpose. These characteristics imply that a corpus is not just any haphazard collection of texts, but a principled collection and organisation of proportions of language according to clear linguistic criteria to serve as a sample of that language and be used for research purposes (Leech, 1992).

The corpus-based approach has been applied in a wide range of language-related studies. These include lexicography and lexical studies, grammar, language learning and teaching, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, stylistics and text linguistics, speech research, discourse analysis, forensic linguistics, psycholinguistics, cultural studies, social psychology, among others (Sinclair, 1991; Biber, 1993b, McEnery

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<sup>32</sup> Annotation means grammatical information, such as parts of speech of words, attached or tagged onto words, and which can be used as search items in analyses.

and Wilson, 2001; Hunston, 2002; McEnery *et al.*, 2006). Corpus linguistics can be used to investigate linguistic units and structures in the context of language complexity. For instance, Biber (1993b), Biber *et al.* (1998) and Nishina (2007) have used this method to investigate different linguistic forms such as *that clauses*, *to infinitive clauses*, *nominalisations*, and *noun phrases* in a language or genre, and these have contributed to an understanding of how the distribution of such occurrences affect meaning. Thus, a corpus-based approach can be invaluable in investigating the independent variables of text characteristics such as words, phrases, clauses and sentences.

### **5.3.4 Readability studies and text difficulty**

In this subsection, I discuss relevant issues concerning the application of readability formula tools as an analytical method in this study. Readability studies, which peaked in the late 1940s, have been generally concerned with linguistic factors affecting the ease or difficulty of reading and comprehending text (DuBay, 2004; Hulden, 2004; Pitler and Nenkova, no date). Researchers focused particularly on both the readability of texts and the reading ability of adults.<sup>33</sup> The studies began in the United States, Britain, Canada, and other Western countries, the initial goal being educational. The motivation was to evolve readability formula tools to help educationists and textbook writers to objectively measure reading materials and precisely ascertain what language style would most benefit readers (Hulden, 2004). The concern later extended to reading activities outside of the school environment. From the late 1940s, writers started questioning the readability of news stories (see Dale and Chall, 1948; Klare, 1963; DuBay, 2004). Consequently, various studies eventually started producing readability formulae from the 1920s to help measure the readability levels of texts (DuBay, 2004).

#### **5.3.4.1 Readability formulae and their application**

Readability formulae are mathematical equations whose results provide interpretations for the description of a text from very easy to very difficult. This is meant to help predict the level of reading ability (in terms of school grade level) required to comprehend a particular written text (Redish, 2000; DuBay, 2004). The formulae are based on research findings that identify vocabulary difficulty (which is

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<sup>33</sup> For a detailed history as well as writers and works produced during this era, see, for instance, DuBay (2004), Hulden (2004) and Heydary (2012).

measured in word familiarity or difficulty, or word length) and sentence structure (measured in sentence length) as two variables of style noted to be reliable indicators of text complexity and difficulty (DuBay, 2004; Hulden, 2004). Many studies have supported these two factors and their measures as strongly associated with reading comprehension<sup>34</sup> (Hulden, 2004; DuBay, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir, 2006). These features are equally prominent in measuring or assessing text complexity in (applied) linguistics and legal studies (see Hess and Biggam, 2004; McNamara *et al.*, 2010; Lu, 2011). The most frequently cited and used formulae to date were developed during the peak of readability studies between the 1930s and 1970s (Flesch, 1948; Dale-Chall, 1949; Gunning, 1952; Fry, 1968; McLaughlin, 1969; among others, cited in DuBay, 2004 and Heydari, 2012). Although the formulae were created originally for manual application, the proliferation of computers has resulted in most of them being computerised.

Readability formulae have been applied in a wide range of domains. The formulae have been used to select suitable reading material and to help simplify texts for readers in the US, UK, Canada, among others (see Klare, 1969; DuBay, 2004). Beyond education, the formulae have found application in the mass media, health information, court actions and legislation, scholarly articles, among others (see Heydari, 2012). In the majority of cases, the aim has been to ensure that published texts are readable and comprehensible for intended audiences (*ibid.*). The formulae also serve as rules for writing and revising documents and through that facilitate the work of writers, editors, publishers, among others, to adapt written material to a given complexity level. Heydari (2012, p.425) notes that it is possible to apply the formulae to any written text from textbooks to government documents and that the “formulae have survived 80 years of intensive application, investigation, and controversy with both their credentials and limitations remaining intact.”

Consequently, I consider readability formula tools suitable in this attempt to assess written texts for public communication. As a mass communication outlet,

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<sup>34</sup> It has to be stated that these factors and measures apply to style, which this study is interested in. Other variables affecting readability include content, coherence, discourse relations (see Pitler and Nenkova, no date), and reader characteristics, among others, but the difficulty in subjecting these to the objective mathematical measure associated with readability formulae makes them inapplicable to the formulae.

newspapers normally target a relatively large and heterogeneous segment of society, and supply news information to their readers. Therefore, using readability formulae to help assess the extent to which aspects of the language style of the newspaper text suit readers contributes to knowledge about the relative success of this form of public communication. Additionally, scholars have acknowledged the use of these formulae to investigate newspapers and other mass media platforms for different purposes (Razik, 1969; DuBay, 2004; Dalecki *et al.*, 2009; Heydary, 2012).

#### **5.3.4.2 Introducing some common readability formulae**

Of the many readability formulae, five of the most commonly used are Flesch Reading Ease (1948), Dale-Chall (1946), Gunning Fog Index (1952), The SMOG, and The Bormuth Mean Cloze formulae (DuBay, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir, 2006). The first three formulae originated from the early periods of readability studies and have been the most popular, reliable, tested, and most influential in the field (Du Bay, 2004; Hulden, 2004). Consequently, I provide below an outline of these three formulae for their subsequent application in this study.

##### **5.3.4.2.1 The Flesch Reading Ease Formula (1948)**

This formula by Rudolph Flesch (1948) is one of the most popular, tested and reliable of the readability formulae tools (Klare, 1969; DuBay, 2004; Hulden, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir 2006; Heydari 2012). It depends on two variables: average number of syllables per word (calculated by number of syllables divided by number of words) and average sentence length (i.e. number of words divided by number of sentences). The formula produces a score on a scale of 0-100. The interpretation is that the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the material. Thus, a score of 30 is very difficult, while 70 is very easy. Table 3 presents a description of this formula. The equation that generates the Flesch Reading Ease score is as follows:

$$RE = 206.835 - (1.015 ASL) - (84.6 ASW)$$

Where: RE = reading grade of a reader

ASL = average sentence length

ASW = average number of syllables per word

**Table 3: The Flesch Reading Ease Score and its interpretation**

<b>Reading Ease Score</b>	<b>Style Description</b>	<b>Estimated Reading Grade</b>
0-30	Very Difficult	College Graduate
30-40	Difficult	13 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> Grade
50-60	Fairly difficult	10 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
60-70	Standard	8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup>
70-80	Fairly Easy	7 <sup>th</sup>
80-90	Easy	6 <sup>th</sup>
90-100	Very Easy	5 <sup>th</sup>

**Flesch’s Reading Ease Score (modified version, cited from DuBay, 2004, p.22)**

The prominence and reliability of this formula is suggested by its incorporation and installation in Microsoft Office Word where it is used to check readability levels of texts.

**5.3.4.2.2 The Dale-Chall Formula (1948, 1995)**

This formula was developed by Edgar Dale and Jeanne Chall in 1948 for adults and children above the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It has been an influential formula and designed to improve on the Flesch Reading Ease Formula. This formula employs a sentence-length variable and a percentage of “hard words.” The hard words are those not included in the Dale-Chall (no date) list of 763 easy words, 80% of which are known to fourth grade readers (see DuBay, 2004).

The original Dale-Chall Formula was revised by the authors and re-published (Dale and Chall, 1995). The new formula is an improved version as it accounted for many readability research findings during the 47 years after the publication of the original formula. The new formula expanded the list of familiar words to 3,000 and was validated against a variety of criteria and correlated highly with other assessment criteria making it one of the most valid of the popular formulae (see DuBay, 2004, p.52). The score is obtained from the equation (DuBay, 2004 p.24):

$$\text{Score} = .1579 * \text{PDW} + .0496 * \text{ASL} + 3.6365$$

**Score** = reading grade of a reader who can comprehend a text at 4<sup>th</sup> grade or below.

**PDW** = Percentage of Difficult Words (words not on the Dale-Chall word list)



ASL = Average Sentence Length in words.

Table 4 indicates a chart of the grade-level scores published by Dale and Chall (1949), where scores from 8.0 upward imply that the text concerned is difficult.

**Table 4: The Dale-Chall Formula (from DuBay, 2004, p.24)**

Formula Score	Grade Levels
4.9 and below	Grade 4 and below
5.0-5.9	Grades 5-6
6.0-6.9	Grades 7-8
7.0-7.9	Grades 9-10
8.0-8.9	Grades 11-12
9.0-9.9	Grades 13-15 (college)
10 and above	Grades 16 and above (college graduate)

#### **5.3.4.2.3 The Gunning Fog Index (1952)**

Robert Gunning's (1952) Fog Index is also a commonly used readability measure developed for adults and based on two variables: average sentence length and the number of words with more than two syllables for each 100 words (DuBay, 2004; Heydari, 2012). The formula produces an output that is a grade level score, the equation being:

$$\text{Grade Level} = .4(\text{Average Sentence Length} + \text{hard words})$$

Where, *hard words* refer to the number of words with more than two syllables. This formula, as shown in Table 5, indicates that a score of 13 is the upper limit of an easy text meaning a score above 13 is difficult.

#### **5.3.4.3 Limitations of readability formulae**

The popularity and wide application of readability formulae over the years does not mean they are without some flaws. Writers such as Smith (1984), Redish and Selzer (1985), and Redish (2000) have questioned the reliability and validity of the formulae as predictors of text difficulty of documents since they do not reflect actual human processing of texts. The scholars argue justifiably that merely

responding to the assumptions underlying the formulae, such as using short and simple words and sentences, does not guarantee the ease of reading a text.

**Table 5: The Gunning fog Index (Taken from Heydari, 2012, p.424)**

	<b>Fog Index</b>	<b>Estimated Reading Grades</b>
	17	College graduate
	16	College senior
	15	College junior
	14	College sophomore
Danger line	13	College freshman
	12	High school senior
	11	High school junior
	10	High school sophomore
Easy	9	High school freshman
Reading	8	Eighth grade
Range	7	Seventh grade
	6	Sixth grade

Arguments are also raised about the fact that the formulae only measure some aspects of style leaving out important contributors to readability such as content, organisation, word order, format, discourse variety, imagery, and collocation, among others (see also Hulden, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir, 2006; Heydari, 2012). Additionally, reader characteristics such as maturity, interest, intelligence, among others, cannot also be included in the workings of the formulae.

One of the most important arguments against the credibility of the formulae has been discrepancies in the results of different formulae on the same text. This refers to a situation where one formula, for example, scores a text as difficult and another formula scores that same text as easy. In a recent study, Heydari (2012) found little correlation between readers' and some formulae's evaluation of text-readability levels. Nevertheless, these weaknesses occur because of the different variables underlying each formula and the fact that the formulae did not account for human factors. Thus, the need to understand the factors underlying the formulae is crucial and researchers need to select formulae that used variables that are relevant to the specific aims of their studies.

In spite of the above criticisms, the reliability and continuous application of the formulae has not been shaken. Indeed, the critics of the formulae recognise the usefulness of the formulae in assessing the readability level of 'old' documents (Redish, 2000). Proponents of readability formulae acknowledge that the formulae do not pretend to measure those textual and reader characteristics which are not applicable to the specific variables underlying the formulae (Klare, 1969; DuBay, 2004). A reasonable approach in the use of the formulae is to use them alongside other methods such as directly testing typical readers (Redish, 2000), an approach this research adopted. The relevance of readability formulae in studies on the comprehensibility of text has been one of the motivations for their continuous use in the field. According to Anagnostou and Weir (2006, p.10), "despite their shortcomings, readability formulae are useful, practical and objective" ways of assessing the complexity of a text when applied appropriately.

#### **5.3.4.4 Readability formulae in non-Western societies**

Research in readability studies appears not to have a wide application in Ghana. Indeed, the various studies from which the formulae evolved drew mostly on Western educational systems and society going by the texts, typical readers and grade levels used to create the mathematical equations (DuBay, 2004). This though does not negate their application beyond the Western origin as research has shown (see Sanni, 1985; Adesonaye, no date).

I contend that the design and purposes of readability formulae appear to make them applicable to any written document anywhere. Thus, attempts to assess the level of complexity or readability of written texts in the Ghanaian context stand to benefit from these formulae. For instance, Sanni (1985) used the Flesch formula to assess the readability of some Nigerian newspapers. However, the critical issue rather involves the interpretation of results in non-Western societies. The question is whether a text score at a grade level in Western societies holds the same significance or indicates the same readability level for people of an equivalent grade level in, for instance, Ghana. This is where Sanni's work fell short, as it did not quite engage with this issue.

The current Ghanaian educational system, as presented in section 1.2.4, may be similar to that of the United States, but as to whether readability results have the

same implications in the two contexts is debateable. The text and human factors used to formulate the formula tools bear the stamp of the Western political, cultural and educational influences that may be different from those of the Ghanaian and other African situation. Additionally, English occurs in Ghana as a second language, and not the people's mother tongue, unlike the situation in the United States where it is a native language. Moreover, Ghana is a developing country with serious socio-economic problems that often lead to a lack of consistent correlation between age and educational levels. These factors could adversely affect educational outcomes, including reading and comprehension ability. Consequently, I argue that readability scores on texts that are meant for Ghanaian readers could have more insightful implications than for readers in developed societies.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: The study's research plan from the linguistic perspective**

The majority of research that have been reviewed from perspectives such as applied linguistics (Stahl, 2003; Norris and Ortega, 2009; McNamara *et al.*, 2010; Lu, 2010, 2011; Guo *et al.*, 2011), readability studies (Flesch, 1951; Klare, 1984; Dale and Chall, 1995; DuBay, 2004; Anagnostou and Weir, 2006), plain language and legal studies (Williams, 2004; Loughran and McDonald, 2009; Stanojevic, 2011; Greene *et al.*, 2012) have contributed to our understanding of text complexity, difficulty and readability. These studies have identified lexical (vocabulary) and syntactic (word formation and sentence structure) complexity as major causes of reading challenges. From the discussions, nominalisations, Latinate expressions, phrasal verbs, passive constructions, long sentences, among others, have been discovered as specific language characteristics that could lead to reading difficulties. Therefore, I propose nominalisations, Latinate words, phrasal verbs (for lexical items), and sentence length, subordination and passive constructions (for syntactic items), as the variables of the linguistic inquiry in the investigation of newspaper complexity in Ghana.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Methodology and Research Design**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

After establishing the important historical and institutional context of the study, including the theories underpinning the research in the preceding chapters, this chapter presents the study's research design. As a reminder, this study's main purpose is to investigate the readability and comprehension of front-page stories of Ghanaian newspapers and related matters. Thus, I specify in this chapter the specific methods used to collect data to help achieve the goals of the research. The research interrogated four major questions:

- a) How can the language of Ghanaian newspaper front-page stories be described based on its lexical and syntactic features, and to what extent do these features enhance or impede the readability and comprehension of front-page stories?
- b) To what extent are the front-page stories of Ghanaian newspapers understandable to readers?
- c) Based on the above two questions, to what extent do the Ghanaian newspapers, by virtue of their language style, alienate or include their audiences in the media discourse of front-page stories?
- d) Would Ghanaian readers prefer that newspapers be written in complex or plain / simple English?

The questions provoked the following hypotheses, which also served to guide the research:

- The language of Ghanaian newspapers is complex and can hinder reading and comprehension for many Ghanaian readers.
- Many readers find Ghanaian front-page stories difficult to understand.
- Most Ghanaian readers are marginalised from direct access to newspaper messages.
- University students and graduates find it easier to read and understand news stories than other educational groups.

- Ghanaian newspapers are excessively difficult for readers with JHS educational attainment.
- Readers prefer that newspapers be written in simple, instead of complex, language since they find that more understandable.

## **6.2 Research design: mixing methods**

It is observed from the above questions and hypotheses that the research interrogates both objective and subjective issues. The objective aspect involves the observable linguistic characteristics of the newspapers' language, while the subjective is about how readers make meaning of the text. To answer the research questions reasonably, (as the questions cannot be answered conclusively in this single study), I adopted a critical and empirical research inquiry in a design that combined different quantitative methods. The design also involved a little qualitative dimension to complement the quantitative methods, and the results, triangulated.

Quantitative research is subject to the positivist view, which emphasises the measurement of data and the neutrality of the researcher in the research process as a means of arriving at 'truth' (Babbie, 2005). On the other hand, qualitative research argues against absolute truth concerning knowledge because, according to this view, knowledge cannot be neutral (Philips and Burbules, 2000, cited in Creswell, 2009, p.7). Knowledge, in this sense, reflects the view of both the researcher and the participant, who are actively involved in the research process. Hence, the researcher and the participants cannot be separated from the social problem of which they are a part (Hennink *et al.*, 2011).

The pragmatic approach adopted in this research blends both logical/objective and subjective/interpretive methods to achieve desired results. In this model, procedures from different approaches may be integrated to enrich a study (Creswell, 2009). Scholars have advocated a blend of different but workable procedures as an acceptable research strategy, especially if suitable and applied skilfully to lead to a relatively more comprehensive understanding and solution of social problems (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Johnson *et al.*, 2004; Creswell, 2009).

### **6.3 Specific methods**

The questions this study investigated may be put in two parts. The first concerned the readability of Ghanaian newspaper text, while the second was about the ability of Ghanaian readers to comprehend the newspaper text. Thus, the methods employed to collect data targeted primarily textual data from Ghanaian newspapers and opinions and comprehension ability from readers of newspapers. Specific data gathering activities first involved collecting newspaper front-page stories for mainly quantitative computational analyses. The rationale was to enable a description of the text in terms of relative complexity. The second involved an audience survey aimed at generating both quantitative and qualitative information from readers about their personal encounter with the newspaper text in the context of reading comprehension. Details of each of these activities are presented shortly in the subsequent subsections. Since the study hinged largely on Ghanaian newspaper front-page stories, I provide some background information about the newspaper data to inform the rest of the data collection activities and the analysis.

#### **6.3.1 Background to data collection and analyses**

The general data collection processes occurred in two phases of fieldwork. The first was between November 2011 and February 2012, and the second, between June and September 2012. The two phases of fieldwork became necessary because of the need to acquire both newspaper text data as well as survey data for the study. During the first period of fieldwork, I investigated the newspaper industry for vital information concerning especially issues relating to newspaper circulation to help plan the main research. I collected the textual data during this period and conducted a small survey for a pilot study. The second phase of the fieldwork was used to collect the main survey data.

Before proceeding to other issues pertaining to the research, I state that the processes involved in the collection and analysis of the data benefited immensely from the pilot study referred to above. The pilot exercise supported the viability of the project. Findings from the pilot (which I presented to my supervisors) and experiences associated with it greatly influenced every aspect of the main research, from data collection to analysis and data presentation.

Gaining access to the field during the fieldwork was relatively easy. As a teacher in a journalism school, I often interacted with journalists at various forums and through that, I became acquainted with many media personnel and their organisations. Additionally, the Rector of GIJ, where I work as a lecturer, introduced me to editors of the newspapers, who granted me access to their institutions to obtain the information I needed.

As indicated at the onset of this project, four national daily newspapers provided the textual data for both aspects of the study. These were the *Graphic and Times*, which were state owned, and the *Chronicle* and *Guide*, both privately owned. These four newspapers are deemed to be representative of the national daily newspapers in the country because they are the most circulated (about 70% circulation), the most read, and the most influential in the country (see sections 1.6 and 4.4.1). Newspaper circulation has been used as a major criterion in selecting newspapers for research purposes in Ghana. For instance, Yankson *et al.* (2010) used circulation to include these four newspapers in a study on Ghanaian newspapers' coverage of road accidents between 2005 and 2006.

### **6.3.2 Period of textual data and related issues**

The newspaper texts that were collected covered happenings during the period leading to the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2008 national/general democratic elections in Ghana (from June to November 2008). Tying the study to this period sought to assess the effectiveness of the press in providing its readers with socio-political information of the period. However, during the data collection exercise, practical problems led to the use of four months' data for each of the newspapers. The planned textual analysis required data in electronic format, but surprisingly, enquiries made with the various publishers at the time showed that the various newspaper organisations did not have electronically saved versions of the news. The editor of a leading newspaper in the country responded thus to the unavailability of electronically saved versions of their news:

Well, you know we're only just going in full blast into the electronic age. We've had a library and I think that it's something that has really not been taken up seriously. But now we have some consultants looking at that so I hope that before long we'll have it (taken verbatim from interview transcript, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012).



This meant that to have the news texts for the planned computational analysis, I had to settle for scanned formats. The library of the University of Ghana provided scanned and digitised versions of all the front-page stories of the four newspapers over the data period for a fee. I then undertook the difficult task of converting the pdf files individually into the ‘word’ and ‘text’ formats required for the analysis.

### **6.3.3 Outline of data collection**

Two main methods were used to generate and organise the specific data for the analysis. The first was through a corpus of front-page newspaper language genre within a corpus-based linguistic approach, while the second was a survey of readers using a survey questionnaire. The corpus-based method helped to systematically collect and organise all the individual news stories reported on the front pages of the selected newspapers for linguistic analyses, while the questionnaire helped to generate information from notional readers of the newspapers. I present details of these methods, beginning with the corpus design.

### **6.3.4 Corpus design**

The corpus used for this study was constructed by this researcher, and is thus a specialised corpus of front-page news stories. The corpus, therefore, represented a language of press reportage of front-page Ghanaian newspaper genre. According to Adolphs (2006, p.30), this type of corpus captures “the language of a particular domain rather than the language in general.”

The corpus design and its subsequent analyses occurred within the framework of the corpus-based approach (Biber *et al.*, 1998; McEnery *et al.* 2006). Being hypothesis driven, this study first identifies specific research questions and a number of predetermined linguistic elements to investigate after which a suitable corpus is built to investigate the elements (Biber *et al.*, 1998; Rayson, 2002). Additionally, the corpus-based method is computer or software-driven, so it enables an efficient way of collecting, organising and storing the data for the analysis. The approach also assures the researcher of fast, reliable, accurate and diverse manipulations of the data during the analysis in line with the objective of the study. Moreover, corpora usually permit annotation, a process of attaching grammatical (and other) information to text for diverse computational applications with tools such as wordlist, concordances, Key Word in Context (KWIC), keyword comparisons

(Adolphs, 2006), among other relevant features. This study exploited and benefited from the procedures and advantages of the corpus-based approach. Apart from the fact that software (here, Wordsmith Tools) for corpus analysis makes it easy to identify, count, and locate linguistic elements in their contexts, the corpus approach also ensured the validity of the study because, being machine driven, the analysis and findings were largely not influenced by the researcher's biases and intuitions.

The use of corpus linguistics and corpora in investigations on or related to text complexity is not new. For example, Biber *et al.* (1998) and Nishina (2007) used available corpora to investigate grammatical occurrences and the distribution of lexical and syntactic characteristics in various genres. McNamara (2010) and Lu (2011) have also used specialised corpora of students' essays to investigate lexical and syntactic features in the context of complex language and its measurement in L2 language development. Corpus linguistics has also been used to collect, organise and analyse large amounts of texts from news agencies and newspapers to study language complexity issues pertaining to ideological meaning in the media (Stenvall, 2011). Taken together, these provided a reasonable justification for the use of the corpus method in this aspect of the analysis.

#### **6.3.4.1 Corpus size and representation**

Underlying the definition of *corpus* is the need for a corpus to be representative (of the language or language varieties it represents) and 'large'. The attempt to apply idealistic notions about best practice in the building of this corpus was informed by the understanding that corpus building in the real world demands compromises (Douglas, 2009). Concerning representativeness, I included all front-page stories of the newspapers in the corpus over the data period (Monday to Saturday: newspapers were not published on Sundays). This eliminated the many challenges associated with sampling and representativeness (Douglas, 2009; Nelson, 2010). The challenge however was with the relatively small size of the corpus, an issue I will engage shortly after presenting an idea of the overall size of the textual data. Data were collected over four months (August to November 2008) for the *Chronicle*, the *Graphic*, and the *Guide*. But the four-month data for the *Times* were so comparatively low that it became necessary to add one more month's data (July) to its (the *Times*) collection. Thus, care was taken to acquire a near equivalent size in words across the newspapers as much as possible, although there are still some

negligible differences in size between the collections. The entire corpus amounted to 896 individual text files or stories with an overall size at 543,698 words. Table 6 presents details of the monthly data of the four newspapers.

**Table 6: Monthly textual data and size of corpus**

	<i>Chronicle</i>		<i>Graphic</i>		<i>Guide</i>		<i>Times</i>	
<b>Month</b>	No. of Words	No. of Files	No. of Words	No. of Files	No. of Words	No. of Files	No. of Words	No. of Files
<b>JULY</b>							<b>27485</b>	<b>57</b>
Aug	39348	57	45847	68	30049	47	26775	55
Sept	35315	57	30456	51	32767	48	19926	44
Oct	36446	50	36534	60	39530	54	21559	50
Nov	36006	51	25940	42	37701	58	22014	47
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>147115</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>138777</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>140047</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>117759</b>	<b>253</b>

The advancement in computer technology today has facilitated the ability to build larger corpora than was the case in past decades, which may suggest that a corpus of less than a million words is small. Scholars such as Sinclair (1991) have advised that a corpus ought to be large, especially if it is to be used to investigate the behaviour of lexical items. The issue of ‘large’ or ‘small’ corpora has engaged scholarly attention, especially in the face of difficulty in obtaining required materials (and in required formats) in uncharted terrains (Meyer, 2002; Douglas, 2003) as was the case with this study. Koester (2010, p.67) shares a view that a corpus of five million words has generally been described as large, while that which is a million or less is seen as small.

However, what is important is a workable corpus size for a project, which scholars, such as Nelson (2010), explain is much influenced by considerations of purpose and pragmatic issues. I have already pointed out in this chapter the practical challenges involved in obtaining an electronic version of the data, which necessitated limiting the corpus data to four months’. The concern over ‘size’ in corpus studies has been due to considerations involving sampling and representativeness, which, as explained earlier, were unnecessary in this research because the newspaper stories collected included all available data over the period earmarked for the research. Moreover, Flowerdew (2004, p.19) argues that ‘small’ (specialised) corpora are generally accepted as being up to 250,000 words. Scholars also acknowledge that small corpora are effective for investigating specific areas of language use such as registers, genres, or grammar (Koester, 2010; Nelson, 2010, Flowerdew, 1998). For instance, the Guangzhou Petroleum Corpus contains 411,612

tokens (that is, all the words in the corpus) (Nelson, 2010, p.56). All these issues underlie and support the credibility of the corpus of this study. Apart from being specialised, the corpus concerns a newspaper language genre and a major aspect of the analysis was grammatical.

#### **6.3.4.2 Data organisation**

The data were systematically organised to facilitate the identification of individual texts during the analysis. The front-page stories of each newspaper were identified and labeled based on font size of headlines and position on the page (that is, prominence). On average, there were two stories per day. The story with the largest headline font and often prominently placed on the front page became the main or lead story and was labeled *story 1* and saved accordingly. The second story by prominence becomes *story 2* and saved as such. Thus, for example, if on 1st September 2008, three stories appeared on the front page of the *Graphic*, the stories were identified and categorised into *story 1*, *2* and *3*. Each story was saved individually as in, for instance, *Graphic Sept 1 story 1*; *Graphic Sept 1 story 2*; *Graphic Sept 1 story 3*. All the stories of each day were put into the same folder and labeled, for instance, *Graphic Sept 1*; *Graphic Nov 4*, after which all the stories for the month were put into one folder and labeled accordingly. In this way, it was possible to easily locate words and expressions in the context and files. The files were then converted into a machine-readable format for the computational analysis.

#### **6.3.4.3 Maintaining the originality of the Corpus**

During the data collection process, care was taken to maintain the originality of the stories. Hence, grammatical and spelling errors in the original document were left unedited. Computer ‘errors’ that occurred during the process of converting the PDF to the machine-readable format were corrected. For instance, the computer occasionally added punctuation marks or omitted them. Sometimes, the computer also changed the word *He* to *lie*, among others. Other checks done to ensure the originality of the texts included checking for repetitions, omissions, and addition of characters. The researcher thoroughly proofread the data and made the necessary corrections as much as possible.

Additional measures were taken to further ensure the accuracy and quality of the data. I applied a systematic random sampling procedure (Babbie, 2005) to select

about 20 per cent of texts from each newspaper for further checks. This procedure yielded 160 texts, that is, ten from each month and therefore forty from each newspaper. Every *n*th story (5, 6, 6, and 7 for the *Chronicle*, the *Graphic*, the *Guide*, and the *Times* respectively) was selected (based on the number of texts for the months) to obtain the figures. The 160 selected texts were thoroughly checked against the original by a final-year undergraduate student at GIJ. This student was a professional proofreader with practical experience in the newspaper industry. The results of the checks indicated an average of about six errors per text. This means that the originality or accuracy level of the corpus was almost 100 per cent since the error margin was less than 1 per cent (that is, the percentage of number of errors over number of words of the sample) (Babbie, 2005). The majority of the errors involved wrong spelling (of mostly indigenous names) and wrong occurrence of punctuation marks (especially the comma and quotation marks). These did not pose any threat to the credibility of the findings since they did not affect any of the units under investigation, nor did they increase or decrease token counts.

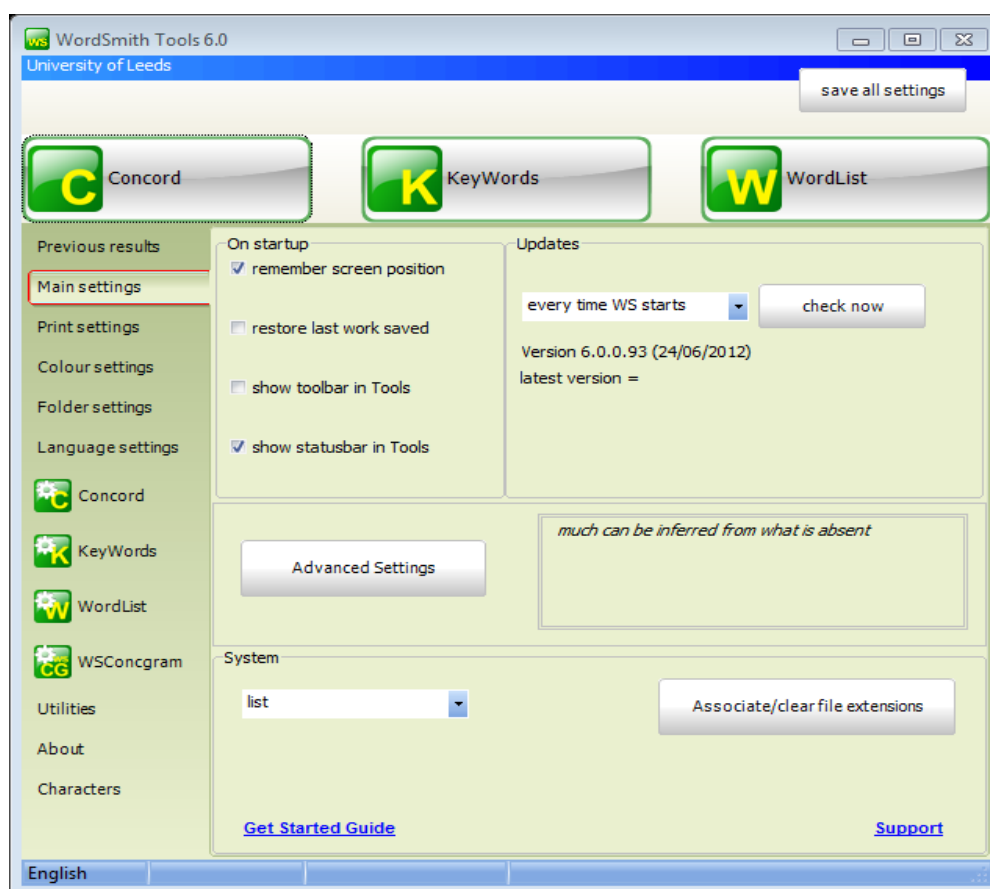
#### **6.3.4.4 Corpus-based analytical approaches**

For the analysis, I used the Wordsmith Tools 6.0, which was developed by Mike Scott.<sup>35</sup> The software's *Concord*, *KeyWords* and *WordList* tools provided useful analytical interfaces for the analysis. While *Concord* helps to find all instances of words and phrases in a corpus, *KeyWords* helps to find characteristic words in a text or set of texts in relation to a reference corpus, and *WordList* identifies all the words and their frequencies in a text or corpus in various arrangements. Wordsmith also has further applications such as statistics, Key Word In Context Concordances (KWIC), among others, making it suitable for this study. Figure 5 illustrates the tools.

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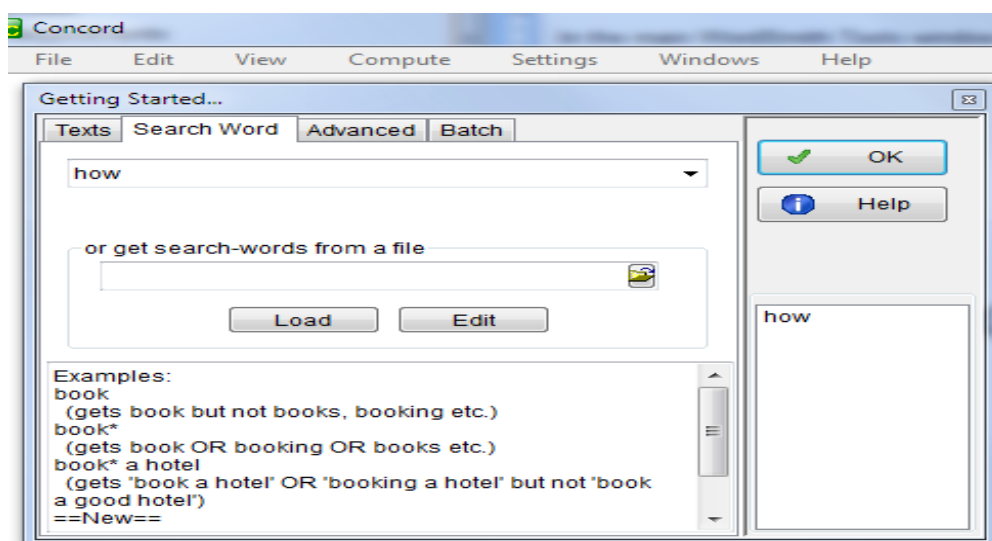
<sup>35</sup> See Wordsmith Tools at: <http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/index.html>

**Figure 5: Wordsmith Tools with the *Concord*, *Keyword* and *WordList* interfaces**



For instance, to find the word *how* in its context in a corpus, one may use the *Concord* interface as illustrated in Figure 6 to generate all the occurrences and counts of the word.

**Figure 6: The Concord interface of the Wordsmith Tools<sup>36</sup>**



<sup>36</sup> From the online manual of Wordsmith tools at:  
<http://www.lexically.net/downloads/version6/HTML/?wshell.htm>

These tools have been used and recommended by scholars including Adolphs (2006) and McEnery and Wilson (2001). A visit to the website of the developers in March 2013 showed that over 150 articles, forty-one full books, one hundred book chapters and over seventy-two PhD theses have used the software.<sup>37</sup> The University of Leeds has a licensed copy of the software and it is available to students.

Both POS-tagged (here annotated) and untagged forms (unannotated)<sup>38</sup> of the corpus were used to analyse the lexical, syntactic, and other grammatical units. Annotation was done by POS-tagging the corpus with UCREL CLAWS5.<sup>39</sup> This is a very reliable tagger whose accuracy has been known to consistently occur between 96% and 97%.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the above computational methods, which are designed to yield mainly quantitative analysis, I also took steps to enhance the rigour of the analysis. Biber *et al.* (1998) have suggested the usefulness of applying qualitative analysis to quantitative outputs in corpora studies. As a result, I employed manual grammatical analysis especially in the case of clauses as well as qualitative analysis of findings involving vocabulary to support the computational findings.

Although the corpus was comprised of the language of four newspapers, the analysis was not comparative but aimed at a general description of the language style of the corpus. Thus, I adopted a predominantly descriptive statistical approach

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<sup>37</sup> See WordSmith Tools at:

[http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/corpus\\_linguistics\\_links/papers\\_using\\_wordsmith.htm](http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/corpus_linguistics_links/papers_using_wordsmith.htm)

<sup>38</sup> POS refers to Parts of Speech (noun, verb, adverb, pronoun, among others) of individual words in a corpus. Annotation has already been explained (see section 5.3.3. Untagged or unannotation means a corpus has no such tags so the raw words become the search items in the analysis.

<sup>39</sup> UCREL and CLAWS are acronyms. UCREL stands for University Center for Computer Corpus Research on Language, while CLAWS means Constituent Likelihood Automatic Word-tagging System. There are a number of CLAWS models from CLAWS1 to CLAWS7 and each has its tagsets. The tagsets are the specific tags used to annotate a corpus. Each CLAWS model has a different number of tags for the parts of speech with varying levels of elaboration. For example, Tagset5 has about 60 tags and does not show the distinction between personal pronouns, but Tagset7 with over 160 tags, differentiates between first person and third person pronouns, etc. (See <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/claws/>).

<sup>40</sup> UCREL. *Corpus Annotation*. At <http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/annotation.html>

in the form of counts, figures, tables and percentages in the analysis as well as prose descriptions, which according to Meyer (2002) are beneficial in such an analysis. Linguistic elements specifically targeted and analysed in the corpus included the following in Table 7:

**Table 7: The lexical and syntactic units of inquiry**

<b>Lexical</b>	<b>Syntactic</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• nominalisations</li><li>• Latinate expressions</li><li>• phrasal verbs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• sentences</li><li>• clauses</li><li>• passives forms</li></ul>

### **6.3.5 Readability formula tests**

To make the linguistic analysis robust, I also concurrently applied readability formula test tools to complement the corpus linguistic analysis. These tools have been applied extensively to assess, predict and even prescribe the readability level of written material in various domains: language teaching, linguistic research, journalism, health care, law, insurance, among others, and they have proved reliable in almost a century of application (DuBay, 2004; Heydari, 2012). Many research projects have successfully used the formulae (Anagnostou and Weir, 2006; DuBay, 2004; Loughran and McDonalds, 2009). Additionally, readability formula studies on newspapers abound (Klare, 1963; Razik, 1969; Dale and Chall, 1995; DuBay, 2004; Dalecki *et al.*, 2009). This method therefore usefully complemented the other methods of the research design, especially as the formulae emphasise structural features of language such as word and sentence characteristics, which are central to this investigation.

To enhance the rigour of the analysis further, I concurrently applied three influential readability formulae in the field: Flesch Reading Ease (Flesch) (1948), New Dale-Chall (Dale) (1995), and Fog Index (Fog) (1952). Since the various formulae use different measurement criteria in calculating their results, I found it useful to consider each of the three scores separately for each newspaper and then correlate their results. The impracticality of running the analysis on all the 986 texts of the corpus made it necessary to plan the analysis on selected texts. Hence, I used the ten stories per month per newspaper that were randomly sampled and verified (using systematic sampling) for the readability formula analysis. This amounted to



40 texts per newspaper and 160 texts overall. DuBay (2004) has reproduced the formulae and provided online links for their computational analyses, and these are available for use and have been used by researchers.

The above linguistic procedures provided a means of collecting and analysing the mainly textual and quantitative data of the study. The design also involved a survey of readers in Accra, Ghana, aiming to collect both objective and subjective data to complement the textual data. In the next sections, I explain the survey activities to integrate the methods of the research.

### **6.3.6 The survey**

As indicated earlier in the chapter, a survey targeting people of different educational levels in Accra was additionally used to draw quantitative and qualitative data for the study. The exercise occurred in August and September 2012. Surveys have been used as data collection methods in a number of major studies in Ghana (Ansu-kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; Amankwah, 2010; Bowen, 2010).

#### **6.3.6.1 Population and sampling**

Since the study investigated the readability of newspapers, educated Ghanaians in the country constituted the study's theoretical population since only such people could read the newspapers. Newspapers in Ghana are typically published and circulated mostly in the urban centres, especially in the capital, Accra, so the research sample was drawn from the *study population* in Accra. The *study population* is the "aggregation of elements from which the sample is actually selected" (Babbie, 2005, p.196).

