



An Etymological Study of the word ‘aborɔfo’ (Europeans) and its Impact on Akan Language

Lawrence Bosiwah, Kofi Busia Abrefa, Charles Okofo Asenso

University of Cape Coast, College of Humanities & Legal Studies, Faculty of Arts, Department of Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics, Cape Coast, Ghana

Email address:

lbosiwah@ucc.edu.gh (L. Bosiwah), kab23gh@yahoo.com (K. B. Abrefa), okofoasenso@yahoo.com (C. O. Asenso)

To cite this article:

Lawrence Bosiwah, Kofi Busia Abrefa, Charles Okofo Asenso. An etymological study of the word ‘aborɔfo’ (Europeans) and its impact on Akan Language. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and Translation*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 1-7. doi: 10.11648/j.ijalt.20150101.11

Abstract: The Akan word ‘aborɔfo’ (Europeans) came into existence in Akan through a derivational process. However, two schools of thought exist concerning the actual meaning of the word ‘aborɔfo’. Those who perceive the colonial masters to be wicked (due to their activities in the country) interpret the word as aborɔ-fo(ɔ) ‘wicked people’. The other school of thought has it that the Europeans got the name aborɔfo because they came to the Gold Coast by sea, hence, a-borɔ-fo(ɔ) (i.e. from behind the horizon). This paper seeks to use both historical and linguistic evidence in support of the latter. For the historical evidence, the paper considers the behavior of the Europeans or what they did when they first set foot on the soils of our mother land that could possibly earn them the name ‘wicked people’. It also looks at when they got that name; and also before they were seen to be wicked what was their name. Linguistically, the word aborɔ-fo(ɔ) is compared with ɔbo-fo/abo-fo ‘wicked people’ to indicate that our ancestors would have preferred abo-fo to aborɔ-fo if they wanted to refer to the Europeans as wicked people.

Keywords: aborɔfo (European), wicked people, etymological study, seafaring people, Akan language

1. Introduction

Akan language belongs to the dialect cluster of the New Kwa (Greenberg, 1963’s Western Kwa) branch of the Niger-Congo of the Central Volta-Comoe language families. Akan covers over two thirds of Ghana’s population. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census (PHC) final report, Akan is the largest ethnic group in Ghana with (47.3%) of the total population of 24,658,823. The language has over fourteen dialects, some of which include: Akuapem, Asante, Akyem, Fante, Wassa, Bono, Kwahu, Akwamu, Asen, Twifo, Dankyira, Agona, Bremang, and Adanse, some of which are more mutually intelligible than others (Schachter & Fromkin, 1968).

From the linguistic point of view, Akan falls into two main divisions, the Fante (also known as Fantse or Mfantse) and Twi, (Ward, 1967). The term “Twi” is now used as a label for the varieties of Akan spoken in such areas as Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asen, Twifo, Asante, Denkyira, Kwahu, and Bono, while “Fante” is spoken along the coast between Sekondi-Takoradi in the Western Region and Accra in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana (Boadi, 1997). The three main dialects of Akan (Fante, Asante Twi and Akuapem Twi)

are studied in schools and are also considered as separate languages (Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012:143).

The major concern has been the existence of the foreigners on the land of Ghana, especially the Europeans, controversies surrounding their name ‘oburoni’ and its implications on the people of Ghana in general and the Akan language in particular.

2. Previous works on ‘Aborɔfo’ (Europeans)

Many scholars have argued much about the coming of the Europeans and their activities in Ghana. We first of all discuss the etymology of the name ‘aborɔfo’ which was given to the Europeans.

2.1. Etymology of ‘Aborɔfo’

The Europeans, who came to Ghana, were named ‘aborɔfo’ by the Akans, especially Fantes. Any white man, Afro-American or any Ghana scholar is also called ‘oburoni’ (Twi) or ‘borɔnyi’ (Fante). The major problem is the actual meaning of the word. There have been two schools of

thought trying to interpret the meaning of the term 'aborɔfo'. One school of thought is of the view that the term which usually connotes white men, came from the land beyond the horizon. Therefore "Oburoni" is someone from 'aburokyire,' (normally translates as white man' (European). 'Aburokyire' – 'the land beyond the horizon (from borɔ: horizon; akyire: back/ behind) (Christaller, 1933: 40; Dolphyne, 1996:17; Botchway, 2008:214).

Another school of thought argues that the word 'aborɔfo' is derived from the base 'ɛ-borɔ' or 'aborɔ', which means venom. Landau & Moore (n.d) explain that, "The term Oburoni is derived from the root word 'aborɔ,' which translates as 'mean, selfish or destructive,' and the affixes 'o' and 'ni' which designate the singular for person. Thus, literally it can be translated as "a bad, mean, selfish or destructive person." In affirmation, Botchway says,

"A breakdown of the word 'Aborɔfo' would yield two Akan Fante Twi words i.e. (i) *Abor*, which, being *Aboro* in Asante and Akuapem Twi, conotes wickedness, malevolence, envy and danger, and (ii) *fo*, a word that means a group of people" Botchway (2008:190). (Obibini, 2007) in his interpretation says,

"The original words 'aborɔ ni' or 'aborɔ fo' meaning wicked person/people or someone who harms you have been corrupted to the present 'aborɔni' and 'aborɔfo' which have lost their true meanings."

This paper discusses the various perceptions of the term, because the same people or authors who argue that Europeans got the name because they came from the land beyond the horizon also turn to say that it means wickedness.

In order to arrive at a better conclusion, let us look at some of the reasons why Europeans came to Ghana, their associations with the Akans, especially the people of Elmina, some of the items brought to Ghana for the first time to be named by the Akans with the base 'aborɔ'.

2.2. The Coming of the Europeans to Gold Coast

2.2.1. The Europeans in Ghana

Although the suggestion that the French were the first Europeans to come to Ghana (the Gold Coast) in the 14th century is still alive (Debrunner, 1967:13), the view that has won wide currency among historians, and which is supported by concrete evidence is that the Portuguese explorers whose expedition was sponsored by Prince Henry the Navigator were the first to touch the shores of Ghana (Gold Coast) at Elmina in 1482. According to Azurara, a Portuguese Chronicler quoted in Odamtten, one of the reasons that prompted the Prince to send expeditions beyond Cape Bojador on the West Coast of Africa "was his great desire to create the Holy Faith Jesus Christ and to lead in this Faith all souls desirous of being saved" (Odamtten, 1978:12).

In 1482, the Portuguese built the Castle of Sao Jorge da Mina at Elmina to serve as a permanent station. Local merchants sold slave, guinea grains and ivory to the Portuguese who in turn sold beads, firearms, alcoholic drinks, cloth and looking glasses to the local merchants. The Portuguese named the area between the rivers Ankobra and

Volta, which so much gold was obtained 'Mina' meaning Mine and the French called it Cote de l'ivoire or the Gold Coast a name which was later adopted by the English and applied to the whole country, (see Antwi, 1992:13). A lucrative trade in gold and slaves attracted other European traders such as the Dutch, the English, the French, the Danes, the Swedes and the Bradenburghers into the field. By the beginning of the 19th century only the British, the Danes and the Dutch were still actively operating along the coast with the British monopolizing about half of the trade.

The first attempt at providing formal education in the country was at the Elmina Castle. The initiative came in 1529 when King John III of Portugal instructed the governor at the Elmina Castle to teach the African children how to read and write. The subjects taught were reading, writing, and religion. The Portuguese language was the medium of instruction.

In Elmina in the year 1572 saw the arrival of Portuguese Augustinians missionaries who after dividing the village of Edina in sections each took a section and there gave regular catechetical instruction and lessons in how to read.

According to Odamtten, this missionary work was brought to an abrupt end when one day the people attacked the missionaries and looted the vestments, chalices etc. The reason for the outburst is unknown, in any case the incident demonstrated that the people retained their independence and were interested in the various articles introduced by the Europeans.

In 1637 the Dutch West India Company captured the Portuguese Fort Sao Jorge. The Protestant Dutch conquerors were also anxious to carry out divine service and also start a school at the castle. They also taught reading, writing and religion. The Dutch language was used as a medium of instruction. They however introduced another dimension to the castle school. They sent out some African children abroad specifically Holland, but it was only a few who returned and actually contributed to the promotion of education. One typical person was Jacobus Capitein, a mullato who entered the Leyden University in 1727 after nine years of schooling there. Capitein was regarded as the pioneer vernacular literature for his translation of the Apostles Creed into Fante. He also translated the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and parts of the Catechism into Fante.