A combination of two non-probability sampling strategies – purposive and convenience – were used to select participants from whom data were collected. While purposive sampling targeted people who possessed the required educational characteristics, convenience sampling relied on available samples (Babbie, 2005; Creswell, 2009). The use of convenience sampling was based on pragmatic considerations involving difficulty in getting participants because of the number of participants required for the research and the fact that the questionnaire involved a reading comprehension exercise, which challenged participation. This sampling procedure has been used successfully in various audience-based studies elsewhere and in Ghana. For example, Tewksbury and Althaus (2000) used convenience

sampling to select university students in the United States in a study that assessed whether there were appreciable differences in how people consume identical news. Ansu-kyeremeh and Gadzekpo (1996), Amankwah (2010), Bowen (2010), among others, also used this method to investigate various news consumption patterns in Ghana. The appropriateness of this sampling method notwithstanding, I acknowledge the weaknesses of the convenience sampling method concerning its negative effect on the representativeness of the sample. Therefore, care was taken in generalising the findings of the study beyond the sample (Babbie, 2005).

The study targeted a sample of 300 participants. This figure was benchmarked on a national survey of the Ghanaian population by an AudienceScapes research<sup>41</sup> conducted by InterMedia (2010) in Ghana. The AudienceScapes research used the probability proportional to size (PPS) method for a representative sample of the Ghanaian population. The PPS sampling means selecting participants based on the proportion of people at a place in relation to the national population. This method was also used by the 1999 Afrobarometer survey of Ghana whose results have been used as a basis for further research (Temin and Smith, 2002; Nisbet, 2008). The AudienceScapes sampling yielded a national representative sample of 2051 with urban Accra represented by 273. Since I collected sample from urban Accra, I pegged my sample at 300 to improve its chances of representativeness.

### **6.3.6.2 The questionnaire: Construction, structure and content**

The construction of the questionnaire was guided by the need to generate useful data to help answer the study's research questions. As such, the questions were simple, clear, concise, and well displayed for easy reading and understanding, and were presented to allow "accurate transmission of respondents' answers to researchers" as much as possible (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003, p.162). The questionnaire form was in four sections, A to D, and it contained both open and closed-ended questions to elicit both objective and subjective information.

The first section introduced participants to the instrument and covered issues such as whether participants read newspapers, their preferred newspapers, their sources of local and foreign news, what they normally read in newspapers, and so

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<sup>41</sup> See InterMedia Knowledge Centre (2010).

on. This section was additionally meant to prepare participants for the critical questions in sections B and C, which aimed to draw responses on the extent to which readers understood the news texts. Sections B and C contain extracts on which both open and closed ended questions were asked for participants to read and provide responses. Section D dealt with demographic information on gender, age, highest educational level attained and occupation. The questionnaire document is attached as Appendix 6.

Much of the information needed to answer the research questions were elicited from questions under sections B and C. The questions were led by extracts taken from the front-page newspaper stories under study. Participants were required to read and indicate their views and attitudes about the language, particularly, the extent to which they found the passages comprehensible. The use of reading and comprehension exercises was adopted because educated Ghanaians are familiar with this mode of expressing how information in extracts is understood. Reading comprehension is a method used to test students' text comprehension in English at all levels of the Ghanaian education system. Usually, words and portions of passages are identified for students to indicate or explain the meaning in paraphrases or summaries. Moreover, reading and comprehension has been a popular method in research to test the readability of documents. For instance, Greene *et al.* (2012) used this method to investigate adult readers' comprehension of legal language of wills. It is worthwhile to explain briefly the nature of the questions in these sections, their organisation and rationale. However, I first outline the steps taken to select the extracts and the rationale for their use.

Since the passages were to help discover participants' understanding of newspapers' language based on writing style, I identified about sixty extracts from the newspapers (about 15 from each newspaper), which contained instances of the linguistic elements under investigation. Six passages were used from the list. The first four occurred as extracts 1 to 4 in Section B, and the remaining two were used for Extract 5 and Passage A in Section C. Although Section C had three extracts, two were revised versions of two of the six original passages, so they are not counted as part of the original passages from the newspapers.

The first four extracts in section B (extracts 1-4) each had three sets of similar questions. The first asked participants to express their opinion about the language of

the extract in terms of how the choice of linguistic elements influenced their understanding. The next question identified four lexical elements and asked if participants understood each expression in its context. Participants who said they did were asked to provide the meaning as well. This additional requirement was to authenticate if they actually understood the meaning. Participants' responses were expected to offer an opportunity to compare aspects of the survey and linguistic data during the analysis. The last question asked participants to evaluate the extract in a three-level Likert scale in terms of whether they found it easy or difficult to understand or whether they could not say. The last extract, that is, Extract 5, required participants to rewrite or explain it (the extract) to show how they understood it. Section C contained three passages: A, B, and C. The first was an original extract from one of the newspapers, and the second, a revised and simplified version of the original. Participants were asked questions about the readability of and preference for each passage. Passage C is also a revised version of Extract 5 for participants to rewrite or explain. The use of a test-revision technique is based on the idea that Ghanaian newspapers use complex language. Hence, the revised passages and their original variants were meant to discover two things: firstly, whether participants preferred complex or simple language for newspapers, and secondly, to locate the source of readers' difficulty.

Scholars have acknowledged the effectiveness of simplifying text to enhance the readability of complex material for some readers (Crossley *et al.*, 2011). Writing from the perspective of L2 reading, Crossley *et al.* (2011, p.85) note, “[s]implified texts are largely modified to control the complexity of the lexicon and syntax.” Thus, simplified texts have been found to contain shorter sentences, less sophisticated vocabulary, (i.e. words with lower frequency) and less syntactic difficulty, among others (Young 1999; Crossley 2007; Crossley *et al.* 2011; Green *et al.*, 2012).

The first revised passage was Passage B in Section C. The original passage (Passage A) contains lexical and syntactic features that mark it theoretically as complex. The sentence is long (fifty-four words) and contains five clauses in a compound-complex structure. It also contains many hypothetically unfamiliar words (nominalisations/Latinate words) such as *constituents*, *descended*, *trait*, *cautioned*, *civic responsibility*, *squander*, and so on. Following Carrel (1987), Young (1999),

Crossley *et al.* (2007), and Crossley *et al.* (2011), I intuitively revised the text by converting the sentence into three sentences of 25, 16 and 24 words respectively with an average of two clauses in each sentence. I also replaced most of the ‘unfamiliar’ words in the original with more familiar words according to my subjective natural sense of comprehension (as an English teacher in the research area) (Crossley, 2011). Participants were asked to indicate which version of the passage they found easier to read and understand. I theorised that the easily noticeable structural differences between the language styles of the two passages should help participants to decide which of the language styles they preferred for news writing.

Passage C is also a revised version of Extract 5 but with a slightly different method of simplification. Although I revised the complex sentence (with two relative clauses) into a compound sentence without any relative clauses and reduced the sentence length from 39 to 34 words, I maintained all the nominalised/Latinate vocabulary in the original. I deliberately separated the revised passage from the original on the questionnaire form to reduce their influence on each other during the answering process. This method was intended to find out whether participants’ reaction to meaning would be influenced by the syntactic or lexical features of the two versions. If readers found the revised version easier, it would suggest that the problem was with the syntax of the original, but if both versions were difficult, then the problem was due to vocabulary. My assumption, in line with existing research, was that vocabulary account for reading difficulties more than syntax does (see Baumann, 2009; Guo *et al.*, 2011).

### **6.3.6.3 Validation**

To ensure that questions of a questionnaire are capable of producing relevant data to help achieve the objective of a study, there is the need to verify them before application (Babbie, 2005). Consequently, I pre-tested the questionnaire form to verify and validate its content to help determine the reliability of the questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003; Babbie, 2005). This occurred in two ways. Firstly, two experts in linguistics read, made comments and eventually endorsed the questions. The first was Mr Prosper Agordjor, the Head of English Department at GIL. Mr Agordjor holds a Master of Philosophy degree in teaching English as a second language and has considerable experience teaching English in Ghana. The

second expert was Dr John Andor who had a long period of work experience in charge of questions and answers at the West African Examinations Council, Accra (WAEC). His PhD is in Educational measurement at the University of Manchester, UK, and he works at the Examination Development and Production Division of Caribbean Examinations Council (CEC), Barbados. These two experts also validated the model answers of the comprehension questions, which were used to measure participants' responses.

Secondly, I administered the validated questionnaire on ten lecturers of GIJ. The responses and feedback received from this exercise confirmed the credibility of the instrument. This assured the researcher that the structure and content of the questionnaire were appropriate for administration.

#### **6.3.6.4 The questionnaire administration**

The questionnaire was administered on 300 educated participants in the urban parts of Accra where various ministries, other government and private agency offices, schools and businesses were located. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face with the help of a team of ten research assistants, who willingly opted to be part of the research and signed a participant form to that effect. Face-to-face was used to prevent the likelihood of the forms being lost or ignored and this improved on the returns rate. The team of research assistants was comprised of well-trained and motivated male and female student journalists at GIJ. They were mostly practising journalists with practical experience in information gathering through various forms of interviewing. Prior to the exercise, the researcher arranged for an expert at GIJ to train the assistants specifically for this assignment. The assistants also gained valuable experience from the piloting exercise that preceded the main survey. The exercise was planned not to interfere with their academic and personal activities. During the running of the questionnaire, the assistants were provided with daily travel allowance and lunch. Moreover, they benefited academically from the research as they learnt useful lessons from the exercise for their schoolwork.

The exercise took 20 working days, from 20<sup>th</sup> August to 14<sup>th</sup> September 2012, that is, from the first day of administration to the day the researcher received all the forms that went out. Each research assistant administered 30 questionnaire forms. All the 300 questionnaire forms were filled, but eight were excluded from the

analysis because the participants did not answer more than half of the critical questions. Therefore, 292 questionnaire forms, amounting to 97.33% of the total forms that were retrieved, became the population for the analysis. This represents a high completion rate because it is much above the recommended returns rates of between 60% and 85% in the field (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). The retrieved questionnaire forms are available for examination by my supervisors and the University of Leeds.

### **6.3.7 Secondary data: semi-structured interviews**

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with some newspaper producers as secondary research to enrich the discussions. I purposively selected and interviewed four editors and four news writers, (a set from each of the newspapers under study) and asked them specific questions about considerations that informed the language style of their newspapers during the news production process. The data collected were used throughout the study where appropriate to support and enhance the understanding of issues related to newspaper language, readability and comprehension.

The interviews took place at the premises of the newspaper organisations and the editors suggested the news writer whose stories often occurred on the front page to be included in the exercise. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the interview was aided by two sets of pre-determined and pretested interview guides<sup>42</sup> (one for editors and the other, a slightly modified version, for news writers) designed to elicit information on issues such as:

- The role of the press in Ghana's social and political life
- News production considerations such as the purpose for the establishment, objectives and values of the newspaper
- Importance of and considerations for selecting stories for front-page stories
- Targets of newspapers and front-page stories
- Language considerations in the writing and news production processes
- Newspaper producers' opinions about assumptions of complexity and difficulty of their newspapers.

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<sup>42</sup> The interview guide for newspaper editors is attached as Appendix 9.

These issues became the thematic markers for the predetermined coding of the interview data (Creswell, 2009). I electronically recorded the interviews and took notes as well to support the transcription. The interview data were then transcribed verbatim and prepared for analysis. I took steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data by crosschecking the transcriptions personally and with the help of a colleague postgraduate student at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

I have the audio versions of the interviews on CDs, which I have kept alongside the transcribed versions in a safe place. These are available for examination by my supervisors and the University of Leeds.

#### **6.4 Overall analytical and interpretive framework**

For the analysis of the overall data, I adopted both quantitative and qualitative measures in line with the types of data collected and the interdisciplinary nature of the study. Combining the analytical procedures in this single study was a complex and difficult enterprise. Even in studies applying just one type of analysis, scholars have noted the complexity and strain involved. Some scholars have suggested that there are distinct procedures for quantitative and qualitative analyses (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Hennink *et al.*, 2011), but Babbie (2005) and Creswell (2009) explain that the procedures only indicate a thin line between numeric and nonnumeric analytical processes. Hennink *et al.* (2011) also note that there are no fast rules on the analysis of data.

Consequently, analytical approaches from both perspectives were applied. Some of the steps scholars have suggested in the analytical process and which were useful in the study include data organisation, transcription, immersion in data, generation of themes, coding and interpretation of findings (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003; Babbie, 2005; Marshall, and Rossman 2006). These procedures ensured numerical representations for the description and explanation of the issues under study, as well as a rigorous understanding of the problem from the perspective of participants (Babbie, 2005; Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Hennink *et al.*, 2011).

The study used mostly descriptive statistics for data presentation and interpretation for the quantitative aspects of the analysis (Babbie, 2005; Creswell,



2009). This involved the use of data distribution and summary statistics, which are two primary methods that media researchers have used to help manage and interpret data (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). Data distribution concerns the organisation of data in tables, figures and graphs and so on, focusing on frequencies and percentages of occurrences, while summary statistics further condense data through the use of central tendency (such as mode, median, mean) and dispersion or variation (such as range, variance and standard deviation). For the qualitative analysis, I developed thematic markers (Creswell, 2009), which I used to analyse the data mainly for themes related to the ease or difficulty of the texts. In line with qualitative reporting, I used detailed prose narratives to present and discuss the findings.

From the analytical perspective, it is important to add that employing a mix of methods presented an opportunity for triangulating and complementing findings (Johnson *et al.*, 2004). While triangulation converges and corroborates the results from the different methods, complementarity adds elaboration and illustration across the various results to enhance a better understanding of the study (*ibid.*).

The presentation of data and discussion of results occur in two separate chapters: Chapter 7 for the textual and Chapter 8 for the survey data. The distinct differences between the linguistic and survey data and the size of data collected across the various approaches informed the need to present the analysis and findings in separate chapters. Important issues in the analysis and findings of the two chapters are discussed in Chapter 9.

## **6.5 Ethical issues and control**

During the research, the research team adhered to ethical considerations related to this study as spelt out in the ethical review documentation approved by the Ethical Review Committee of the University of Leeds on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 to regulate this research. Ethics in research is an important issue, especially for research that directly affects human lives (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Thus, all the research activities, both during the fieldwork and writing processes, were informed by considerations such as participants' informed consent (see Appendix 2 for the participant consent form), confidentiality (of participants and information they provided), safety for all those involved in the research, respect for the sensibilities of participants, avoiding bias, and securing all information gathered.

Importantly and in practical terms, I ensured informed consent in writing or verbally depending on the participant's informed choice. We also respected the convenience and 'person' of potential participants. We were mindful to assure participants of confidentiality and anonymity, and we took pains not to make them feel their English ability was under scrutiny. Permission was sought from each participant for his or her responses to be quoted in the report. While the interviewees agreed for information that they provided to be included in the report, they did not want their personal names to occur in the report, and this was respected. All documents and information on every aspect of the research were and are still kept with the researcher and can only be accessed by him. Electronic information was saved on external memory drive and hardcopy materials and kept in a locked safe.

As the lead researcher, I monitored the data collection process in various ways to guide it to a successful end. I was in touch with the research assistants each day for feedback and discussions on the progress of the exercise. I also visited and discreetly monitored some of the exercises to assess the activities and was satisfied with the process. The major problem was the reluctance of people to participate once they realised they had to read and write. To solve this problem, we explained the fact that the exercise was not meant to test people's English ability and emphasised its anonymity, and this improved participation.

## **6.6 Challenges of the data collection**

The data collections exercise did not go without some challenges. The main challenges associated with acquiring textual data and participants' reluctance to respond to questions have been discussed. Therefore, this section discusses problems faced during the survey. A major problem that the research faced was that some potential participants demanded financial rewards before taking part. Such occurrences are common (anecdotally) with research in Ghana and other societies with similar socio-cultural indicators. They provide useful insight for other researchers in similar settings in future. Another challenge was that some participants did not answer some of the critical questions. This created a problem of interpreting the blanks during the analysis. Experts in survey procedures acknowledge that such occurrences, as well as strange answers that are often not connected with questions, are normal with surveys (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003).

What was important was for the researcher to understand why a participant did not answer or left a blank for a particular question since this knowledge is vital in the overall interpretation of the results.

These challenges did not undermine the research since they were successfully resolved. As a Ghanaian teacher and having spent most of my life in the country, I anticipated and was prepared for such challenges. On the issue of people's reluctance to participate as respondents, I realise that two problems informed the attitude. One was the perception that researchers were out to exploit them by collecting information and selling it to institutions such as NGOs for money. The second reason was people's uneasiness about their language competence. On the first issue, what was needed was to explain the type of research I was engaged in and its purpose: that it was academic, for a university, and useful to journalism in Ghana. Most people understood and willingly took part. For those who were uncomfortable because they were unsure of their English ability, explanations about the anonymity and confidentiality measures associated with the research helped to reassure them. Those who asked for money before taking part were not included in the research. This is because their responses could be biased whether their demand was met or not. The convenience sampling technique adopted ensured that it was easy to replace such people without undermining the research.

To solve the problem of unanswered questions, experts have advised the need to find out (from participants) why such a situation occurred (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003). Thus, participants were asked during the research why they left the blanks, to which many said they did not know what to write. Interpreting this was tricky, but I depended on the context of the data-collection exercise to help understand the situation. For instance, cases involving the meaning of lexical items showed that the participants involved did not understand the words but did not want to say so. However, it was often difficult to arrive at any definite reason for blanks involving explaining or rewriting extracts. These accordingly informed the analysis and discussions of the data as demonstrated in Chapter 8.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented details of the research plan of the project. It has discussed the specific procedures and activities involved in generating the textual (newspaper

stories) and survey data of the project. The chapter has also indicated the analytical framework within which the results of the study were produced and interpreted. Additionally, the ethical considerations guiding the research as well as the challenges encountered and measures adopted to successfully solve the problems have been discussed. Overall, the data collection exercises were successful and occurred within the time lines accorded them during the research as a whole. The next step of the project involves analysis, findings and discussion of data, and these occur in the next two chapters. While Chapter 7 covers the linguistic analysis, Chapter 8 deals with the survey after which Chapter 9 integrates and discusses the key findings.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Textual Data: Analysis, Presentation and Discussion**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the textual or linguistic analysis of the study. The textual data was analysed to help answer the first research question and support answering the rest of the questions of the study. Specifically, the analysis aimed at characterising or describing the language of front-page Ghanaian newspaper text based on the linguistic features investigated. It also attempted to determine the extent to which the language enhances or impedes the readability and comprehension of stories. The discussions occur in two parts. The first part presents and discusses findings involving corpus linguistic analysis using Wordsmith Tools, while the second does the same, using three readability formula tools. Some manual analysis was also done to provide qualitative support to the quantitative methods. Additionally, aspects of the analysis and findings of this chapter are correlated with aspects of the audience survey for a comprehensive picture of how the newspaper text related to readers' comprehension. Before beginning the discussion, I explain and contextualise key linguistic terms.

##### **7.1.1 Lexical diversity and word frequency**

Lexical diversity refers to a measure of the number of different words within the total number of words in a text, and it usually occurs as the type-token ratio (Johansson, 2008; McNamara *et al.*, 2010). In corpus linguistics, *tokens* are the overall number of words of a text, while *types* refer to the different or distinct words of the text. For example, the sentence, *The smart boy is the one in the smart shirt.*, has 12 *tokens* and 9 *types* because *the*, *in* and *smart* are repeated. The type-token ratio (hereafter, TTR), therefore, describes the ratio obtained by dividing the number of types (different words) of a text by its number of tokens. Thus, the example above has a TTR of 0.75 or 75%. A high TTR implies a high degree of lexical diversity/variation, while a low ratio means the opposite (Adolphs, 2006, p.40). A highly lexically diverse text means that the text contains many different words (i.e. with little repetition) across the text (Johansson, 2008, p.62), making the text hypothetically challenging to read and understand (McNamara *et al.*, 2010, p.63).

Conversely, less diversity of words means that a text contains a few different words, making it relatively easier to understand.

Word frequency, for its part, refers to the number of times individual words (including their other forms or lemmas) occur in a text. It can also be low or high. A text with low frequency words possesses many words that are less frequently repeated and encountered, thereby making them notionally unfamiliar to the reader (McNamara *et al.*, 2010, p.63). High frequency, on the other hand, means many words (with the same meaning) are repeated in a text, making them familiar to the reader.

Thus, a highly lexically diverse text with low frequency words has a serious implication for text complexity and difficulty. Experts such as Just and Carpenter (1987, 1992) and McNamara *et al.*, (2010) have noted that such a text contains many unfamiliar words that attract longer eye-fixation time of readers and make text relatively difficult to read and understand.

### **7.1.2 Nominalisations**

For the purpose of this analysis, nominalisations are nouns derived from a verb or adjective (Biber *et al.*, 1998) by adding derivational suffixes to the verb or adjective. The suffix occurs at the end of the verb or adjective to transform it into the noun, as in *-ment* in *treatment*; *-ery* in *bravery*, and so on. The nominalisation process involves converting the nature of the verb (action/stative, tense, etc.) or adjective (quality) to that of a noun, which accordingly functions as a noun. Researchers have explained that the process often renders nominalised words and their roles in constructions vague, ambiguous and abstract, thereby making such words potentially complex in a text (Biber *et al.*, 1998, 1999; Stenvall, 2011).

### **7.1.3 Latinate words**

Latinate words or expressions in this analysis refer to English words that have roots in Greek and Latin, which Corson (1997, p.671) refers to as *Graeco-Latin* vocabulary. Quirk (1974) described this type of vocabulary as “the more learned, foreign-sounding and characteristically rather long words,” as distinct from Anglo-Saxon words that are typically short and used in everyday purposes (cited in Corson, 1997, p.672). According to Corson (*ibid.*), this type of vocabulary is characteristic of academic prose and is “essential to academic success.” Latinate words are typically

associated with technical vocabulary or register, and the fact that most are polysyllabic make them unfamiliar and complex (Biber *et al.*, 1999). Nation (1990, p.14) classifies Latinate words into two categories: technical and non-technical. Technical words relate closely to the topic of the text, implying that they are important for any learner or person continuing to study or work professionally in an area. The area can be legal, economic, education, and so on. Non-technical words are those Latinate words that occur ordinarily or outside of a technical language domain. In this analysis, no distinction is made between these types; they are all Latinate words or expressions and may have the same effects on readers. Examples include *encapsulation*, *indignant*, *criterion*, *phenomenon*, *injunction*, and so on.

#### **7.1.4 Phrasal verbs**

Phrasal verbs (PVs) occur as a combination of verb and adverbial particle to function idiomatically as single words (Biber *et al.*, *ibid.*; Evert, 2004). Examples from Biber *et al.* (*ibid.*) include, *look into*, meaning *investigate*; *find out*, meaning *discover*; and *carry out*, meaning *perform*. PVs have been classified in various ways in an attempt to help understand their meaning implications. Biber *et al.* (1999) include PVs among idiomatic units and classify them according to their syntactic structure. The following are the combinations that are relevant to this analysis:

- Verb + adverbial particle = phrasal verb, such as, *pick up*, *look into*, *give up*, etc.
- Verb + particle + preposition = phrasal prepositional verb, such as, *get away with*, *put up with*, etc.

Other scholars have drawn on the above combinations to classify PVs based on the relationship between the individual words forming the unit and the meaning of that unit. Two studies are particularly useful: Dagut and Laufer (1985) and Laufer and Eliasson (1993). Dagut and Laufer used three meaning-related approaches to classify PVs. The first type is literal PVs where the meaning of the phrasal verb is a direct product of the semantic parts of the unit. Examples are *sit down*, *come in*, and *pick up*. The second type is figurative PVs where the meaning is completely different from the semantic components, such as *turn up*, *get along with*, etc., and the third is completive PVs where the adverbial particle completes the action of the lexical verb, such as *cut off*, *burn down*, etc. Laufer and Eliasson also suggested three types of PVs: transparent, semi-transparent and figurative. According to these

scholars, the meanings of transparent and semi-transparent PVs are slightly associated with the individual words in the combinations and with their context respectively, but figurative PVs are lexicalised units. Thus, the types of PVs for these authors are the same as only the terms describing them are different. For the sake of clarity, I apply Dagut and Laufer's terms to define the types of PVs in the study. Although PVs generally pose meaning challenges, the figurative PVs are the most semantically problematic.

### **7.1.5 Sentences and clauses**

A sentence denotes a complete sense unit, which begins with a capital letter and ends with a sentence-final punctuation mark, usually a period, exclamation or question mark. Since we are dealing specifically with news reports, which are informational and typically declarative, a sentence in this analysis will refer to a sense unit that begins with a capital letter and ends with a full stop. An example is the first construction in the next subsection (*Most studies ... finite verb.*).

#### **7.1.5.1 Clauses**

Most studies describe clauses as structures containing a subject and finite verb (Lu, 2011, p.44). A clause may be independent, dependent, adjectival, adverbial or nominal. This study acknowledges structures that occur as non-finite clauses because they occur without finite verbs but with the infinitive or participle forms of a verb. Such clauses are also considered in the analysis since they are also a potential source of complexity in language use. Following Carter and McCarthy, (2006), I will briefly explain these types of clauses. An independent clause can occur on its own as a complete sense unit or sentence. An example from the corpus of this study is, *The reports of both committees are yet to be made public [Times, September 4 2008].*<sup>43</sup> A dependent clause cannot occur by itself; it requires an independent or another clause to make sense. An example from the present study is the bold part of the sentence below, where the independent clause is, *The lack of ... oppression.*

*The lack of proper understanding of their roles and functions had turned them into "monsters" and "instruments*

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<sup>43</sup> Words and expressions taken from the corpus of this study are in italicised Century Gothic typeface.



of political oppression", **whose "misguided activities" was destroying the Revolution and national economy** [*Chronicle*, September 24 2008].

A dependent clause may function as adjectival, adverbial or nominal in a sentence. For instance, the dependent clause in the above extract (in bold) is adjectival because it modifies a noun group ("monsters" and "instruments of political oppression"). Clauses functioning as adverbial (of time) and nominal (object of the verb, *indicate*) respectively are illustrated in the bold portions of the examples below.

- He said this **when he addressed a two-day encounter between the EC and parliamentary candidates in the Volta Region ...** (adverbial) [*Graphic*, November 24 2008].
- The reports indicate **that surgery was indeed performed on the Finance Minister to remove the anomaly** (nominal) [*Guide*, September 29 2008].

Clauses integrate into one another in sentences as dependent and independent clauses. Biber *et al.*, (1999) refer to this relationship as 'clause embedding'. A sentence, as Carter and McCarthy (*ibid.*, p.487) note, "...must have at least one main clause."

#### 7.1.5.2 Types of sentences

There are four types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and compound-complex. I have applied the traditional terms and definitions of these sentence types for the sake of clarity. Most grammarians agree that a simple sentence or independent clause has a single clause (as illustrated earlier). Following Biber *et al.* (1999) and Russell (2001), I explain the other types of sentence with illustrations from this study's corpus. A compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, for, so*, and so on). Here is an example, where **S** = sentence, and [ ] = independent Clause):

**S-** [The chartered Egypt Air aircraft (AB 330) took off at the Kotoka International Airport at exactly 7:00 am as scheduled] **and** [it was expected to arrive at the Jeddah Airport within seven hours] [*Graphic*, 20 November 2008].

A complex sentence contains one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. Illustrations of these types of sentence are found in the bulleted examples

above, where the portions in plain typeface are the dependent clauses. A compound-complex sentence is a blend of compound and complex methods in the clause-linking process. The parsed sentence below illustrates this type of sentence, where S = sentence, [ ] = independent Clause, and ( ) = dependent clause):

S- [Meanwhile, Sheikh Osman said (the processing of passports had been delayed as a result of some technical difficulties at the Passport Office)] and [indicated that about 800 passports were still being processed] there [Graphic, 20 November 2008].

The complex sentence is central to this study. Russell (2001, p.127) explains that such sentences are ‘complex’ because they involve more intricate processes compared to simple or compound sentences. The more clauses there are in a sentence, the more the sentence become increasingly complex, especially when the clauses are connected by the process of subordination (Carter and McCarthy, 2006).

#### 7.1.6 Passive constructions

A finite clause that contains an action verb can be active or passive. In an active sentence, the doer of the action of a verb or agent occurs as the grammatical subject (that is, it agrees with the verb). An example is, ***The project management team approved the proposal*** (from Biber *et al.*, 1999 p.475), where the portion in bold typeface is the subject or doer of the act of *approving*. The passive form is a situation where the object of the verb acts instead as the grammatical subject. In that case, the subject is not the actual doer of the action of the verb. An instance from Biber *et al.* (1999, p.475) is, *The proposal was approved by the project management team*. In this example, “**the proposal**”, as the subject, is not the doer of the act of *approving*; it is the object in the corresponding active form above. In such a case, the actual agent or doer of the action occurs in a *by*-phrase, for instance, *by the project management team*. Consequently, this study adopts Biber *et al.*'s (1999, p.154) description that the passive form is:

a structural reorganisation of a clause, ... a means of choosing a participant other than the agent as the starting point for a message without departing from the normal subject-initial word order.

The passive is typically indicated by the verb, *to be*, followed by a past participle (that is, *be + past participle*). It is possible for other verbs like *get*, *become*, and *seem* to occur in place of *be* in a construction. An example, is, *The car got stolen*.

Nevertheless, I confine the study to the use of *be* because it appears to be the norm for English passives.

The passive may be short (that is, agent deletion), in which case the agent is ellipsed, or it may be long when the agent is expressed. For example, *The proposal was approved* is short, while *The proposal was approved by the project management team* is long. Biber *et al.* (1999) observe that the passive form is complex and “a formal and impersonal choice” (p.943). This means that the passive form could have readability implications especially in the case of the long passive because it implies using more words in a particular construction than its active or short passive variant. Additionally, a passive form could result in ambiguity or misunderstanding if the passive subject is misunderstood as the agent (Ferreira *et al.*, 2002). In terms of choice, the short passive is a more preferred passive option, all things being equal. This is because it is shorter and implies that the reader knows the agent of the action. Therefore, while the study acknowledges the obfuscating nature of short passives, the analysis focused more on long passives because they are relatively more complex than the active variants or short passive forms.

### **7.1.7 Measuring and interpreting Corpus results**

The procedure applied in measuring and interpreting the corpus results in this study follows conventions in this type of language study. It involves comparing occurrences of items in the corpus with occurrences in other corpora (see Biber *et al.*, 1998; McEnery *et al.*, 2006). Additionally, the ratios of occurrences of the specific linguistic items investigated were considered individually and collectively in relation to the overall linguistic characteristics of the corpus. These provided a basis for assessing the extent to which the occurrences of items may be interpreted as causing text complexity or not. Furthermore, the corpus analysis was complemented with other analytical methods. The readability formula test analysis was particularly important in helping to assess and verify the corpus results. This is because the characteristics of the lexical and syntactic items targeted in the corpus analysis (especially word and sentence length features) are associated with the variables that the formula tools employ. In this way, the correlation of results of the various linguistic analyses was used to assess the contribution of the corpus study in the overall study. Moreover, the qualitative analysis I employed to complement the quantitative method also helped in interpreting the results.

## **7.2 Analyses, presentation and discussion of data**

The findings from the analyses are presented mainly as descriptive statistics. The discussions begin with the corpus analysis, after which the readability formula analysis occurs. Results from these two perspectives are then triangulated to correlate the respective findings, in preparation for further triangulation with results of the audience survey analysis. I begin with a general statistical description of the overall corpus as a basis for the fine details of the rest of the analysis and discussions.

The statistical results indicate that the corpus size was 549,912 words (tokens) or running words from 896 text files, of which 543,698 were the identifiable words used to generate the word list and other statistical information. The information is found in Table 8. I have discussed in section 6.3.4.1 of the research design issues relating to the corpus size. I add here that the study's investigations aimed at assessing the impact of the language of Ghanaian newspapers on a specific event (the 2008 national elections in Ghana). Thus, a consistent collection of all the daily front-page stories of the prominent newspapers over the four-month period leading up to that event satisfied the purpose for which the corpus was built. There are 17,757 sentences in the whole corpus, with averages of approximately 20 sentences and 607 words per text. The average sentence and word lengths are 31 words and 5 letters respectively with an average of 26% of the words being seven letters or more in length. The corpus contains 21,306 discrete words or TYPES (that is, the different words in the corpus) giving a type-token-ratio (TTR) of 4 and standardised TTR (S-TTR), 41.35. Details of these findings are discussed in the next subsections.

### **7.2.1 General linguistic information about the four newspaper texts**

The results show no significant differences in tokens used for the word lists across the four newspaper sub-corpora. This is especially true in the case of the *Chronicle*, the *Graphic* and the *Guide*. For instance, of the total tokens, the *Chronicle* contributed 27% (215 texts), the *Graphic* 25% (221 texts), *Guide* 26% (207 texts) and *Times*, 22% (253 texts). Similarly, the results indicate homogeneity of linguistic features in terms of number of sentences and their averages, and average text or story length. Importantly, the results show that the *Graphic*, the most widely circulated newspaper in the research area, had an average sentence and word length

**Table 8: Statistical details of the monthly corpus data**

ITEMS	<i>CHRONICLE</i>	<i>GRAPHIC</i>	<i>GUIDE</i>	<i>TIMES</i>
Tokens or Running Words	148350	140761	141338	119413
<b>Tokens Used for wordlist</b>	<b>147115</b>	<b>138777</b>	<b>140047</b>	<b>117759</b>
Types (distinct Words)	11279	10945	11450	10702
Type/token Ratio (TTR)	8	8	8	9
Standardised TTR	40.33	40.06	43.06	43.38
Mean Word Length	5	5	5	5
Total No. of Sentences	4585	4403	4661	4108
Mean Sentence Length	32	32	30	29
Std. Dev., Av. Sent. Length	15.41	13.36	13.53	12.68
No. of texts	215	221	207	253
Mean Length of Text (Words)	684	628	677	465
7-letter Words and above	37699	37407	34674	31069

of 31 and 5 respectively, and about 27% of its tokens are between 7 and 18-letter words. I have benchmarked word length on seven-letter words upwards because the focus is on words with more than one syllable, and a minimum of seven-letter words provides a reliable indicator of such words. For instance, a six-letter word such as *months* is one syllable. This finding about the near homogeneity of the linguistic features analysed seems to suggest that the newspapers share a similar linguistic characteristics and targeted readership.

The general information involving word and sentence length as well as type-token ratio presented above provides initial cues about the nature of language of the corpus. The next section begins the detailed discussion toward an informed description of the language of the corpus.

### **7.2.2 Analysis of lexical and syntactic complexity**

This study has hypothesised that the language of Ghanaian newspapers is linguistically complex. The discussion in this section presents and discusses analysis and findings of the corpus linguistics data to interrogate the hypothesis in order to answer the first research question. The discussion begins with the lexical issues and later, the syntactic. For the lexical aspect, the discussion proceeds from three perspectives: lexical diversity and frequency, word length, and then the three specific categories of lexical items that were investigated.

Statistical results involving the corpus analysis, as captured in Table 8, indicate a TTR of 8 and an S-TTR of between 40.06 and 43.38 across the newspapers. The

TTR is sensitive to corpus size and may also not provide useful results with texts of considerably varied lengths. The S-TTR is, however, a better indicator since it calculates the ratio per every 1000 words. The finding of this study regarding the S-TTR almost replicates Nishina's (2007) study, which describes a newspaper genre of S-TTR 48.27 as complex.<sup>44</sup> The finding suggests that the corpus of this study is relatively highly lexically diverse and, therefore, relatively significant, especially because the texts of the corpus are news stories. Nevertheless, this measure is sensitive to text size and type of words that occur therein. Scholars have hence advised that care be taken in its application and interpretation (see Adolphs, 2006). Consequently, because of the size of this corpus, little can be said beyond speculating that the language of the corpus may be complex.

Word frequency, however, provided a more reliable indicator of assessment. The statistical analysis involving the wordlist indicates that 64% of the lexical items of the corpus occurred four times or less over the four-month data period. This implies that the corpus exhibits very low frequency of such words, and so the words may be unfamiliar. This measure has been an important and long-standing measure of readability (Klare, 1963). While studies show that most lexical words have low occurrence in a text, especially in short texts (Sinclair, 1991; Adolphs, 2006), there seems to be no established standard on such occurrences in a text. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that less frequent words are less common to most readers and since such words are less frequently encountered, they draw longer eye fixation time and thus pose comprehension challenges (Just and Carpenter, 1980, 1992; McNamara *et al.*, 2010). The importance of this finding is emphasised by the fact that the majority of the low frequency words are Latinate and/or nominalisations, which have characteristics that make texts in which they occur complex.

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<sup>44</sup> Nishina's study, for instance, investigates three writing genres -- academic, newspaper and literature -- along with a general reference (GR) corpora derived from six pre-existing corpora. The corpora were Micoro Concord Corpora A and B; the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of British English (LOB); the Brown Corpus; the Freiburg-LOB Corpus; and the Freiburg-Brown Corpus of American English. One of the aims of the study was to compare the complexity of the various genres and the sub-corpora were composed to meet this objective. The results, therefore, provide a comparative basis to assess the results of this current study.

Additionally, the analysis indicates that the average word length of the corpus is 5 letters and that 26% of the words in the corpus are 7 to 18 letters as shown in the examples below and in Figure 7. These findings imply that over a quarter of the words in this study's corpus were long words that could exert a relative burden on mental processing during reading. Examples of the words are captured below:

<b>Letter word</b>	<b>Examples</b>
7	<i>comment, tension, faction</i>
8	<i>impunity, capacity, dynamism</i>
9	<i>augmented, dimension, rationale</i>
10	<i>precaution, commitment, sentiments</i>
11	<i>devastation, tranquillity, impediments</i>
12	<i>dispensation, intervention, surveillance</i>
13	<i>documentation, collaboration, eventualities</i>
14	<i>discrimination, accountability, disenchantment</i>
15	<i>competitiveness, professionalism, familiarisation</i>
16	<i>decentralization, inter-ministerial, intercontinental</i>
17	<i>maladministration, industrialisation, misrepresentation</i>
18	<i>telecommunications, characteristically</i>

The examples also indicate that the long words are mostly Latinate expressions, whose effect on comprehension is discussed shortly. Neath and Nairne (1995) have predicted that the negative effect of word-length to meaning is larger for visual items than auditory words. The fact that most people read newspapers on their own and deal mostly with the visual aspect of words makes the findings important. A normalised<sup>45</sup> comparison of the frequency of long words (7 to 18-letter words) with the British National Corpus (BNC)<sup>46</sup> indicated that the 140,849 words of our corpus map to 25,351,583 words of the BNC's 23% (22,349,769) proportion of such

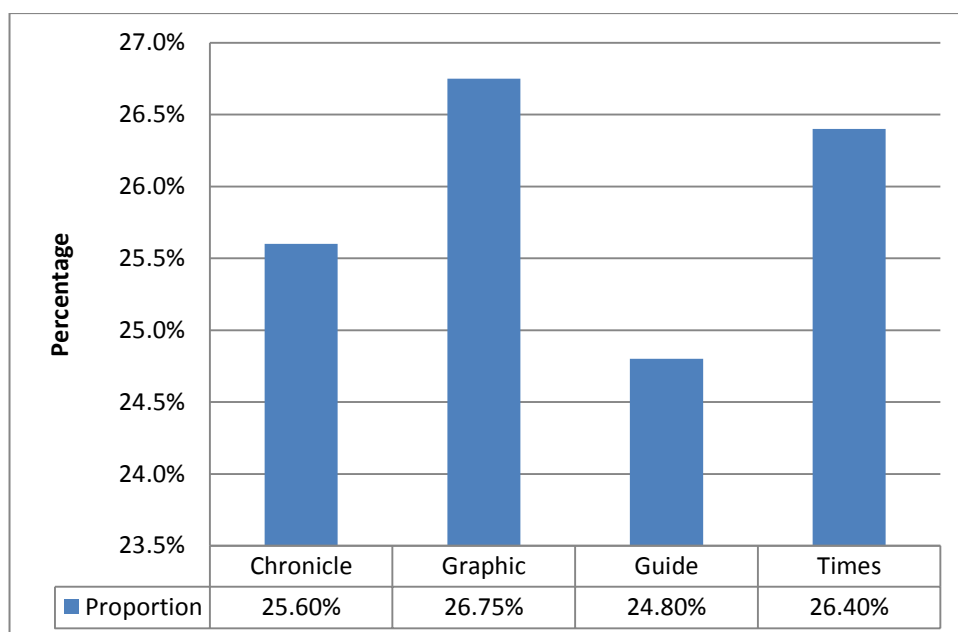
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<sup>45</sup> According to Biber *et al.* (1998, p.263), “[n]ormalization is a way to adjust raw frequency counts from texts of different lengths so that they can be compared accurately.”

<sup>46</sup> The BNC is a 100 million balanced and representative corpus of British English. It is made up of 90% written and 10% spoken texts and has been used for many corpus-related studies (Davies, 2009).

words.<sup>47</sup> This means that there could be more of such long words in our corpus than in the about 100 million-word BNC. Although the BNC contains 10% spoken language, the 90% written component contains technical and academic texts that may contain long words. This possibility makes the results of this study significant, especially as the corpus is a newspaper genre and not a technical publication. Percentages of the proportions of the long words in the corpus across the various newspapers are presented below in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Percentage of long words (7 to 18 letters) in the corpus**



### 7.2.2.1 Analysis of lexical items

From the general description of the corpus, attention is now focused on the specific lexical items under investigation. Table 9 presents overall results of the three categories of lexical items investigated in terms of proportions in each newspaper. The results indicate that Latinate expressions consistently occurred the most in the sub-corpora at an average of almost 10%, followed by nominalisations with PVs occurring at less than 1%. A detailed discussion of how these findings individually and collectively influence the text is presented shortly.