Anthony William Amo a native of Axim also enjoyed the Dutch scholarship to study abroad. He gained the degrees of M.A and Ph.D in German Universities and even lectured at the Universities of Wittenberg, Halle and Denvar before he returned to Axim in 1747 (Boahen, 1966:107).

Like their predecessors, the Dutch main objective was to trade with merchants from other countries making definite attempts to gain a foothold on the coast. The Dutch for some time concentrated more and more on consolidating their position; evangelization among the peoples, and therefore received very little attention.

The English also arrived in Cape Coast around 1650's under their leader Captain Thomas Windham. The British after establishing the Cape Coast Castle also started a school

in 1694. In the English area the first serious attempt had been made by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the Cape Coast Castle through the missionary, Rev Thomas Thompson. A major contribution that he made was his initiative in sending out of the country three African boys to England in 1754. These were Philip Quaque, Thomas Caboro and William Cudjoe. Philip Quaque, the only survivor of the three returned in February 1766 as missionary school master and catechist to the Negros on the Gold Coast. It is interesting to note that this was the first time a missionary specifically for the Negros people was appointed. Philip Quaque is better known for the castle school which he ran rather than any missionary work of evangelization that he undertook.

The Danish Merchants for their part after gaining a footing on the coast followed the patterns of the others and built forts in various places and maintained chaplains who ranked high in the table of precedence. The Danes also initiated some castle school education as from 1722 in the Christianborg Castle. Chaplain Elias Svane took the initiative. In 1726 Svane returned home to Denmark and took along with him two mulatto children one was his own son by an African woman and the other boy's name was Christian Protten. He met leaders of the Moravian church and by this connection; the Moravians became the first Protestant Missionaries to start work on the coast.

The castles were built for the purpose of trade and defense. The chaplains and the castle schools were generally meant to serve the garrisons of the mulatto children. As Wiltgen has stated: 'The chaplains in the Castle of Sao Jorge were after all not missionaries, they were chaplains to the garrisons and as such did not feel obliged to go outside the castle walls and live with the people' (Wiltgen, 1956:14).

Though the castles were built for the purposes of trade and defense in the castles a mere footnote to the European commercial enterprise, the schools did make some modest impact. The castle Schools helped debunk the idea of academic knowledge as being the preserve of the white man. The academic attainment of Ghanaian like William Amo helped erase the erroneous impression Europeans held about the academic ability of Africans. The castle schools also produced the first outstanding Ghanaian scholars who championed the political economic and social development. Notable among these was George Blankson, the first African member of the Legislative Council.

Also the leaders of the first nationalist movement, the Fante Confederation of 1867, came from the Cape Coast castle schools. The development of our local languages, which have become a permanent of our present system, could be traced to the pioneering work of products of the castle schools. Pioneers like Capitein, Protten, Owusu-Ansah and Nkwantabisa prepared the ground for missionaries like Riis, Christaller, Westermann, Laing who studied and developed the Ghanaian languages.

As has been pointed out already, evangelization was not the main purpose of the first European Enterprise in Ghana (Gold Coast). Economic consideration came first. Prince

Henry's aim was to use the Christian converts to promote trade. He therefore asked his navigators to bring some of the natives to Portugal so that "he might have them baptized, educated and sent back so that the Portuguese might afterwards be able to open commerce with them in their own country.

2.2.2. The Missionaries in the Development of Akan Language

It is well known fact that even though several European countries interacted with the Akan as far back as the 14th century and even established trade centers on the then Gold Coast, it was not until the Christians came with their acclaimed aim of propagating their religion to our people that the study of our L1 started (see Schweizer 2005). Expressed in the language of that time, - a language that no longer sounds familiar to our ears - the missionaries travelled to Africa "in response to God's call to elevate the uneducated heathen from his state of ignorance" (Schweizer 2005). According to Boadi (1973),

"By the end of the nineteenth century, all the books in the Bible had been translated into Twi and Fante dialects of the language by the Basel and Wesleyan missions working independently on the coast and hinterland. It became an important medium of both adult and formal education in the nineteenth century. In 1929, the two dialects were examined as Cambridge School Certificate subjects. The language and its literature are taught in almost all schools in the Akan-speaking areas of Ghana and at the University of Cape Coast as part of first-degree humanities program" (Boadi 1977:3, 4).

The first generation of applied linguist of Africa was missionaries and anthropologists who helped to reduce most African languages into writing and who wrote the first religious and secular books.

In order to entrench their religion in the culture of our people they opened local schools for the purpose of teaching the arts of reading and writing their own languages. In addition, some of the young ones so educated were further trained to become priests to eventually take up and continue preaching Christianity to our people.

The major missionaries who worked on L1 are the Basel, Wesleyans and the Bremen. "The invaluable by-product of the Basel Missionary activity was the renaissance of Ghanaian languages, most prominently 'Ga' and 'Twi'. Their aim was to preach in the local languages, write dictionaries and grammar, and ultimately make the Holy Scriptures accessible to Ghanaians in their own vernaculars" (Schweizer 2000: 6). In addition to their Akan religious texts, primers and linguistics works, the Basel Missionaries published the first Akan Oral History, collected in Ghana (see Christellar 1884) and the first oral Literature in the form of proverbs (268 proverbs were included in Riis 1853 grammar) and Folktales (Christellar 1887). The first accurate ethnographic account of Akan religion was published in 1862 by the Basel Missionary Mader; followed by the comprehensive

ethnographic studies of the Asante (1889-1900) by Rev. Edmond Perregaux (see Warren 1976: xvii). In 1859, the Wesleyan began to translate a number of Twi books obtained from the Basel missionaries into Fante in their schools. By 1870, Rev. T. Laing, a mulatto minister, had produced the first primer in the Fante language to be used in the schools.

3. Methodology

We had series of interactions with the lecturers in the Departments of History and Ghanaian Languages & Linguistics, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. We also conducted interviews to support our claims. In all, 20 people were selected for the interview. This is made up of 2 tour guards (one each from Cape Coast and Elmina castles respectively), 3 people from Ashanti Region residing in Cape Coast, 8 people who are from Cape Coast and 7 people from Elmina and its environs. They ranged between the ages of 25 to 73 years. In addition to the interview and observation data, we also collected artifacts, such as school curriculum and some pictures from the websites. The data were coded hierarchically into topics, categories and finally into themes. The data were then displayed visually in order to look for trends and patterns, as well as to be able to triangulate it across participants.

We used low-inference descriptions and participant voice in the write-up, although it should be noted that all of the interviews were conducted through translation. While the observational data was collected verbatim, the interviews were conducted in the participants’ local language on most occasions. On most occasions, the participant responded in Akan, which was then translated into English and recorded. The two researchers were very careful to translate as clearly as possible, while keeping the participants phrasing as close to the original intent. At times, the participant responded to questions in English, in which case their words were recorded verbatim. This may account for some variation in voice as one reads this article. This is also a limitation of this study. We recognize that some nuances of meaning may be lost in translation, although both researchers regularly discussed this issue and attempted to maintain as much of the meaning as possible, and to member check with participants to clarify meaning in order to address the trustworthiness of this research.

4. Findings and Discussions

The etymology of *aborɔfo* was analysed in three areas. That is, those people who perceive them to be wicked and those who see them as seafaring people. The third aspect is the use of linguistic evidence to prove the case.

4.1. Why Some People Interpret ‘*Aborɔfo*’ (Europeans) as Wicked People

Answering the question why some people interpret ‘*aborɔfo*’ as wicked people, a 69 year educationist, Madam Sandra Jacobson, a citizen of Cape Coast said,

“Well, I think they say this because of the slave trade, or it could be that some of the Europeans they got in contact with cheated on them. Listen! Were they not the Ashantis who were killing themselves and selling others to the Europeans as slaves? I was told that the Europeans were trading in ivory, slaves, etc, to develop their country. Some of us stupidly, sold our own people to them to be used to develop their country at the expense of ours. Look! I was even told that we the Fante (from Cape Coast and Elmina) were interested in drinks, gun powder and things which were not necessary, and we in turn gave them gold, human beings, etc. tell us who is wicked, the white man or the people of Gold Coast?”