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<sup>47</sup> Scott, M. 2012. BNC Wordlist. Available from:  
<http://www.lexically.net/downloads/version4/downloading%20BNC.htm>.

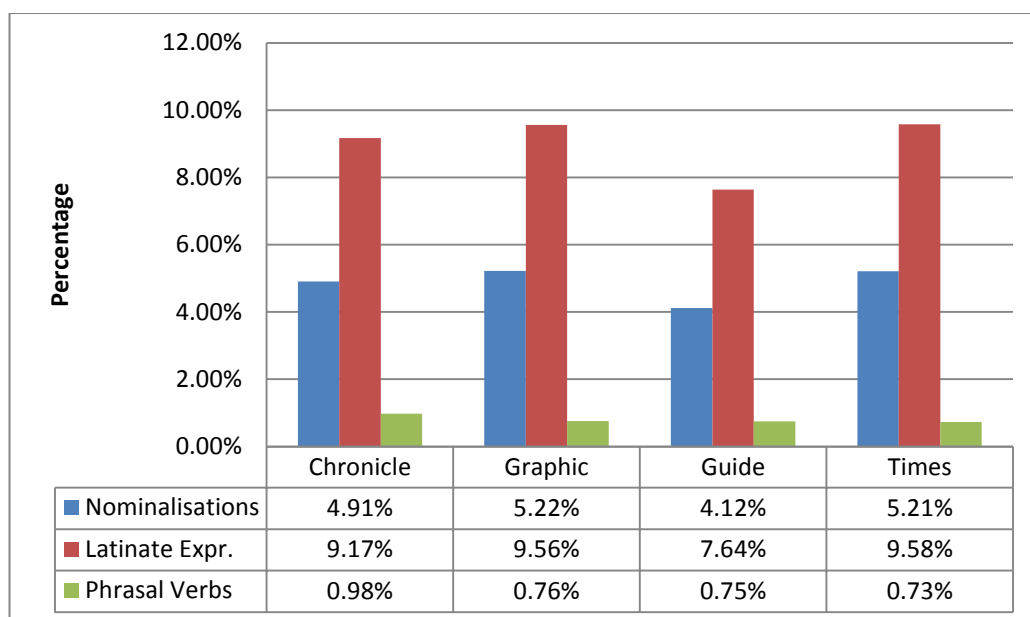


**Table 9: General occurrence of the lexical items under study**

	<i>CHRONICLE</i>	<i>GRAPHIC</i>	<i>GUIDE</i>	<i>TIMES</i>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>LEXICAL ITEM</b>					
<b>Nominalisations</b>	7236	7250	5780	6142	<b>26408</b>
<b>Latinate Expr.</b>	13491	13278	10711	11283	<b>48763</b>
<b>Phrasal Verbs</b>	1443	1062	1056	865	<b>4426</b>

Figure 8 presents a clearer picture in percentages of the various proportions of the lexical items. In the next subsections, I present a detailed discussion of the analytical procedures and results of the individual elements. It must be stated that results of each instance of analysis were carefully crosschecked manually to ensure as much as possible that only targeted items were included in the results.

**Figure 8: Percentage of lexical items in the corpus**

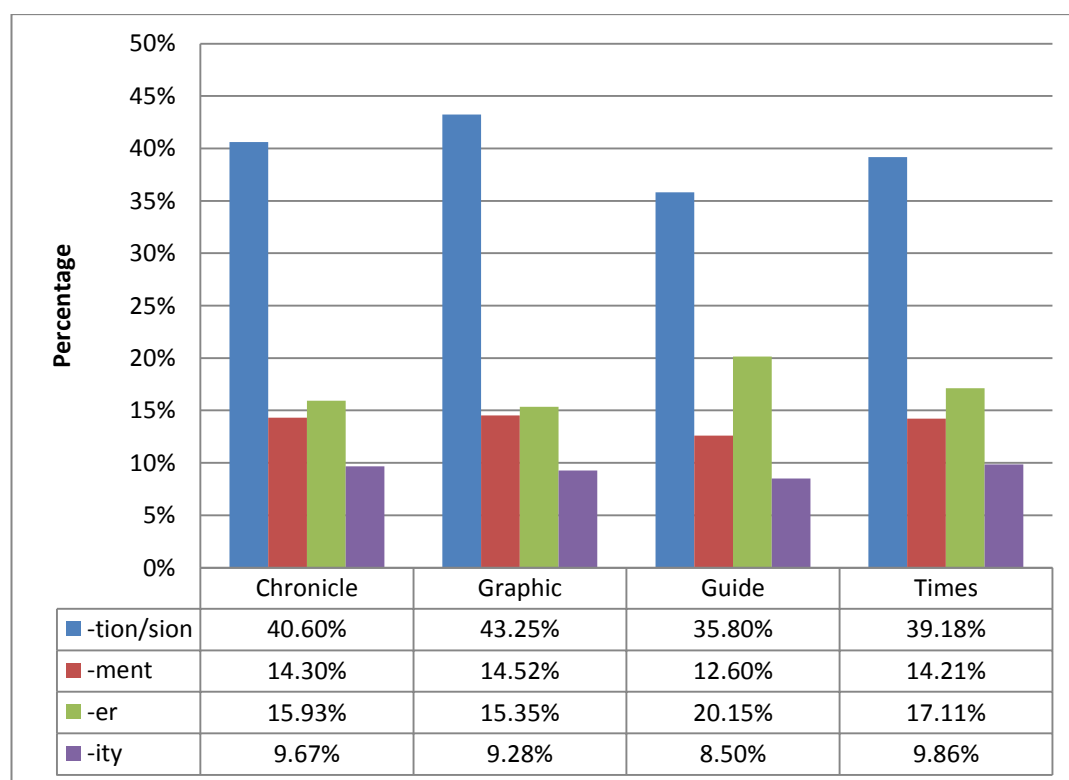


#### 7.2.2.1.1 Analysis of nominalisations

Since a nominalised noun is derived from an adjective or verb by adding a suffix to the adjective or verb, I used suffixes to locate the elements. Based on Biber *et al.*'s (1999) findings that <-tion/sion>, <-ity>, <-ism>, <-ment>, <-ness>, and <-er> are productive in newspapers, I applied these suffixes and their plurals. I also applied <-ship>, <-ance>, <-ence>, <-cy>, <-al>, <-age>, and <-ery>, which I also found relatively productive.

The results indicate that nominalisations produced by <-tion/sion>, <-ment>, <-er>, and <-ity> occurred most in that order with <-tion/sion> constituting between 35% and 43% across the sub-corpora. Figure 9 presents the results of the four most occurring nominalisations showing a similar pattern of results across the newspapers. A detailed list of the results of all the nominalisations is attached as Appendix 3a. As indicated earlier, I manually checked the various productions to delete words with the endings of the above suffixes but which are not nominalisations. For instance, *station*, *nation*, and *occasion* for <-tion/sion>; *element*, *cement*, and *lament* for <-ment>; *city*, *entity*, and *pity* for <-ity>; and <-er> in particular produced tokens such as *father*, *matter*, *offer*, among others, that are not nominalisations and were accordingly edited out. In situations of uncertainty, I consulted the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* online (2012).

**Figure 9: Four highest occurring nominalisations in the corpus**



These types of nominalisations and the proportion of their occurrences across the newspapers<sup>48</sup> are in line with trends in academic writing and newspapers (Biber

<sup>48</sup> The exception is *-er*, which most studies appear to ignore but which was productive in this study. Similarly, the suffix *-ness* did not yield significant occurrences because it converts an adjective into a noun to express personal feelings and qualities, which newspapers do not often report.

*et al.*, 1998; Biber *et al.*, 1999; Nishina, 2007). In a study using the written Longman-Lancaster Corpus, Biber *et al.* (1998, pp.59-63) compared the occurrence of nominalisations formed from <-tion/sion, -ment, -ity and -ness> across three registers (academic prose, fiction and speech). The writers discovered that nominalisations occurred most in academic prose and explained that the abstract quality of the nominalised words suits the nature of academic writing. Therefore, the occurrences of these nominalisations in our corpus suggest that the language of the newspapers is similar, in respect of nominalisations, to that of academic prose. In fact, a normalised comparison with the academic prose of Biber *et al.*'s study indicates that nominalisations in the Longman-Lancaster Corpus stand at 44,000 in 2.7 million tokens, which is a ratio of 1.62%, while those of this corpus stand at 17,028 out of 543,698 tokens with a ratio of 3.13%. This shows that the quantity of nominalisations in this current study is almost double that of the academic prose of the Longman-Lancaster Corpus.

#### **7.2.2.1.1.1 Qualitative insight into the complexity of nominalisations**

In terms of how nominalisations contribute to text complexity and difficulty, Biber *et al.* (1998), explain that the nominalisation process converts actions, processes and descriptive qualities into abstract objects that are separate from human participants. The writers used the nominalised word *movement* in “*if **movement** has occurred recently, the effect on topography drainage patterns, vegetation ... recognised*” (p.61) to explain that *movement*, as a process, has been nominalised (as the subject in the sentence) implying that the text now discusses the “generalized action of moving, rather than a particular person moving.” The example below from our corpus illustrates the argument further.

*Such support, he said, should manifest itself in the timely release of resources for critical programmes in the shared plans, since delays in the **implementation** of programmes had led to **frustrations** and tended to cause political **disenchantment**, which has rendered some **governments** in democratic countries vulnerable (Graphic Sept. 5 2008 story 2).*

From the above, “implementation” and “frustrations” are *-tion/sion* nominalisations from the verbs *implement* and *frustrate*. Their use has converted the action and state represented in them respectively to abstract objects in a way that eliminates the human agent, and this is a potential source of complexity and difficulty. For

example, it is not clear who is ‘implementing’ or ‘feeling frustrated.’ Other instances of this process are as follows:

<u>Form in Corpus</u>	<u>Process</u>
• ... express <b>appreciation</b> to members ... + <i>-tion</i>	appreciate (verb)
• ... as ongoing <b>negotiations</b> on a free ....	negotiate (verb) + <i>-tion</i>
• ... <i>the McCain</i> <b>concession</b> of defeat ...	concede (verb) + <i>-sion</i>
• ... to create <b>confusion</b> in the country ...	confuse (verb) + <i>-sion</i>

The massive occurrence of nominalisations formed by <*-tion/sion*> among the nominalisations identified in the corpus appears to indicate the newspapers’ emphasis on objects or things, processes and states in news reports, which are prominent features of hard news on governance and politics in Ghana.

Similarly, nominalisations formed by <*-ment*> convert action of verbs to nouns to refer to process making/doing something or mental states (Biber *et al.*, 1998). In the above example again, *disenchantment* and *governments* are formed from the adjective, *disenchant*, and the verb, *govern*, to denote a *mental state* and *process making* respectively. In this way, attention is shifted from the individual or group that is feeling “disenchanted” or involved in “governance”. Other examples include:

<u>Form in Corpus</u>	<u>Process</u>
• These <b>developments</b> followed ...	develop (verb) + <i>-ment</i>
• ... rather prefer a <b>re-enactment</b> of ....	Re-enact (verb) + <i>-ment</i>
• ... <i>his</i> <b>endorsement</b> as the ...	endorse (verb) + <i>-ment</i>

The corpus of this study has a considerable occurrence of nominalisations generated by the suffix <*-er*> than studies have indicated. Although Biber *et al.* (1999) classify <*-er*> among those that generate nominalisations in newspapers, such nominalisations have not been a common feature in studies perhaps because they have not been noticed to occur significantly to merit attention. In this current study, nominalisations generated by *-er* occurred second highest (after *-tion/sion*) in all the newspaper sub-corpora. The nominalisation process involving <*-er*>, such as, *sender*, *commander*, *informer*, etc. converts the action of the verbs *send*, *command* and *inform* into an abstract entity or agent. The confusing aspect of this

process is that it converts a specific doer of an action to a permanent and general doer of the action. Other examples from the corpus include:

- ... *has not been signed by a **commissioner** of oaths...* (from the verb *commission*)
- ... *Bawumia as an **achiever** and a hard ...* (from the verbs *achieve*)
- ... *Nana Addo's fierce **contender** at the ...* (from the verb *contend*)
- ... *and a vigorous **promoter** of a regime ...* (from the verb *promote*).

The occurrences of such forms in the newspapers reflect the abstract emphasis on “doers of things” in a manner that removes the concrete agent. The usage captures the political mood of the research area, particularly, tendencies during run-ups to democratic elections.

Critical discourse analysts such as Roger Fowler, Norman Fairclough and others have used systemic functional grammar to demonstrate how nominalisation is used, especially in the press, as a metaphor to deliberately conceal issues or mislead readers (Fowler, 1991, Stenvall, 2011). This conclusion is based on the abstract and vagueness of nominalised words as explained earlier. However, it is difficult to sustain the argument that any time a nominalisation occurs in the press, it implies a deliberate act of concealment. The use of nominalisations is also a matter of the writer’s writing style and may not always occur intentionally to confuse or hide something (Stenvall, 2011). Nevertheless, there seems to be consensus that the occurrence of many nominalisations in a text, whether intentionally to hide an idea or not, has the potential of making the language complex and difficult, especially due to their abstract nature.

#### **7.2.2.1.1.2 Connecting the discussion on nominalisations with the Audience Survey**

The complex nature of nominalisations, as demonstrated above, was confirmed in this study through an audience survey in this study. Participants were presented with different newspaper extracts in which five nominalised nouns were identified for the participants to indicate whether they did or did not understand the words in their contexts. Table 10 presents the words and the results of the survey involving 292 participants comprising tertiary, Senior High/post Senior High (SHS/Post SHS), and

Junior High/post Junior High educational levels (JHS). Of the number, 155 were tertiary level participants, while 95 belonged to the SHS or post SHS group. The analysis here considered only the critical educational groups of the study and did not include the JHS category.

The results suggest a correlation between the nominalised words and text difficulty, as many of participants found it difficult to deal with many of the nominalisations. From a quarter of the overall population to nearly half said they did not understand the meaning of the words. Among those who claimed to understand, 10% (*security*) to 61% (*prosecution*) supplied unsuitable meanings, demonstrating a lack of true understanding. For the tertiary group, from **10% to a third** of the 155 participants said that they did not comprehend the words. This is significant because of the general notion that African quality newspapers target such readers (BBC World Service Trust, 2006, p.35), which was also a hypothesis of this study. Of those who said they understood, between 5% (*security*) and more than half (*prosecution*) supplied unsuitable meanings, implying that they did not understand after all. For those with secondary school qualifications, the results indicate that the nominalised words were very unfamiliar to them. Between almost a third and two-thirds of the 95 participants of this group said that they did not know the words. *Prosecution*, a common word in the media because of its frequent use in press reportage on legal matters, attracted the highest difficulty level among participants, thereby supporting the hypothesis that technical words are difficult for 'ordinary' readers to understand. These results do not include those who did not answer the questions or who said they understood but provided no meanings to support their initial responses.

**Table 10: Survey participants who found nominalisations challenging<sup>49</sup>**

Nominalisation	Overall Population (N=292)			Tertiary (N=155)			SHS/Post SHS (N= 95)		
	Don't Understand %	Yes Understand		Don't Understand %	Yes Understand		Don't Understand %	Yes Understand	
		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %
<b>Prevalence</b>	<b>49</b>	55	<b>42</b>	<b>31</b>	52	<b>45</b>	<b>65</b>	60	<b>40</b>
<b>Prosecution</b>	<b>46</b>	35	<b>61</b>	<b>32</b>	44	<b>53</b>	<b>57</b>	14	<b>82</b>
<b>Security</b>	<b>35</b>	83	<b>10</b>	<b>28</b>	87	<b>5</b>	<b>36</b>	78	<b>15</b>
<b>Extension</b>	<b>24</b>	64	<b>31</b>	<b>12</b>	64	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>	66	<b>28</b>
<b>Government</b>	<b>26</b>	75	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	76	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>	74	<b>20</b>

<sup>49</sup> See Figure 23 and Appendix 8 for the full details of the results. This information does not include those who left a blank and did not indicate whether they understood or not.

**Key to the Table:**

- **Don't Understand:** Those who said they did not understand the word
- **Yes Understand:** Those who said they understood the word
- **Correctness test = pass:** Those who said they understood the word and provided acceptable meanings to that effect
- **Correctness test = fail:** Those who said they understood the word but provided unacceptable meanings (meaning they did not understand)
- **Tertiary:** Participants with tertiary level of education
- **SHS/Post SHS:** Participants with Senior High School and post Senior High School educational level. (Post SHS indicates a qualification higher than SHS but below tertiary level)

Responses from participants who inaccurately claimed to understand the words showed that they had guessed the meaning. For instance, in the context, *prevalence* means *widespread, frequency, etc.*, but meanings such as *evidence* or *prevail* were supplied. For *prosecution*, which means (in the context) *those accusing the persons before trial*, responses such as *to convict, punish a person, allegation, justice, etc.* were given, while *security* attracted unacceptable meanings such as *blockade, precaution and covering*, some of which may be collocates of the word but unsuitable in the context in which the word was used. The indication then is that if a text has many nominalisations, that text could be challenging for these participants. Thus, the proportion of nominalisations in each text (about 5% of total tokens) suggests that the text could be complex and difficult for a significant number of its Ghanaian readers, going by the proportion of tertiary and secondary level participants who found the words difficult.

**7.2.2.1.2 Analysis of Latinate expressions**

For Latinate expressions, research in corpus linguistics has surprisingly been almost silent on them, so there were few procedural references to guide the analysis. However, since the investigation primarily concerns the occurrence of such lexis, I applied various wildcard concordances using Biber *et al.*'s (1999, pp.320-400) list of affixes as a basis. Based on pre-tests with various wildcard forms, I devised some search items involving prefixes, suffixes and other miscellaneous searches to help extract as many of the Latinate items as possible. A prefix occurs at the beginning of a word while a suffix is at the end of a word. The miscellaneous search items,



which I labelled ‘others’, were designed to produce Latinate items with the search form occurring anywhere, whether at word initial, medial or final position. The following are the various search items used:

**Prefix:** <co-, cur-, de-, dis-, in-, po-, pr-, sub->

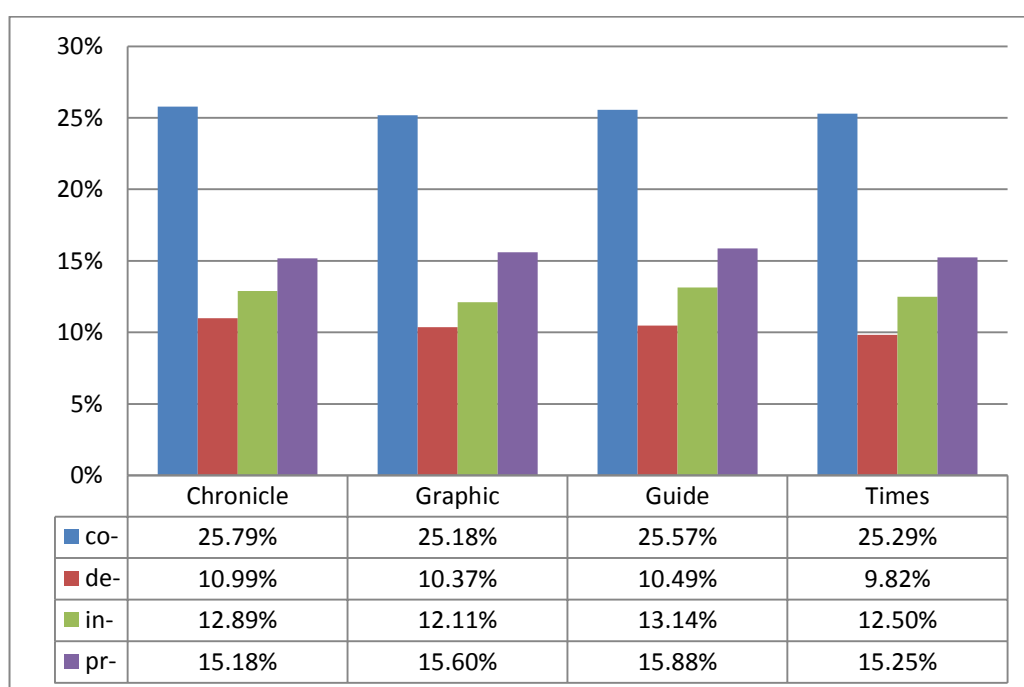
**Suffix:** <-ance, -ble, -ise/ize, -ist, -ive, -ure>

**Others:** <-age-, -ate->

Through manual checking, care was taken as much as possible to prevent the occurrence of a word in two separate categories, for instance, having *comparable* among results for the prefix <co-> and the suffix <-ble>. Additionally, I checked each entry in the *OED online* (2012) to ensure that each expression listed in the analysis is actually Latinate. Details of the results are presented in Appendix 3b.

The overall results indicate that about 10% of the lexical items in the corpus were Latinate expressions. Four of the results that occurred most were produced by <co->, <pr->, <in->, and <de-> across the newspapers as presented in Figure 10. The results indicate that the majority of Latinate words in Ghanaian newspaper front-page stories are prefixed by <co->, which occurred between 25% and 26% among the Latinate words identified across the various newspapers. Instances of such words include *collaborate*, *commemorate*, *commitment*, *conjecture*, *consent*, *corroborate*, *counsel*, *covetous*, among others.

**Figure 10: Four highest occurring affixes and their Latinate items in the corpus**



In addition to the above systematically generated output, the following are some instances of Latinate vocabulary in the corpus, which did not fall neatly into any of the above groups:

*aptitude, legacy, elated, audience, vicinity, attitude, sanction, faction, volition, jurisdiction, rationale, authority, dimension, legacy, envisage, heritage, legal, monument, assessment, criteria, admonish, metropolitan, disclosed, logistics, immigration, manifesto, remand, critical, frustrations, implementation*

The findings and analysis suggest a widespread use of Latinate words across the newspapers most of which are long and polysyllabic. It is clear from the results that the language of the newspapers compares with academic or legal writing. For instance, a comparison with a University Word List (UWL) containing the most frequently and widely used 150 words (see Corson, 1997, p.679) indicates that most of the Latinate words of this corpus do not feature on that list (see Appendix 10). The UWL is based on academic texts and designed for users of English as a Second Language (ESL). A similar and updated list, the Academic Word List (AWL) by Coxhead (2000, p.132) also indicates that many of the Latinate items discovered in this study are rare on that list. The few that are listed have low frequencies, as discussed further in section 9.2.

It is not clear whether the potential difficulty of these types of words lies specifically in their being polysyllabic or because they are Latinate. It seems that the difficulty involves a blend of the two characteristics since most of such expressions occur as jargon in specialised register. According to Rock (2007, p.65, citing PEC, 1993), “jargon might be used ‘accidentally’, without considering readers, or ‘maliciously’, intending to ‘impress, confuse or humiliate’ readers.”

#### **7.2.2.1.2.1 Qualitative insight into the complexity of Latinate expressions**

The discussion of Latinate lexis draws on a hypothesis that the usually long or polysyllabic and abstract nature of Latinate expressions makes the language of the text in which they occur formal and specialised, as in academic and legal texts. Russell (2001) notes that such expressions make text “hard”, and many such occurrences could render a text formal and technical. I argue that a text with such a

characteristic is suitable for specialised, and not general audiences; hence, the **over 10%** of such lexis in this corpus has a significant implication for the complexity of the language of the corpus. The example below serves to provide a qualitative illustration of this point.

*The court said it took into **consideration** the **prevalence** of armed robbery in the country, the overwhelming evidence **adduced** against the convicts by the **prosecution**, the **character** and **antecedents** of the convicts, among others, before imposing the **sentence** (Daily Graphic, September 17 Story 2).*

The above extract, which was used in the audience survey to test readers' understanding, contains Latinate words such as *consideration*, *prevalence*, *adduced*, *prosecution*, *character*, *antecedents*, and *sentence*. The extract reports a court case, so legalese such as *prosecution* and *sentence* occur alongside other Latinate words to make the extract formal and technical. The implication is that these words are usually associated with the kind of formal writing found in technical reports, academic and scientific documents that may not be for public consumption. Such a sentence is likely to pose meaning problems as was confirmed in the audience survey.

#### **7.2.2.1.2.2 Connecting discussions on Latinate words with the Audience Survey**

A test of some Latinate words on readers during the audience survey indicated that a large proportion of the participants had challenges understanding them. Five of the words sampled were *adduced*, *antecedent*, *sabotaged*, *cabinet* (of government), and *upsurge*. Table 11 presents the findings.

**Table 11: Percentage of survey participants who found the Latinate words challenging (Key to the Table: see Table 10)**

Latinate expression	Overall Population (N=292)			Tertiary (N=155)			SHS/Post SHS (N= 95)		
	Don't Understand %	Yes Understand		Don't Understand %	Yes Understand		Don't Understand %	Yes Understand	
		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %		Correctness test = pass %	Correctness test = failed %
<b>Adduced</b>	<b>66</b>	65	<b>30</b>	53	<b>67</b>	28	<b>80</b>	53	<b>47</b>
<b>antecedent</b>	<b>73</b>	54	<b>32</b>	61	<b>56</b>	38	<b>82</b>	38	<b>38</b>
<b>Sabotaged</b>	<b>46</b>	67	<b>27</b>	28	<b>69</b>	27	<b>61</b>	61	<b>27</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	<b>46</b>	34	<b>60</b>	34	<b>42</b>	52	<b>54</b>	16	<b>76</b>
<b>Upsurge</b>	<b>68</b>	71	<b>22</b>	51	<b>70</b>	23	<b>84</b>	73	<b>18</b>

The results above are not very different from the trend identified with the nominalisations where many participants said they did not know the words. From almost half the overall population to as high as 73% said they did not know the words. Of the numbers that said they understood, at least a quarter could not demonstrate that understanding. The same pattern applies to the tertiary and secondary school educational sub-populations. The results show that participants found Latinate words more difficult to deal with than nominalisations. The fact that the proportion of Latinate items in the corpus is almost double that of nominalisations, appears to make the results significant.

Meanings provided by those who said they knew the words but supplied unacceptable meanings showed that participants could not have understood the texts in which such words were located. *Cabinet*, which in the context means the core decision-making body of government, for instance, attracted meanings such as *parliament*, *ministerial position*, *important people in opposition*, among others. *Sabotaged* also generated meanings like *go behind*, *protect against something*, *track down*, among others, while *evidence*, *contributing factors*, *forebears*, etc., were given as unacceptable meanings of *antecedent*. These findings, therefore, appear to confirm the negative effect of Latinate vocabulary on the readability of the Ghanaian newspapers.

#### **7.2.2.1.3 Analysis of phrasal verbs (PVs)**

Similar approaches like those applied in the earlier analyses were used to generate PVs in the various sub-corpora. Firstly, I used the POS tag, AVP, for adverbial particles as a search item to produce a concordance list of PVs. This procedure was informed by the fact that an adverbial particle such as *above*, *across*, *down*, *out*, *over*, *off*, *up*, and so on, combines with a verb to form a phrasal verb. Secondly, since adverbial particles and prepositions are almost the same structurally, I used the POS tag for preposition to generate a concordance list as well, after which I carefully eliminated all verb-preposition combinations that are not PVs. The *OED online* (2012) served as a reference in the process. A cross-reference with some of the listings in the (hardcopy) *Oxford English Dictionary* (2010) showed that both listings correspond in terms of the lexical combinations and interpretations. Instances of PVs in the corpus included *work out*, *put up with*, *spew out*, *turned up*, *speed up*, *setting up*, *get along with*, *fashion out*, among

others. Figure 11 shows a concordance list that illustrates the combinations. The quantity of PVs in the corpus is 4,426 as seen in Table 9.

**Figure 11: Occurrences of phrasal verbs in the corpus**

N	Concordance	Set	Word #	Sen	Sen	Para	Pe
1,536	1 is_VBZ being_VBG set_VVN up_AVP by_PRP the_AT0		48,820	1,5	27%	0	3
1,537	,_PUN had_VHD also_AV0 set_VVN up_AVP tribunal_NN1 where_CJS		79,448	2,2	45%	0	4
1,538	2 must_VM0 be_VBI set_VVN up_AVP to_TO0 handle_VVI the_AT0		136,671	3,9	65%	0	8
1,539	1 members_NN2 as_CJS set_VVN out_AVP in_PRP Articles_NN2 11		87,010	2,7	69%	0	5
1,540	1 ,_PUN you_PNP set_VVB off_AVP on_PRP a_AT0 trip_NN1		42,794	1,3	15%	0	2
1,541	not_XX0 prepared_VVN to_TO0 sit_VVI down_AVP with_PRP the_AT0		73,522	2,1	69%	0	4
1,542	they_PNP would_VM0 not_XX0 sit_VVI down_AVP unconcerned_AJ0 to_TO0		94,126	2,6	55%	0	5
1,543	and_CJC they_PNP sped_VVD off_AVP with_PRP Prof_NP0 Mills_NP		126,186	3,9	63%	0	8
1,544	0 pair_NN0 trawling_NN1 sped_VVD off_AVP leaving_VVG the_AT0 naval_AJ		39,367	1,1	84%	0	2
1,545	which_DTQ they_PNP sped_VVD off_AVP ,_SENT ----_PUN DAILY_AJ0		90,138	2,8	100%	0	5
1,546	1 ,_SENT ----_PUN Speed_VVB up_AVP trial_NN1 of_PRF remand_NN		131,154	3,7	13%	0	8
1,547	EC_NP0 TO_TO0 SPEED_VVI UP_AVP OVERSEAS_AV0		104,571	3,3	9%	0	7
1,548	0 President_NN1 to_TO0 speed_VVI up_AVP with_PRP the_AT0		101,624	2,9	50%	0	6
1,549	0 courts_NN2 and_CJC speeding_VVG up_AVP the_AT0 administration_NN1		118,947	3,4	87%	0	7
1,550	2 and_CJC not_XX0 spew_VVB out_AVP lies_NN2 about_PRP		76,841	2,2	90%	0	5
1,551	2 were_VBD spewed_VVN out_AVP during_PRP the_AT0		60,429	1,9	15%	0	3
1,552	to_TO0 be_VBI spewing_VVG out_AVP incredulous_AJ0		40,021	1,2	76%	0	2
1,553	it_PNP ,_PUN can_VM0 spill_VVI over_AVP to_PRP the_AT0 south_NN1		123,914	3,9	85%	0	8
1,554	1 which_DTQ had_VHD spilled_VVN over_AVP into_PRP the_AT0 main_AJ		55,832	1,7	78%	0	3
1,555	led_VVD him_PNP to_TO0 stand_VVI out_AVP and_CJC undeniably_AV0		101,381	2,8	76%	0	6
1,556	0 attempted_VVN to_TO0 stand_VVI in_AVP for_PRP the_AT0 N_NP0		33,998	1,0	31%	0	2
1,557	Tamale_NP0 debate_NN1 started_VVD off_AVP with_PRP the_AT0		51,426	1,6	26%	0	3
1,558	staff_NN0 would_VM0 stay_VVI over_AVP for_PRP the_AT0 next_ORD		78,428	2,2	57%	0	5
1,559	0 's_POS family_NN1 stayed_VVD up_AVP all_DT0 night_NN1 in_PRP		54,316	1,5	29%	0	3
1,560	he_PNP should_VM0 step_VVI down_AVP the_AT0 sale_NN1		17,381	51%	59%	0	1
1,561	I_PNP had_VHD to_TO0 step_VVI in_AVP and_CJC lead_VVI to_TO0		98,611	2,8	63%	0	6
1,562	made_VVN to_TO0 step_VVI down_AVP by_PRP the_AT0 NPP_NP		81,385	2,3	60%	0	4
1,563	PC_NN1 elect_NN1 to_TO0 step_VVI down_AVP ,_PUN for_PRP one_CRD		35,477	1,0	45%	0	2
1,564	these_DT0 ex-soldiers_NN2 turn_VVB up_AVP as_CJS polling_NN1		153,767	4,7	11%	0	9
1,565	"_PUQ If_CJS you_PNP turn_VVB out_AVP negative_AJ0 ,_PUN		105,104	3,3	30%	0	7

The relatively few PVs across the sub-corpora, less than 1% (Figure 8), seem to confirm studies that they are rare features in second language (L2) writing (Dagut and Laufer 1985; Laufer and Eliasson 1993; Liao and Fukuya 2002). This notwithstanding, a normalised comparison with PVs in the Corpus of Contemporary American English's (COCA)<sup>50</sup> 76 million-word newspaper component (4,720 per million words) (Davies, 2009, p.183) seems to suggest that the occurrence in this study's corpus is considerable and hence significant. The normalised results (with 1000 as the denominator) indicate that PVs in our corpus (8.14) is almost twice as

<sup>50</sup> The COCA is a representative 'monitor' Corpus of contemporary English that keeps growing because new texts and words are added each year. Thus, it is one of the most current useful corpora available. The corpus is over 450 million words. By 2008, it was over 350 million (Davies, 2009). In terms of research application, the COCA is comparable to the BNC.

much as what occurs in the COCA (4.72). The significance is that scholars have acknowledged that native speakers use more PVs and that there is a tendency for them to use phrases rather than words (Sinclair, 1991). Moreover, the COCA newspaper genre includes texts from sports, entertainment and other parts of newspapers where less formal writings may be found.

The results, as reflected in the concordance list (Figure 11), indicate that the PVs used in Ghanaian front-page stories reflect the three types of PVs. *Spew out* and *sped off*, meaning *say unpalatable things* and *move away in haste* respectively, belong to the literal type. *Stay over* (sleep overnight at a place) and *speed up* (increase the pace) are instances of completive PVs, while *turn up* (arrive), *set up* (establish) are figurative. Any reader who does not know the collective meaning will miss the import of these lexical items, and this may affect the overall understanding of the sentence in which the lexis appeared as well as the language of the text as a whole.

Concerning the complex aspect of PVs, Sinclair (1991, p.68) notes that PVs have been of interest to language teaching since they offer “exquisite problems to learners.” Particularly relevant has been the finding suggesting that the use of PVs is generally uncommon among L2 users mainly because the PV structure does not exist in the users’ L1 (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Liao and Fukuya, 2002). The consequence is the hypothesis that L2 users avoid PVs and therefore find such linguistic features difficult to understand (ibid.).

#### **7.2.2.1.3.1 Connecting the discussion on phrasal verbs with the audience survey**

Findings of the audience survey appear to confirm the inherent meaning challenges of PVs (see Figure 23 and Appendix 8). Three PVs, *penciled in*, *rope in* and *called for*, were tested. In their respective contexts, *called for* means *demanded*, *required* or *made a public appeal*; *penciled in* means *put a name on a list* (for provisional appointment); and *rope in* means *include* or *get ...in*.<sup>51</sup> Of the total population, 39% did not know *penciled in* while half of those who said they did (N=115) showed that

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<sup>51</sup> See Extract 2 on the questionnaire form (Appendix 6).

they did not understand the expression since they provided unsuitable meanings. The same trend applies to the other two expressions.

*Called for*, in particular, was the highest individually occurring PV in the whole corpus with 133 occurrences (including its various conjugated forms or lemmas). 74% of the overall participants initially said they knew the expression, but most of the responses they provided were unsuitable and showed that they confused the individual meanings of the two words in the combination with the meaning of the phrase. They provided answers such as *draw attention, invite someone, like calling, seek help, assembling individuals*, among others. The same trend was realized with the responses across the educational categories. The suggestion is that PVs, like the nominalizations and Latinate words, contributed to making the overall understanding of the extracts in which they occurred difficult for many of the participants.

#### **7.2.2.1.4 Comparison of keywords with the BNC and COCA**

To discover if the overall lexis of our corpus is striking because of the results discussed so far, I did a keyword comparison of the corpus with the BNC and COCA. *Keywords* are lexical items in a corpus that “occur with a significantly higher frequency (positive keywords) or with a significantly lower frequency (negative keywords)” when the corpus is compared with a larger reference corpus (Adolphs, 2006, p.46). Thus, a keyword analysis provides statistically significant results of either positive or negative keyness of words in a particular corpus.

The results of this exercise yielded over 2000 lexical items in this study’s corpus as occurring with positive keyness in both corpora, as illustrated in the BNC, Figure 12. This statistically significant finding (the analysis being chi-squared) indicates that the positive keywords are characteristic and hence, unique to the Ghanaian newspapers. The majority of these words are nominalisations or Latinate expressions such as *constituency, governance, security, municipality*, among others. The size of these reference corpora as well as the fact that the corpora are composed of representative proportions of newspaper and other written language categories makes the findings significant. The findings seem to suggest that the language of Ghanaian newspapers is unique and complex.



**Figure 12: Keywords analysis showing lexical items of high keyness (in the BNC)**

N	Key word	Freq.	% RC.	f	RC. %	Keyness	P	Lemmas	Set
1	CONSTITUENCY	514	0.09	1,862		19,276.51	0.0000000000		
2	STAKEHOLDERS	102	0.02	49		12,274.08	0.0000000000		
3	GOVERNANCE	145	0.03	180		11,460.74	0.0000000000		
4	CHEFTAINCY	44		4		7,122.28	0.0000000000		
5	ASPIRANT	63	0.01	38		6,947.91	0.0000000000		
6	ELECTION	634	0.12	9,684		5,896.85	0.0000000000		
7	DEMOCRATIC	468	0.09	5,899		5,373.00	0.0000000000		
8	SECURITY	669	0.12	13,713	0.01	4,418.41	0.0000000000		
9	ASPIRANTS	44		40		4,032.70	0.0000000000		
10	CAMPAIGN	482	0.09	9,381		3,385.38	0.0000000000		
11	ELECTORATE	151	0.03	1,052		3,147.32	0.0000000000		
12	CONGRESS	343	0.06	5,414		3,069.64	0.0000000000		
13	PARLIAMENTARY	301	0.05	4,238		3,059.19	0.0000000000		
14	POLITICAL	890	0.16	30,168	0.03	3,042.74	0.0000000000		
15	MUNICIPALITY	38		56		2,661.02	0.0000000000		
16	JUSTICE	350	0.06	7,321		2,251.84	0.0000000000		
17	CONTESTING	48		139		2,112.06	0.0000000000		
18	NARCOTIC	35		66		2,086.36	0.0000000000		
19	ALLEGATION	74	0.01	370		2,079.80	0.0000000000		
20	STRESSING	83	0.02	480		2,048.10	0.0000000000		
21	CREDIBLE	78	0.01	438		1,975.74	0.0000000000		
22	ENTREATED	21		18		1,929.64	0.0000000000		
23	NOMINATION	87	0.02	586		1,863.00	0.0000000000		
24	INVESTIGATIONS	146	0.03	1,681		1,836.64	0.0000000000		
25	APPEALED	130	0.02	1,374		1,787.11	0.0000000000		
26	EXECUTIVES	127	0.02	1,319		1,777.48	0.0000000000		
27	COMMISSION	369	0.07	9,844		1,747.15	0.0000000000		
28	DEBUNKED	15		7		1,718.72	0.0000000000		
29	ENSURE	373	0.07	10,225	0.01	1,704.05	0.0000000000		
30	DISCLOSED	104	0.02	939		1,675.93	0.0000000000		

In addition to the words listed in the keywords analysis above, the following are some other nominalisations and Latinate words that showed significant positive keyness:

*motion, commended, challenges, constituencies, electioneering, entourage, investigations, aspirants, cautioned, perpetrators, assurance, reiterate, municipal, metropolis, multi, millennium, dialysis, transparent, adjudication incumbent, indigenes, circumspection, dispensation, entrenchment, mandatory, prosecution, intimidated, inauguration, interact, communiqué, characterised, candidature, interlocutory, etc.*

#### **7.2.2.1.5 Overall significance of findings concerning lexical items**

The significance of the results of these three categories of lexical elements relative to text complexity lies in their collective occurrences in the corpus. The proportion

of such words, particularly nominalisations and Latinate, has significant text complexity implications for the language of the corpus as a whole. Research has established that grammatical or function words such as *on*, *in*, *upon*, *a*, *the*, etc., constitute about half of the tokens of any text or corpus, but such words do not carry content or information (Nation, 2001; Adolphs, 2006). This means that the lexical items investigated form part of the remaining words that carry information in the corpus. Thus, since **almost 10%** of the information-laden words of the corpus are Latinate and potentially unfamiliar, and many of the words occurred with positive keywords in the corpus, there is a strong case for the complexity of the language. This conclusion is reinforced when the findings involving the lexical items are complemented with the syntactic aspects, which will be discussed shortly.

For a deeper understanding of the effect of such words on text complexity and difficulty, I discuss two such words in their context: *motion* and *interlocutory*. These words (without their other forms, such as plural forms) have a relatively high (5%) and low (about 1%) occurrences respectively in the corpus. Concordance lists of some of the listings of the words are presented below in Figure 13 (*motion*) and Figure 14 (*interlocutory*). The discussion explores the ideas associated with the words, the expressions that occur with the words and how the interaction can cause reading and meaning difficulties. The words are centred in the concordance lists with about five words on both sides. In this way, the implication of some of the words that usually co-occur in the context of the selected words in the corpus can be noted in the analysis.