Most Akans from the interior, especially Asante, Akyem, Denkyira, Kwahu, Bono, etc confessed that initially, they did not have the vocabulary ‘*borɔ*’ (horizon), because there is no sea in such areas. Commenting on the term ‘*aborɔfo*’ they first heard it from the Fantes, who became the middlemen between the Europeans and the Asantes during the slave trade. Reaffirming this, Madam Adwoa Ata, a 70 year old woman, a native of Asante Bekwai stated emphatically that,

“We the Ashantes call them ‘*aborɔ foɔ*’ (wicked people) because of the slave trade. They made us kill our own people. We sold our own people. Look! We became enemies in our own land, why?”

4.2. Why ‘*Aborɔfo*’ (Europeans) are Seafaring People

Among the Akans, if somebody who is a stranger comes to the town or somebody’s home, the first classification given to that person is ‘*ɔhɔho*’ (stranger). So they could say, “*ɔhɔho bi aba ha*” (there is a stranger here). The question one will ask is, “*Eben ɔhɔho a?* (What kind of stranger?)” Then the description follows, for example, a tall man; a short woman; a person with a white skin; and so on. In the case of this study, most of the interviewees affirmed that the Europeans came to the Gold Coast by sea. Now there was a belief that the place where the sea and the sky meet is the horizon, and that was the end. The all of a sudden, some people (Europeans) came through this horizon.

Interacting with Eric, a tour guide at the Cape Coast Castle had this to say, “According to the local people, the Europeans came to Ghana by sea. They appeared through the horizon. Now the horizon is ‘*borɔ*’ in Fante, that is why our forefathers called them, ‘*aborɔfo*, a- (nominative pl marker) - *borɔ*- (horizon) -*fo* (people), thus, people from horizon”.

We Fantes didn’t know where they came from. What we saw was that these people came beyond the sea. At first we thought there was a town after the sea, and that was where these whites were coming from, therefore we called them ‘*borɔ-fo*’ (people who live in a town beyond the sea”. Obibini (writer, Ghanaweb) in answering a question who ‘*oburoni*’ is has this to say, “I was under the impression that ‘*borɔ*’ means ‘the horizon’, therefore A-*borɔkyire* means land beyond/behind the horizon, and O-*buro-ni* is someone who is from those lands. It certainly doesn’t mean

white man literally, but being a white man in Ghana you are, obviously, an oburoni". (A 72 year old man from Elmina)

4.3. Linguistic Evidence

The word *àbòrɔ́fó* could either come from the base *àbórɔ́* 'wickedness' or the root *bòrɔ́* 'behind the horizon'. Let us first consider the base *àbórɔ́* and the affix *-fó(ɔ́)*. *Àbórɔ́* in Akan simply means wicked/wickedness as the following examples portray.

1. Kòfí yè àbórɔ́.
K. be wicked
'Kofi is wicked.'
2. Àbórɔ́ ñ-!yɛ.
Wickedness NEG-be.good
'Wickedness is not good.'

The affix *-fó(ɔ́)* on the other hand, could be used as an inflectional affix or a derivational affix. As an inflectional affix, it is used to mark number, specifically plural as in *mpànimfó* 'elders', *àhèmfo* 'kings' etc. As a derivational affix, it can be used as an agentive marker (i.e. the one who performs a particular action expressed by the predicate) as in *(ɔ́)bàyifó* 'a witch', *òwùdɪ!fó* 'murderer' *ɔ́kòrɔ́mfó*, 'thief' etc. It can also signify the origin of a group of people as in *Ghánàfó* 'people of/from Ghana (Ghanaians)', *Kumásɪ!fó* 'people of/from Kumasi' etc. And it can indicate membership of a group, club, party, association, school etc as in *Kɔ́tɔ́kɔ́fó*, 'Kotoko supporters/players' *UCCfó* 'students of UCC', *Akristofó* 'Christians', etc. That is not all, it can also indicate the state of being of some people as in *àsikàfó* 'the rich', *àhiá!fó* 'the poor' *àyàrɛ!fó* 'the sick'. The morpheme *-fo* is inherently plural except when it is used as an agentive marker, which can sometimes occur with both singular and plural nouns. In that case, it is the prefix that determines whether the word in question is plural or singular as in *ɔ́-bàyi-fó* 'a witch' and *à-bàyi-fó* 'witches'. The morpheme *-fo* has an allomorph *ni/nyi* which always indicates singular whether it is used as an inflectional affix or derivational affix.