From the context in Figure 13, *motion* usually occurs in the newspapers as a legal term referring to a 'thing' and it may be *filed* and *considered*. It may be an *ex parte* (another typical legal term), be *ruled* on by a judge, and may provoke *affidavit* (a jargon, again). The *motion* may be an *interlocutory injunction* or a *notice*. It may *stay proceedings* and *commit for contempt*, among others. Thus, most of the expressions that occur with *motion* are also legal or have legal implications. This implies that, on the one hand, a person who does not have an idea of what a *motion* is may find it difficult to understand the text and context in which the word occurs. On the other hand, the accompanying expressions and the ideas they connote may also make the expression difficult to understand even if the reader knows the word in question. The same implications go for *interlocutory*. As indicated in the context

of Figure 14, the word is found to co-occur with *injunction* as a unit. In this case, too, *interlocutory injunction* is something that may be *filed*, *applied for*, *granted* by a court, *sought* by anybody and *ruled* on. It may be *against* somebody or thing, may *stay execution*, *restrain an action*, or *receive judgement*. Additionally, *interlocutory injunction* may be a *motion*. All these implications have to be understood to comprehend the texts.

**Figure 13: A concordance list of *motion***

File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help														
N	Concordance	S	T	Word #	Sen	Sen	Par:	Par:	Hea	Hea	Sec	Sec	File	Date
1	against Mrs Justice Abban. That followed a motion filed by Mr Gharbey on the grounds			2,120	73	17%	0	20%		0	5%	DAILY GRAPHIC AL	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
2	superior court was different. Tskata filed a motion at the court to disqualify Justice			2,163	75	8%	0	21%		0	5%	DAILY GRAPHIC AL	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
3	the floor, because the house is considering a motion and not the document he is referring			20,812	674	83%	0	61%		0	53%	CHRONICLE AUGU	2012/Sep/07 00:00	
4	. The affidavit was in reaction to a motion filed at the court, for an interim			21,483	698	28%	0	63%		0	55%	CHRONICLE AUGU	2012/Sep/07 00:00	
5	of Dr Blankson. The panel is yet to rule on a motion for interlocutory injunction which was			17,804	642	42%	0	65%		0	65%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
6	Department Stores in Accra, had filed a motion of notice to impose a heavy fine on			12,662	450	34%	0	46%		0	46%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
7	the case could be heard, the A-G filed a motion to stay proceedings pending a similar			2,269	77	54%	0	22%		0	5%	DAILY GRAPHIC AL	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
8	in Ga Mashie, in October last year, filed a motion for interlocutory injunction, seeking the			19,750	713	35%	0	72%		0	72%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
9	defying and ignoring the pendency of a motion for interlocutory injunction'. The			19,978	719	94%	0	73%		0	73%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
10	him. Meanwhile, Mr Paintsil has filed another motion for committal for contempt at the FTC			39,240	1,2	20%	1	99%		0	100%	CHRONICLE AUGU	2012/Sep/07 00:00	
11	parties law 2000, Act 574. In an ex-parte motion for contempt jointly filed yesterday by			20,034	721	9%	0	73%		0	73%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
12	. The order was made following an ex-parte motion filed by the Attorney-General and			13,572	434	53%	0	68%		0	38%	DAILY GRAPHIC OI	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
13	for interlocutory injunction'. The substantive motion, filed on November 14, last year, is			19,984	720	8%	0	73%		0	73%	GHANAIAI TIMES	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
14	Supreme Court and, therefore, he filed the motion to enable the court to ensure that the			23,103	716	43%	3	13%		0	64%	DAILY GRAPHIC OI	2012/Nov/26 00:00	
15	of Justice. In an affidavit in support of the motion to set aside the earlier order, Mr			13,588	435	20%	0	68%		0	38%	DAILY GRAPHIC OI	2012/Nov/26 00:00	

**Figure 14: A concordance list of *interlocutory injunction***

File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help														
N	Concordance	S	T	Word #	Sen	Sen	Par:	Par:	Hea	Hea	Sec	Sec	File	Date
1	action at the High Court and applied for an interlocutory injunction against the NLA, which			30,857	963	59%	3	50%						
2	High Court, on March 14, 2008, granted an interlocutory injunction filed by the GLOA to			31,012	968	35%	3	50%						
3	leave. In the case, the GLOA is seeking an interlocutory injunction to stay the execution			3,852	161	29%	0	17%						
4	plaintiff company consequently filed for an interlocutory injunction restraining the Millicom			23,990	729	46%	0	68%						
5	Willie Amarfo, countered that the motion for interlocutory injunction was frivolous, and			19,853	715	36%	0	72%						
6	and ignoring the pendency of a motion for interlocutory injunction'. The substantive			19,980	719	98%	0	73%						
7	, in October last year, filed a motion for interlocutory injunction, seeking the Ga			19,752	713	38%	0	72%						
8	. The panel is yet to rule on a motion for interlocutory injunction which was filed in			17,806	642	50%	0	65%						
9	last Friday turned down an application for interlocutory injunction to restrain the Ga			19,668	711	49%	0	72%						
10	. That was even after the court had given interlocutory judgement in favour of the			2,446	73	63%	0	13%						
11	. It prayed the court to grant an order of interlocutory injunction to restrain the GIMPA			19,980	677	28%	0	98%						

What is deduced from the above discussion is that such potentially complex expressions occur with other similar expressions in the newspapers. The fact that such expressions are often not explained or interpreted makes the text in which they occur challenging to ‘ordinary’ readers. This applies as well to nominalisations and Latinate expressions that occur ordinarily in non-technical texts, as demonstrated in some of the extracts used in this research to test readers.

### **7.2.2.2 Analysis and discussion of syntactic complexity**

Studies in syntactic complexity have often relied on the relationships between sentence length, clauses and other internal linguistic units of a sentence using the number of occurrences and averages as measures (Norris and Ortega, 2009; Lu, 2011). In this study, I used four specific syntactic variables: sentence length, types of sentence, clauses embedding and passive constructions. I will first discuss them individually and then sum up their collective impact on the language of the corpus.

#### **7.2.2.2.1 Types of sentence, clause embedding and sentence length,**

I discuss here the above three variables because of their close association. In terms of analysis, both annotated and unannotated forms of the corpus were used to produce concordances of clauses and sub-clauses. To locate clauses in the corpus for an idea of the proportion of complex sentences, I targeted finite verbs because a finite clause must have a finite verb (Biber *et al.*, 1999). For dependent clauses, I used various subordinating conjunctions as search items. The UCREL POS CLAWS5 tagger has consistent and reliable tags for all the finite verbs and the various conjunctions. For the dependent clauses, I target the various categories of subordinating conjunctions involving adverbial, nominal and relative, among others, such as *although*, *if*, *when*, *that*, *while*, *who*, and *which*. Careful manual crosschecking was done to ensure as much as possible that only items that indicate clauses and subordinate clauses were included in the analysis.

Concerning sentence length, the corpus analysis indicates that the average sentence length is 31 words with the *Chronicle* and the *Graphic* scoring 32. This finding is far above existing journalistic standards or research recommendations, thereby indicating possible syntactic, and therefore, text complexity. The news reportage component of the corpus that was used to produce Biber *et al.*'s (1999) *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* has a mean sentence length of 20

words. Most researchers and experts (in readability and plain English studies), agree that written information for public communication is best presented in sentences of between 15 to 25 words (Flesch, 1949; Russell, 2001; DuBay, 2004). For example, Rudolph Flesch's (1949) ten-year study [still an authoritative finding (DuBay, 2004)], indicated that a standard sentence for public communication has 17 words and that fairly difficult writing has 21 words, and very difficult material has more than 29 words (reproduced by DuBay, 2004, p.23). In fact, according to Flesch's study, very difficult writing with more than 29 words suits scientific writing and is readable by college graduates. *Essential Reporting: NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists* (Smith, 2007) advises journalists to use an average sentence length of 20 words and that writers should rarely go beyond 35 words.

Thus, the occurrence of relatively long sentences in the corpus has implications for readability, no matter the accompanying number of short sentences. Although the standard deviation of the average sentence length was 13.75, which indicates relatively dispersed sentence lengths, the study showed that the corpus contains many long sentences. For instance, a sentence such as the one below from the *Guide* is so long (75 words) that by the time the reader finishes reading, the import of the issue that the sentence begins with may be lost. Specifically, at the end, the sentence shifts focus from a comparison of the strengths of *Mahama* and *Bawumia* to introduce another issue on some voters' belief, and by the time the reader gets to the issue of the belief, he/she could have forgotten the issue that begins the sentence.

While Mr Mahama is perceived to be more expressive with a richer experience on the political soapbox, Dr Bawumia's understanding of Ghana's current economic challenges and his direct involvement in stabilizing the country's financial sector has earned him the reverence of the business community and that class of voters who do not vote on party lines but on the belief that the country needs a leader who can transform the economy into a first-class one (*Guide* August 21 story 1).

The argument, in relative terms, is that the longer a sentence the more clauses it may contain and therefore the more complex it becomes. As I discuss further below, long sentences contain usually clauses with various linking processes that reveal other patterns of complexity.

The sentences of the corpus display other internal structure characteristics that point to complexity. Table 12 provides information on types of sentences, proportion of clauses, dependent clauses (particularly relative clauses), as well as passive constructions in each newspaper. Relating the number of clauses to the number of sentences in the corpus (or the percentage of sub-clauses to the total number of clauses) indicates that each sentence has at least a subordinate clause. This means that **each sentence of the corpus is a complex sentence**.

**Table 12: Syntactic profile of the corpus**

	<b>Total No. of Clauses</b>	<b>% of Sub-clauses</b>	<b>% of Relative Clauses</b>	<b>% of Passive Forms</b>
<i>Chronicle</i>	13030	51.81	12.29	18.19
<i>Graphic</i>	11674	53.79	11.89	13.20
<i>Guide</i>	12717	51.45	12.55	13.47
<i>Times</i>	11279	51.19	12.04	14.00

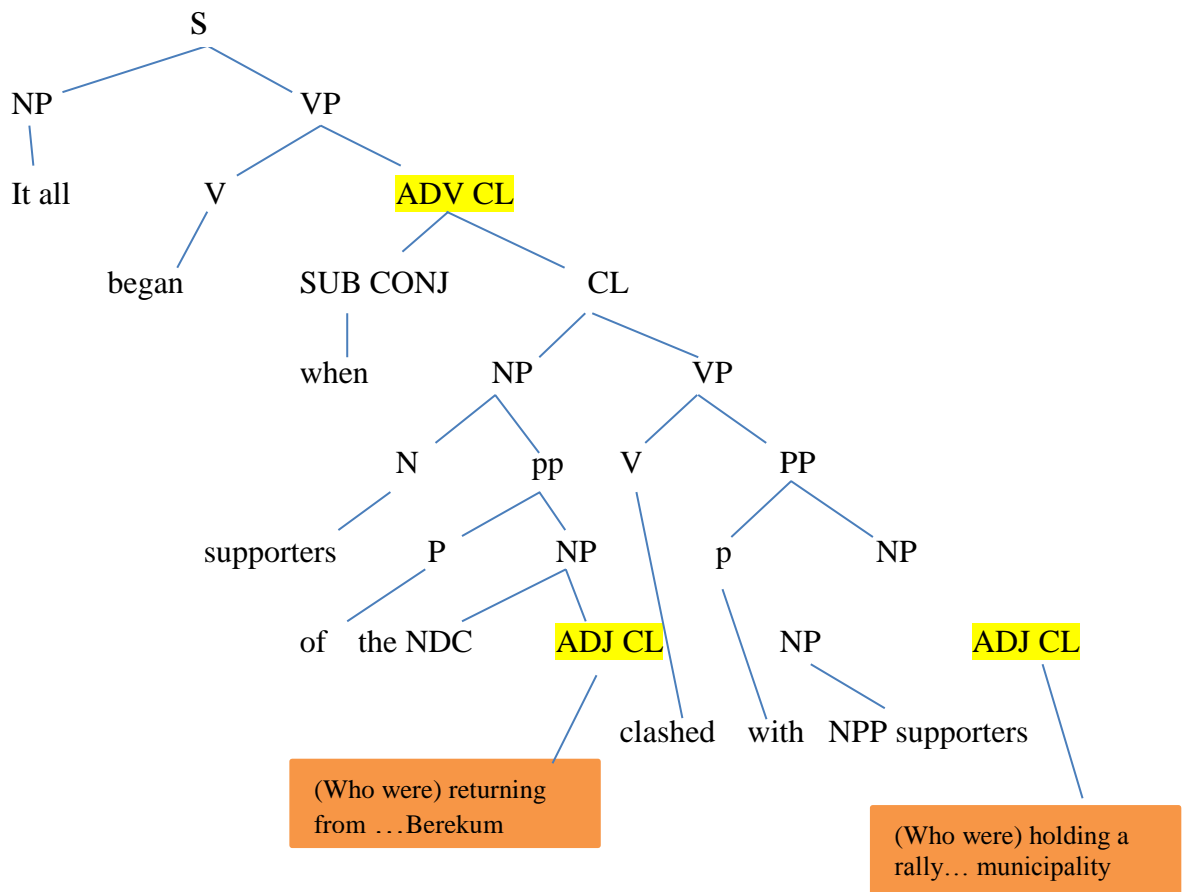
The complex sentences are made further complex by the way the clauses relate to each other in clause embedding. As explain earlier in this chapter, clause embedding is the grammatical integration of clauses in each other. The tree diagram below in Figure 15 indicates the relationship between the clauses of a sentence from the *Times* and it serves to illustrate clearly the point on clause embedding.

The analysis shows that the sentence contains three subordinate clauses (highlighted in the diagram). The adverbial (dependent) clause (... *when supporters ... municipality*) has two other embedded non-finite or reduced (relative) adjectival clauses. They are non-finite or reduced because only part of the form of the clause appeared in the sentence. Reduced clauses, which were identified through manual analysis, are clauses in which the subject and finite verb are omitted leaving only a participle or an infinitive, for which reason the computer did not identify them as a clause. In the parsed example, the omitted part has been supplied in parentheses. The embedding as well as the reduced form of the adjectival clauses adds to the adverbial clause. Additionally, the fact that adjectival clauses modify an antecedent noun that must be understood for an overall understanding of the sentence all contribute to predispose the sentence to complexity and difficulty.

Other complexity indicators concerning meaning may be located in the relationship between clauses and ideas or thought. Studies on clause grammar argue that the clause serves as a unit of thought (Biber, 1999), so it is reasonable to assume that a complex sentence contains more than one idea. In relative terms, the processes

**Figure 15: A tree diagram of a parsed sentence illustrating clause embedding**

*It all began when supporters of the NDC, returning from fun games at Senase, a village near Berekum, clashed with some NPP supporters holding a rally at Nyamebekyere, in the Sunyani municipality*



Key: **S** – sentence

**NP** – noun phrase

**VP** – verb phrase

**PP** – prepositional phrase

**ADV CL** – adverbial clause

**ADJ CL** – adjectival clause involved

involved in creating a complex sentence (that is, subordination) are grammatically intricate, and may relate to efforts needed to decode such sentences (Just and Carpenter, 1992; Biber, 1999; Russell, 2001). It is argued further that the ideas in a complex sentence interact in an embedded or firmer relationship (depending on the

number of clauses) and this and other linguistic (and non-linguistic) factors may combine to make that sentence difficult to deal with semantically, as explained further in the examples below.

- a. The source explained **that** food was taken to the girl only in the evening by the grandmother in the uncompleted building **when** nobody was around (*Guide* 16 September).
- b. Mr Aggrey-Mensah said **when** Telekom Malaysia's agreement was abrogated, it was the poor GT, **which** did not benefit from the sale **that** was made to pay the \$52 2 million as settlement fee (*Graphic* 2 August2).

Example (a) has three clauses each indicating an idea or thought: i. *The source explained (it)*; ii. *that food was taken to the girl only in the evening by the grandmother in the uncompleted building*; and iii. *when nobody was around*. The independent or main clause is *The source explained (it)*, while the two others are dependent. The words that are highlighted in bold are the subordinating conjunctions that link the various clauses to the main clause. The first dependent clause, the THAT-clause, is nominal, functioning as the object of the verb *explained*. The complete nominal clause has to be understood as the object of the main verb in order to make sense of that part of the sentence. The second clause is adverbial. In addition to contributing an idea to the sentence (nobody was around), the conjunction, *when*, links that clause to the main clause by indicating time. Additionally, the two dependent clauses ought to be understood as subordinate to the main clause in terms of the importance of the ideas in each clause. All these meaning implications combine to dispose such a sentence to difficulty.

Example (b) also has five clauses with a more intricate structure. The various clauses, each presenting an idea, are as follows:

- Mr Aggrey-Mensah said (it);
- **(that)** it was the poor GT (which did not benefit from the sale);
- **When** Telekom Malaysia's agreement was abrogated;
- **Which** did not benefit from the sale; and
- **That** was made to pay the \$52 2 million as settlement fee

The independent or main clause is *Mr Aggrey-Mensah said (it)*, where *it* refers to *it was the poor GT*, *which did not benefit from the sale*. This clause is itself a



complex one because it has an implied or obligatory relative clause (in bold italics) that describes ***the poor GT***. The four conjunctions in bold, that is, omitted *that*, *when*, *which* and *that*, signal the dependent clauses in that order. The first dependent clause is the direct object of *said* and so it is nominal. The second, indicated by *when*, is adverbial adding time to the idea it contributes to the sentence. The other two dependent clauses are relative or adjectival, describing *the poor GT* and *the sale* respectively. If a reader fails to connect the conjunctions or relative pronouns, that is, *which* and *that*, to their correct noun as explained above, meaning could be lost. Additionally, if all these clause structures are not properly related and understood in the context explained above, there could be meaning challenges. Making all these connections in reading has important implications for language processing and recall, and hence for comprehension (Just and Carpenter, 1992).

Closely linked to the above is the occurrence of some peculiar dependent clauses that may function as nominals, adverbials and relative clauses in sentences. Such clauses are led by *WH-*, *THAT*, and other such conjunctions, and they function structurally as either a clause element or part of a clause element, thereby producing intricate grammatical structures (Biber *et al.*, 1999). For instance, consider the nominal clause in bold typeface below:

***What the broad masses of the people in the northern belt and the NDC are concerned about*** is for the government to bring to book the perpetrators of those heinous crimes which cost property and lives in Tamale and Gushiegu (*Graphic* 20 November).

In the example, the nominal clause is the subject of the main verb **ARE CONCERNED**, and the *WH-* word, **WHAT**, which begins the nominal clause subject (of the whole sentence) is itself again the subject of the dependent clause in which it occurs. Thus, a reader, who mistakes the subject of the clause for *masses*, *the people in the northern belt*, or *NDC*, may not get the import of the sentence. Biber *et al.*, (1998, pp.77-78) explain: “readers often must process a long complicated structure in subject position before coming to the main verb of the sentence, which can cause difficulty in understanding.” The same explanation and intricacy go for relative clauses as well, thereby supporting the hypothesis that the language of the corpus could be complex.

### 7.2.2.2.2 Analysing Passive Forms

To identify passive forms, I targeted the verb *BE* plus the past participle of the main verb and the *by*-phrase that indicates the agent. Since the emphasis was on long passives, I used *<be>* as the search word for results that had the structure *BE + Past Participle* (whether it occurred in full, partially or was fully ellipted). Here are some examples to illustrate.

- He **was released** by the prison authorities. (full *BE + Past Participle*)
- The evidence **given** by the witness solved the case. (Partial: minus *BE*)
- The evidence by a witness solved the case. (fully ellipted: but implied)

Figure 16 shows a concordance list of some of the listings.

**Figure 16: A frequency list of passive constructions in the corpus**

N	Concordance	Set	Word #	Sen	Sen
1	realized that the country was not governed by a "jungle law", whereby people could do		1,233	46	63%
2	he was introduced to the thriving business by a friend, disclosed that he and his		1,148	35	33%
3	some think Mr. Rawlings should be talked to by a select number of party personalities,		898	23	25%
4	fair share of the assault as he was attacked by a urported NDC man at the Kwame		875	31	63%
5	health shortcoming, the matter was unearthed by a senior party member who was contesting		855	27	73%
6	as a knee-jerk move, he said it was informed by a newspaper report. Emerging facts		747	21	84%
7	bigwigs. The thanksgiving rally was attended by a large crowd of enthusiastic party		730	25	24%
8	and that Ghana will not bum as being spread by a section of politicians in the country.		693	18	83%
9	He was met on arrival at the Tamale Airport by a mammoth crowd, including the Northern		692	19	53%
10	received with enthusiasm and high morale by a thick crowd throughout tour.		673	22	67%
11	was the most appealing ticket to be presented by a political party in recent Ghanaian politics.		453	13	78%
12	leading to the funeral grounds was jammed by a sea of human beings making it extremely		375	11	43%
13	currency. He said he was accompanied by a relative called Abdul-Fatau Mohammed to		353	13	17%
14	letter. He was subsequently replaced by a new team including Adams whose role is		338	12	29%
15	'broken Twi' which was later straighten up by a staff at the palace, lamented over what		324	10	33%
16	and the suspect was subsequently arrested by a "troto" driver. He was later handed over		314	9	86%

The results indicated about 15% long passives in the corpus (see Table 12). The focus on passive forms was based on the hypothesis that they make sentences formal, impersonal and 'weighty' (Biber *et al.*, *ibid.*). The passive voice has been identified in discussions concerning plain English as a key contributor to text complexity and difficulty (Loughran and McDonald, 2009). Similarly, studies in applied linguistics generally suggest that passive constructions have the potential of causing comprehension problems (Amdur *et al.*, 2010; Ferreira *et al.*, 2002), although few of these studies have discussed specifically how the construction interferes with meaning making. Amdur *et al.*, (2010) recommend that there should

not be too many passives in articles published in medical journals, since they make reading and understanding difficult. This suggests importantly that passive constructions could affect reading and understanding, especially in public documents such as newspapers. Ferreira *et al.*, (2002) also examined the issue of misinterpretation of passive sentences and discovered that while their participants identified the improbability of the statement, *The man bit the dog*, about 20% of the participants found the statement, *The dog was bitten by the man*, plausible. The writers, consequently, argued that readers sometimes are unable to apply the meaning implication in the passive verb form. For instance, in Example (c) below, a reader could misinterpret the passive verb form *would be absorbed* as active and think the *public SHSs and technical institutions* would do the action of absorbing the *private schools*.

- c. Mr Adu said it was expected that the remaining students who would not get access to the public SHSs and technical institutions would be absorbed by the private schools.

The full sentence of number 18 on the concordance list above (Figure 16) is reproduced below to discuss the passive form therein.

- d. Led in evidence by a State Attorney, T Amponsah, the first prosecution witness, Musah Hassan, told the court that he is a businessman operating at the Central Business District of Accra (*Guide* August 27 2008 story 2).

In example **d** above, (*was*) *led* is the passive verb, while *a state attorney, T Amponsah*, is the agent. The act of *leading* ‘affects’ *Musah Hassan*, but the passive form seems to portray the *state attorney* as the one who was led in evidence. The sentence was particularly made confusing by the inversion in which the subject of the passive verb (*Musah Hassan*) is removed from the verb. Thus, it would seem as if *Musah Hassan* is not affected by the action of *state attorney*, and this is a possible source of complexity.

Although the focus of the study was on long passives, I acknowledge the presence of agentless passives as well in the corpus. These forms can also lead to meaning challenges, especially when the agent cannot be inferred from the context of the construction as illustrated below.

- e. When contacted yesterday, however, Alhaji EA Tetteh, Greater Accra Regional Chairman of GPRTU said the

union has not been informed about the package (*Times* Sept 4 story 1)

There are two short or agentless passives here: *When contacted yesterday* and *the union has not been informed about the package*. In the first instant, no one knows who did the ‘contacting’ while in the second instance, it is not clear who is to provide the ‘information’. Inability to infer the missing pieces of information from the context of the sentence (as required of short passives) makes the sentence confusing and therefore difficult. However, I argue that there is still the need for further studies to discover the exact manner in which the passive form may interfere with meaning, especially in Ghana.

#### **7.2.2.2.3 Connecting the syntactic complexity issues with the audience survey**

In the audience survey, participants were asked to read various sentences that contain instances of the syntactic elements discussed and to rate the degree of difficulty of such sentences. Participants were also requested to provide meanings for some of these sentences.<sup>52</sup> In their responses, many participants expressed views that implied that the syntax of the sentences contributed to making the extracts difficult. Some of the responses are presented below verbatim.

- I think the sentence is too long and winding. Some of the words are too complex as well.
- The sentence is too long. The style is confusing and the words are difficult to understand.
- The writer used complex sentences and difficult words that affect understanding.

Expressions such as *too long and winding*, *too long*, and *complex sentence* indicate that participants found the language difficult and that the difficulty was caused by the syntax.

Similarly, participants’ versions of the meaning of the extract below show that the occurrence of clauses and the passive forms contributed to making the extract not wholly understandable to some of them.

- *The media blitz, which Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom relished during his showing at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) presidential debates, is being threatened by a*

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<sup>52</sup> Details of the methods involved in this aspect of the analysis are discussed in Chapter 8.

*simmering credibility crisis which has broken out in the Convention People's Party (CPP) (Guide November 20).*

The sentence, taken from one of the newspapers under study, has three clauses. The main clause is *The media blitz is being threatened by a simmering credibility crisis*. The two dependent clauses, which begin with *which* are relative clauses. The first dependent clause is about Dr Nduom enjoying media's publicity after his performance at the IEA debates, while the second tells of a crisis slowly emerging in the CPP, which is threatening Nduom's popularity. Applying meaning implications concerning clause links and sentence weightings reveals that the writer of the extract is emphasising that the media blitz (about Dr Nduom's performance) is being threatened by a crisis in the CPP. This is because this information is located in the main or independent clause. Yet, here are some of the meanings provided by participants:

- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom's expectation of a media hype during his participation in IEA presidential debate is suffering a setback
- The good time Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom had with the media during the institute of economic affairs presidential debates is posing threats in the CPP credibility.
- The media blitz which Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom brought out during presidential debates was noted to be the reasons that brought divisions in the CPP.

It realised from the responses that the multiple clauses and ideas of the extract contributed to the readers' comprehension challenges. In the first response, for instance, the participant reacted only to initial information and disregarded the second dependent clause. It is also clear that the participants mixed up the ideas of the extract, which could cloud their comprehension. For instance, while the first response said (wrongly) that Dr Nduom anticipated 'media hype', the second response similarly focuses on Dr Nduom's 'good time with the media' as the cause of the problem in the CPP, among others.

Additionally, all the responses above misunderstood the grammatical implication of the passive voice. Participants interpreted the passive verb in the original extract, *is being threatened*, as an active verb thereby leading to a misunderstanding of the extract. For instance, one participant felt that the good time Nduom had is what is posing threats to the CPP, while another understood that the media blitz is the reason why there were divisions in the CPP. This provides

evidence that the use of the passive construction posed a challenge to the comprehension of the extract to some participants.

### 7.2.3 Focusing the analysis on a text

I now focus attention on the occurrence of the various linguistic items discussed in each news text or story for more insights into the investigation. I argue that each news story is unique and complete on its own and has an independent interaction with any particular reader at any particular time. Therefore, focusing the investigation on individual stories is expected to provide a practical understanding of the complexity issues that underlie the interaction between a particular reader and a news story at any particular time. Table 13 provides some linguistic information on each text of the various newspaper sub-corpora.

**Table 13: Summary of the linguistic features of each news text/story**

	<i>CHRONICLE</i>		<i>GRAPHIC</i>		<i>GUIDE</i>		<i>TIMES</i>	
ITEM PER STORY	FREQ.	%	FREQ.	%	FREQ.	%	FREQ.	%
No. of Words	684		628		677		465	
No. of sentences	21		20		22		16	
No. of Nominalisations	34	4.97%	33	5.25%	28	4.13%	24	5.16%
No. of Latinates	63	9.21%	60	9.55%	52	7.68%	45	9.67%
No. of Phrasal Verbs	7		5		5		3	
Average Sentence Length	32		32		30		29	
Average Word Length	5		5		5		5	
No. of Long Passives	4		3		3		2	
No. of Clauses/ sentence	3		3		3		3	
No. of sub clauses/ sentence	1		1		1		1	
No. of relatives / Story	3		3		3		2	
7-letter words and above	175	25.58%	170	27.07%	168	24.81%	123	26.45%

The results provide at a glance the occurrences and proportions of the language elements investigated in each news story of the corpus. For the lexical items, nominalisations accounted for about 5% of the total words of each story, while Latinate expressions constituted about 10%, phrasal verbs, 5. Additionally, about 25% of the lexical items were seven-letter words and above. For syntax, each story contained an average sentence length of 31 words, and each sentence, a complex one. Within the sentence is located other linguistic complexity markers such as passives (15%), clause embedding, and *WH*-led clauses as discussed earlier.

Drawing on earlier analysis and findings, these text-specific findings suggest a trend toward text complexity. Findings involving the *Graphic* are particularly revealing because of its central place in news information circulation in the country. As the highest circulating newspaper, its readership philosophy always emphasised ‘the people’, that is, reaching almost ‘every’ reader. However, it was one of the newspapers with the highest complexity markers across the linguistic features investigated. With a sentence average of 32 words, each story in this newspaper contains 5% nominalisations, 10% Latinate expressions, 5 phrasal verbs, 15% long passives and 3 relative clauses. There were about 27% of 7-letter words and above in each story. Additionally, each sentence was complex, having three clauses and at least one subordinate clause.

As I argued during the summary on the results of the lexical items, the significance of the results of the linguistic variables lies in their collective occurrences. The lexical and syntactic units and their individual and collective interaction suggest strongly that each text could be complex. This interpretation and the significance of the findings are made clearer in a correlation of the findings with the results of the readability formula analysis (see section 7.2.3.2).

### **7.2.3.1 Domain-specific language and text complexity**

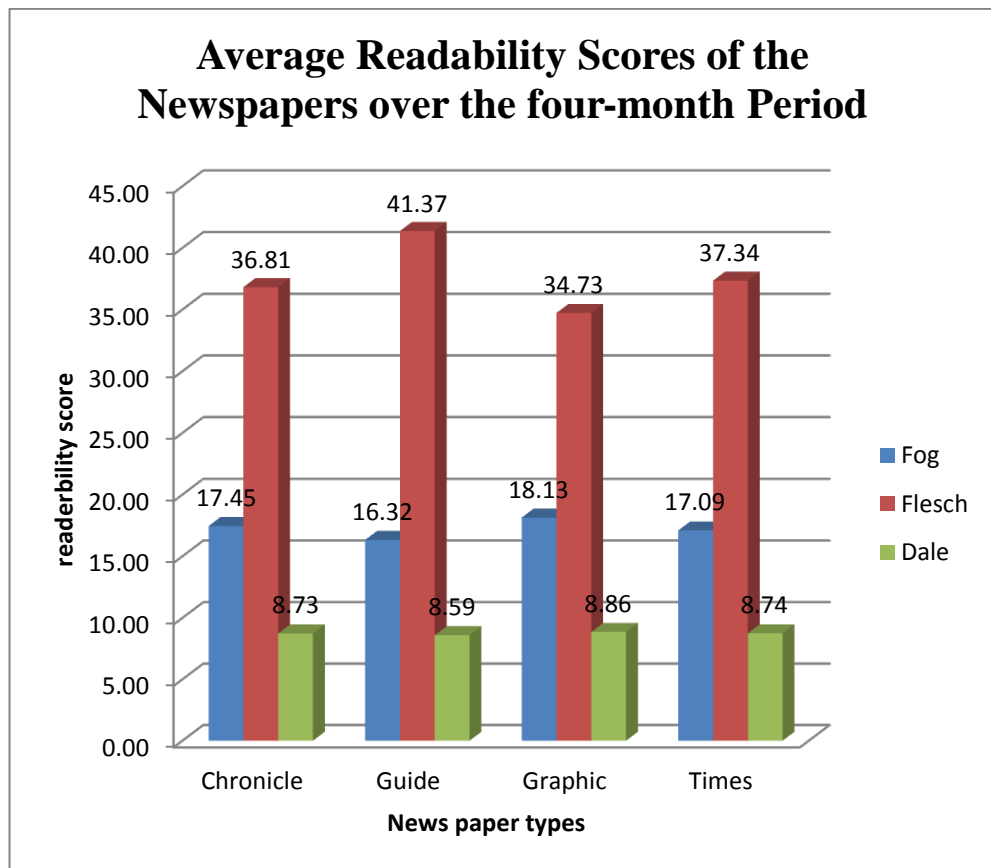
From the perspective of content, it was discovered that about **18%** of the 896 texts of the corpus (16%, 17%, 16% and 22% for the *Chronicle*, *Graphic*, *Guide* and *Times* respectively) were on legal related issues such as reports on court proceedings and insurance, and this has serious text complexity implications. Such texts were found to contain instances of domain-specific linguistic forms that are associated with legal language. The texts contained considerable proportions of lexical and syntactic characteristics including nominalisations, Latinate expressions, long and complex sentences, passives forms, among other linguistic forms that are specific to the legal field (see section 9.2 for illustrations). As explained in section 5.3.2, legal language is not appropriate for communicating to general readership since it is exclusionary and largely incommunicative to lay readers (Crystal and Davies, 1969, cited in Williams, 2004, p.112). From the statistical findings on each newspaper story, it was realised that some of the linguistic features associated with legal language also occurred in other non-legal texts on, for example, economics, governance, and other statutory issues. This aspect of language use in the

newspapers supports the complexity of the language of most of the texts of the corpus.

### 7.2.3.2 Readability formula test analysis and results

The monthly average scores produced by each readability formula tool on each newspaper and an outline of the interpretation of the three formulae are presented in Appendix 5. The monthly presentation was to provide an idea of the consistency of the individual results even across months and formulae. The results for the three formula tools indicate a high level of consistent correlations in terms of the relative ease or difficulty of the texts even across the individual text scores. As indicated in Figure 17, the overall monthly average scores obtained across the four newspapers for Fog were between 16.32 and 18.13. Scores for Flesch were between 34.73 and 41.37 and those for Dale were between 8.59 and 8.86. The standard deviation for most of the scores was below 0, showing how clustered the results were over the period. By interpretation, the scores indicated largely that the language of the four newspapers is *difficult* to comprehend and suitable for *college/university level* readers.

**Figure 17: Results of readability tests**





**Key to the Interpretation of the above Scores (from DuBay, 2004, p.25):**

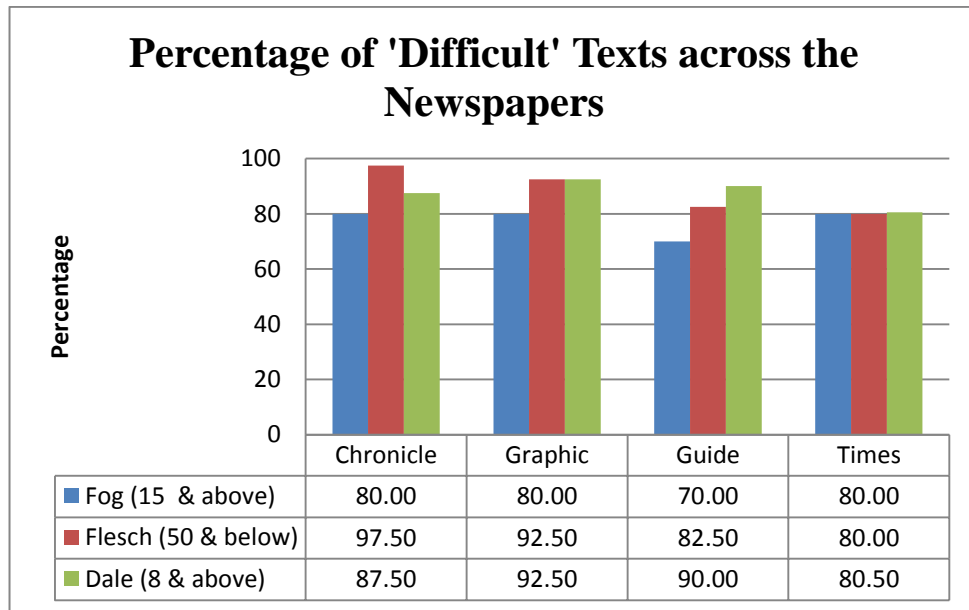
- **Fog Index:** 5 is readable; 10 is hard; 13 is difficult; and 20 is very difficult. (Note that, college or university level has a score of 10 or less)
- **Flesch Reading Ease:** the higher the score the easier to read; 70 – 100 indicates from easy to very easy to read; 0 – 30, very difficult to read (post university or college graduate); 30 – 50, difficult to read (university/college graduate); 60-70, standard
- **New Dale-Chall:** 4.9 and below, for grade 4 and below; 5.0 – 6.9, for grades 5 – 6; 7.0 – 7.9, for grades 9 – 10; 8.0 – 8.9, for grades 11 – 12; 9.0 – 9.9, for grades 13 – 15 (college level); 10 and above for grade 16 and up

The monthly averages for each formula reflected almost the same pattern; hence, I narrow the analysis to results produced by Fog. The fog formula measures difficulty based on word syllable count (word length) and sentence length, which suits the major orientation and argument of this thesis regarding the sources of newspaper language complexity. For the monthly results, the August scores for Fog for the four newspapers were between 16.00 and 18.46 where the *Guide* had the least difficult score and *Graphic* the most difficult score. For September, the range was 16.62 and 18.19 with the *Guide* and the *Chronicle* having the least and most difficult scores respectively. October averages for Fog were between 16.38 and 18.37 and the least difficult was the *Times* while the *Graphic* was the most difficult. Similarly, the scores for November ranged between 16.03 and 18.54 with the *Guide* and the *Graphic* having the least and most difficult scores respectively. The same pattern is reflected in the scores of the other readability tools. The monthly results over the period indicate the consistency of the writing style of the newspapers within a score range that interprets as *difficult* and this strengthens the hypothesis of the study that Ghanaian newspapers adopt a similar writing style or language.

Concerning interpretation, the individual text scores of the three formulae indicate clusters within the same interpretation ranges. The majority of scores for Fog were between 15 and 19.9, when the danger line for readability is 13 (Gunning, 1952; Heydary, 2012). In fact, according to the Fog formula, news is expected to read at a score of 10 (see DuBay, 2004, p. 25). The interpretation for all the tools is

that the Ghanaian newspapers read at the *difficult* level, and this indicates that the material is largely suitable for university or tertiary level readers. In terms of percentages, results of texts for each newspaper that scored *difficult* and above are presented in Figure 18. The results indicate a remarkably high 80%-93% of the news stories of each of the newspapers were difficult and readable largely by college/university level readers.

**Figure 18: Readability test results showing percentage of difficult news texts**



Within the above *difficult* range are the critical readability scores, that is, scores indicating very difficult material, which is suitable for university/college graduates. The scores are 20 and above for Fog, 30 and below for Flesch, and 9 and above for Dale (DuBay, 2006). As Table 14 indicates, apart from *Guide* with low percentages of 2.5% of texts falling within this critical range for Fog and Flesch, the rest were between 20% and 40%. For *Graphic*, 20%, 25% and 40% of its stories were in this very difficult range for Fog, Flesch and Dale, respectively. These findings show considerably high levels and proportions of difficulty across the four newspapers.

**Table 14: Percentages of 'Very Difficult' readability scores**

	Fog	Flesch	Dale
Scores	20 & Above	30 & Below	9 & above
<i>Chronicle</i>	22.50	25.00	30.00
<i>Graphic</i>	20.00	25.00	40.00
<i>Guide</i>	2.50	2.50	20.00
<i>Times</i>	12.50	20.00	35.50

#### **7.2.4 Correlating the corpus linguistics and the readability formula test results**

Results of the corpus linguistics analysis seem to correlate strongly with findings of the readability formula tools. The strong representation of long words and sentences in the corpus seem to be reflected in the readability scores, which interpret as *difficult* across the newspapers. Therefore, results of these two perspectives triangulate to suggest that the complexity level of the newspapers' language can challenge comprehension to a large extent.

#### **7.2.5 Significance of the readability results**

The use of readability formula tools to assess reading levels of documents appears not to be popular in Ghana. Earlier readability studies in Nigeria in the 1980s are replicated by the Ghanaian situation discovered in this research. For example, Sanni (1985) used Flesch readability tests to assess the readability of editorial opinions of two Nigerian newspapers, the *Guardian* and *Daily Times*, of the 1980s and found results that were far beyond the ability of the average Nigerian West African School Certificate holder. It was discovered that **80%** of the *Guardian* editorials read at the university graduate level. Similarly, it was discovered that 30% of the *Daily Times*' language could be read by graduates, **50%** by undergraduates with just 20% being at the level of secondary school holders (see also Adesonaye, no date).