Thus, in the sense of 'wicked people', the *fo* in *àbòrɔ́-fó* is considered as an agentive marker which implies 'people who indulge in wicked acts (wicked people)'. However, a word for wicked people - through similar derivational process - already exists in the language (i.e. *àbó!fó* 'wicked people'). We can see that with *àbó!fó*, the final syllable of the base, *aborɔ́* (i.e. *rɔ́*) is deleted before the agentive marker is attached. Thus, the word *àbórɔ́!fó(ɔ́)* 'wicked people' is realized as *abo-fo*. Again, as stated above, usually, unlike the other forms of the morpheme *-fo*, the agentive marker can go with both singular and plural nouns. Thus, the singular form of *àbó!fó* is *ɔ́bó-!fó* but never *ɔ́bó!ní/ɔ́bó!nyi*. Therefore if *oburoni* were to be interpreted as a wicked person, the word would have been *ɔ́bó-!fó* but not *òbùròní*. In addition to the above, *aborɔ́* is realized phonetically as [àbùrɔ́] and *-fo(ɔ́)* as [fù(ɔ́)] and the derived word is [abù!fù] or [ɔ́bù!fù] which is closer to the root words in terms of their tones.

Considering the orthography, one may be tempted to say

that the root word *borɔ́* is a homonym which can mean horizon, scabies, sweet or venom. However, a closer look at this word indicates that, it can have just one meaning so far as the phonology of the word is concerned. The word for scabies is /-borɔ́/ [è-bùrɔ́], that of venom is also /-borɔ́/ [è-bùrɔ́], that of sweet is a reduplicated form /borɔ́borɔ́borɔ́/ [bùrɔ́bùrɔ́bùrɔ́] while that of horizon is /borɔ́/ [bùrɔ́]. We can see from the transcription that while the others have HH, that of the horizon is LL. Let us now consider the second school of thought.

The second school of thought indicates that, the word is derived from an inflectional affix marking number - an inflectional affix marking number - *a*, the root word *bòrɔ́* 'horizon', and the derivational affix that indicates an origin '*-fó*'; hence, *à-bòrɔ́-fó* 'people from the horizon or people from behind the horizon (aburokyire 'abroad')'. The plural marker *a-* is usually said on a low tone as in [àdán] 'houses' and [àbùɔ́] 'stones'. We have already seen that the affix *-fo(ɔ́)* has high tone(s). The derived word is therefore transcribed as [abùrɔ́fù] which is in consonance with the tones of the root and the affixes. Now, the question is how come the singular is *òbùròní* but not *ɔ́bòrɔ́ní*? The answer is not farfetched. Vowel harmony operates in Akan. And the direction of the vowel harmony in Akan is regressively driven. Thus, the final [+ATR] vowel (i) assimilates the preceding [-ATR] vowels. Thus, [ɔ́bòrɔ́ní] becomes [òbùròní].

Following the argument so far, we can tentatively state that the linguistic evidence is in favour of *àbòrɔ́fó* 'as people from behind the horizon' than 'wicked people'. Apart from the conceptual meaning of *àbòrɔ́fó/òbùròní*, the word has different associative meanings in the language today that makes it difficult for it to connote wickedness since the Akan eschew any form of wicked act. It is associated with colour, beauty, promptness, value, cleverness/scholar, adorable etc.

In terms of colour, any fair coloured person can be referred to as *òbùròní* 'white person' in the language. Thus, we hear sentences like;

1. ɔ́-à-wó òbùròní bí.
3SG.SUBJ-PERF-give.birth fair (baby) INDEF
'She has given birth to a fair baby'
2. Nè ñmá nó nyínáá yè àbòrɔ́fó.
Her children DEF all be fair people
'All her children are fair'.

Obviously, when someone says an Akan has given birth to *òbùròní* the person does not seek to say the baby is European or wicked, rather the person implies the baby is fair. And most of our people admire fair people; no wonder some (especially the ladies) bleach to become like the whites. It should also be noted that there are words for white and fair in Akan already; *fúfúó* and *kɔ́kɔ́* respectively. Therefore, for one to use *òbùròní* instead of *kɔ́kɔ́* 'fair', it means the person has some affection for the whites.

In terms of beauty, the whites are generally considered to be beautiful. So, even a dark beautiful lady is sometimes likened to *òbùròní*. Thus, we hear sentences like *obibini sɛ òbùròní*, literally, 'a black (lady who is) like a white lady' or

‘an African who is like European’ (that is, a beautiful lady). Here, the emphasis is not on colour but beauty. Likewise, things from the western world are considered beautiful and valuable. Therefore we hear sentences like *yɛi dɛɛ ɔ̀bɔ̀rɔ̀fɔ̀ ɲ!sá ɔ̀nó* ‘As for this, it is the handy work of the whites’; in other words it is beautiful or valuable or both.

In terms of time, the Europeans or those from the western world are considered very discipline. That is to say, they are always punctual. On the other hand, most Africans (if not all) are noted for lateness. They usually attend meetings or appointments about thirty (30) minutes after the time scheduled. Thus, to stress that the time scheduled must be adhered to, we hear sentences like, *yɛ̀bɛ̀hyíá ɔ̀nwùmméré ɲ̀nò̀n ɲ̀són pépéépe, aborɔfo time* ‘we will meet at 7.00pm prompt.’ Here, though the word *pépépe* ‘exactly’ emphasizes punctuality, the phrase *aborɔfo time* ‘European time’ makes it more precise. *Kɔ̀fi dɛɛ, ɔ̀bùróni ɔ̀dò, ɔ̀dí né ɲ!méré sɔ̀ yíè* ‘as for Kofi, he is a European (because) he is very punctual’. Here, Kofi is referred to as *ɔ̀bùróni* not because of his colour or where he comes from but rather because of his punctuality.

Usually, people who are clever or who have climbed higher in terms of the academic ladder are also associated with the word *ɔ̀bɔ̀rɔ̀fɔ̀*. Thus, scholars are sometimes referred to as *ɔ̀bɔ̀rɔ̀fɔ̀*; possibly due to the English language they usually speak. Also, students who are in secondary schools or tertiary are sometimes associated with *ɔ̀bɔ̀rɔ̀fɔ̀*. Thus, we can hear a sentence like, *mè búróni nó á!bá* ‘my scholar has arrived’.

That is not all, lovers usually refer to each other as *ɔ̀bùróni*. In other words, *ɔ̀bùróni* does not only indicate beauty or colour but also it shows how adorable or valuable something is. So when a man refers to a lady as *mè búróni* ‘my European’, it means the man adores the lady and vice versa. Possibly he adores her due to her beauty and character, which is likened to the whites.

Looking at the way the Akan adore these Europeans, and anything that comes from Europe, it is difficult to believe that the Akan perceived them to be wicked that is why they referred to them as *ɔ̀bɔ̀rɔ̀fɔ̀*. The reason is that, if they knew right from the beginning that they were wicked, they would not have associated all these good attributes to them. And this is evident in the naming ceremony of the Akan. Before a child is named after someone, the parents or family would ensure that the person is of good character. Thus, for someone to refer to his/her lover as *oburoni*, or his/her child as *oburoni* because s/he is a scholar depict that the word does not originate from wickedness. Even today, some people name their children as *oburoni*; probably due to their colour, and it becomes their second/surname. Thus, we have names like, *Yaw Buroni, Akua Buroni, Yaa Buroni*, etc.