The above findings imply that the language of Ghanaian and West African newspapers is suitable for the highly educated (university level) readers and, consequently, a narrow readership. This is because the vast majority of educated people in these societies attain formal education below the tertiary level. The significance of this finding is the claim by the newspapers during the research that they target every reader with a minimum educational attainment of JHS. While it has been suggested that documents for public communication read at grade 9 in the UK and North America, research from the 1960s to date has put the readability of quality newspapers in these societies at between 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades (Razik, 1969).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See also [impact-information.com](http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/literacy.htm) at: <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/literacy.htm>

These levels are equivalent to secondary school educational levels in Ghana and other English speaking West African societies such as Nigeria. Thus, the Ghanaian newspapers do not seem to target the average reader; and if they do, they are ineffective in reaching that target.

It is also worthwhile considering some issues about the interpretation of the readability results. The question is whether the results provoke the same significance in Ghana, as they will in developed settings (such as the United States or the UK). This question is crucial because the readability formula tools were originally designed for Western contexts. Therefore, going by the results, it is largely people with university education in Western societies who can easily read and understand the Ghanaian newspapers. The question is whether a Ghanaian reader with university educational attainment, for example, compares exactly with the Western counterpart. From this perspective, I argue that the findings have more dire consequences for the Ghanaian context. The reason lies with my earlier submission that many problems challenge education in Ghana, and these could hinder educational achievements, including reading and comprehension abilities in general and newspaper reading in particular.

The findings and discussion above concerning the readability formula analysis should be of interest to experts in education in Ghana, especially because attention has not focused on the use of the tools in the country. A few experts I discussed this issue with in the course of this study showed enthusiasm about the applicability of the tools. Mr Prosper K. Agordjor,<sup>54</sup> for instance, was of the view that although the readability formulae were designed originally to predict readability levels of texts in Western societies, their application and results have relevance for both text production and reading ability in Ghana.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has so far focused on the analysis, findings and discussions of the textual data of the study. Two main quantitative-led methods of analysis were used for the findings that served as a basis for the discussions. These are the corpus-based

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<sup>54</sup> Mr Agordjor is the Head of English Department at Ghana Institute of Languages, Accra. This Institute teaches all aspects of language use, including English, to various people.

linguistic and readability formula test analyses. Some qualitative insights from the survey component of this study were also used to triangulate the quantitative findings in the discussions. The main aim of this chapter was to help provide a structural description of the language style of the texts (based on the composition and distribution of some of the lexical and syntactic features of the texts) and through that help to answer the first research question of the study.

The analyses and discussions of this chapter suggest strongly that the language of the corpus is complex going by the proportion and blend of the linguistic features investigated and other tendencies generated by them. This conclusion is emphasised by the results of the readability formula tests whose average readability scores is 'difficult' (Figure 18). The results also imply that the language of the newspapers largely suits tertiary level readers. From the near similarity of the results across the four newspapers as seen from the different analyses, it is reasonable to apply a homogeneous description to the language of the front-page stories of the national daily newspapers in Ghana and describe it collectively as complex. The findings therefore suggest strongly that the language of Ghanaian newspapers could largely hinder the readability and comprehension of the front-page stories. In fact, trial correlations of each of the investigated lexical and syntactic items with the audience survey results appear to support the hypothesis that the complex language of the press hinders comprehension. Nevertheless, given the narrow perspective of the investigation in terms of the linguistic features studied, I point out that the findings should not be understood as conclusive. Rather, it should better be viewed as a contribution toward a holistic understanding of some challenges associated with the overall meaning-making process in newspaper consumption in Ghana.

The next chapter presents the survey component of the research for a comprehensive view on the extent to which these results are supported by views and aptitude of specific readers. The survey provided a robust analytical complement in the overall discussion by delivering findings involving the people who are the primary and possible targets of the newspapers to complete the triangulation rationale behind the study's research design and to help answer the rest of the research questions.

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Survey Data: Analysis, Presentation and Discussion**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis, findings and discussion of the survey data to complement findings of the linguistic material of the previous chapter. The discussion in the previous chapter focused on answering the study's first research question. It revealed that, going by the linguistic elements investigated, the language of the text under study could be significantly complex and consequently potentially difficult for some Ghanaian readers. This current chapter focuses on text difficulty, which is the subjective counterpart of text complexity, that is, the ability of readers to understand the text under study. Being an instance of user-oriented testing (Redish and Selzer, 1985), the analysis provides the reader's perspective on the extent to which they comprehend the language of the newspapers to complete the complexity/difficulty duality underlying the study. The findings of this chapter should help answer the study's second, third and fourth research questions. These questions involve the extent to which the text under study is understandable to readers; the extent to which the text alienates or includes readers in its discourse; and whether Ghanaian readers prefer complex or simple language in newspaper texts.

#### **8.2 Analyses, presentation and discussion of data**

This section first presents demographic information of research participants and then proceeds to discuss the rest of the data. In this analysis, *comprehension* draws on the 'surface code' of comprehension in Kintsch's (1988, 1998) Construction-Integration (CI) model of text comprehension. This aspect of the model refers to the representation of words and syntax in meaning construction (McNamara *et al.*, 2011; Best *et al.*, no date). In this respect, the meaning of linguistic features in their contexts applies to the decoding of text as an important step in comprehension. According to McNamara *et al.* (2011, P.231), if a reader fails to successfully form a representation of the linguistics of a text, that reader will be unlikely to form a coherent understanding of that text.

### 8.2.1 Demographic profile of participants

The demographic information captured participants' gender, age, highest educational level attained and occupation. The results are presented in Figure 19. The data indicated that the majority of the 292 participants were male. This finding reflects general trends in Ghana over the decades concerning interest in and consumption of newspapers, as males have been more interested in getting information from or being associated with newspapers than females. This result correlates with findings of a recent study by Amankwah (2010), who suggested that the imbalance was because women were less interested in the political matters that dominated the newspapers. This appears to be a trend in Africa regarding women's relative disinterest in political matters (Kafewo, 2006).

In terms of age, the majority of participants, about 80%, were between 16 and 45 years. The dominance of participants in this age bracket is noteworthy and will be discussed further in Chapter 9. This is because the results contradict what pertains elsewhere, especially in some Western countries where older people read newspapers more than younger ones.

**Figure 19: Demographic information of participants**

							<b>GENDER</b>				
							<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>		
							173	119	<b>292</b>		
							59.25%	40.75%	100.00%		
<b>AGE DISTRIBUTION</b>											
<b>0-15</b>	<b>16-30</b>	<b>31-45</b>	<b>46-60</b>	<b>61+</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>						
24	156	78	29	5	<b>292</b>						
8.22%	53.43%	26.71%	9.93%	1.71%	<b>100.00%</b>						
<b>EDUCATIONAL LEVELS</b>											
<b>TERTIARY</b>	<b>SHS</b>	<b>POST SHS</b>	<b>JHS</b>	<b>POST JHS</b>	<b>OTHERS</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>				
155	83	11	37	4	1	<b>1</b>	<b>292</b>				
53.08%	28.42%	3.77%	12.67%	1.36%	0.35%	0.35%	<b>100.00%</b>				
<b>OCCUPATION</b>											
<b>PUBLIC/PRIVATE</b>	<b>INFORMAL</b>	<b>STUDENT</b>	<b>BOTH</b>	<b>UNEMPLOYED</b>	<b>BLANK</b>	<b>TOTOAL</b>					
65	30	143	23	26	5	<b>292</b>					
22.26%	10.27%	48.97%	7.88%	8.90%	1.72%	100.00%					

### **8.2.1.1 Educational Proportions of Participants**

Participants' educational attainment is the most important variable of the study because it was directly related to the ability to read and write English in Ghana. The results show that over half of the sample, or 53%, held tertiary level qualification or were in tertiary institutions, while those in the SHS and post-SHS category constituted about 33%. Participants within the JHS and post-JHS group were about 14%. The relative dominance of tertiary-level participants could be because, during the survey, people with tertiary education readily agreed to participate in the exercise. In contrast, most of the other educational categories recoiled and opted out after initial eagerness to be included when they realised that they had to write their responses. This indicates to some extent that the use of reading and writing to generate critical information for this aspect of the study influenced participation. However, this did not undermine the findings since the sampling generated feasible numbers of participants across the educational categories, and the analysis also focused on intra-educational groups.

Furthermore, educational levels are sub-variables that provide information on the category of educated readers who may be targeted by the press. Educational sub-variables most crucial to the analysis were the tertiary and SHS/post SHS levels. Therefore, results concerning these two educational sub-variables should inform the findings to enhance our understanding of the advocacy orientation of the study.

### **8.2.2 Sources of news information**

Results concerning news sources reflected existing trends in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa. The majority of participants depended on radio and TV as presented in Table 15. However, almost half (43%) of the participant said they depended on the newspaper for information on events happening around them. This finding is higher than findings of earlier studies such as Temin and Smith (2002) and Bowen (2010), where newspapers had low proportions of those who said they depended on it for information. For instance, Temin and Smith (2002) found that in Accra, only 29% depended on newspapers, although their study confirmed general trends for radio and TV as the highest sources of news in Ghana. The high proportion of newspaper readership in this study could be because, unlike other studies, this one focused on only educated people.



The results also showed that even educated people depended on other people for news information, as more than a third of the participants said they received information from friends. This trend replicates earlier studies showing that most Ghanaians picked up news from opinion leaders who read newspapers and discussed the issues with others (Bowen, 2010). Additionally, the use of internet as a source of information showed a high response of about 46%. This could be because most offices and educational institutions, as well as mobile (phone) devices, now have internet access, although with unstable connectivity. Additionally, most newspapers now have websites with online versions of their news, all of which was not so much the case in 2008. This makes the issue of news readability on the internet an equally important prospect for research that could be explored beyond this study.

**Table 15: Participants' sources of information on local events**

<b>SOURCE</b>	<b>COUNT</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Radio</b>	209	71.75
<b>TV</b>	201	68.83
<b>Newspaper</b>	126	43.15
<b>Internet</b>	134	45.89
<b>Friend</b>	101	34.58
<b>School</b>	52	17.8
<b>Church</b>	28	9.58

**N=292**

NB: Each percentage is calculated independently against the total population of 292 since participants could make more than one choice.

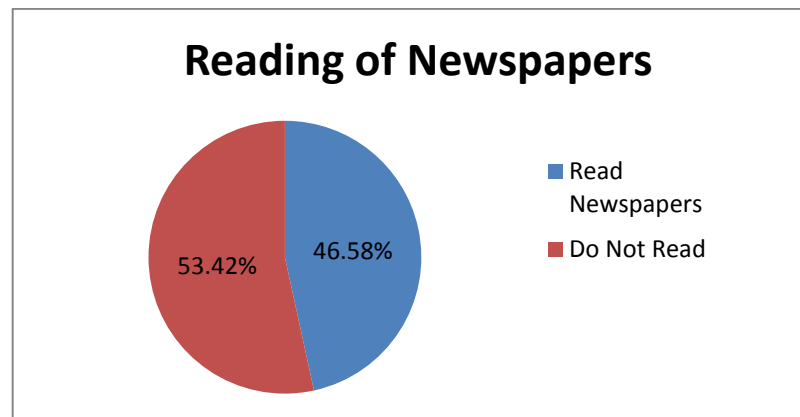
The results showed that the newspaper may not be the biggest source of news for participants. However, the results as well as findings on participants' daily and weekly readings of newspapers and their newspaper choices and preferences (see Tables 16 and 17) point to the fact that the newspaper strongly complements the electronic media as news sources.

### **8.2.3 Newspaper consumption patterns**

Regarding newspaper consumption, 136 participants, representing almost half the population said they read newspapers. Figure 20 presents this information. The results on participants who read newspapers, coupled with the proportion of those

who depended on newspapers for information (see Table 15), imply that nearly half the total survey population read newspapers. This finding suggests that newspapers remain an important source of news information for many educated Ghanaians. Thus, even in the face of competition from the electronic media as well as the Internet, the printed press in Ghana still has a significant readership, and therefore, has relevance as a source of news in the research area.

**Figure 20: Those who read and those who did not read newspapers**

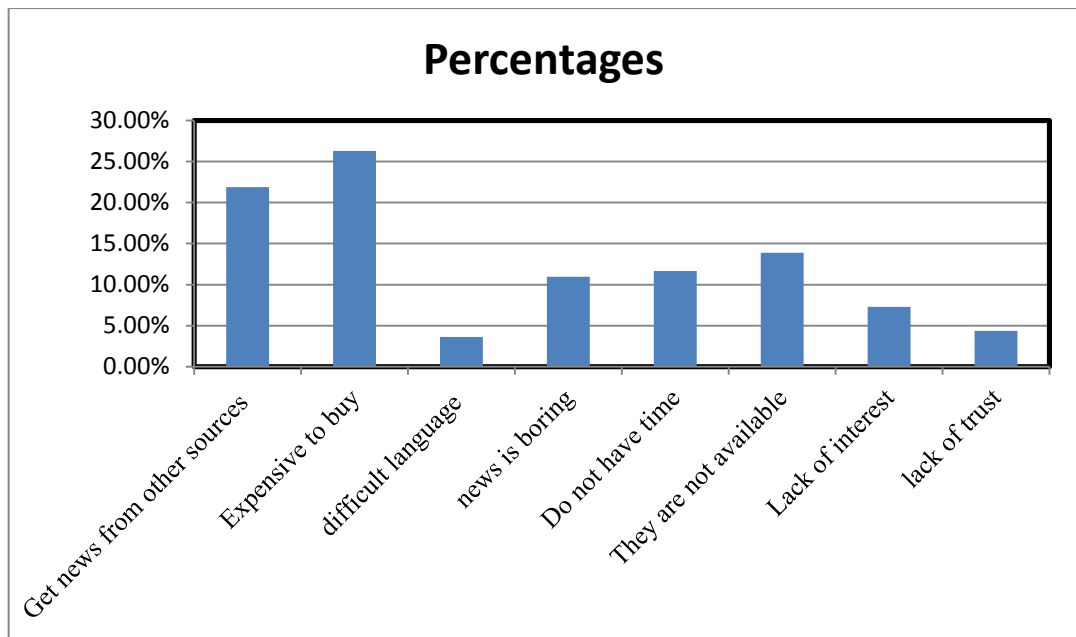


For the 156 participants who said they did not read daily newspapers, 137 adduced diverse reasons for not reading. The most common reason was that newspapers were too costly, as illustrated below in Figure 21. This could be a reason why the use of the newspaper as a source of information is not as high as other relatively cheaper media platforms such as radio and television (see Table 15). Other reasons given for not reading newspapers included the availability of other sources of news such as radio, television and internet; unavailability of newspapers; lack of time to read; finding the news boring; and the lack of interest.

Interestingly, the least frequently cited reason given by about 4% of the participants was that the language was too difficult to read and understand. Although marginal, this finding is significant because it came from educated people with at least ten years of education. This finding is contradicted by the results of the audience survey as seen later in this chapter. The survey revealed that many participants (including most of those who did not specify here that the newspapers' language was challenging) found the language of the newspapers difficult. The results, therefore, suggest importantly that some participants who thought they had no problems with understanding the newspapers actually had problems as discerned in this chapter. This suggests that they were either not aware of the extent of their

understanding, or they were not willing to concede that they had reading difficulties. The findings about language difficulty being the reason for not reading newspapers generally replicate Bowen (2010) where 21% (N=2,051) of participants (including people without formal education) found the language of newspapers too difficult to understand. This information reinforces the relevance of this study. It indicates that news production and consumption, especially news information and its comprehension, are important research issues in Ghana.

**Figure 21: Reasons for not reading newspapers**



#### **8.2.4 Frequency of newspaper reading**

Participants who said they read newspapers were also asked to indicate how often they read newspapers in an average week. Their responses are captured in Table 16. Since some participants chose different reading frequencies for different newspapers, I computed the percentages against the total counts, assuming that each count represents a participant. The results indicate that about 66% read newspapers at least two days each week. The responses also show that about one-third read newspapers daily. Importantly, these findings reveal the high level to which readers are exposed to newspapers, which in turn suggests possible influences of newspapers on such readers.

**Table 16: Frequency of newspaper reading**

<b>Frequency of Newspaper Reading</b>		
<b>Weekly Reading</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Once a Day	57	30.16%
4-5 Times a Week	24	12.70%
2-3 Times a Week	44	23.28%
At Least Once a Week	64	33.86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### 8.2.5 Newspaper choices and preferences

The 47% of the participants who said they read newspapers indicated their preferred newspapers as displayed in Table 17.

**Table 17: Newspaper consumption and preferences**

<b>Newspapers Read by Participants</b>		
<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Daily Graphic</i>	126	92.64
<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	51	37.5
<i>Daily Guide</i>	29	21.32
<i>Finder</i>	9	6.61
<i>Crusading Guide</i>	4	2.94
<i>Enquirer</i>	3	2.2
<i>Insight</i>	2	1.47
<i>Chronicle</i>	3	2.2
<i>Dispatch</i>	1	0.73
<i>Observer</i>	1	0.73
<i>Lens</i>	1	0.73
<i>Daily express</i>	1	0.73
<i>Public Agenda</i>	1	0.73
<b>Participants' Newspaper Preferences</b>		
<i>Daily Graphic</i>	110	80.88%
<i>Ghanaian Times</i>	10	7.35%
<i>Daily Guide</i>	8	5.88%
Others	8	5.88%
<b>N=136</b>		<b>100%</b>

**NB:** The percentages were based on the total number of participants (136) who read daily newspapers, and participants could choose more than one.

The results show that the overwhelming majority of newspaper readers of this study read the *Graphic* out of which 81% said it was their most preferred newspaper. The

*Times* and the *Guide* followed in that order as the most preferred and read newspapers. The rest of the newspapers, classified as ‘**Others**’ in the ‘preference’ proportion, received very little attention, some not selected by any participant. The results showed the overwhelming dominance of the newspapers used in this study, especially the *Graphic*, in terms of readership and reader preference. These findings are supported by existing research on newspaper consumption patterns in Ghana (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; Temin and Smith, 2002; Kafewo, 2006). The results also indicate that the fortunes of the *Chronicle* appeared to have dipped in recent times. However, earlier research showed that it had substantial readership and influence by 2008 (see Easmon, 1999; Dzisah, 2008).

### **8.2.6 Type of information desired in the newspapers**

Results concerning the type of information readers look out for in the newspapers indicated that news on political and social happenings, sports and entertainment received the most attention. Because participants were not restricted to only one choice, the percentage of each type of information was computed independently based on the total number of participants who said they read newspapers. Table 18 presents the results of this inquiry.

**Table 18: Type of news information participants looked out for in newspapers**

<b>Type of News</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Hard news	94	69.11%
Sports	69	50.73%
Adverts	69	50.73%
Editorial	29	21.32%
Entertainment	64	47.05%
Feature	41	30.14%
Blanks	10	7.35%
<b>Others</b>	7	5.14%
<b>N=136</b>		

The results show that a vast majority of participants desired political and social news. That the majority of participants read ‘hard news’ (which was explained to participants as news on socio-political issues, especially those featured on front pages) makes the readability and comprehension of front-page news relevant for research attention. Such stories cover political and social news that newspaper

organisations consider the most important information of the day for their readers and society.

### **8.2.7 Qualitative analysis and findings on comprehending news information**

The demographic and newspaper readership information presented above provides insight into the background of the hypothetical readers of the newspapers. It informs the subsequent analysis and discussion of the issues regarding the comprehension of the language of the newspapers. The data for the analysis were collected through responses to a reading comprehension test during the survey. Since *comprehension*, as a construct, is central to this analysis, the next section situates the concept within the context of the study, after which the analysis, findings and discussion of the critical data follow.

### **8.2.8 Analytical conceptualisation of ‘comprehension’**

Comprehension is essentially a mental process, which can best be measured through psycho-linguistics, cognitive or scientific (laboratory) experimental studies, among others, but these are beyond the competence and scope of this study. Therefore, to analytically assess or measure comprehension, I proposed and adopted measures based on the role of a reader’s linguistic skills (vocabulary and syntactic abilities) in the reading and comprehension process.

The assessment criterion for text comprehension and difficulty in this analysis was based on participant’s attitudes and opinions in relation to the process of reading and comprehension. In other words and following Razik (1969) and Bjornsson (1983), it is possible to know whether a reader finds the language of the various passages easy or difficult to understand:

- if the participant (who is faced with the language) says so;
- if the participant demonstrates understanding by providing an appropriate meaning to the word or expression concerned; and / or
- if the attitude of the participant (that is, if he or she did not provide any meaning affirming his or her understanding) points to that.

The above conceptualisation stems from the understanding that text difficulty is a dependent variable referring to the actual or anticipated performance of readers

based on assessment of a text or text feature (Mesmer *et al.*, 2012). In this respect, comprehension and understanding occur subsequently as interchangeable terms.

### **8.2.9 Comprehension of newspaper texts**

Sections B and C of the survey instrument were used to elicit crucial responses to help answer the research questions on the readability, comprehension and other implications concerning the extent to which participants acquire information directly from newspapers. Put together, there are three patterns of information that these two sections generated and the presentation follows this order. The first pattern involves information on the first four extracts in Section B, while the second is based on questions on two extracts (Extract 5 in Section B and Passage C in Section C) both of which produced similar information on similar extracts. The last pattern concerned an original passage and its revised version where participants indicated and explained which one they found easier and preferred to be used in newspapers. Relating these patterns to the research questions, the first two patterns provided information to answer the second and third research questions (the extent to which readers comprehend the language of the newspapers and the extent to which readers are included directly in the discourse of the press), while the last pattern provided information to answer the last research question.

#### **8.2.9.1 First pattern of information**

Information concerning the first pattern came from the four extracts (in Section B of the questionnaire form). Three sets of information were derived from each of the extracts. The first set of questions, B1, B5, B9, and B13, asked participants' opinion about the language style of each respective extract in terms of how the language helped or hindered their understanding. The second set, B2, B6, B10, and B14, sought to find out if participants understood selected lexical items in each passage. Those who said they understood the expressions were required to provide the meaning, while those who did not understand any lexical items simply chose *No* and moved on to the next question. The third set of questions, B4, B8, B12, and B16, involved choosing responses from a three-level Likert scale to describe each respective extract in terms of *easy*, *difficult* or *can't say*.

In presenting the results, I varied the sequences of the information, following insights from the pilot study, to construct a logical flow of information from participants. Participants' understanding of the vocabulary items is first presented

(second set), followed by their opinion on the language style (first set), after which participants' general description of the text based on their earlier responses (third step) is presented. Taken together, these responses helped to describe the language of the text as well as the ability of readers to read and understand it. In this way, the responses helped to support or contradict the answer to the first research question (the textual findings) and also contributed to answering the second and third research questions.

**8.2.9.1.1 Comprehension of lexical items**

The lexical items specifically investigated in the survey included thirteen nominalisation/Latinate words and three phrasal verbs. Table 19 presents these items, which were distributed in the four extracts under discussion (See the questionnaire form in Appendix 6 for their contextual occurrences.)

**Table 19: The lexical elements of inquiry**

<b>Latinate and Abstract Words</b>		<b>Phrasal Verbs</b>
<b>Nominalisations</b>	<b>Latinate Expressions</b>	
Prevalence	Adduced	Called for
Prosecution	Antecedents	Rope in
Extension	Informal sector	Penciled in
Government	Verbally assaulted	
Security	Obscene	
	Cabinet	
	Upsurge	
	sabotaged	

For accepted meanings of the lexical elements, I applied a combination of methods. These included the use of KWIC meanings from concordance listings for each of the words, validation of model meanings by experts, and further validation by lecturers of GIJ. I briefly explain these methods. First, drawing on Biber *et al.* (1998), Adolphs (2006) and other scholars, I produced a concordance list of each word and noted the meanings of the words in context. For instance, a concordance



list of *prosecution* in Figure 22 shows that the word has two meanings: *a person or those (Lawyer, etc.) accusing a defendant or someone before court* and *trial in a court of law*. From the context of the word in Extract 1, it is realised that the meaning in this instance is the first one, that is, *a person or those (Lawyer, etc.) accusing a defendant or someone before court*. Some of the concordance listings for some of the words investigated had only one meaning for a lexical unit, for example, the phrasal verb *rope in* had one meaning from the context, which is, *include*. These meanings served as the first step toward generating possible acceptable meanings for the respective lexical items. This approach to lexical and grammatical meanings has been advocated and used in reference grammars such as Biber *et al.* (1999) and Carter and McCarthy (eds.) (2006).

**Figure 22: Concordance list of *prosecution* for its meaning**

N	Concordance	Set	Word #	Sent	Para	Para	Hea	Hea	Se
1	loans to quickly do so in order to avoid prosecution.		703	15	100	0	100		
2	of the accident as claimed by the prosecution. It said the test result of 0.		477	14	100	0	48%		
3	ended in March 2008 with the prosecution calling a total of 13		272	8	74%	0	95%		
4	up his window glasses." He said the prosecution was able to prove that		662	20	13%	0	67%		
5	be brought to court. According to the prosecution, Goodies swallowed 80		275	11	25%	0	67%		
6	adduced against the convicts by the prosecution, the character and		282	10	67%	0	61%		
7	Amoatia Ofori Panin, has called for the prosecution of traditional rulers found		21	0	68%	0	3%		
8	he was in office. It was the case of the prosecution that Valley Farms,		590	16	22%	0	91%		
9	the sentence. It congratulated the prosecution on calling eight witnesses		299	11	29%	0	64%		
10	Attorney General, he authorised the prosecution of his colleague who was		1,179	39	28%	0	74%		
11	hours, Justice Yeboah held that the prosecution was able to prove beyond		214	8	29%	0	31%		
12	get the statement of the victim for the prosecution of the case without		158	4	83%	0	35%		
13	and discharged by the court after the prosecution failed to prove a case		155	5	82%	0	22%		
14	by the court on December 20, after the prosecution filed a nolle prosequi		958	30	33%	0	97%		
15	narcotic drugs, the trial judge said the prosecution failed to lead evidence that		311	10	44%	0	32%		
16	Chief State Attorney, who led the prosecution team yesterday, described		702	31	35%	0	83%		
17	the police to prepare adequately for the prosecution of Mr Nuro Bediako. ASP		492	18	89%	0	82%		
18	took away his car keys also. The prosecution had earlier told the court		605	21	13%	0	83%		
19	week Wednesday, Ataa Ayi cursed the prosecution, investigators and police		46	1	41%	0	6%		
20	to play its expected role while the prosecution aspect of its work is left		342	8	37%	0	73%		
21	ground for convicting the accused. The prosecution, he said was able to show		524	17	12%	0	44%		
22	EC will not hesitate in calling for their prosecution after this exercise," Dr		45	1	61%	0	6%		
23	government which had failed to bring to prosecution, suspected criminals who		485	14	65%	0	74%		

Secondly, I presented the extracts with the identified words and the list of acceptable meanings to the two experts who moderated the questionnaire form for validation. I then tested the validated meanings of each expression again by asking five lecturers at GIJ to choose those they considered the same as the identified lexical elements in the original contexts. Any three or more similar choices were

included in the final list of suggested acceptable meanings. Based on these processes, I produced model answers and used them to assess the responses of participants who said they understood the expressions. The list of the various acceptable meanings are attached as Crib Sheet 1 (Appendix 7).

In the analysis of the lexical items and their meaning, I acknowledge the fact that ‘comprehension’ is slippery, highly abstract, internal to the reader, and difficult to pin down objectively. Thus, the process was not considered as a strict academic comprehension examination. There was reasonable flexibility in deciding responses that were either appropriate to the context of the passages or not. For instance, a verb expressing past time such as ‘*sabotaged*’, is expected to elicit a corresponding meaning that reflected the past time. However, meanings in the present (such as, sabotage or sabotages) or infinitive forms (to sabotage) were accepted. In other words, any responses that in a way showed an idea or association with the selected words or expressions in the context of the passages were accepted. For instance, ***adduced***, (which in the context means *presented, made available, gathered, etc.*) attracted expressions such as *raised, specified, brought*, among others, which were deemed acceptable. Figure 23 presents the overall findings for vocabulary in the four extracts.

The results involved three major responses: ***Yes***, ***No***, and ***Blank***. The portion labelled ‘**Yes**’ refers to all participants who said they understood each word, and it also represents the sum of the following choices: ‘**Yes (correct)**’, ‘**Yes (wrong)**’, ‘**Yes (blank)**’, and ‘**Can’t Explain**’. The next major result was those who said “**No**”, which means that they did not understand and so did not have to give any meaning. The compartment labelled ***Blank*** has participants who did not provide any response. Participants in this category (that is, those who did not specify whether they understood the word or expressions) were included or classified as not understanding the expression concerned. This was because, when asked specifically why they did not provide any response, the participants concerned said they did not know what to write, which could imply that they did not understand the words concerned.

For the sub-responses of ***Yes***, the portion labelled ‘**Yes (correct)**’ captures those who said that they understood the word or expression and provided an acceptable meaning. The next box, ‘**Yes (wrong)**’, represents those who said they

understood but supplied an unacceptable meaning, which implies in the circumstances that they did not know the word or expression. ‘**Yes (blank)**’ refers to those who said they understood but did not provide any meaning, which could also mean in the circumstances that they could not give the meaning because they did not understand.

**Figure 23: Overall population’s understanding of words/expressions of the four extracts**

EXTRACT 1									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1 =	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2 =
	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	
Prevalence	46.58	<b>49.32</b>	4.10	292	55.15	<b>42.65</b>	0.73	1.47	136
Adduced	28.77	<b>66.44</b>	4.79	292	65.48	<b>29.76</b>	1.19	3.57	84
Prosecution	48.63	<b>45.55</b>	5.82	292	34.51	<b>61.27</b>	2.81	1.41	142
Antecedent	22.26	<b>72.60</b>	5.14	292	53.85	<b>36.92</b>	1.54	7.69	65
EXTRACT 2									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1 =	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2 =
Called for	73.63	<b>21.92</b>	4.45	292	65.58	<b>30.70</b>	0.93	2.79	215
Extension	71.92	<b>24.31</b>	3.77	292	63.81	<b>30.95</b>	0.00	4.76	210
Rope in	48.29	<b>45.89</b>	5.82	292	63.12	<b>34.04</b>	0.00	2.84	141
Informal Sector	39.38	<b>53.08</b>	7.53	292	56.52	<b>34.78</b>	1.74	6.96	115
EXTRACT 3									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1 =	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2 =
Verbally assault	65.07	<b>29.11</b>	5.82	292	94.21	<b>3.68</b>	0.53	1.58	190
Obscene	33.56	<b>59.93</b>	6.51	292	67.35	<b>27.55</b>	0.00	5.10	98
Sabotaged	48.63	<b>46.23</b>	5.14	292	66.90	<b>27.46</b>	1.41	4.23	142
Government	68.49	<b>26.03</b>	5.48	292	74.50	<b>21.00</b>	1.00	3.50	200
EXTRACT 4									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1 =	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2 =
Pencilled in	39.38	<b>56.85</b>	3.77	292	46.96	<b>48.69</b>	0.87	3.48	115
Security	60.96	<b>34.59</b>	4.45	292	83.15	<b>10.11</b>	1.68	5.06	178
Cabinet	46.58	<b>46.23</b>	7.19	292	33.82	<b>59.56</b>	2.21	4.41	136
Upsurge	24.66	<b>68.15</b>	7.19	292	70.83	<b>22.22</b>	1.39	5.56	72

- Key to the Figure:**
1. **Yes** refers to the total number of participants who said they understood the selected word/expression.
  2. **No** stands for those participants who said they did not understand the words/expressions.
  3. **Blank** represents those who did not respond to the question at all.
  4. **NI** is the overall population

5. *N2* refers to **YES**, that is the total number of participants who said they understood a word
6. **Yes (Correct)** is for those who said they understood and supplied the appropriate meaning to support that.
7. **Yes (wrong)** refers to those who said they understood but provided meanings that were inappropriate, implying that they did not understand.
8. **Yes (No Ans)** is for those who said they understood the words or expressions but did not provide any meaning to support their understanding.

The results show that a considerable proportion of participants, ranging from **22% to 73%** of the 292 participants (See bold portion of Figure 23 under *No*) said they did not understand the words. On average, **46%**, nearly half the total population said they did not understand the various words. Similarly, between 4% and 61% who said they understood the words and expressions provided meanings that were unacceptable, thereby implying that they did not actually understand after all [see section under **Yes (wrong)**]. For example, *called for* in Extract 2 recorded the least number of participants (22%) who said they did not understand the expression, but about a third of those who said they understood the expression supplied unsuitable meanings. For the other words, there were similar or more proportions of participants who said they understood the words and expressions but could not supply the meanings. There were yet others who said they understood the expressions but did not provide any meaning to that effect (see section under ‘**Yes blank**’). Therefore, a total of the results of ‘*No*’, ‘**Yes wrong**’, and ‘**Yes blank**’ constitute those who are theoretically deemed not to have understood the expressions, and the findings far outweigh those who understood the sampled linguistic elements.

A closer analysis of participants’ meanings suggests that most readers misunderstood what they read. Results in Figure 23 show that between a high of **74%** (for *called for*) and a low of **22%** (for *antecedent*) of the participants said they understood the expressions, and out of this number, between **4%** and **61%** provided unacceptable meanings. In fact, more than **32%**, again about a third, of participants who said they understood the sixteen lexical items supplied unsuitable responses.

These findings appear to suggest a problem with the communication potential of the news extracts under discussion.

Although the task of identifying the source of such misunderstandings (error analysis) falls outside the objective of this thesis, an examination of the unacceptable responses indicates that most participants guessed meaning from the context of the extracts. For instance, it is clear from the choice of words that Extract 1 concerns a court proceeding. Hence, for a word like *adduced*, some participants provided meanings such as *accusation*, *support with evidence*, *alleged*, and so on, and for prosecution, some said *to convict or punish a person*, *justice*, *persuit (sic) of legal action*, *accuse*, among others. Concerning the phrasal verb, *called for*, in Extract 2, some participants gave meanings such as *invited*, *initiate the meeting*, and *draw attention*. This suggests that those participants did not understand the phrasal form but tried to guess the meaning from context as well as from the meanings of the individual words in the combination.

Narrowing the analysis onto the tertiary (N=155) and SHS/post SHS (N=95) educational levels (sub-variables that are of particular interest because of the study's advocacy position) indicates that many participants across the two educational sub-variables had comprehension problems with the words (see Appendix 8). Since the various educational categories had different proportions within the overall population, the analysis focused on proportions within each category, creating a clearer picture of how each educational subcategory related to this linguistic problem.

For participants in the tertiary category, between **12%** (for *extension*) and **61%** (for *antecedent*) did not understand the words and **3%** (for *verbally assaulted*) and **52%** (for *cabinet*) said they understood but could not provide appropriate meanings. Similarly, between **26%** (for *extension*) and **84%** (for *antecedent*) of those in the SHS/post SHS level did not understand the lexical items, and of those who said they understood, between **6%** (for *verbally assaulted*) and **81%** (for *prosecution*) could not provide a suitable meaning although they claimed to understand the expressions. On average, considerable proportions of **33%** of the tertiary population and **57%** of the SHS/Post SHS group said they did not understand the meaning of these words. These results show that difficulty with the items under study is not limited to people of low educational attainment. In fact,

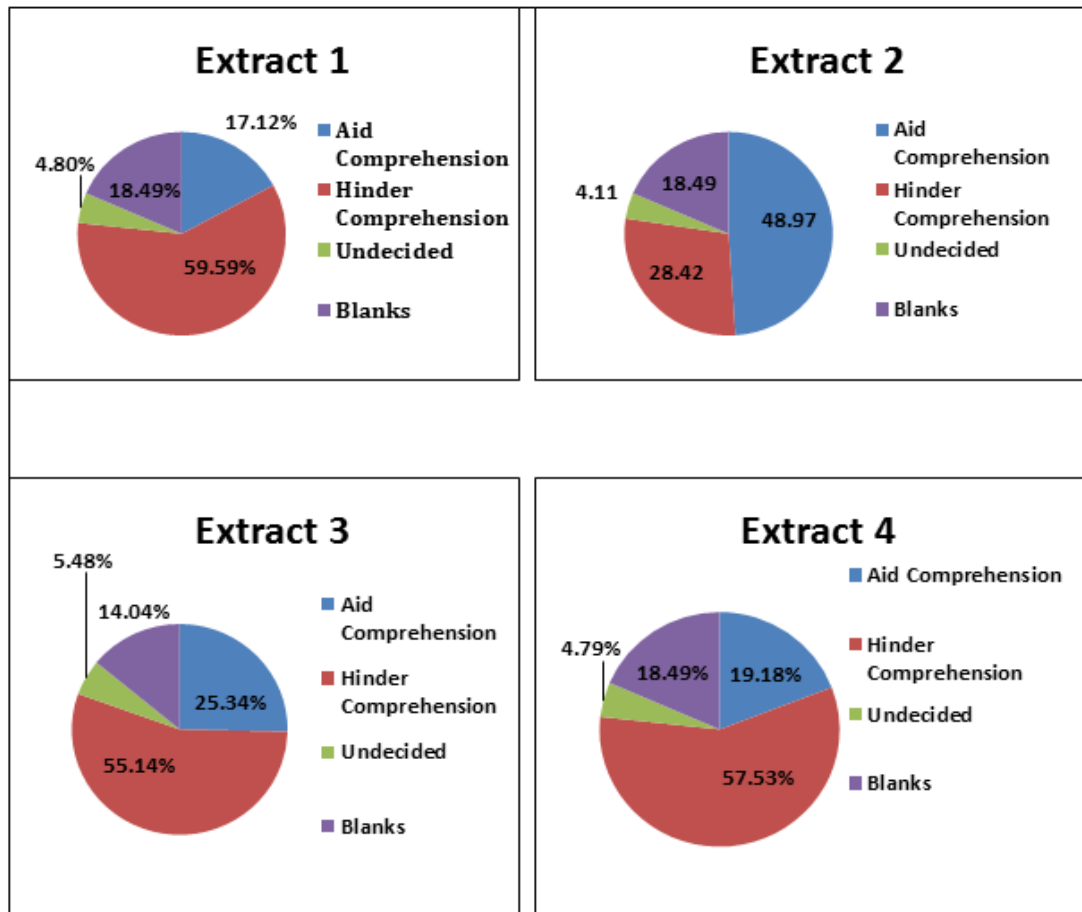
findings concerning the tertiary level participants are particularly significant because one would expect that people of such high educational levels should not be challenged by the language problem discovered in the study.

#### **8.2.9.1.2 Whether language style aided or hindered understanding**

Closely linked to the previous section is information participants provided about their opinion on the language style of extracts 1 to 4. Participants read and provided their opinion on the linguistic structure of each of the extracts in terms of the extent to which the choice of words and sentence structure helped or hindered their understanding. Being a qualitative analysis, I used phrases in their responses to categorise participants into those who felt the language aided their understanding, those who felt that the language hindered their understanding, and those who were undecided (that is, an extract both aided and hindered their comprehension). For example, expressions such as *easy (to understand), understandable, simple words, suit my level, simple language*, and so on, means the language aided their understanding; while expressions such as *difficult (to understand), hard, complicated, complex language, don't understand, sentence too long*, among others, also mean the language hindered their understanding. And responses such as *it was ok but a little difficult, some of the words are difficult but I understand*, among others, were grouped as undecided responses. Figure 24 presents these results.

The analysis indicates that the language style of the four extracts largely hindered the understanding of a majority of the overall population. From Figure 24, **50%** of the participants complained about the complex and difficult nature of the language of the Extracts. In exception of Extract 2 with **49%**, the rest of the extracts recorded relatively low proportions (compared to those who said it hindered their understanding) of between **17%** and **25%** of those who felt the language aided their understanding. These results are significant since collectively, they show that only about a quarter of the whole participant population felt the language helped them to understand the extracts. The significance of these findings lies in the fact that the majority of participants were people with tertiary level educational attainment. Similar results were obtained across the educational subcategories.

**Figure 24: Participants' opinions about the language style of news stories**



Mostly similar reasons were given for the above opinions across the four extracts. Those who said the language obstructed their understanding gave reasons including the words being technical, hard, difficult, high, complex, unfamiliar, long sentences, complicated expressions, among others. Illustrations of participants' views are presented verbatim as follows<sup>55</sup>:

- The technical words associated with some of the writings make it difficult to comprehend what the writer is trying to put across.
- Language style not all that simple since some of the words are too big and technical to understand. Infact some of the words I have to refer to a dictionary before understanding.
- The language should have been broken down a little into simpler words. One need to think a little to understand and not all readers would understand.
- News like this is supposed to be for the average Ghanaian. The language is ambiguous, complex and not easy to understand even for the literates.

<sup>55</sup> As indicated earlier, the direct quotation from participants' responses throughout the thesis is verbatim; thus, any errors are from source and should be understood as such even without the application of 'sic'.

- I think the language is too high for the standards of most Ghanaians, thus I think the language should be simple.

As seen in the above responses, participants expressed frustration about the language and stressed the efforts they had to put in to understand. Importantly, some recommended the simplification of the language, while others (the last but one response, for instance) expressed the feeling that the language was beyond the level of even educated Ghanaians. Going by the relatively acceptable (except for a few grammatical mistakes) linguistic ability as seen in the responses above, it could be argued that the reading and comprehension problem could be blamed on the language of the text and not so much on the readers' incompetence in English.