5. Conclusion

What this paper sought to do is NOT to determine whether or not the Europeans were/are wicked but rather to look at the etymology of the word *oburoni* (singular) or *aborɔfo* (plural). It is clear from the discussions so far that

oburoni/aborɔfo initially referred to European(s). Today, *oburoni* has so many interpretations. It could be used to mean affection – example: *me dɔfo buroni* (my true love). It is “Westernized,” “acculturated,” “enlightened” or *anibue*, *wapow*, *onim de*. *Oburoni* also refers to any foreigner, especially those with light complexion: Ghanaians use the term to describe Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese, etc as *aborɔfo*. Additionally, Ghanaians use *oburoni* as a designation for “bi-racial” Ghanaians and light complexioned Ghanaians. *Oburoni* may be used to describe anyone who is visiting Ghana from overseas, including African Americans and even Ghanaians domiciled overseas. This one has nothing to do with skin color, but much to do with living overseas. Of late, Ghanaians used to call the blacks in other countries with African names (*Obibini*) and associate with the country they come from. For instance, African American is *America obibini*, Black Brazilian is *Brazil obibini*, and so on. People, who speak with British, Canadian, American accents, or its corrupted versions, whether they are *Jamaicans*, or Ghanaians, may be described as *oburoni/aborɔfo*.

References

- [1] Akpanglo-Nartey, Rebecca A. (2012) “Gender Effect On Vowel Quality: A Case Study Of Ghanaian English”. *Canadian Journal on Scientific and Industrial Research Vol. 3 No. 3, March 2012, pp 142-150*
- [2] Akrofi, C. A. & Botchey, G. L. (1968), *An English-Twi-Ga Dictionary*. Waterville Publishing House, Accra
- [3] Akrofi, C. A. & Ludwig, R.E. (1951 revised ed.), *Twi Nsem Nkorenkore Kyerewbea (Twi Spelling Book), Government Printing office Accra, Ghana* Berry, J. (1960), *English, Twi, Asante, Fante Dictionary*. The Presbyterian Book Depot, Accra & Kumasi
- [4] Berry, J. (1960), *English, Twi, Asante, Fante Dictionary*. The Presbyterian Book Depot, Accra & Kumasi
- [5] Boadi, L. A. (1997): *Forms and Meaning in Akan*, Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Legon. Manuscript.
- [6] Botchway, De-Valera N.Y.M (2008), “When the people decide: colonialism, social and emergence of modern nationalism in the Gold Coast”. In DRUMSPEAK, International Journal of Humanities, Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. New series Vol. 1 No 2: 168-217
- [7] Christaller, J.G. (1933) Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Languages called Tshi (Twi) Basel, 1881, 2nd edition.
- [8] Dolphyne, F. A. (1988): *The Akan (Twi- Fante) Language, Its Sound Systems and Tonal Structure*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- [9] Dolphyne, F. A., & Dakubu, M. E. K. (1988). The Volta-Comoe languages. In M. E. K. Dakubu (Ed.), *The languages of Ghana* (pp. 50-90). London: Kegan Paul International.
- [10] Ghana Statistical Service (2012). *2010 Population and Housing Census, Summary Reports of final Results*
- [11] Groves, C. P. (1954). *The planting of Christianity in Africa* Volumes 1 & 2 London.

- [12] Holmes, Janet (1994). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Longman.
- [13] Kuupole, D.D. & Botchway, De-Valera N.Y.M (2010)(ed), "Polishing the pearls of Ancient wisdom: exploring the relevance of endogenous African knowledge system for sustainable development in postcolonial Africa". University Printing Press, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.
- [14] Landau, Jennifer & Moore, David Chioni (n.d.), "Towards reconciliation in the motherland: race, class, nationality, gender, and the complexities of American Students Presence at the University of Ghana, Legon". *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. Retrieved on 30/06/2010
- [15] Methodist Book Depot (1967) 12th Ed. Mfantse Nkasafua Nkyerewee Nye Ho Mbra (Fante Word List with Principles and Rules of Spelling. Cape Coast, Ghana.
- [16] Obibini (2007, Jan. 1, 2) Discussion: View topic: What is the real meaning of the word 'obroni'? www.ghanaweb.com
- [17] Odamtten, S K (1978), *The Missionary Factor in Ghana's Development (1820-1880)*. Accra Waterville
- [18] Reindorf, C. C (1966), *History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti*. Accra, Ghana universities Press.
- [19] Schachter, P., & Fromkin, V. (1968). Phonology of Akan. In: *Working Papers in Phonetics* (pp. 1–268). No. 9. Department of Linguistics, UCLA.
- [20] Ward, W.E.F. (1967): *The History of Ghana (4th Edition)*. Novello and Company Ltd.