Participants who said the language suited and helped them to understand the extracts also offered various reasons for their opinions. To some, the language was appropriate for the domain or activity being described (that is, in the case of the use of jargons or technical expressions), while others felt the language was simple, easy, clear and acceptable. Examples of some responses would do in this case, too.

- Well, I think the sentence is OK and it is quite understandable.
- The language is that of what it should be when one is reporting from the courts. One would have to be conversant with the court system and proceedings to understand.
- The words are quite simple and clear.
- The language style is simple. It enhances good reading and understanding
- It's okay. It's very professional and technical that would help others to sharpen their vocabulary.

Hence, some participants were comfortable with the language style. Some based their reasons on the simple, clear and understandable nature of the writing, while others felt the technical words suited the context of the contents. Some participants also felt the complex language was good because it helped readers to improve on their (English) language skills.

#### **8.2.9.1.3 Describing the newspaper text**

Findings involving participants' description of the newspaper text in terms of whether overall they found the extracts easy, difficult or they could not say, corresponded with results of the previous two steps. The descriptive statistics that has been the main analytical procedure of the study, applied the ordinal level of measurement. Results from the Likert scale indicate that significant proportions of



respondents across the educational divide found the extracts difficult, as displayed in Figure 25.

**Figure 25: Participants' description of the newspaper text in percentages**

<b>Overall Population</b>					
<b>Extract</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	
<b>1</b>	68.15	14.38	16.44	1.03	100
<b>2</b>	35.96	46.92	15.41	1.71	100
<b>3</b>	48.97	30.48	18.15	2.40	100
<b>4</b>	60.62	16.10	18.49	4.79	100
<b>Tertiary</b>					
<b>Extract</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	67.10	15.48	16.77	0.65	100
<b>2</b>	27.74	54.20	16.77	1.29	100
<b>3</b>	43.22	34.84	20.00	1.94	100
<b>4</b>	54.84	18.06	21.29	5.81	100
<b>SHS &amp; Post SHS</b>					
<b>Extract</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	67.37	12.63	17.89	2.11	100
<b>2</b>	36.84	45.26	15.79	2.11	100
<b>3</b>	51.58	28.42	17.89	2.11	100
<b>4</b>	62.10	15.79	18.95	3.16	100

The results for the overall population indicate that more than a third of the total participants (**36%** for Extract 2 and **68%** for Extract 1) found the four newspaper passages difficult, with between **14%** ( Extract 1) and **47%** (Extract 2) finding the passages easy. A high of 18% (Extract 4) and a low of 15% (Extract 2) were undecided about whether the passages were easy or difficult. The same trend is replicated with results across both the extracts and educational categories. For the tertiary educational category, a significant proportion of between **28%** and **67%** found it difficult, while between as high as **37%** and **67%** of participants in the SHS groups said the extracts were difficult.

Remarkably, the degree of results from high to low across the extracts is the same for the extracts across the educational categories as well as for the overall population. Thus, Extract 1 and Extract 2 proved consistently to be the most and the least difficult respectively across the groupings, while Extract 2 and Extract 1 recorded the highest and least easy, respectively. Similarly, Extract 4 and 2 received the highest and lowest choices respectively for those who were undecided across the educational divide as was the case with the overall population. This consistency provides a high level of validity for the study relative to this aspect of the analysis. This is because it showed a trend that consistently reflected the natural differences in the complexity levels of the extracts, as inferred from the responses of the different participants.

This leads to the question of the linguistic causes of the differences in the difficulty levels of the extracts. It was discovered that the difference between the most difficult (Extract 1) and the least difficult (Extract 2) extracts was marked in clauses and nominalisations/Latinate expressions. Although Extract 2 is longer by fifteen words and has two phrasal verb forms, the coloured part of Table 20 indicates that readers found Extract 1 more difficult because it contained more clauses and nominalisations/Latinate expressions. Most of the lexical items of Extract 2 are names, titles of institutions and other lexical items that might have been familiar to the readers. These include *Mr Wilson Atta Krofah, President of the Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GNCCI), Registrar General's Department (RGD), business registration facilities, regional and district capitals* and so on.

**Table 20: Source of difference in difficulty levels between extracts**

<b><u>Linguistic Variable</u></b>	<b><u>Extract 1</u></b>	<b><u>Extract 2</u></b>
Length of Sentence	38	53
No. of Clauses	3	1
No. of Nominalisations/Latinate	13	6
No. of Phrasal Verbs	-	2

This finding suggests that, while sentence length and phrasal verbs may contribute to text difficulty, the number of clauses and occurrences of

nominalisations/Latinate words influence the complexity and difficulty levels of a text more than other linguistic variables. The finding also indicates that a text in which many of the sentences contain more than one clause (that is, a complex sentence) with a significant number of nominalisations/Latinate expressions could be the most challenging to Ghanaian readers. This is significant because the linguistic analysis indicates that each sentence of the newspapers is complex and that each text or story has a considerable number of nominalisations/Latinate expressions (see Table 13 and section 7.2.2.1.5).

### **8.2.9.2 Second pattern of information**

To complement efforts in the previous subsections to answer the second and third research questions, participants explained or re-wrote two passages to express their understanding. The passages were an original newspaper passage (Extract 5), and its revised version (Passage C), and which occur on the questionnaire form as questions B17 and C3, respectively. The idea was to locate the contribution of syntax in the text difficulty inquiry as the previous section has investigated that for lexis. The original passage is reproduced below with a brief background to its meaning.

*THE MEDIA blitz, which Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom relished during his showing at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) presidential debates, is being threatened by a simmering credibility crisis which has broken out in the Convention People's Party (CPP).*

**Background to the Passage:** This passage was part of a news story on presidential debates in which the various presidential candidates for the 2008 multi-party elections answered various questions about why they should be voted into office as the President of Ghana. The debates were organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs, Ghana (IEA) during the run-up to the general elections. After the events, the media presented glowing stories about Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom's performances: that he was outstanding. Dr Nduom was then the Presidential Candidate for Convention People's Party (CPP), one of the contending parties in the elections. The debates occurred within the backdrop of accusations about his loyalty to his party, the (CPP) since, among others, he was then a minister of state in the Government of the then ruling NPP.

I agree that one needs to have this background by either being in Ghana at that time or following political happenings in the country in order to 'really' understand the extract. The participants in the survey (it was ensured) were accordingly Ghanaians

who had been in the country from at least 2007 to the date of the survey and were likely to be familiar with the happenings captured in this and the other extracts used in the study.

The revision of the above original passage was done with the rationale of trying to locate the source of text difficulty for readers. The idea was to discover whether the cause of difficulty lay in the syntax (sentence structure) or lexis (words). Therefore, in the revised version, the complex sentence was converted into a compound one by eliminating the relative clause, while the passive form in the original was also made active. In this way, the revision simplified the syntactic structure of the original extract. However, the key lexical items in the original extract were maintained in the revised version. The theory behind the revision has been explained in Chapter 6 under the survey research design. The point is that if readers found the revised variant markedly easy, it means the source of difficulty was in the syntax, but if they reacted similarly to both passages, or if the revised extract proved more difficult as per the results, then the source of difficulty was in the lexis.

Concerning model meanings of the two rewrite passages, I again relied on meanings provided by the two experts who validated the content of the questionnaire form. As expected within the cultural perspective of interpretive meaning making (Hall, 1980), the experts' meanings, although similar, showed nuances of variation concerning individual biases and word choice. To select a model for the analysis, I again exposed the meanings and the original passages to five GIJ lecturers. I then adopted the explanations that had at least four picks as meaning the same as the original passages. These became the respective analytical models for the two rewrite passages (see Appendix 7).

During the analysis, the model passages were used to measure participants' explanations based on the extent to which the explanations were close to or far away from the expected meaning. This approach became necessary because the rewrite questions prompted an ultimate or interpretive meaning, which was difficult to determine in near exact terms. Additionally, the assessment of comprehension across the Ghanaian educational system requires comprehenders to either paraphrase or summarise their explanations to show their understanding, and these procedures require the use of very few words and expressions ('lifted') from the comprehension

passage. Thus, the assessment dilemma was to determine the permissible number of words participants could 'lift' from the passage, as well as what happens when participants provided only half meanings or meanings that did not fully reflect the ideas of the passage.

In view of the above dilemma, an expert in reading and comprehension at the University of Leeds, Faculty of Education, Dr Paula Clarke,<sup>56</sup> explained the difficulty in accurately testing reading comprehension in a situation where people have to provide extensive answers in writing. This is because the method implies that one is testing two skills: interpretive understanding as well as writing and self-expression. This realisation demanded a new line of analysis.

I therefore used a blend of approaches to assess the rewrites. I considered the proportion of participants who complained that any of the passages were difficult. Secondly, I used the participants' opinion about the extent to which they found the two passages (the original and its variant) easy or difficult (that is, responses to questions B18 and C4). Additionally, I qualitatively analysed the rewrites or responses provided by participants for an understanding of how communicative the passages were to the study population. I did not consider the 'blanks' here because it was impossible to ascribe meaning to why participants left them. Although many of such participants said they did not know what to write, that alone could not provide any conclusive basis for their action in this particular instance.

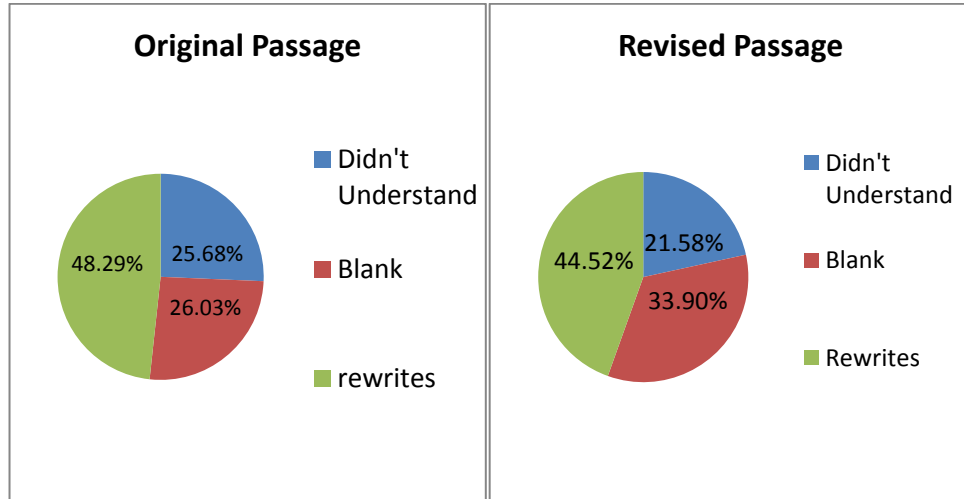
The analysis revealed various suggestive insights about where the source of difficulty is likely to reside in the linguistic structure, and how communicative the passages were. As indicated in Figure 26, about a quarter of the survey participants said they did not understand the original passage, while about 22% said they could not comprehend the revised version. Almost half the overall population explained or wrote their version of both passages. There were huge occurrences of blanks of about 30% of participants for both passages perhaps because this particular aspect required much writing. It could be that participants just did not want to go through

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<sup>56</sup> Dr Clarke offered this explanation in a discussion with this researcher on the issue of assessing reading and comprehension. For details about the expert, see: <http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/people/academic/clarke>

the task of rewriting or they just did not understand but did not want to say so. It is because of such uncertainties that it was impossible to rationalise the blanks.

**Figure 26: Proportion of overall participants who could not understand the rewrite passages**



The results concerning the percentage of those who did not understand the two passages imply that slightly fewer participants said they did not understand the revised than the original passage. It suggests that the original extract was slightly more difficult. This conclusion is reinforced by participants' opinion about whether they found the two extracts difficult, easy or they could not say, as presented in Figure 27. The results indicate in the overall population and the various educational levels that participants consistently found the original passage more difficult than its revised version.

For the overall population and tertiary subgroup, there was about **10%** difference between the results for the original and revised extracts with more participants finding the original difficult and fewer participants finding the original easier to understand. In other words, more participants found the original passage difficult compared to the revised, and more participants found the revised easier compared to the original passage. These results correlate with findings that simplifying a text for readers improves readability by about **10%** (Greene *et al.*, 2012). The gap between the results for the original and revised versions in the context of this discussion begins to widen predictably to about 20% in the SHS/post SHS level.

**Figure 27: Participants' opinion on ease or difficulty of the passages**

	<b>OVERALL POPULATION</b>				
<b>TYPE OF PASSAGE</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Original Passage</b>	57.20%	15.41%	15.75%	11.64%	100.00%
<b>Revised Passage</b>	46.57%	23.29%	16.44%	13.70%	100.00%
	<b>TERTIARY</b>				
	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Original Passage</b>	50.32%	20.00%	16.78%	12.90%	100.00%
<b>Revised Passage</b>	41.29%	30.32%	14.84%	13.55%	100.00%
	<b>SHS &amp; Post SHS</b>				
	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Original Passage</b>	60.00%	12.63%	16.84%	10.53%	100.00%
<b>Revised Passage</b>	41.05%	18.95%	22.11%	17.89%	100.00%
	<b>JHS &amp; Post JHS</b>				
	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Easy</b>	<b>Can't say</b>	<b>Blank</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Original Passage</b>	78.05%	4.88%	7.32%	9.75%	100.00%
<b>Revised Passage</b>	78.05%	7.32%	9.75%	4.88%	100.00%

- **Number:** The reference number on the questionnaire form
- **Difficult:** Participants who said they found the extract difficult
- **Easy:** Participants who said they found the extract easy
- **Can't say:** Participants who said they could not tell whether the extract was difficult or easy
- **Blank:** Participants who did not provide any response

The results of the two analytical procedures suggest strongly that syntactic complexity (complex sentences and passive forms) contributed to the original text's difficulty. However, the high proportions of those who did not understand the revised versions in both Figure 26 (between 22% and 26%) and Figure 27, (about 41%) across the tertiary and SHS/Post SHS categories indicate that syntactic complicity alone could not account for the problem. Lexical complexity also accounted for the difficulty since most of the nominalisations and Latinate expressions in the original were maintained in the revised passage.

Participants' responses concerning their understanding of the original and revised passages showed that the passages did not communicate effectively to them. Three categories of responses could be deduced in the rewrites of the 130 (45%) and

141 (48%) participants who responded to the original and revised extracts respectively. The first category was responses that were almost close in meaning to the model rewrites. These were few for both passages, constituting not more than 15% for each passage. Instances of such responses included the following, presented verbatim:

**Original extract:**

- Dr Nduom's favorable publicity gained from a strong showing at the IEA presidential debate is diminishing due to internal party problems.
- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom seemed to have performed excellently at the IEA, but he seems to have problem with his own party, CPP as a result of credibility.
- The CPP have raised concerns about Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom's credibility despite the brilliant performance he put up at the presidential debates.
- Though his performance at the IEA debate was great the party's internal problems is overshadowing this great showing.

**Revised extract:**

- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom enjoyed the media hype during his showing at the IEA presidential debates but an attack on either his person or the credibility of the CPP is adversely affecting his popularity.
- Dr Nduom's surge in popularity after the IEA debate has diminished due to credibility issues in the CPP.
- Paa Kwesi Nduom enjoys media popularity during his showing at Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) debate, but credibility crises in his party is threatening this popularity.
- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom enjoyed the media coverage of his showing at the IEA. But crises in the CPP is threatening his popularity.

It is clear that participants 'borrowed' more words from the revised extract in their responses unlike the responses they provided for the original extract. This could be perhaps because the revision made it convenient for them to paraphrase using those same words.

The second class of responses consists of those that were not altogether close to the model rewrites, but also not altogether farfetched from the original passages. These form the majority of the responses for both passages. The responses here brought out only partial meanings or included other meanings that were unconnected with the original passages. This suggests that participants could not fully understand or connect the various ideas contained in the extracts. Examples of these responses are presented verbatim below.



**Original extract:**

- Dr Nduom's remarkable work throughout the years which the media has brought to the lime light after his splendid performance at IEA debate is at the verge of going down the drain after issues regarding the CPP has raised various concerns which need to be addressed.
- The media fun given to Paa Kwesi Nduom during his appearance at the institute of economic affairs (IEA) presentation debate was threatened with question on crises within the convention people's party (CPP)
- The credibility crisis in the Convention People's Party is causing Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom to lose popularity.
- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom after being hailed publicly after the debates at the IEA is facing problems in proving himself eligible in the CPP.

**Revised extract:**

- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom dazzled at the IEA encounter, but unfortunately he is having problem with credibility, which is affecting his popularity in his own party i.e., CPP
- The credibility crisis in the Convention People's Party is causing Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom to lose popularity.
- Although Nduom achieved great feats during the presidential debate rumours around him in the party is toning down his fame.
- Paa Kwesi Nduom's media blitz at the IEA is threatening his popularity.

The third category was those responses whose meanings were completely different from the model rewrites to warrant any consideration as reflecting any of the two passages. These responses constituted about **30%** and **25%** respectively of participants who provided rewrites for the two passages. A careful scrutiny of these rewrites showed that participants appeared not to have understood the language and, therefore, used their background knowledge to bring in issues that had happened but were unconnected with the passages. Some also tried to connect the crisis in the CPP with Dr Nduom's performance at the debates when, in fact, the two had no causal relationship. Some instances of these types of response are again presented verbatim below.

**Original extract:**

- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom liked the media's defeat during his turn at the IEA presidential debate though the CPP's shaking credibility crises is threatening his chance.
- Paa Kwesi said at the presidential debate that he is being threatened by some crises which had broken out in CPP.
- The attitude of Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom towards the media during his encounter with the Institute Of Economic Affairs has reduced his credibility in the Convention people's party.

- Dr Nduom is seen as not fully belonging to the CPP to represent them at the IEA presidential debate.

**Revised extract:**

- Nduom came out with a kind speech of which reduces the conviction people have for him.
- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom enjoyed the presence of the media at the IEA presidential debate, which is threatening its credibility in the CPP.
- Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom lose his popularity by the Convention People's Party after he relished to show himself to the media blitz by Institute of Economic Affairs.
- It means Dr Nduom lost credibility as well as the CPP because he couldn't answer most questions asked during the (IEA).

These second and third patterns of explanations suggest strongly that many of the participants who thought they understood the extracts did not really understand and it is obvious from their explanations that the linguistic choices accounted for these mis-readings. The suggestion from these findings is that the linguistic choices made the news extracts to communicate ineffectively to these readers. The findings here also mean that many of the readers thought they understood what they read when unknowingly they did not understand either completely or they gained only partial comprehension.

**8.2.9.2.1 Answering the second and third research questions**

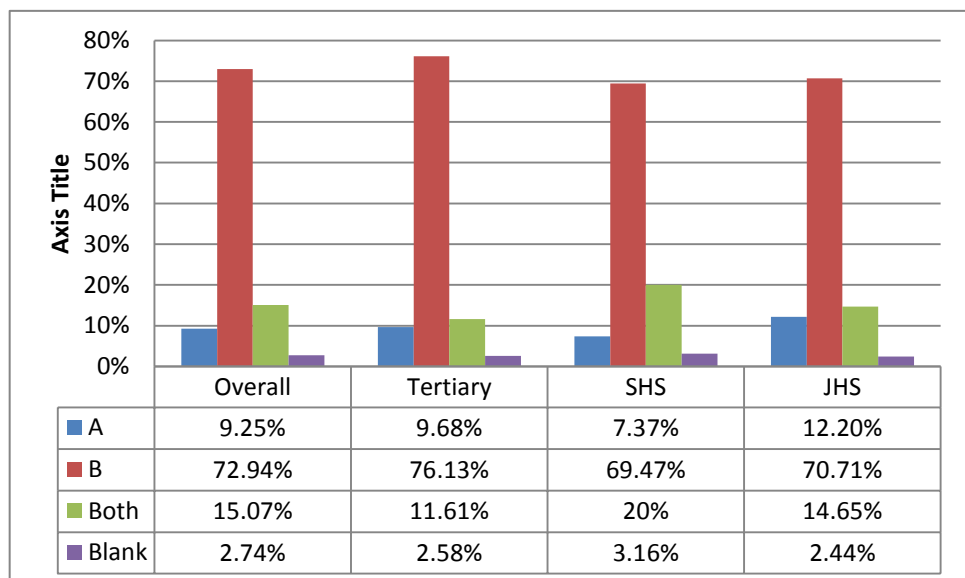
The discussion so far on the two patterns of information from participants has provided answers to the second and third research questions. Firstly, the various results arising from readers' encounter with the newspaper extracts indicate strongly that a sizeable proportion of the readers found the newspapers' language difficult, even across the educational sub-categories. This is suggested by participants' responses to the vocabulary tests, their opinions and descriptions of the language of the texts, and the general meanings they provided for the tested extracts. The findings imply that Ghanaian newspaper readers largely find the language of front-page newspaper stories difficult to read and understand. This finding then suggests, as demonstrated in the syntactic analysis of readers' explanations or meanings of the extracts, that the majority of readers could miss the full import of the message of the extracts. The consequent implication of this provides the answer to the third research question, that most of these people could largely be excluded from directly accessing messages from the newspaper.

Another associated issue is the possible impact of the newspapers in the 2008 multi-party general elections. The research data targeted these elections for an idea of the possible contribution of the newspapers to the outcome of the elections. However, the analysis did not provide definite information beyond inferring a possibility from the results of the readability, complexity and comprehension issues at the core of the study. Thus, although it is clear that many participants found it difficult to understand the newspapers' information, what cannot be said in certain terms are the information readers gained from the newspapers, the exact amount of information gained and how the newspapers could have independently influenced their actions during the 2008 general elections.

### 8.2.9.3 Third pattern of information

To discover participants' language style preferences for newspaper writing, I again employed a passage revision technique. An original newspaper extract (that is, Passage A on the questionnaire form) was revised into Passage B for participants to indicate which they found easier to comprehend. Participants were again to say which of the two passages they would prefer to be used in newspaper stories and to explain why. In this case, and unlike the revised passage discussed earlier, both lexical and syntactic simplifications were made to the original extract. Information from this aspect of the analysis is expected to help answer the last research question of the study. Figures 28 and 29 present the information.

**Figure 28: Participants' opinion about the easier of the original and revised passages**



**Key to the Figure: C1b and C2b = Question numbers on the questionnaire form**

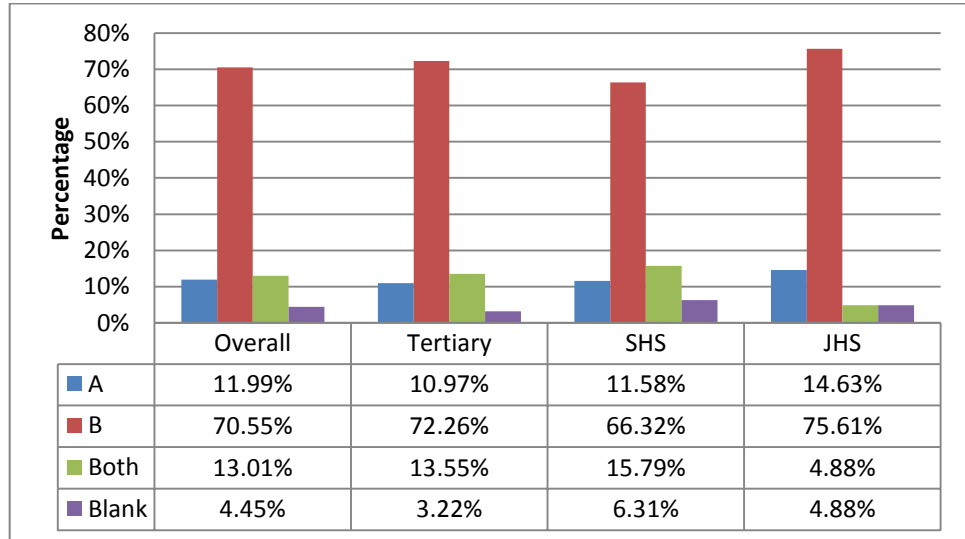
**A= Original extract**

**B = Revised extract**

**Both** = Representing both Passages A and B

**Blank** = No responses given

**Figure 29: Participants' preference of language style of the two extracts**



**Key to the Figure: same as Figure 28**

The results show that the overwhelming majority found the revised passage easier to read and comprehend and almost the same proportion preferred that simple language be used in newspapers. As indicated in Figure 28, **73%** of the total population said the revised was easier than the original. Similarly, an overwhelming **71%** preferred that news be written in simple language (Figure 29). The same trend in responses was realised across the various educational levels. For the easier of the two passages, the majority of **76%** of the tertiary level population and **69%** of the Senior High level shared the view that the revised passage was easier for them.

Regarding language style preferences, again the overwhelming majority (**72%**) of the tertiary level participants and **66%** of those in the SHS/post SHS category said they preferred that the language of the revised passage be used to present news to them. These findings indicate that the majority of participants identify simple language as a linguistic characteristic that enhances easy reading and comprehension of text.

Participants gave reasons for their choices and preferences, most of which centred on the impact of either complex or simple language on reading and

comprehension. Concerning responses for the easier of the two passages, many of those who said the revised was easier referred to its simple words and sentences as the reasons for their choice. Participants provided verbatim responses such as: *Passage B contains more simple words and expressions which makes (sic) it easy to understand; This is due to the very simple English used in passage B; The language is simple; among others.* Some of the participants' reasons compared the language of the two Passages to emphasise their choice as follows: *The use of expressions such as 'traits of ...', 'civic responsibility', 'squander' in A do (sic) not make it easy to be understood; Passage B employs simple words and straight forward expressions to convey meaning as compared to passage A; The words and expressions are difficult to understand in A; among others.* One realises that words such as *traits, civic responsibility, squander, etc.*, which were cited as making Passage A difficult are Latinate expressions.

On the other hand, participants who opted for Passage A (the original passage) as the easier of the two reasoned that the language was simple, displayed apt vocabulary, and that the presentation was to the point. Some gave their reasons as: *Because of the kinds of words used; Words used were easy to understand; The use of simple but appropriate language; and so on.* Others emphasised the aesthetic quality of the passage, saying the passage was *simple because it is presentable.* And those who felt both passages were equally easy said, among others, that: *They are easily understandable; Inasmuch as different dictions are used (sic), they are both quite understandable; in both passages, the words used are simple.* Additionally, while some participants in this last group share the view of a participant that: *both passages are understandable but B is more understandable,* others said they were familiar with the words in both passages. One participant put it thus: *I have met most of the words before.* From these verbatim responses, it is clear that the simplicity, familiarity and clarity of language dominated reasons given for any of the options. This reflects earlier findings that the extent to which a reader find language characteristics simple, complex, familiar or not influence readability and comprehension for such a reader.

Secondly, participants gave various reasons for their language preferences. Those who preferred the language style of the revised passage said that it facilitated their understanding, saved them time in reading, made it possible to include 'less'

educated Ghanaian in the discourse, and encouraged newspaper reading, among others. Those who preferred the complex language of the original passage also said, among other reasons, that they understood what they read, that such language would help them to develop their English skills, and that the style was meaningful. Most of those who were indifferent said the language style of both passages were easy and understandable to them since they were familiar with the words, among other similar responses.

Although the overwhelming majority of participants said they preferred news to be written in simple language, a closer look at the results indicates that a significant proportion of the readers appear to be comfortable with complex and impressive language as well. For instance, the results in Figure 29 indicate that readers who preferred the original passage and those who preferred both passages amounted to **25%**, which is a quarter of the whole population. The same pattern is seen with tertiary level participants with **24%** and the SHS/post SHS population with as high as **27%**. Here are three verbatim responses representing this view:

- I appreciate presentations when terminologies are used and makes you read more on those terminologies if you don't understand.
- Reading is supposed to broaden your knowledge. If the use of vocabulary is going to help do that then it's okay.
- It will help improve the vocabulary of the readers and their reading skills.

It is noted from the responses that some participants admire the complex or impressive language and see it as a way of acquiring and improving on one's English ability. These findings seem to suggest, to some extent, that a significant proportion of the study's population would not mind if newspapers use complex language although they may find it hard to understand. This is very insightful as discussed further in the next subsection. Nevertheless, the greater majority of participants generally preferred simple language style since it is clearer and easier to read and understand, and therefore, accessible to readers irrespective of educational attainment

### **8.2.10 Counter intuitive findings**

The finding that a significant proportion of the study's population (about 25%) would not mind if newspapers employ complex language is insightful. This is especially because the majority of such people found the language incomprehensible. This finding goes against the intuitive hypothesis of the study that

readers would prefer texts they find readable and comprehensible. The finding suggests that language complexity has other intrinsic values for some Ghanaian readers beyond comprehension/communication or otherwise. For example, as some participants suggested, difficult texts can help them to learn and improve on their language. Being seen reading difficult material can also accord the reader prestige, and so on. Although this counter hypothesis cannot be empirically tested in this study, further possible explanations for the finding are suggested in section 9.3.

### **8.3 Answering the last research question**

Results concerning the answer to the fourth research questions were inconclusive. Although the majority of readers preferred that plain language should be used to write news stories, a substantial proportion of readers across the educational divide that cannot be ignored preferred complex language or were indifferent about the use of complex language although they may not understand it. This is an interesting finding that could have a cultural undertone and this counter hypothesis requires investigation beyond this thesis.

### **8.4 Concluding the qualitative analysis: Triangulation of findings**

This chapter has focused on the qualitative aspect of the analysis and provided answers to the three remaining research questions designated to be answered in this chapter. The discussions have indicated that Ghanaian readers find it largely difficult reading and comprehending front-page newspaper stories because the language is complex. Consequently, many such readers could be alienated from direct information of front-page stories. The findings in this chapter thus support those of the previous chapter that the language of front-page stories of the Ghanaian press is lexically and syntactically complex and is potentially difficult for the average Ghanaian reader. This therefore seems to support the hypothesis that the Ghanaian press has not been effective in its normative information function. The study has discovered from the various educational subcategories that front-page texts of the quality press in Ghana could be more suitable for tertiary level readers. Nonetheless, the study has also found that a significant proportion of readers with tertiary education also face comprehension challenges with newspapers. Concerning the fourth research question, it was discovered that although a majority of readers wanted simple language to be used, a significant proportion opted for or were

indifferent to the use of complex language. This seems to support a perception that some Ghanaians like complex language although they may not understand it.

Importantly, the findings of this chapter seem to support the hypothesis that the newspapers have not been successful in making information directly accessible to a broad readership to enhance a fruitful engagement in political participation in the Ghanaian society. The findings also raise questions, which though have not been conclusively answered in this research, about the extent to which direct reading of the newspapers influence political participation in Ghana. Therefore, as I recommend in the conclusion, Ghanaian quality newspapers need to broaden access by using a simpler writing style in order to be understood by more readers, particularly pre-university readers. This is because the study has found that the newspaper continues to be an important source of news information in Ghana, and that a majority of readers are interested in the political news which often occurs on the front pages of the quality newspapers of the country.



## **Chapter 9 Discussion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

From the analyses, findings and discussions presented in Chapters 7 (mainly linguistic) and 8 (mainly audience survey), this chapter discusses key issues emanating from the results. Three broad areas are covered. The first integrates the findings of the linguistic and audience survey analyses. The discussion will show that the language of Ghanaian newspapers relates to readers in line with the main hypothesis that the language of Ghanaian newspapers is linguistically complex and that many readers could find it difficult to comprehend the stories. The second explores issues relating to normative notions concerning the role of the press, language use, ideology and newspaper readership. The third, which concludes the chapter, explores findings that relate to the role and implications of the Ghanaian press in relation to communication and knowledge gaps, and political participation.

### **9.2 Ghanaian newspapers, text complexity and text difficulty: An integration**

Summary findings across the two analytical perspectives concerning the main hypothesis of the study are presented in this section to relate the language of the news stories to readers. The discussion exposes tensions and negotiations that occur during the news consumption process. This should pave way for further discussions of broader issues that flow from the integration.

Concerning text complexity, the results involving the lexical, syntactic and readability units and variables that were investigated complemented each other to suggest that the language of the newspapers is highly complex. In the analysis, vocabulary provided the most reliable evidence about the complexity of the language. The results indicated that the newspapers contain many long words, nominalisations, Latinate expressions and phrasal verbs in proportions that individually and collectively predispose the language to complex. The findings were achieved through corpus linguistic analysis, which, I concede, was challenged by a lack of precise measurement of, for instance, the proportion of occurrences required

of each of the units to make a text complex. This limitation, though, is not specific to this study but largely general to the field, as explained in Chapter 7. Comparing results with findings of other studies and corpora usually provide assessment criteria.

The findings that the corpus, and in fact, each news story, contains about 10% Latinate expressions, 5% nominalisations, and nearly 1% phrasal verbs provide some evidence that the language is complex. The significance lies in relating the findings with the function words of the corpus, which as I indicated earlier do not carry content or information and make up about half the words of any text (see section 7.2.2.1.5). The occurrence of such potentially complex lexical or information-bearing items in such proportions strongly suggests the complexity of the text or language.

Additionally, comparisons of results with occurrences in other related corpora as well as with findings of other relevant studies provided reliable notional indicators about the complexity of the texts. For example, a normed comparison of occurrences of long words of 7 to 18 letters in our corpus and those in the BNC shows that the occurrences in this study's corpus (26%) are slightly more than what occurs in the BNC (23%). The significance of these findings lies in the fact that the about 100 million-word BNC contains about 90% written texts that include well-represented proportions of press reportage, academic prose and other technical documents. Similarly, the proportion of nominalisations in the corpus at a normed occurrence of 3.13% (per 1000 words) is relatively higher than those in the academic prose of the LOB Corpus (composed of only written texts) at 1.62% (per 1000 words). Furthermore, a keyword analysis with the BNC and COCA as reference corpora produced statistically significant results of many long and technical expressions as characteristic of the language of Ghanaian newspapers (see Figure 12). Some of the typical words include *adjudication*, *municipality*, *communique*, *electorate*, *reiterate*, among others.

These findings relate the language of the newspapers strongly to academic writing, especially for ESL users. Yet, it is also discovered that the majority of these words fall outside of the University Word List (UWL) of frequently occurring words in academic prose (Nation, 1990; see Appendix 10). Examples of the frequently occurring words include *acquire*, *revise*, *imply*, *phase*, *imply*, and so on, which even

gives about 9% in academic texts and 4% in newspapers (Nation, 2001, p.188). An improved version of the UWL is Coxhead's (2000, p.132) 570 word families of Academic Word List (AWL). A comparison shows that most the nominalisations and Latinate words discovered in this study, such as *antecedent*, *adduced*, *prosecution*, among others, do not appear on the AWL. Those that appear such as *accumulate*, *advocate*, *confine*, *appreciate*, and so on, are less frequent. These findings contribute to suggest that the proportion of the investigated lexical elements found in the corpus could render the language of the newspapers complex.

The relationship between syntax and text complexity was established through sentence length, types of sentence, occurrences of clause embedding, and passive forms. The study found the average sentence length of this corpus to be 31 words, while scholars and media industry experts have suggested between 15 and 25 as the readable length (see Chapter 7). The analysis also shows that each sentence of the corpus is complex and contains a blend of intricate clause embedding involving *WH*-complementisers that Biber *et al.* (1998, 1999) have described as potentially complex structures. A complex sentence implies the occurrence of more than one clause in that sentence. Going by the notion that a clause is a unit of thought, the implication is that each sentence of the corpus contains a number of ideas occurring in intricate sentence structures as demonstrated manually in Chapter 7 (see section 7.2.2.2.1 and Figure 15). Thus, such sentences could challenge memory and recall as argued by Just and Carpenter (1992) and Neath and Nairne (1995). The results therefore showed that the complexity of the text derived from both lexis and syntax.

The notional complexity of the text was corroborated by results of the readability formula analysis, which indicate that on average, **85%** of the texts of the various newspapers were difficult and readable by readers with university educational attainment. The readability results came from three formula tools (Flesch Reading Ease, Fog Index, and New Dale and Chall). Although readability formulae have been criticised, especially in their use to guide the writing and revision of documents (Redish and Selzer, 1985; Redish, 2000), they remain reliable tools in determining levels of language complexity (DuBay, 2004). Their relevance in this instance is the fact that this study was not meant to revise or guide the writing of newspaper stories but just to indicate the readability level. The consistency of the results (see Appendix 5) of the different formula tools indicates the reliability of the

findings concerning the complexity levels of the language to support the description of the corpus as complex.

The finding that about **18%** of the texts of the corpus were reports on court proceedings and other legal matters (see section 7.2.3.1) goes further to support the complexity of the language. This is because the language used in such reports, as illustrated below in the *Times* of 23 July 2008, usually has considerable instances of domain-specific lexical and syntactic features relating to the legal field. The story in question is about the recognition of a traditional ruler or chief of a locality in Accra.

### **GA MANTSE TO MAINTAIN STATUS – C'tee**

**THE Ga Mantse, King Tackle Tawiah III, is to maintain that status until the final determination of cases at the Greater Accra Regional House of Chiefs challenging his nomination and installation.**

**This is the decision of the Judicial Committee of the House which last Friday turned down an application for interlocutory injunction to restrain the Ga Mantse from acting as such, an official at the Registry of the House told the Times yesterday.**

**The committee's panel, chaired by Nii Tetteh Otu, president of the House, ruling on the matter last Friday, explained that the Ga Mantse could continue in that capacity until the final determination of the substantive case.**

**Nii Maya Arday, head of Abola Piam We, one of the four ruling houses in Ga Mashie, in October last year, filed a motion for interlocutory injunction, seeking the Ga Traditional Council to be restrained from allowing Dr Joe Blankson to act as the Ga Mantse until the final determination of the case in which Nii Arday is challenging the election, nomination and installation of Dr Blankson as Ga Mantse.**

**Bright Akwetey, counsel for the petitioner, earlier contended that Dr Blankson's continuous acting as Ga Mantse was detrimental to the outcome of the case, stressing that as the substantive suit is challenging the very basis for his kingship, it was important that he was restrained. But the respondent's counsel, Willie Amarfio, countered that the motion for interlocutory injunction was frivolous, and came in too late, contending that the Ga Mantse was properly elected, nominated and installed according to Ga custom.**

**The Times had reported on Monday that the Committee was yet to give a ruling on the application for the injunction. However, the Registry source said, the report was an error and explained that the panel did take a decision on the matter before adjourning. The next sitting will be this Friday, July 25.**

**The *Ghanaian Times*, 23 July 2008**

The story concerned, and was relevant to, the people (including ordinary people) of that area and in the country as a whole, thereby requiring that the language should appeal and be user-friendly to this general readership.

Yet, typical legal expressions, which were not explained to the lay reader, abound in the story. These included *determination of cases, judicial committee, application for interlocutory injunction, to restrain ..., filed a motion, counsel for petitioner, substantive suit, respondent's counsel, adjourning*, among others. Other lexical items that may not belong to the legal jargon of the extract include nominalisations and Latinate words such as *maintain, nomination, decision, restrain, contended, detrimental*, and a phrasal verb, *turned down*. Syntactically, the sentences are long (an average of 39 words) and almost all the sentences are complex. The extract has an average of 3 clauses (both finite and non-finite) per sentence with the kind of clause embedding discussed in **section 7.2.2.2.1**. Going by the discussion of section 8.2.9.1.3, this text reflects features found to make text most challenging to readers, irrespective of their educational level. Readability formula tool analysis of the story provided the following results: **Flesch 28.8, Fog 19.8 and Dale-Chall 9**. These results mean that the text is very difficult and readable to university graduates. Many other texts of the corpus were about issues relating to governance processes, government briefs, general statutory issues, and so on, in which some of these expressions and sentence structures occurred, thereby indicating potential challenges with the comprehension of the texts.

For text difficulty, results of the reading comprehension test on readers showed that there was a correlation between the complexity level of the text and the difficulty readers found in understanding the text. The correlation occurred in four ways: firstly, a correlation of vocabulary with readers' aptitude; secondly, a correlation of syntax with readers' aptitude; thirdly, readers' opinion about whether the language of the text aided or hindered their understanding; and then whether readers found the text easy or difficult.

Results on vocabulary concerning nominalisations, Latinate expressions and phrasal verbs provided strong evidence of the difficulty of the newspaper texts. The findings that about **46%** of the study's participants did not know the tested items and another **32%** of those who initially said they understood but later demonstrated that they did not understand indicate the large extent to which the vocabulary used in

the newspaper did not match the ability of many of the readers. The significance of the results lies in the fact that about **53%** of the participants belonged to the university category. In fact, as the results indicate, the majority of readers without university education found the texts markedly difficult.

Studies in reading and comprehension in general have established a strong correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Vocabulary has been known not only to make an independent contribution to reading and comprehension (Guo *et al.*, 2011), but has also been found to be a key determinant for successful comprehension of text (Carver, 1994; Read, 2000; Baumann, 2009; McNamara *et al.*, 2010; Yildirim *et al.*, 2011). Scholars such as Mezynski (1983) have expressed doubt about how a reader could understand text in which most of the words are unfamiliar or incomprehensible. Schmitt *et al.* (2011, p.27) identify knowledge of words as one of the major factors consistently shown to affect reading comprehension. Drawing on consistent findings in the field over the last 50 years and their own work, Guo *et al.* (2011, p.175) concluded that, “vocabulary was the most important factor in reading comprehension in adult skilled readers.” Stahl (2003) also stresses a strong relation between a person’s knowledge of a word and his or her capacity to understand text.

Indeed, the **33%** and **57%** of the Tertiary and SHS/post SHS respectively who did not know the lexical items show the gravity of the language issue under discussion. This excludes others across both educational levels who said they understood the words but provided unacceptable meanings, and many others who could not attempt to provide any information (see Figure 23). The significance of the above findings is that lexical items carry the information that a text transmits. Therefore, if a reader does not know many of such words, it could affect the quality of the overall information the reader gains from the text. Researchers such as Laufer (1989) and Nation (2001, p.145) have noted that **a reader needs to know about 95% and 98% respectively of the words of a text in order to ensure a ‘reasonable’ reading comprehension of the text.** Below this threshold, the text becomes increasingly difficult. From the general results, it is clear that most of the readers could not hit these percentages, emphasising the challenge they could face with the newspaper text.

Results concerning participants' explanations of the extracts provided reliable clues about some of syntactic challenges of the text and further accentuated the vocabulary problem as well. For example, in the rewrite of Extract 5, most of the responses did not include all the ideas of the extract, implying that some readers found it difficult to cope with the various ideas in long and complex sentences. Similarly, the semantic implication of the passive form led to misunderstanding. Here are some of the participants' explanations of **extract 5** (see Appendix 6) presented verbatim showing how readers miss information in syntactically complex sentences:

- A credibility crisis within the CPP is threatening the media
- The media release a speech by Nduom which is a problem in his party
- The media blitz has been criticised by the CPP
- Nduom's comment in the media is believed to threaten the credibility of the CPP.

In the first bulleted explanation, the reader missed what is under threat (that is, is it Nduom's media publicity or the *media*?). The same misunderstanding occurs in the second explanation where the participant understood incorrectly that Nduom's speech is the cause of the problem in his party, while the third completely missed the message by ignoring 'Nduom' and the issue of a 'crisis' and understanding wrongly that the party criticised 'media blitz'. For the last illustration, in addition to the meaning being completely unrelated to the original extract, it also misinterprets the passive form of the sentence by implying that something else is threatening the 'credibility of CPP'. Additionally, the responses used many words from the original extract or were silent about words such as *blitz*, *relished*, *simmering*, *credibility*, *crisis*, among others, which seem to reinforce the problem readers faced with the vocabulary of the text. This seems to confirm Guo *et al.*'s (2011) finding that syntax is a dependent contributor to reading difficulty through vocabulary. These findings also support the view that the nature of the lexis and syntax of a text contributes significantly to the ease or difficulty with which a reader makes meaning from that text (Biber *et al.*, 1999).

The results on participants' opinions and descriptions of the language of the newspapers provide an overall understanding of the extent to which the linguistic elements contributed to the difficulty of the texts. The about half the population who felt the language of the text hindered their understanding, and the about **42%** who did not either understand the original texts or know what to write, clearly

complement findings concerning the difficulty of the specific lexical and syntactic items investigated. Reasons provided by participants who found the language style difficult were around three expressions: vocabulary/words, language, and sentence. For example, for readers who found the texts difficult, either the vocabulary is *difficult, hard, high, complex, etc.*; or the language is *complicated, too difficult, too high, should be broken down, etc.*; or the sentences are *too long, above my level, too difficult to understand, etc.* The readers who found the texts easy used the same three key words but accompanied them with favourable expressions such as *easy vocabulary, simple sentence*, among others. These expressions suggest that readers identify the language style or linguistic elements as the foremost indicator of the ease or difficulty of the language.

Results of participants' opinion on whether the language of the text was easy or difficult indicated that an average of **55%** of the overall population, **48%** of the tertiary and **55%** of the SHS categories felt the language of the newspapers was difficult (see Figure 25). These results do not account for those who showed uncertainty by indicating that they could not tell and others who did not provide any response at all. That such a proportion of a sample of educated people, the majority of whom were tertiary-level participants, felt the language of the newspapers was difficult tells a significant story about the difficulty and meaning implications of the language.

Additionally, the finding that many participants did not know the linguistic items investigated raises critical questions about the type and quality of information they received from the text. Some of the meanings many participants provided for the vocabulary items and extracts suggest that they gained meanings that were completely different from the possibilities that the texts could have implied. For instance, it was discovered that an average of about **38%** of the overall population, as well as **27%** and **46%** of the Tertiary and SHS/post SHS groups, respectively, understood none of the sixteen lexical items investigated. These occur at the backdrop of research findings that a reader needs to know a very high proportion of the words to understand a text. Thus, it is interesting to consider the kind of understanding they could take away from the whole text. For instance in Extract 1, a participant understood *prevalence, adduced, prosecution* and *antecedent* as 'occur', blank (no meaning was given implying possibly that he did not understand), 'verdict', and 'behaviour' respectively. If 'occur' is loosely accepted as a suitable



meaning in the context of the extract, it means that three of the words were not known, and this suggests hypothetically that this person would gain a kind of meaning that departs completely from the import of the extract. The same situation applies to another participant who supplied unsuitable meanings like 'raised', 'prolong', 'established' and 'uneducated sector' for *called for*, *extension*, *rope in* and *informal sector* for Extract 2. It could be deduced from these findings that participants could have misunderstood more words as the study tested only four words in each extract. Therefore, the finding that many participants supplied unrelated meanings is a causal reaction to the linguistic complexity of the texts.

While the intra-educational level results appear to support the general notion that many people with qualifications below tertiary level face challenges with the language of the newspapers, some of the results seem to contradict the hypothesis involving tertiary level readers. This study assumed that the language of the quality press should suit readers with higher or tertiary level education because they are regarded as the elites of society, who would have little difficulty with the language of the extracts. However, while the results on, for instance, vocabulary (see Appendix 8) indicate that a large proportion of the SHS/post SHS group found the language difficult, the same situation applied for tertiary level participants. In some instances, there were no major differences in the results of the two educational levels. **These findings seem to suggest that the Ghanaian press also marginalises many tertiary level readers.** As an example, consider results for the word *prevalence* across the two educational levels. For the tertiary group, **98 (63%)** participants said they understood the word and of this quantity **44 (45%)** supplied unsuitable meanings. For the SHS group, 30 participants (**32%**) said they understood the word out of which **12 (40%)** could not provide an acceptable meaning. To compare these results effectively, the total numbers of the different groups were normalised which showed that the proportions that provided unsuitable meanings for the word were almost equal for the two groups. In fact, calculating the 12 participants of the SHS/post SHS group as a proportion of the 98 tertiary participants is 39, which is less than the 44 of the tertiary level participants. This suggests that both categories of readers face almost equal challenges with the word and for that matter, the language in this instance.

The above discussions and associations provide evidence of a strong correlation between the textual and audience survey analyses. The fact that a

simplified text showed an improved readability level of above **10%** (see Figure 27) over the original across the various categories of participants indicates the responsiveness of readers to the complexity levels of different texts. Information in Table 20 has also identified the occurrences of clauses, nominalisations and Latinate occurrences as the most influential elements of text complexity and difficulty. The correlation, therefore, suggests strongly and generally that the linguistic complexity level of the newspapers' stories did not match the ability of many readers. This also means that simplifying the language of the newspapers, paying attention to clauses, nominalisations and Latinate words, would improve readability significantly as demonstrated in the study. Overall, the findings suggest to some extent that the press has not been effective in making information easily available to many readers, and this has serious negative implications for political participation, as discussed shortly.

### **9.2.1 Is it a language problem or education/reader problem?**

The above correlation of textual and survey results showing a mismatch between the complexity level of the language of Ghanaian newspapers and the ability of many readers raise critical questions about the source of the problem. Two causal assumptions about the difficulty of the language of the newspapers may be proposed: the problem could relate to language or to education. 'Language problem' means that the newspapers' language is too complex over and above the reasonable ability of many of their targets and for public communication. In that case, the problem is from the news producers' lack of knowledge of their readers; hence, they use language that is beyond the readers' ability. 'Education problem' in turn implies that the Ghanaian education system is to blame, since it is not equipping students with the needed language and reading skills to match their educational levels.

Tied to the education problem is the role of the reader in the comprehension process, which has often received little attention, especially in readability studies. As Rock (2007) notes, whenever a text proves challenging to a given readership, the problem is implicitly placed at the doorstep of the writer and the text. The problem may not always come from the writer or text because the reader also has a role to play in the process; he has to provide some characteristics such as motivation, interest, and cognitive ability, among others, to contest the text for effective comprehension. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the reader's role becomes relevant if the text matches the reading level of such a reader. Therefore, the attempt

to find an answer to the mismatch began with insights into opinions and attitude of news producers to language use in the newspapers.

The study discovered that a majority of the news producers seemed to have little idea that they use complex language. They also seemed to be unaware of the repercussions of the complex language of their newspapers in terms of the possibility that it could be alienating some readers. This finding replicates the tendency of journalists elsewhere. For instance, Dalecki *et al.* (2009, p.2) discovered that Spanish newspapers use more complex language in writing news on real happenings and note that, “journalists yield to the instinct to write for themselves and others like them,” instead of writing for their audiences. Some of the Ghanaian editors expressed surprise about the possibility that readers could have problems with the language of their newspapers. They thought they used simple enough language, which even a JHS student should be able to read and understand with ease, as captured by an editor:

When I take today’s paper, we try as much as possible to reach our readers otherwise we’ll be losing out on all those, as you say, JSS; they should be able to read ... Using complex language doesn’t make reading interesting. When you have to stop and go to the dictionary and then look for a word and all that. It flows when you understand everything (verbatim from interview transcripts of an editor: interview date, 17 September, 2012).

The editor’s surprise and perceived conviction that the newspaper linguistically targets its readers when the study has shown that the language is far above the JHS level seem to suggest that Ghanaian newspaper producers have little knowledge about and interaction with their readers. This situation also suggests that the industry does not do effective audience research to know readers and their relationship with the newspapers. A news writer confirmed this point thus:

... that is why I said that under normal circumstances we should be communicating with our readership. We should be finding out some of these things from our readers, how they find the news we produce for them, what their opinion is, but (because) we sit in the assumption table and assume that they understand (verbatim from interview transcripts of a news writer: interview date, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012).

Some news producers blamed the Ghanaian educational system and Ghanaians’ lack of a reading culture for the possible reading problems. The argument was that the school does not inculcate good reading habits and skills in students. Here is an editor’s opinion:

...then it will also mean that our educational system is not up to it because English is the core together with mathematics and so if we have a large youth population who are not able to read basic English, then there is a problem somewhere (verbatim from interview transcripts of a editor: interview date, 22nd August 2012).

By blaming the educational system for not equipping readers with the appropriate reading ability and people's disinterest in reading, and referring to the language of the newspaper as "basic English", the editors indicated their lack of awareness of the language level of their newspapers. It also means that they lack knowledge of their readers' language ability, and these imply a kind of alienation or disconnect between news production and consumption. These suggestions, nonetheless, invite research into educational levels and people's reading ability to allow definitive conclusions on the issue. The finding, however, reveals importantly that news producers appear to write, assuming implicitly that, once they write, the reader should be able to read and understand.

Considering the findings of this study, it appears that the complexity levels of the language of the newspapers and their negative effects on reading and comprehension appear to be language based, rather than education or reader-based. The argument of this study is that newspapers must be written in a language that is readable and understandable to those addressed. In written communication, the responsibility toward comprehension rests more with the writer, who should write in clear and readable language. The study, therefore, suggests that the complex language of newspapers indicates a communication weakness of the press.

### **9.3 Ghanaian newspapers and the paradox of normative roles, language use and ideology**

The section on normative theories of the press in Chapter 2 has spelt out the specific expected roles of the contemporary Ghanaian press. The press is expected to blend roles within the broad framework of the liberal-market, social responsibility and development journalism to create and enhance conditions that promote democracy and the development of the Ghanaian society. I stressed in that section the need to factor language use in the normative arrangement since the press should reach a wide spectrum of readers to make its expected impact on society. The informative role of the press in contemporary Ghana has been more crucial in current times than ever. This is because the socio-political and liberal-market conditions of the country

today have radically transformed from the authoritarian periods before the 1990s when the press was made to perform narrow and largely uncontested roles. The democratisation process of today has continued to broaden the scope of liberalisation on political, social and economic fronts, leading to a pluralist and diversified society of different ideologies, opinions and interests freely contesting for attention and choices. Hasty's (2005, p.2) observation that the newspaper has remained the major contributor of the type of information needed to organise this contested political field around various positions, opinions, and actions remains very salient today.

The findings that a considerable proportion of readers had difficulty with the language of the newspapers highlight normative-related questions about linguistic considerations that inform the writing style of the newspapers. That the majority of readers below tertiary level had difficulty with the language of the newspapers is not surprising due to the uncertainty about whether the quality press specifically targets such readers. However, it is unexpected for a significant proportion of readers with tertiary status to find the language difficult. This critical issue demanded that the thesis explores the newsroom perspective on language use for an understanding of normative and linguistic considerations (if any) that inform news production. Incorporating views from the newsroom into the discussions was important because both news producers and consumers are intricately engaged in the mass communication process (Hall, 1980; van Dijk, 1995). Engaging with newspaper editors and writers also provided information on some aspects of the news writing culture in Ghana and the extent to which news production engages with news consumption in the context of meaning making.

The findings of this study regarding the above issues indicate paradoxes, controversies, and tensions between the news producers' perspective of their normative functions and their news production practices. Information gathered from the interviews of the editors indicates that the press believed it is serving the public good. According to the editors, the press exists principally to provide and circulate news information in the Ghanaian society, to educate people and empower them to make informed political and social decisions, to take part in the governance processes, and in this way enhance political participation. The news producers described their press roles with expressions such as *inform, educate the masses,*

*entertain, watchdog role, watchman, gatekeeper, national interest*, among other ideological and epistemological terminologies. The suggestion, therefore, is that the press in Ghana is aware of its central role in the democratic arrangement of the country.

A dominant belief of the news producers about normative roles of the press, as discovered in the study, was its central place in the development agenda of the country. The idea was that the press is a tool and a partner for the development of society. The press empowers readers with information to enable them participate in national development. This point of view believed that the press in Ghana must function as a development agent and reflect the developing status of the country rather than reflecting universal press roles elsewhere. To achieve the above, the press must expose social ills, let people know their voting and other rights, and ensure self-censorship in its publications. According to one editor:

We have to remember that we are a developing country, so the press cannot be seen probably in the same vein as it is seen in the West or East. The media should be seen as a tool that is used to ginger people for development, to put government on their toes as the role of the media is, but at the same time concentrate a bit on issues involving with development (taken verbatim from interview transcripts of a news editor: interview date, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012).

By this view, the press positions itself as a site of discursive action through which people should become aware of and be included in the happenings of society. Thus, the press believed it creates a platform of participation for various sections and interests in the democratic arena.

For readership, the study found that Ghanaian news producers seem not to have any particular segment of society they target. Most Ghanaian newspapers claimed they produced news for (as the editors put it): *those who can read and understand* and *everybody*, that is, every educated Ghanaian. This is in contrast with practices elsewhere. In some Western societies, the occurrence of different newspaper forms such as broadsheets and tabloids indicates a conscious realisation of different readers and their needs that are specifically targeted (Conboy, 2010, 2011). In addition to the choice of topic, layout, animations, among others, the writing style of such newspapers specifically reflects the specific audiences they target. The lack of audience segmentation in press practices in Ghana is supported by the findings of this study, where linguistically, the various newspapers have a

similar writing style, as discovered in Chapter 7. The issue is that if the newspapers target ‘everybody’ then the language should also reflect this generalised audience.

Yet, the study found that, in writing to the Ghanaian public, the news writers display some ambivalence about the language style of their publications. On the one hand, they acknowledged the importance of simple, clear and understandable language in presenting their message to readers. On the other hand, the language of their publications, as discovered in the study, is complex and opposed to the above view.

The conflicting situation is resolved in the understanding that the specific and ultimate writing style of the newspapers often reflects the preferences of the editorial committee of the various newspapers and not always the news writers. This means that individual journalists may not be solely responsible for the final language style of the front-page news stories. One editor put it thus:

The published work is not the first draft. You need to see sometimes the first draft and then compare it with published works to appreciate that (taken verbatim from interview transcripts of a news editor: interview date, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2012).

The “first draft” here refers to the news writer’s final copy presented for publication. However, this copy is often much overhauled by the time it is published. Thus, the language style of the press in Ghana is largely a collective responsibility, especially that of the editorial conference, and not just the by-line of the story. This depicts tensions between the individual journalist’s conviction about language use and the journalistic conventions and corporate direction in news production.

This inclination of the editorial conferences seems to have some cultural basis. Ghanaians have been known to use complex language in public communication without considering whether it leads to effective communication or not (Boafo, 1987; Hasty, 2005). The inconclusive results of the study concerning whether participants preferred simple or complex language for newspapers seems to support the belief that some Ghanaians adore complex language for its own sake. In Ghana, the use of complex language, especially English, confers power on such users who are often associated with intelligence and fame (Guerini, 2007; Sarfo, 2012). What makes this finding remarkable is that many of those who want such complex and learned English may not understand it.

The use of complex language in journalism may not be peculiar to the journalism field. The tendency seems to reflect a general Ghanaian tendency that is cultivated, reproduced and entrenched in the education system. For instance, in a recent undergraduate examination in academic writing at a university in Ghana, students were to summarise a passage, and a sentence in the passage reads as follows:

The Wikipedia is the epitome and the reification of an ominous trend; Internet surfing came to replace research, online eclecticism supplanted scholarship, and trivia passes for erudition.<sup>57</sup>

The proliferation of Latinate expressions and nominalisations in the extract is enough to support the argument of this paragraph. From an intuitive point of view, words like *epitome*, *reification*, *ominous*, *eclecticism*, *supplanted*, among others, could certainly pose comprehension challenges, especially in the particular reading context of the text. As a lecturer in a higher educational institution in Ghana, this researcher can say intuitively that the majority of students may find it difficult to understand this passage but would carry along this language ideology when they leave school because of the social status and power it grants users.

Journalists and journalism, in both electronic and print media, appear to reinforce the above belief, and this was revealed by this researcher's interaction with the news producers. To these news producers (as mentioned earlier in this section), the use of complex language attracts, rather than repels, audiences because appealing language was one of the critical factors the editorial conference of newspapers consider in determining stories for the front page. Some of the news writers told of deliberate changes that editors made to their (i.e. the news writers') stories to make the language complex. Here is a complaint from one of the writers:

We put words in there then we debate: will the people understand this word you have put here? Then my editor would tell me it is not kids who read the paper. Sometimes I put the word there, and sometimes I feel we should break it down because of the reader then the editor says *no*, keep it there, let it be there, or sometimes I write my headline, I take it there, he changes it and put let's say, a very complicated word there. Then I say but what does this also mean? Then he will explain. Then I say will everybody understand this? He would tell you they would understand, the people who read would (taken verbatim from

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<sup>57</sup> University of Ghana, BA/BSC, Second Semester Examinations 2012/2013 (Distance), UGRC 110: Academic Writing



interview transcript of a news writer, interview date, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2012).

These views expose controversies, tensions and negotiations in the newsroom concerning the different attitude of some news writers and editors to linguistic considerations during the news production process. While the news writer felt that readers might have problems with aspects of the language, the editor felt the language was suitable. Sometimes, too, news writers use complicated language to beat competition and have their stories selected for the front page as illustrated by another news writer:

And then sometimes, the words [complicated] too are also used to be able to influence the editorial conference that the story will be selected. Sometimes when you make the lead too simple or without a catchy word, try to introduce a catchy word in the lead that can attract attention and catchy words have led to the selection of front-page stories (taken verbatim from interview transcripts of a news writer, interview date, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2012).

Importantly, the above newsroom scenario reveals that newspaper producers believe that the language of their newspapers has some influence on both the image of the newspapers and readership. To the news producers, it accords the newspaper organization popularity and attracts readership. The fact that the newspapers continue to maintain the complex writing style seems to reinforce a belief that some readers could prefer that type of style. The argument is that editors would not insist on a particular writing style if they thought it would not attract readership. And indeed, as the results show, although the majority of readers preferred that simple language be used to write news stories, an equally important proportion preferred the complex language or was indifferent to its use although they may not understand it.

The discussion so far raises an important issue concerning the consumption of newspapers in Ghana. The issue is that some readers may not understand complex language but they prefer newspapers to be written in that kind of language style. This questions the purpose and motivation for reading in the first place, thereby provoking the need to explore uses and gratifications<sup>58</sup> tendencies among Ghanaian

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<sup>58</sup> The uses and gratifications theories refers to the idea that people pay attention to media outlets or information that is useful for them or provides some psychological satisfaction (Graber, 1984).

readers of newspapers, especially why people may buy or read a newspaper whose message they may not understand. This behaviour suggests that some people have other psychological reasons for reading other than the need for information in the newspaper. Specifically, readers may be more interested in the prestige that goes with the ability to read (or being seen reading) a newspaper. The occurrence may be understood in the explanation proposed in Bourdieu's (1973, 1993) 'cultural capital'. According to Bourdieu, people may associate with objects, attitudes or mannerisms of privileged, dominant or powerful groups in society in order to gain access or be associated with the privileges of the group. In Ghana, higher educational attainment and English use attract respect and other socio-economic benefits. Thus, people may buy newspapers or desire to be associated with or be seen 'reading' newspapers even when they may not understand the language because they want to benefit from the power status attached to those able to read newspapers.

The same explanation goes for the writers or news producers as well. The use of complex language confers status on them and this explains why the editorial board of the newspapers consciously change supposedly simple language into a complex and impressive one. To the producers, in addition to raising their image in the public's eye, they believe they are satisfying some people who want this type of language. In fact, the news producers believe that people patronise their newspapers because of the complex language. This implies that commercial interests are also at the base of the use of complex language in the newspapers.

The notion that the Ghanaian press consciously or unconsciously prioritise elites in news reportage is suggested in the content and language of the newspapers. Most front-page stories, as discovered in the stories of the data collection period (July/August to November 2008), concerned important personalities and celebrities and their activities. Personalities regularly featured included politicians, especially the top hierarchy of political authority and other powerful people in society. This is expected since the period in question was toward national elections and the focus was on such political figures. Nevertheless, the citizens needed to understand what was presented about these people and the various interests they represented for political decisions to be made in the elections. The complexity of the language, the focus on political elites in news reportage and the profit orientation of the

newspapers support the belief that the press largely represents the interests of the powerful. This largely confirms general assumptions that the press produces and reproduces dominant ideologies and power relations that structure society in favour of the social and political elites (Gramsci, 1971; Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1995a; van Dijk 1998; Taiwo 2007).

It is therefore clear, especially from the perspectives of language use, that news information in Ghanaian newspapers provides less space for grassroots participation and opportunities that directly concern 'common' people. Additionally, despite news producers' claim that they select stories that are of public interest, the realisation that their choices are influenced by motives other than comprehensibility seem to question the normative expectations of the press and its functions. Hence, this study seems to affirm the idea that the Ghanaian press may be serving sectional interests that agree with its commercial interests rather than selfless service in the interest of the public good (Votmer, 2006). This is not good news for the country's democratisation experience.

#### **9.4 Ghanaian newspapers and readership issues**

Studies on communication effects regarding the relationship between media use and knowledge acquisition in both developed and developing democracies have largely favoured newspapers among the traditional media. For instance, McLeod *et al.* (1999, p.329) found that, the "path from newspaper use to knowledge is almost twice as strong as the path between television and knowledge." Nisbet (2008, p.473), using the Malian experience on the relationship between media use, knowledge and participation, also concludes that "... even in media systems with low literacy, low newspaper circulation, and distribution challenges, newspapers may still play an important political mobilising role." This could be because newspapers provide more detailed information and opportunities for reasoned engagement on issues. In fact, studies on the Ghanaian press have shown that the newspaper has contributed largely to the country's democracy (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; Amankwah, 2010). Thus, although newspapers in Ghana may not have the most readers, their overall notional and potential contribution to democracy and participation cannot be underestimated.

The important place of the newspapers in Ghana's democracy put newspaper circulation, audiences and other related matters in Ghana into sharp focus. In terms of newspaper circulation and consumption, the pattern discovered in this work reflected existing tendencies in media use within the developing status of the country and elsewhere in the continent. The study reflected a longstanding pattern that radio has more audiences, followed by television (TV) and then newspapers (Temin and Smith, 2002; Kafewo, 2006; Bowen, 2010). Similarly, the demographic situation and its relationship with newspaper consumption have followed the same pattern over the years. Readership studies have shown that education, gender and age continue to be key factors influencing newspaper readership in Ghana and most parts of Africa (Ansu-Kyeremeh and Gadzekpo, 1996; Easmon, 1999; Nisbet, 2008; Amankwah, 2010). The majority of newspaper readers, as demonstrated in this study, happen to be male and young people (mostly 45 years and below), which appears to fit into the age structure of the country. The population of Ghana has a significant composition of a youthful population between 15 and 45 years, with the median age at 21.7 years (see CIA, 2013: *The World Factbook*). This indicates prospects of a huge readership potential for newspaper readership in the country if the newspapers position themselves well in terms of language style to attract such readers.

The news-related trends presented above differ in some respect from what pertains elsewhere in Britain and the United States of America, obviously because of the historical, cultural and economic circumstances of the African and Western societies. Recent survey reports from the Pew Research Centre (2012) and Ofcom (2013) indicate that television in the United States and Britain command more audiences than the other traditional media forms. The reports show that while more people read newspapers (40%) than listen to radio (35%) in Britain, it is the other way round in the United States with radio at 33% and newspapers, 29%. Concerning demographics, the studies, including Lauf (2001), who says the young reader in the West is vanishing, found that young people in those societies spend less time with news, especially newspapers, contrary to the Ghanaian and African situation (see section 8.2.1). Western societies are radically shifting from hardcopy news sources to online and other digital sources, clearly due to advancement in communication technologies. This trend is emerging in Ghana, as discovered in this study, albeit at a much slower pace because of the instability of internet access. These reports indicate

that although audiences for the traditional media are declining in the US and the UK, the traditional media, particularly the newspaper, still serve as the biggest source of political news for the majority of people. It is also suggested that newspapers would continue to have relevance in the West in a long while (McNair, 2009a, p.1). The findings concerning the Western world suggest that the traditional media will continue to have relevance in Ghana and Africa as well.

The finding that a significant proportion of participants (46%) access news online in addition to the traditional media is because most newspapers in Ghana now have online versions. The online news stories are often the same in content and writing style as the hard copies sold in the streets (Amankwah, 2010). This implies that the proportion of newspaper readership could be higher than has been identified in recent surveys, including this current study. Importantly, the findings of this work should give clues about the readability and comprehension of such online news versions as well, particularly since studies have shown that reading on a screen has a challenging influence on understanding and recall as compared to reading the hard copy (Tewksbury and Althaus, 2000; Yang and Grabe, 2011). The issue of newspaper readability has other implications as discussed further in the next subsections.

## **9.5 Ghanaian newspapers, communication and knowledge gaps, and political participation**

The overall results provide clues on the relationship between exposure to newspapers, knowledge acquisition and political participation, although the study did not specifically focus on these relationships. The importance of political information (from the press) in participation is because information is the lifeblood of democratisation and political participation. Long standing belief about the pathway to democratisation is information that empowers inhabitants for informed decisions (Dahl, 1989; Voltmer, 2006). Through information from the press, inhabitants acquire political knowledge about issues and problems in their community and society, and learn of opportunities and ways to participate. As McLeod *et al.* (1999, p.316) emphasise, “regardless of the type of participation, the willingness to participate is the outcome of a dynamic process of information and

motivation.” Information provides the confidence that enhances political efficacy<sup>59</sup> and improves the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in participation. Although information for participation may be accessed from various sources and in different ways other than through newspapers, this study emphasises the strategic place of newspapers as central in communication flow and political debates in the country.

The results concerning language complexity and difficulty provide clues about and implications for communication gaps and their attendant knowledge gaps, as well as their consequences for political participation. While Nisbet (2008, p.474) has discovered that education is a leading pointer to communication gaps in some transitional societies, this current study has discovered that language challenges are an additional education-related cause of the gaps in Ghana. In this sense, people of the same social status or within the same group (educated people) are differentiated based on their ability to understand information and the amount of information and knowledge they receive directly from newspapers.

Hence, this study suggests deductively that the complex language of the newspapers could be further creating knowledge gaps in Ghana. This is because some of the readers who should be able to read appear to be marginalised alongside the many other people who cannot read and write. This occurs in two ways. The first is the realisation that participants in this study with tertiary level education found the language relatively easier to deal with than those of lower educational status (SHS), when it is expected that the newspapers should be readable and understandable to both educated groups. Secondly, the study has shown that even within the tertiary group, a significant proportion demonstrated challenges with the language, implying the occurrence of knowledge gaps within this privileged group as well. The implication is that a few elites continue to have dominion over political information, which grants them power to represent their version of reality and interests as the society’s.

While arguing for the importance of information in political participation and the role of the press and its language in this enterprise, this study appreciates that the

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<sup>59</sup> ‘Political efficacy’ refers to “the feeling that one is capable of influencing the decision-making process (McLeod, 1999, citing Goel, 1980, p.127).

situation is not linear. It is not all information that works in the interest of society. Consequently, effective participation for development, as argued in this work, depends on the quality of the information produced, consumed and understood. Additionally, it is not automatic that once people have information, they would definitely participate. People could be politically informed but refuse to vote or talk about mainstream politics. Again, the press may use user-friendly language but some people might still decide not to read and gain the information therein. All these are possibilities, but the study's argument is that people's decisions should flow from an informed position as much as possible. For instance, an educated person may refuse to participate politically, but the decision should be informed and not based on ignorance caused by inability to understand information from the press.

Chapter 3 of this study has raised concerns by some scholars that democracy is failing in Ghana and Africa and that part of the problem could be due to inhabitants' lack of needed information to contest political authority and demand accountability. While writers continue to urge the press to provide politically relevant information to address the problem (Nyamnjoh, 2005; Mukhongo, 2010; Opuamie-Ngoa, 2010), this current study contends that the language of the press also plays a key role. The finding that many people find it difficult to understand information from the press suggests that the press could be lacking in its informative role to some extent, and this could explain the slow pace of democratic awareness and action in the political public space. It is thus not surprising that even national elections in the country, such as those of 2008, and elsewhere in the continent that are claimed to be free and fair have been associated with issues such as fraud, involving vote buying and other manipulations (Bratton *et al.*, 2005). It appears that not only ordinary people but also some educated (and hence) elites are manipulated into taking political decisions that work against their interest, arguably because they lack discerning political information and knowledge.

The findings of this study, especially about the possible ineffectiveness of the press, raise critical questions about earlier press publications, especially during the colonial and authoritarian periods. The use of complex language in Ghanaian newspapers seems to date back to the colonial days although, as demonstrated in this study, little empirical study has been done on the issue to establish and foreground it

for attention. For instance, in Figure 4, the lead of the main front-page story of *The Accra Evening News* (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1952) is reproduced verbatim below:

Despite assurances made by Mr K. A. Gbedemah, Minister of Commercial and Industry of the Gold Coast, that his government has no intention to nationalize the mining industry controlled by and exploited by British financiers, these imperialists are prepared to support any group or faction of reactionary African politicians in their campaign to discredit Kwame Nkrumah and the semi-Self Government and obstruct the realisation of complete self government or Dominion status within the Commonwealth (*Accra Evening News* of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1952).

A brief linguistic analysis along lines of this study's linguistic analysis indicates that the lead story is a sentence containing many nominalisations such as *assurances*, *imperialists*, *reactionary*, among others, as well as Latinate forms like *nationalise*, *controlled*, *exploited*, *factions*, *discredit*, *obstruct*, and so on. Additionally, the sentence is complex (has four clauses - indicated by the four colours - and passive forms in the yellow and green clauses). The sentence is also very long (seventy-four words). Taken together, these features render the language complex and difficult, as demonstrated in the study.

Therefore, from the perspective of language, it is difficult to reconcile the language problem identified in this study with the direct impact of the press when many of the supposed readers had low levels of education. This situation has not changed radically today, implying that the press may not be supporting political participation as much as it is expected to do. Consequently, as I recommend in the next chapter, Ghanaian newspapers need to use a more user-friendly language to enhance people's participation in the political process of the country.



## **Chapter 10**

### **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research**

#### **10.1 Summary and conclusion**

This research investigated the language of Ghanaian newspapers to discover the extent to which the language of front-page news stories was complex, readable, and comprehensible. The investigation occurred from two perspectives. The first focused on the newspaper text, dealing with its lexical and syntactic elements in the context of text complexity, readability and meaning difficulty. The second perspective focused on the Ghanaian reader, to find out how the reader engages with the language of the newspaper text. These issues were addressed through a pragmatic research design that employed a critical and rigorous interdisciplinary approach involving computational analyses of newspaper texts (using Wordsmith and readability tools), an audience survey of readers and interviews with news producers in Accra, Ghana. The results from these perspectives and methods were correlated and triangulated. This enriched the overall findings in the attempt to provide answers to the issues investigated. This final chapter summarises the major findings of the study, concludes the investigation with key points and contributions of the analysis, discusses recommendations and limitations, and ends with suggestions for further research.

The study has discovered that Ghanaian newspapers employ complex language in their front-page news reports. The analyses revealed considerable occurrences of long words, nominalisations and Latinate expressions, as well as long, complex sentences, and passive forms in the writing of the newspapers. These features were found to have the potential to causing reading and comprehension problems for consumers, and indeed, many readers of the study found the language difficult because of the linguistic elements. Therefore, linguistic elements play a significant role in the readability and comprehension of the newspapers. This discovery reaffirms research findings on the relationship between the linguistic elements of any text and its readability and comprehension. As this study shows, the less

complex the linguistic characteristics of the newspapers, the easier it is to read and understand them, and vice versa with more complex features.

Concerning vocabulary, the results show that a considerable number of the lexical items of the corpus were long (about **26%** were seven letters and above) and that the text displayed a relatively high lexical variety and very low lexical frequency. These characteristics imply notionally that the words of the text are largely unfamiliar and possibly difficult. Reading and comprehension experts such as Just and Carpenter (1992) and Neath and Nairne (1995) have noted that such words in any text can attract extra eye fixation time and exert a burden on the working memory of the brain. The research also found that **10%** and **5%** of the 613 words of each newspaper story were Latinate and nominalised expressions, respectively. These lexical items are usually long, abstract, vague, and technical. A comparison of the corpus with established corpora such as the BNC and COCA revealed that the newspapers employed typical vocabulary items, most of which were Latinate and technical words such as *dispensation*, *incumbent*, *circumspection*, *communique*, *mandatory*, *reiterate*, *municipality*, among others. Many of these words have been found to be rare even in academic writing (see Nation, 1990, 2001; Coxhead, 2000). The significance of these findings rests on the interpretation of the quantity of the difficult expressions within the total number of words in the corpus. Corpus linguistic studies have shown that about half of the words of any text are *function* words like *the*, *in*, *of*, etc., with the remaining being content or information bearing words such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, etc. Function words do not carry information, so the critical information of any text resides in the content words, such as those studied in this research. Thus, this study's findings about the quantity of difficult information-bearing words in the corpus have an important implication for the linguistic complexity of the newspapers.

These lexical items are located in a generally intricate syntactic structure. The results show that each sentence is complex and long (with at least two clauses and an average of 31 words). Meanwhile, experts such as Russell (2001) and Smith (2007) suggest an optimal maximum sentence length of 25 words for newspapers (see section 7.2.2.2.1). Additionally, the sentences display a varied combination of different clauses and passive forms. It is known that the longer the sentences of a text; the more clauses there are per sentence; and the more passive forms there are in

a text, the more complex the text becomes (Russell, 2001; Snow, 2002; Hess and Biggam, 2004; Norris and Ortega, 2009). This is because these syntactic structures are inherently complex.

Readability test results, also based on word and sentence features, supported the above findings about the complexity of the news stories. The results show that, on average, about **85%** of the news texts read at 'difficult' level. The interpretation is that the texts are mostly suitable for tertiary level readers. Yet, the study found that the newspapers target a wider readership, including readers with educational attainments below tertiary level.

Results of the audience survey correlated with the linguistic findings. They indicated that a significant proportion of readers across the educational groups found the nominalisations, Latinate expressions, phrasal verbs, long complex sentences and passive forms of the newspapers difficult to comprehend. Results of comprehension tests of readers and their opinions about the language of the newspapers indicated that many readers found it difficult to deal with the newspapers' language because of its complexity. The study discovered through usability tests that nominalisations, Latinate expressions and multiple clauses in a sentence were the most influential markers of the problem. This means that using simple language (that is, language with limited occurrences of the variables investigated) could considerably facilitate reading and comprehension, as demonstrated in the research.

Most of the participants of this research were university graduates or in tertiary educational institutions, and this connects with a general belief, that the quality press in Ghana targets highly educated people (BBC World Service Trust, 2006). This was also a hypothesis of this study because of the linguistic choices of the newspapers. This hypothesis has been confirmed by the findings of this study. The implication is that many readers with educational attainments below tertiary levels are excluded from accessing information directly from the quality press, together with the associated political knowledge that the exposure is supposed to promote. What is alarming is that many people with higher educational attainments also find the language challenging. Thus, Ghanaian newspapers, instead of helping to spread political knowledge for effective participation, are rather creating conditions that favour a privileged elite class.

Importantly, the results revealed a remarkable finding that contradicted a hypothesis of the study. The study had predicted that readers prefer simple language because it is clear, readable and easily understood. The study found that a significant proportion of readers (nearly **30%**) wanted or were indifferent to the use of complex language. Interestingly, the study discovered that the majority of these readers were themselves challenged by the language since most of them demonstrated during the research that they did not understand the language. This finding implies that some Ghanaians endorse complex language for its own sake. Perhaps they prefer the complex language because of the symbolic and cultural power associated with that type of language. The finding raises questions that could serve as hypotheses for further research. For example, how would this particular group react to or receive publications in plain English, and what would be the impact of such a linguistic attitude to political participation?

Additionally, the results involving phrasal verbs were marginal, at less than 1% of the 614 words of a news story. However, it is difficult to assess accurately the impact of their occurrences on the complexity or difficulty of the text. This is because it is usually difficult to control variables in studies of this nature to establish an idea of the individual contribution of variables to text complexity and difficulty. Therefore, although the corpus linguistic and readability test results suggest strongly that the language under study was complex, it cannot be established in definite terms the quantity of the linguistic items that would individually and collectively provide a description of text as complex or not. The findings are consequently to be understood in holistic terms.

Therefore, from the textual perspective and based on the above summary findings, the language of the Ghanaian front-page newspapers is best described as considerably complex. The nature and level of complexity of the newspapers' language may compare with academic prose (as demonstrated with the LOB Corpus in Biber *et al.* (1998)) and legal language in terms of language style and structure. These two genres are specialised domains and meant for advanced readers; yet, newspapers, as public communication outlets, target a generalised readership. The findings, thus, provide empirical evidence that Ghanaian newspapers use 'big' English in news reportage. They also support the notion that many Ghanaians readers across the educational levels have problems understanding the messages

published by the English language newspapers. Importantly, the use of complex and technical language strongly suggests that many readers could be unable to access information directly from the press, which implies their alienation from the discourse of the press. An important associated possibility is that many Ghanaian readers may be receiving distorted information from the press, because they may be gaining vague or 'partial' meanings due to their inability to fully comprehend the message. This then suggests that the press may not be empowering people much through the issues it primes for citizens to take critical political decisions and actions. It is therefore suggested that the press is not effective in transmitting socio-political information to the broad spectrum of the people it claims to target, and this may not augur well for political participation and democracy in the country.

It must be pointed out that the findings and conclusions of the study should not be misunderstood to mean that a text with simple language (short sentences, familiar vocabulary, among others) is immediately and always easy to read and understand. For instance, a short sentence with familiar words may be badly organised, or may express an unfamiliar topic, which may challenge a reader. Thus, knowing, for instance, the words of a text may not necessarily always mean really understanding and engaging with that text. Therefore, the findings of this research should not be understood in absolute terms. Rather, they should be construed as general expectations relative to the perspective of this project.

## **10.2 Toward a concept of *linguistic exclusion* in press practices in Ghana**

Drawing on the findings and interpretations of the study, I propose and describe a concept of *linguistic exclusion* as a step toward a full conceptualisation of the term in press practices. Following up on the discussion in section 1.1.2, I locate the term within the broad notion of relative marginalisation and deprivation from the perspective of language use. Johnson and Coulthard (2010, p.9) provide a view on 'exclusion' in language that is similar to the ideas of this concept, only that its focus is narrowly on legal language. The writers explain, "[L]egalese is unnecessarily exclusive and that preserving stylistic features, such as lengthy and complex sentences with a high degree of subordination and embedding, wordiness ...

‘excludes those who do not belong’” (citing Tiersma, 1999). This understanding leads us to a description of the concept that is integral to this study.

*Linguistic exclusion*, as conceptualised in this study, may be understood as a situation whereby news writers or producers unintentionally use language that is too difficult and largely incomprehensible to much of the target audience. It applies to a situation in which the problem resides largely with the language of the text and not the reader. Thus, linguistic exclusion applies to an instance where persons who are socialised to understand a particular language are unable to do so because the language is not user-friendly. This occurs when the communicators believe that they have specific audiences in mind and that the audiences should find the language easy and understandable. In this way, access to the information is deliberately or inadvertently limited to some privileged sections of the society, thereby creating a form of language-based exclusion. This idea though requires further conceptualisation to develop it into a model of analysis.

### **10.3 Ghanaian newspapers: A case for the use of plain English**

Results concerning the complex and difficult nature of the language of the newspapers provide a reason for the study to adopt an advocacy position, as cued in the Introduction of this study. This position stems from scholarly and practical views on language of journalism. It is a normal expectation that news producers must use language consciously to connect with their audiences and through that demonstrate their knowledge and awareness of their audiences. Conboy (2007, p.41) cogently expresses this linguistic dimension of journalistic practice thus:

Vocabulary of news attempts to appeal to a particular audience in terms of the register used. Register refers to the use of a particular type of language in a particular context. Register can reveal as much about the media institution as it can about its perceived audience because it circulates a version of the language of its targeted social grouping.

This perspective bears testimony to the positive appeal that using a language style that suits audiences has on readership. The case of the penny press of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in the US and the tabloid in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in UK serves to show how conscious shifts in language style influenced newspaper circulation (Brochu, no date; Conboy, 2011). Drawing on Brian McNair, Conboy (2011, pp.119-120) observes that a shift in the language style of the elite press from pompous and

erudite forms to a more user-friendly style (of the tabloid) illustrated a step “towards a more inclusive, even democratic journalism culture.” Similarly, Turner (1998, p.48) observes that the use of simple language in the penny press helped to “solidify a democratic consciousness in its readers.” Thus, the use of “simplified or proletarian” language (Conboy, 2011, p.110) was one of the important factors that appealed to a much broader readership to revolutionise newspaper circulation.<sup>60</sup> The role of newspaper readability in empowering citizens for development in such circumstances cannot be overemphasised. Brochu (no date) is of the view that the use of simple language in the penny press, language that everyone could understand, played a key role in literacy rates in the US. The argument of this study is that these happenings and views could similarly apply to the Ghanaian situation.

The practical usefulness of using simple language in news as indicated above is supported by the fact that journalism textbooks and news writing guidebooks (see for example, Harcup (2009) and Smith (2007)) promote simple writing styles. These studies on journalism devote chapters or sections to linguistic issues concerning lexical and syntactic usage to emphasise the importance and role of these linguistic elements in news comprehension. For example, Smith (2007, p.120) provides the following caution:

- Use short words rather than long ones if they do the job just as well – *fire* not *conflagration*, *dead* not *decease*. People tell you *what they saw*, not *inform you what they witnessed*.
- Be active, not passive. Say people did something, not something happened to them.
- Be user-friendly. Don’t say *a sewage regeneration schemes planned* when you mean *families are going to get better drains*.

The writer advises that writers should aim for a sentence length of 20 words and should rarely go beyond 35 words. Nevertheless, the writer adds importantly that short words and sentences should blend with a few reasonably long ones to prevent chunky and meaningless sentences. This means that news writing is a kind of negotiation at both the writing and reading phases of the communication process. However, this study puts the responsibility more at the writing phase. Journalists must use simple and clear language to make otherwise complex topics, such as legal and governance issues, easily comprehensible to audiences. As demonstrated in the

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<sup>60</sup> Instances of such newspapers included the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sun* of the mid 1900s (between 1930 and 1970).

study, the misuse of certain linguistic features (such as those investigated in this work) in certain proportions and arrangements can lead to readability challenges whether a sentence is long or short, though the bigger danger lies more with the use of long and complex linguistic items. It is the view of this study that this knowledge should consciously influence, especially, the language aspect of the news production process. I follow up on this proposal shortly with some recommendations on some of the issues at stake in this thesis.

#### **10.4 Contributions**

This research contributes significantly to scholarship on communication and media studies as well as to journalistic practices in Ghana and other similar societies in Africa. Some of the benefits have already been implied in earlier discussions. Firstly, the study is original research, which adds to knowledge on the direct access and influence of the press in Ghana. As stated earlier, the issue of news readability and comprehension, particularly the specific perspective proposed in this research, has received little research attention in recent times even in global perspectives. Thus, while reviving scholarly interest in newspaper readability in the global literature, it contributes another important perspective to communications research on language use in the press regarding news production and consumption. Additionally, this project also serves as one of the first major attempts at investigating the topic in Ghana and it may open up scholarly interest in the field in the country and similar societies.

Secondly, the study also provides an important contribution to theory development and methodology in the field of media studies on Africa. Paulo Freire's educational philosophy has been suggested to underpin communication generally (Servaes, 1996). However, this study has adopted and discussed Freire's educational philosophy as an empowerment framework that focuses specifically on the developing conditions of new democracies to analyse the informative function of the mass media. This model may be used as a framework for other studies on new democracies. The research design (a combination of corpus-based computer-aided and readability formula analyses and an audience survey of newspaper readers and producers) for this interdisciplinary study is a rare approach in journalism and media studies. This design may be applied in similar studies to carry further studies in media language and journalism.



Additionally, Ghana shares demographics and other socio-political characteristics with many other countries in Africa and elsewhere. Therefore, the outcome of the study could be generalised to other settings of similar socio-political, linguistic, educational and press characteristics. Insights from the linguistic analyses and the relatively broad similarity in the social, cultural, political and economic circumstances between Ghana and other Anglophone sub-Saharan African countries make it possible to apply some aspects of the research to such societies. Thus, the social and cultural influences behind the use of language in Ghanaian newspapers as well as the ability to read the newspapers could be nearly similar, enabling the possibility of generalising the findings at least notionally to such societies. Finally, the study should provide an empirical basis for the Ghanaian press to adopt news production practices that are informed by linguistic considerations regarding the relationship between the language of news and its comprehension.

### **10.5 Recommendations: Achieving linguistic inclusion**

The results of this study have shown that Ghanaian newspapers use complex language and that many readers find it difficult understanding the newspapers' language. Hence, I draw on useful pieces of advice such as those provided by Smith (2007) and advocates of plain English to propose that Ghanaian newspapers should use simple language (English). This proposal is based on the understanding that the primary goal of any writer, whatever the text, is for the text to be understood by those for whom it is written. I argue further that regarding news production and comprehension, it is not the reader's duty to understand; it is the writer who has to provide clear and readable texts. The writer can achieve the purpose of his/her writing by significantly reducing the occurrence of nominalisations, Latinate expressions, long words and sentences, clauses, passive forms, and other linguistic features that may challenge readers. However, advocating the use of simple language in journalism should not be misunderstood as a call for a type of inordinate and banal simplification of journalistic writing. This study has demonstrated that the language of newspapers can be made simple without destroying or undermining the vigour of the language and the message. Thus, as 'storytellers', (not 'article' or 'report' writers), Ghanaian journalists should cultivate a distinctive version of narrative with accessible lexical and syntactic features that responds to the language and socio-cultural needs of their readers. This will enable more readers to access

information in the newspapers than has been the case previously to enhance political participation and, consequently, the democratisation process.

Additionally, since the research has revealed that news editors and editorial conferences appear to lack knowledge of their audiences' linguistic ability, I propose that newspaper organisations should strive to know and engage with their audiences through audience research rather than just writing and expecting that every reader will understand. It is recommended that Ghanaian newspapers use language from an informed position and not rely on an assumption that complex language is what sells the newspapers. Mass media audiences are the ultimate consumers of press productions; therefore, audiences should be considered during the news production process.

The research has revealed that the tendency to use impressive or 'big' English in Ghana without considering whether it is understood is cultivated in the formal school system. Hence, the school has a role to play to enhance the effective use of language in communication. It is therefore recommended that the school system, from basic to tertiary levels, revise its curricula and approach to English teaching and learning to enable students understand that language use is to promote communication and that comprehension is the keyword in the process. Students should also be made to understand how to use language across various ability levels depending on targeted readership and the purpose of communication.

## **10.6 Limitations of the study**

Although the study has largely succeeded in investigating what it set out to do, I point out some limitations, which is normal with a study of this nature. The issue of language complexity, readability and comprehension (of newspapers) has different dimensions, which is almost impossible for a single study to cover comprehensively, given constraints of time and logistics. I therefore discuss major limitations of the research from three perspectives: issues involving comprehension, the research process, and the results.

The conclusions of the linguistic aspect of the study are based on only a number of lexical and syntactic features and did not include some other text features or all the linguistic elements of the text. Additionally, the study was not designed to

establish precisely the quality and amount of information readers obtain from the press. Within the constraints of time and logistics, it is practically impossible to study all linguistic items as well as all issues concerning reading and comprehension of a corpus such as the one used in this instance. Other linguistic features such as cohesion, collocation, noun phrases, among others, are alternative and complementary items that could serve as variables of inquiry for further research toward a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Additionally, part of this research ambitiously tested the subjective, and hence complex, issue of comprehension from reading a text, and the findings were expressed through another (language) skill, writing. These lend the study itself to complexities because of possible uncertainties about whether, for instance, readers were able to reproduce in writing meanings that they had in mind.

The findings of the linguistic analysis regarding text complexity are better understood in relative terms since they are generalisations. Although many studies have established a close association between lexical and syntactic complexity and comprehension difficulties, the matter appears to be inconclusive as findings have not been consistent and stable (Israel and Duffy, 2009). For instance, while most studies have established a strong relationship between vocabulary and comprehension in general, Yildirin *et al.* (2011) discovered a high correlation between vocabulary and comprehending expository text but a medium correlation with lexical and narrative text. Researchers have used a variety of language, text and human characteristics in their studies for which reason findings may vary in the field.

Although the overall methods of the study are largely reliable, some challenges may also be identified with aspects of the research methods and analysis. Practical considerations concerning the cultural and technological context of the study necessitated that relatively few and short newspaper passages and texts were used as data for the analysis. Again, although participants were admitted based on an educational criterion and further classified according to educational backgrounds, controlling for cognitive ability was beyond the scope of the analysis.

The above or any other perceived limitation notwithstanding, the research was not undermined in any way. The various methods and processes employed in the investigation were well thought through and yielded results that helped to achieve

the objectives of the research. The specific weaknesses of the various methods and variables are moderated and supported by the mixed methods research design, which enabled the use of computational analyses, reading comprehension, survey questionnaire, and interview methods. In fact, the use of the mixed methods design and the computational analysis provided enough validity and reliability of methods and findings to offset the methodological weaknesses of the study.

### **10.7 Suggestions for further research**

This study appears to be one of the few major studies in news readability and comprehension in Ghana. As such, there is the need for more research either using the same methods for longitudinal effects or with other approaches and variables toward a comprehensive understanding of the issues discussed in this research. Specific areas that may be investigated, in addition to other areas identified and signalled throughout the thesis for further studies, include comprehension of newspapers from cognitive perspectives, how media-led ideologies are manufactured and consumed, specific effects of the media on society, and so on. English is used in the electronic or broadcast media in Ghana; hence, the issue of language complexity in those media is a relevant topic for study as well.

The issue of language complexity goes beyond newspapers readability or language use in the mass media to also include other public and government communications in general such as wills, contract forms, pension documents, government letters, and so on. These may also be prone to language complexity and are worthy of study since they border on human rights, democracy and empowerment. These issues are of particular interest to this researcher and will engage his research attention upon completing this project.

The readability levels of texts and other written documents in Ghanaian schools require research attention. Issues concerning the reading levels of reading materials in the various educational levels are important because the reading ability and potential of Ghanaians depend on the school system. Thus, studies are needed toward the development of research-based criteria for selecting and developing reading material for the various school levels in the country.

## **10.8 Concluding remarks**

The focus of this study on Ghanaian newspapers was based on the notion that the newspaper is a medium of mass communication involved in mediated communication of events and issues that are relevant for public engagements. The newspaper is believed to be a major organiser of political participation and an influential initiator of agenda for public discourse in Ghana through the political and social matters it primes (Hasty, 2005; Sikanku, 2011). The language problem discovered in this study indicates that the press could be failing in its informative role. That the press uses a language style that unintentionally challenges and prevents many targeted readers from directly accessing needed information for political participation is not just a disincentive to democracy, but is also undemocratic and a violation of the people's (access to information) rights. Such a situation leaves the political space for mostly political elites to contest and seek their interests and to disadvantage the majority of inhabitants, thereby limiting the pace of participation and development generally. Therefore, making original news information in newspapers understandable to as many citizens as possible is crucial and largely holds the key to the success of democracy in the country. The concerns and serious implications of this study should, therefore, engage the attention and action of all stakeholders in the country's media industry, particularly, news producers and media educators, for news to be more responsive to consumers.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: The Ghanaian newspapers used for the study



## Appendix 2: Participant informed consent form

University of Leeds

Leeds, LS2 9JT. UK

### Research and Participant Consent Information

**Title of Research: The press and political participation: Newspapers and the Politics of linguistic exclusion and inclusion in Ghana**

**Name of Researcher:** Modestus Fosu

(This will be read to participants for their verbal agreement or given to institutions (such as schools to include participants under 16) to read and sign before being included. The researcher will have a sheet to mark for verbal informed consent).

#### **Research Information:**

This research seeks to find out the interaction between English language newspapers and their readers in Ghana. Specifically, it is to discover what readers think and feel about the language of the papers. The purpose of the research is purely academic seeking to make newspapers more beneficial to their readers in the country than has been the case. The results of the research will be submitted to the University of Leeds and may be published by the university.

Therefore, you are being chosen as a participant to read and express your views on sample newspaper language items. You are free not to take part or withdraw if you begin. Kindly give your honest responses to the questions on the questionnaire.

You are assured that your participation and any information you provide will be securely protected and kept very confidential. You may ask for further clarification if you are not sure about anything.

*Tick the box if you agree with the statement to the left:*

- 1 I confirm that I have read/heard and understand the information on this paper dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 2011 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
- 2 I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. Do not hesitate to contact the researcher about the above point or any other issue by phone on +233 285199401 or +44 7424626844 or by e-mail, csmf@leeds.ac.uk.
- 3 I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the

report or reports that result from the research.

4 I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research

5 I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant  
*representative*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher (*or legal*  
or person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**(must additionally be completed for participants below 16 years):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Head Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**NB:** If you want any further clarification or have any questions to ask, please do not hesitate to call the researcher on + 233 285199401

Copies:

*Once this has been signed by both parties, the institution should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant paper. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.*

### Appendix 3a: Distribution of nominalisations in each newspaper

	<i>CHRONICLE</i>	<i>GRAPHIC</i>	<i>GUIDE</i>	<i>TIMES</i>
<b>Suffix</b>				
tion/sion	2938 (40.60%)	3136 (43.25%)	2045 (35.38%)	2407 (39.18%)
ment	1035 (14.30%)	1053 (14.52%)	732 (12.66%)	873 (14.21%)
ness	63 (0.87%)	86 (1.18%)	108 (1.82%)	76 (1.23%)
er	1153 (15.93%)	1113 (15.35%)	1165 (20.15%)	1051 (17.11%)
ity	700 (9.67%)	673 (9.28%)	497 (8.59%)	606 (9.86%)
ism	55 (0.76%)	44 (0.60%)	35 (0.60)	35 (0.56%)
ship	128 (1.76%)	100 (1.37%)	89 (1.53%)	99 (1.61%)
ance	203 (2.80%)	226 (3.11%)	211 (3.65%)	222 (3.61%)
ence	321 (4.43%)	334 (4.60%)	337 (5.83%)	270 (4.39%)
cy	507 (7.00%)	221 (3.04%)	286 (4.94%)	189 (3.07%)
al	43 (0.59%)	95 (1.31%)	126 (2.17%)	158 (2.57%)
age	36 (0.49)	67 (0.92%)	23 (0.39%)	87 (1.41%)
ery	54 (0.74%)	102 (1.40%)	126 (2.17%)	69 (1.12%)
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7236 (100.00%)</b>	<b>7250 (100.00%)</b>	<b>5780 (100.00%)</b>	<b>6142 (100.00%)</b>

### Appendix 3b: Frequency of Latinate words and their percentages within the total occurrences of Latinate words

		<i>CHRONICLE</i>	<i>GRAPHIC</i>	<i>GUIDE</i>	<i>TIMES</i>
	<b>Item</b>				
<b>prefix</b>	-co	3480 (25.79%)	3344 (25.18%)	2739 (25.57%)	2854 (25.29%)
	-cur	104 (0.77%)	97 (0.73%)	72 (0.67%)	47 (0.41%)
	-de	1483 (10.99%)	1378 (10.37%)	1124 (10.49%)	1108 (9.82%)
	-dis	490 (3.63%)	430 (3.23%)	373 (3.48%)	408 (3.61%)
	-in	1740 (12.89%)	1609 (12.11%)	1408 (13.14%)	1411 (12.50)
	-po	896 (3.64%)	786 (5.91%)	656 (6.12%)	491 (4.35%)
	-pr	2049 (15.18%)	2074 (15.61%)	1701 (15.88%)	1732 (15.25%)
	-sub	83 (0.61%)	109 (0.82%)	116 (1.08%)	114 (1.01%)
<b>suffix</b>	-ance	271 (2.00%)	328 (2.47%)	264 (2.46%)	283 (2.50%)
	-ble	281 (2.08%)	364 (2.74%)	245 (2.28%)	316 (2.80%)
	-ise/ize	386 (2.86%)	402 (3.02%)	261 (2.43%)	450 (3.98%)
	-ist	96 (0.71%)	84 (0.63%)	74 (0.69%)	78 (0.49%)
	-ive	422 (3.12%)	446 (3.35%)	315 (2.94%)	375 (3.32%)
	-ure	301 (2.23%)	473 (3.56%)	274 (2.55%)	424 (3.75%)
<b>others</b>	-age	419 (3.10%)	469 (3.53%)	365 (3.40%)	445 (3.94%)
	-ate	990 (7.33%)	885 (6.66%)	724 (6.75%)	747 (6.62%)
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>13491 (100.00%)</b>	<b>13278 (100.00%)</b>	<b>10711 (100.00%)</b>	<b>11283 (100.00%)</b>

### Appendix 4: Clauses in the corpus

Finite Verb Forms					
TAG		<i>CHRONICLE</i>	<i>GRAPHIC</i>	<i>GUIDE</i>	<i>TIMES</i>
VBB	<i>am, is, are</i>	365	316	382	436
VBD	Past of <i>BE</i>	2070	2078	2215	1566
VBZ	s' form of <i>BE</i>	801	526	742	836
VDB	<i>DO, DOES</i>	73	32	73	57
VDD	past of <i>DO</i>	149	99	129	99
VDZ	s' form of <i>DO</i>	34	13	32	31
VHB	<i>HAVE</i> (base)	339	202	288	311
VHD	Past i.e. <i>HAD</i>	685	950	833	463
VHZ	s' form: <i>HAS/HAVE</i>	641	296	509	455
VVB	base of lexicals	1006	771	922	803
VVD	past of lexicals	4562	4514	4761	4406
VVZ	s' form lexicals	643	391	548	569
VM0	modals	1662	1486	1283	1247
	<b>Total Clauses</b>	<b>13030</b>	<b>11674</b>	<b>12717</b>	<b>11279</b>

### Appendix 5: Results of readability formula Tests

	<i>Chronicle</i>					<i>Guide</i>		
	<u>Fog</u>	<u>Flesch</u>	<u>Dale</u>		<u>Fog</u>	<u>Flesch</u>	<u>Dale</u>	
<b>August</b>	<b>17.06</b>	<b>34.55</b>	<b>8.88</b>		<b>August</b>	<b>16.00</b>	<b>41.45</b>	<b>8.68</b>
<b>Sept</b>	<b>18.19</b>	<b>36.22</b>	<b>8.84</b>		<b>Sept</b>	<b>16.62</b>	<b>40.64</b>	<b>8.46</b>
<b>Oct</b>	<b>16.71</b>	<b>39.32</b>	<b>8.63</b>		<b>Oct</b>	<b>16.64</b>	<b>40.65</b>	<b>8.71</b>
<b>Nov</b>	<b>17.83</b>	<b>37.15</b>	<b>8.58</b>		<b>Nov</b>	<b>16.03</b>	<b>42.72</b>	<b>8.51</b>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>17.45</b>	<b>36.81</b>	<b>8.73</b>		<b>Average:</b>	<b>16.32</b>	<b>41.37</b>	<b>8.59</b>
<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>1.99</b>	<b>0.15</b>		<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>0.98</b>	<b>0.12</b>
	<i>Graphic</i>				<i>Times</i>			
	<u>Fog</u>	<u>Flesch</u>	<u>Dale</u>		<u>Fog</u>	<u>Flesch</u>	<u>Dale</u>	
<b>August</b>	<b>18.46</b>	<b>34.01</b>	<b>8.87</b>		<b>August</b>	<b>18.37</b>	<b>32.39</b>	<b>8.81</b>
<b>Sept</b>	<b>17.16</b>	<b>36.79</b>	<b>8.77</b>		<b>Sept</b>	<b>16.81</b>	<b>35.33</b>	<b>8.97</b>
<b>Oct</b>	<b>18.37</b>	<b>34.99</b>	<b>8.75</b>		<b>Oct</b>	<b>16.38</b>	<b>39.79</b>	<b>8.72</b>
<b>Nov</b>	<b>18.54</b>	<b>33.11</b>	<b>9.03</b>		<b>Nov</b>	<b>16.8</b>	<b>41.84</b>	<b>8.47</b>
<b>Average:</b>	<b>18.13</b>	<b>34.73</b>	<b>8.86</b>		<b>Average:</b>	<b>17.09</b>	<b>37.34</b>	<b>8.74</b>
<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>1.58</b>	<b>0.13</b>		<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>4.27</b>	<b>0.21</b>

Key to the Interpretation of the Scores (from DuBay, 2004):

- **Fog Index:** 5 is readable; 10 is hard; 15 is difficult; and 20 is very difficult. (Note that, college or university level has a score of 10 or less.)
- **Flesch Reading Ease:** the higher the score the easier to read; 70 – 100 indicates from easy to very easy to read; 0 – 30, very difficult to read (post university or college graduate); 30 – 50, difficult to read (university/college graduate); 60-70, standard.
- **New Dale-Chall:** 4.9 and below, for grade 4 and below; 5.0 – 6.9, for grades 5 – 6; 7.0 – 7.9, for grades 9 – 10; 8.0 – 8.9, for grades 11 – 12; 9.0 – 9.9, for grades 13 – 15 (college level); 10 and above for grade 16 and up.

## Appendix 6: Survey questionnaire form

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK

### RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello,

My name is Modestus Fosu, and I'm a research student at the University of Leeds, UK. I'm studying issues concerning the language of the press in Ghana in terms of reading and comprehension. Specifically, I'm trying to find out what readers think and feel about some aspects of the language of Ghanaian newspapers. The purpose of this academic research is to contribute information that can help in making newspapers more user-friendly. The findings will be submitted to the University of Leeds and may appear in academic publications.

You have been chosen as a participant in this research to read and express your views on sample newspaper language items and other issues. You are free not to take part and can withdraw at any time without any obligation. Kindly give your honest responses to the questions. Please, don't write your name or provide any information that can identify you on the questionnaire form.

You may ask for further clarification if you're not sure about anything.

Thank you very much.

### NOW ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW

#### SECTION A

**Instructions: Write your answers in the spaces provided after each question or tick the appropriate box.**

A1. What is/are your main source(s) of information on **local** events?  
(Example: magazines, church, radio, internet, school, TV, newspapers, friends, etc.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

A2. What is/are your main source(s) of information on **foreign** events?  
(Example; magazines, internet, TV, church, newspapers, school, radio, friends, internet, etc.)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

A3. Do you read daily newspapers?

- YES
- NO





**newspaper** and answer the questions on the extracts. (The headlines of the stories from which the extracts are taken have been supplied to help you)

**Extract 1:** Headline: Ataa Ayi Gets 20 more yrs

**The court said it took into consideration the prevalence of armed robbery in the country, the overwhelming evidence adduced against the convicts by the prosecution, the character and antecedents of the convicts, among others, before imposing the sentence.**

B1. What do you think of the language style (that is the words, expressions, nature of the sentences, etc.) of the above extract, (i.e. how does the language style help or hinder in your reading and understanding of the message)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B2. The words and expressions below are taken from the extract above. For each word or expression, tick **YES and briefly give the meaning** if you understand, or tick **NO** if you don't understand:

	YES	NO	If YES, briefly state the meaning
• prevalence	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• adduced	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• prosecution	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• antecedents	[ ]	[ ]	.....

B3. Mention any other word(s) or expression(s), if any, that you do not understand or which do not help you to get the message?

.....  
.....  
.....

B4. Based on the above, how would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:

- [ ] Easy to understand
- [ ] Difficult to understand
- [ ] Or you can't say

**Extract 2:**

Headline: Govt to exceed projected revenue

**The President of the Ghana National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GNCCI), Mr Wilson Atta Krofah, called for the widening of the tax net through the strengthening of the Registrar General's Department (RGD) and the extension of business registration facilities to regional and district capitals to rope in businesses in the informal sector.**

B5. What do you think of the language style (that is the words, expressions, nature of the sentences, etc.) of the above extract, (i.e. how does the language style help or hinder in your reading and understanding of the message)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B6. The words and expressions below are taken from the extract above. For each word or expression, tick **YES** and **briefly give the meaning** if you understand, or tick **NO** if you don't understand:

	YES	NO	If YES, briefly state the meaning
• <b>called for</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>extension</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>rope in</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>informal sector</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....

B7. Mention any other word(s) or expression(s), if any, that you do not understand or which do not help you to get the message?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B8. Based on the above, how would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:

- [ ] Easy to understand
- [ ] Difficult to understand
- [ ] Or you can't say

**Extract 3:**     Headline: Nduom Exposed

**The presidential hopeful who has equally let loose David Ampofo, 'a Rawlings man', to verbally assault anyone that catches his fancy in obscene manner, constantly whined to the President about how he was being maltreated and sabotaged by his colleague ministers and chief directors of the ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and how being in government had prevented him from making money.**

B9.    What do you think of the language style (that is the words, expressions, nature of the sentences, etc.) of the above extract, (i.e. how does the language style help or hinder in your reading and understanding of the message)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B10.   The words and expressions below are taken from the extract above. For each word or expression, tick **YES and briefly give the meaning** if you understand, or tick **NO** if you don't understand:

	YES	NO	If YES, briefly state the meaning
• <b>verbally assault</b> [ ]	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>obscene</b> [ ]	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>sabotaged</b> [ ]	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>government</b> [ ]	[ ]	[ ]	.....

B11.   Mention any other word(s) or expression(s), if any, that you do not understand or which do not help you to get the message?

.....  
.....  
.....

B12.   Based on the above, how would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:

- [ ] Easy to understand
- [ ] Difficult to understand
- [ ] Or you can't say

**Extract 4:** Headline: Ex-President slated for holy position at national security, as dreaded Tony pencilled for defence

**FLT. LT. Jerry John Rawlings (rtd) has been pencilled in for what is technically described as an advisory position with national security, in a star-studded cabinet of an Atta Mills Government, which also lists Dr Tony Aidoo, the slow speaking tormentor-in-chief of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), should the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which appears to be on the upsurge, regain power.**

B13. What do you think of the language style (that is the words, expressions, nature of the sentences, etc.) of the above extract, (i.e. how does the language style help or hinder in your reading and understanding of the message)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B14. The words and expressions below are taken from the extract above. For each word or expression, tick **YES and briefly give the meaning** if you understand, or tick **NO** if you don't understand:

	YES	NO	If YES, briefly state the meaning
• <b>pencilled in</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>security</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>cabinet</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....
• <b>upsurge</b>	[ ]	[ ]	.....

B15. Mention any other word(s) or expression(s), if any, that you do not understand or which do not help you to get the message?

.....  
.....  
.....

B16. Based on the above, how would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:

- [ ] Easy to understand
- [ ] Difficult to understand
- [ ] Or you can't say

**Extract 5. Headline: Nduom Is Hot**

**THE MEDIA blitz, which Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom relished during his showing at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)**

**presidential debates, is being threatened by a simmering credibility crisis which has broken out in the Convention People's Party (CPP).**

B17. Briefly state or rewrite your understanding of the extract above.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

B18. How would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:  
 Easy to understand  
 Difficult to understand  
 Or you can't say

---

**SECTION C**

**Instructions:** The following two passages (**Passage A and Passage B**) present the same message in different ways or language styles (that is, in terms of type of words, expressions, sentences, etc.). Read each and answer the questions that follow.

**Passage A:** Mrs Asmah, who was addressing her constituents over the weekend descended heavily on the two political leaders, an unusual trait of her, and cautioned Ghanaians to observe their civic responsibility on December 7 with maximum care, else they would squander their votes on people who cannot be trusted with the management of the country.

**Passage B:** Mrs Asmah, who was speaking to people in Takoradi over the weekend, severely slammed the two party leaders in a way unusual of her character. She advised Ghanaians to perform their public duty by going out to vote on December 7. She urged them to vote with care, else they would waste their votes on people who cannot be trusted to rule the country.

C1a. Which of the two passages do you find easier to read and understand?

Passage A       Passage B

Both passages are equally easy

C1b. Give reasons or a reason for your choice above.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

C2a. Which of the two language styles would you prefer to be used in a newspaper to present messages to you?

Passage A  Passage B  Any of them

C2b. Why would you want such a writing style (that is your answer for C2a above) to be used in newspapers to present information to you?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Passage C: Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom relished the media blitz during his showing at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) presidential debates, but a simmering credibility crisis in the Convention People's Party is threatening his popularity.**

C3. Briefly state or rewrite your understanding of the extract above.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

C4. How would you describe the passage generally? Would you say it is:

- Easy to understand
- Difficult to understand
- Or you can't say

**SECTION D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

**Instruction: Tick as appropriate**

D1. **gender:**  Male  Female





**Appendix 7: CRIB SHEET 1 – Suggested meanings of identified words/expressions and extracts**

QUESTION	WORD, EXPRESSION OR PASSAGE	SUGGESTED MEANINGS
B2	<b>prevalence</b>	frequency; widespread; high rate; rampant occurrence; frequent occurrence; many occurrences/happenings; prevailing issue; etc.
	<b>adduced</b>	presented; gathered; drawn; provided; made available; etc.
	<b>prosecution</b>	the one or those Lawyer, etc. accusing someone before trial in court; lawyers, etc. supporting a charge in court; petitioner; official state accuser; the one accusing; the one taking legal action; etc.
	<b>antecedents</b>	history of activities; background; previous actions/acts; previous deeds; etc.
B6	<b>called for</b>	asked for; demanded; made a public appeal for; etc.
	<b>extension</b>	taking the exercise to; expansion; widening; broadening; etc.
	<b>rope in</b>	bring in; include; involve; capture (to help); etc.
	<b>informal sector</b>	business other than government controlled; unofficial; unregulated; private (business); etc.
B10	<b>verbally assault</b>	insult; hurt feelings using words; orally insult; attack orally; abuse; etc.
	<b>obscene</b>	unpalatable; gross; lewd; impolite; disgraceful; etc.

	<b>sabotaged</b>	undermined; obstructed; deliberately prevented; put obstacles in the way; prevented from making progress; frustrated; etc.
	<b>government</b>	the ruling party; national ruling body/group; state/national authority; those in charge of running the state; etc.
<b>B14</b>	<b>penciled in</b>	brought in; name written in a list; earmarked for; slated for; etc.
	<b>security</b>	law enforcement agency, safety authority; (nation's) agency or body in charge of protection, safety and welfare of the nation; etc.
	<b>cabinet</b>	president's special decision-making team; president's executive committee; the president and selected ministers forming the heart of government; national executive committee; etc.
	<b>upsurge</b>	increase (in popularity); gaining (popularity); etc.
<b>B17</b>	<b>Extract 5</b>	The publicity the media gave Dr Paa Kwesi Nduom as a high achiever during his contribution at the IEA Presidential debates is at risk because he is not seen in the same light in the CPP; here, members seem suspicious of his actions.
<b>C3</b>	<b>Passage C</b>	Dr Nduom enjoyed the way he was presented by the media during his display at the IEA debates. But mistrust by members of the CPP could destroy his popular acceptance in the society

## Appendix 8: Results of lexical items and their meanings

<b>EXTRACT 1</b>									
<b>Tertiary</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
	%	%	%		%	%	%	%	
Prevalence	<b>63.2</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>5.81</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>52.04</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>2.04</b>	<b>98</b>
Adduced	<b>41.3</b>	<b>52.9</b>	<b>5.81</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>67.19</b>	<b>28.12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4.69</b>	<b>64</b>
Prosecution	<b>60.6</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>43.62</b>	<b>53.19</b>	<b>1.06</b>	<b>2.13</b>	<b>94</b>
Antecedent	<b>32.3</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>6.45</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>SHS/Post SHS</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1 =	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Prevalence	<b>31.6</b>	<b>65.3</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>60.00</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>30</b>
Adduced	<b>15.8</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>53.33</b>	<b>46.67</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>15</b>
Prosecution	<b>39</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>13.51</b>	<b>81.08</b>	<b>5.41</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>37</b>
Antecedent	<b>13.7</b>	<b>82.1</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>38.46</b>	<b>38.46</b>	<b>7.69</b>	<b>15.38</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>EXTRACT 2</b>									
<b>Tertiary</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Called for	<b>81.93</b>	<b>13.55</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>66.93</b>	<b>29.13</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>127</b>
Extension	<b>83.22</b>	<b>12.26</b>	<b>4.52</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>64.34</b>	<b>31.78</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>129</b>
Rope in	<b>29.23</b>	<b>29.03</b>	<b>7.74</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>68.37</b>	<b>29.59</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>2.04</b>	<b>98</b>
Informal Sector	<b>50.97</b>	<b>38.71</b>	<b>10.32</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>63.29</b>	<b>30.38</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>6.33</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>SHS/Post SHS</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Called for	<b>66.32</b>	<b>28.42</b>	<b>5.26</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>63.49</b>	<b>31.75</b>	<b>1.59</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>63</b>
Extension	<b>70.53</b>	<b>26.31</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>65.67</b>	<b>28.36</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>5.97</b>	<b>67</b>
Rope in	<b>40.00</b>	<b>56.84</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>50.00</b>	<b>44.74</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>5.26</b>	<b>38</b>
Informal Sector	<b>31.58</b>	<b>65.26</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>40.00</b>	<b>46.66</b>	<b>6.67</b>	<b>6.67</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>EXTRACT 3</b>									
<b>Tertiary</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Verbally assault	<b>81.29</b>	<b>12.26</b>	<b>6.45</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>94.44</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>1.59</b>	<b>126</b>
Obscene	<b>47.10</b>	<b>43.87</b>	<b>9.03</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>73.97</b>	<b>21.92</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>73</b>
Sabotaged	<b>65.81</b>	<b>28.39</b>	<b>5.81</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>68.63</b>	<b>27.45</b>	<b>0.98</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>102</b>
Government	<b>77.42</b>	<b>16.13</b>	<b>6.45</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>75.83</b>	<b>20.00</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>SHS/Post SHS</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Verbally assault	<b>52.63</b>	<b>43.16</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>94.00</b>	<b>6.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>50</b>
Obscene	<b>21.05</b>	<b>76.84</b>	<b>2.11</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>55.00</b>	<b>35.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>10.00</b>	<b>20</b>
Sabotaged	<b>34.74</b>	<b>61.05</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>60.61</b>	<b>27.27</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>9.09</b>	<b>33</b>
Government	<b>64.21</b>	<b>32.63</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>73.77</b>	<b>19.67</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>EXTRACT 4</b>									
<b>Tertiary</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Pencilled in	<b>55.48</b>	<b>40.65</b>	<b>3.87</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>51.16</b>	<b>45.35</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>86</b>
Security	<b>65.81</b>	<b>28.39</b>	<b>5.80</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>87.25</b>	<b>4.90</b>	<b>1.96</b>	<b>5.88</b>	<b>101</b>
Cabinet	<b>58.71</b>	<b>33.55</b>	<b>7.74</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>41.76</b>	<b>51.65</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>5.49</b>	<b>90</b>
Upsurge	<b>39.35</b>	<b>50.97</b>	<b>9.68</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>70.49</b>	<b>22.95</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>4.92</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>SHS/Post SHS</b>									
Word / Phrase	Yes	No	Blank	N1	Yes Correct	Yes Wrong	Can't explain	Yes No Ans	N2
Pencilled in	<b>28.42</b>	<b>68.42</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>29.63</b>	<b>62.96</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>27</b>
Security	<b>62.11</b>	<b>35.79</b>	<b>2.10</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>77.97</b>	<b>15.25</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>5.08</b>	<b>59</b>
Cabinet	<b>38.95</b>	<b>53.68</b>	<b>7.37</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>16.22</b>	<b>75.68</b>	<b>5.40</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>37</b>
Upsurge	<b>11.58</b>	<b>84.21</b>	<b>4.21</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>72.73</b>	<b>18.18</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>9.09</b>	<b>11</b>

## **Appendix 9: Interview guide for news editors**

**University of Leeds, UK**

### **Interview Guide for Editors (Estimated Time: 40 mins)**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Modestus Fosu, a postgraduate research student at the Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds, UK. I'm doing this research to find out the views of some editors of Ghanaian newspapers regarding the language of Ghanaian newspapers in general, and that of their respective newspapers in particular, which is an important aspect of my postgraduate course. Since language is central to communication, I am interested specifically in the language aspect of news production and consumption and wish to ask you some questions for your views about these. As indicated on the informed consent form you signed, I assure you that your name and that of your media house will be treated with strict confidentiality and information you provide will be used only for academic purposes. You have the right to decline answering any question and may ask for information you provide not to be used (at any time) and this will be done. In case you have any questions later, don't hesitate to call me on +447424626844. Are there any questions you want to ask before we begin?

#### **1. Background information (to be noted by the researcher before the interview)**

- 1a. Gender .....
- 1b. Name of Newspaper.....
- 1c. Specific position and role.....

#### **2. Opening questions (to ease tension and relax interviewee)**

- 2a. What do you think is the role of the Ghanaian press in the nation's social and political life? (prompt for past, present and future)
- 2b. How would you describe the press scene in Ghana today?
- 2c. Can you tell me a little about your job? (What you typically do, the interesting and challenging aspects, etc.)

- 2d. Can you tell me a little about your newspaper? Purpose of establishment and philosophy, etc.
- 2e. What is the importance of your front-page stories? (Newsworthiness)

### **3. Questions on Language of Newspapers**

- 3a. Who is your specific readership, i.e. the precise readers you have in mind and target to read the newspapers you publish, and why this readership?
- 3b. Who specifically do you target in your front-page stories?
- 3c. In what ways does this knowledge of your audience influence your news stories and their presentation generally?
- 3d. How do you relate the English language you use (to send your messages) to the readers you have in mind? (i.e. how your writing style—words, phrases, expressions, sentences, etc. -- relates to your readers)
- 3e. (If there is no mention of language in above) What language consideration(s) do you apply in writing publishing your news and why?

### **4. Closing Questions**

If this study discovers at the end that the language of your newspaper is difficult, will that affect your style of writing? If so, in what ways?

**Thanks for giving me this opportunity.**

**Appendix 10: A University Word List (cited from Corson, 1997, p.679)**

*Corson*

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Table 2

*A University Word List: The Most Frequently and Widely Used 150 Words*

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accelerate	contribute	fluctuate	notion	sequence
achieve	convert	focus	obtain	series
adjacent	create	formulate	obvious	<i>shift</i>
affect	criterion	function	occur	signify
alternative	crucial	generate	passive	similar
analyze	data	guarantee	period	simultaneous
approach	define	hypothesis	perspective	sophisticated
approximate	definite	identify	pertinent	species
arbitrary	demonstrate	ignore	phase	specify
assert	denote	illustrate	phenomena	stable
assess	derive	impact	portion	statistic
assign	design	implicit	potential	status
assume	devise	imply	precede	structure
authorize	devote	indicate	precise	subsequent
automatic	dimension	individual	presume	suffice
chapter	distinct	inhibit	prime	sum
compensate	distort	initial	principle	summary
complex	element	innovation	proceed	technique
complicate	emphasize	intense	publish	technology
comply	empirical	interpret	pursue	tense
component	ensure	intuitive	<i>random</i>	theory
comprehend	entity	involve	<i>range</i>	trace
conceive	<i>environment</i>	isolate	react	tradition
concentrate	equate	magnetic	region	transmit
concept	equivalent	magnitude	require	ultimate
conclude	establish	major	respective	<i>undergo</i>
consequent	evaluate	manipulate	restrict	usage
consist	evident	mathematics	reverse	valid
constant	expand	method	<i>role</i>	vary
construct	expose	minimum	section	verbal
consult	external	modify	segment	verify
context	feasible	negative	select	vertical
contrast				

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