

Words in Healing: Some Ethnographic Observations from the Hohoe Area of Ghana

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Abstract

The study addresses the question of lack of in-depth study of the efficacy of words in the indigenous Ghanaian healing practices which makes the healing process a success. The study is an attempt to fill this hiatus. It examines the significance of words, not just in our daily lives but specifically in the healing process. It highlights how indigenous medical practices have continued to be in existence from the earlier times. It accesses untapped information that deals with the operations of indigenous healers in the past. The major highlight from the study is the factors that give power to the spoken words of the traditional healer to cause healing to be effective in the Hohoe area of the Volta Region of Ghana.

Keywords: Words, Healing, Efficacy, Hohoe, Ghana

1. Introduction

In Ghana, and all over Africa, there is the belief that the human being is a tripartite or a three-part entity consisting of mind (soul), body and spirit. Our well-being therefore requires the promotion of harmony between the body, mind and spirit. Also that, the continuity and change of biological activity in life is influenced by the continuity and change of activity within our planet and the larger forces around us.¹ It is strongly believed that the health of the human being has a link with the Creator, divinities and ancestral spirits or the metaphysical world. The causation of disease therefore, has both spiritual and physical dimensions (i.e. psychosomatic).

Ill-health or disease is therefore believed to be the result of failure of humankind to maintain a well-balanced relationship with the physical as well as the ancestral world.² Deviant behavior, what goes contrary to accepted social norms can lead to imbalance and cause disease. Also that, disease no matter its cause appears on the spiritual body (bio-energetic body) long before it manifests on the physical body.³

A number of studies on alternative, complementary and traditional healing practices have come to a conclusion that even many Euro-Americans have been increasingly using traditional healing practices alongside conventional or allopathic medicine in the last two decades.⁴ According to some scholars this practice has been growing and steadfastly increasing especially

¹ Ibid

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Roy Moodley & Patsy Sutherland (2010) "Psychic retreats in other places: Clients who seek healing with traditional healers and psychotherapists , Counselling" Psychology Quarterly, 23:3, 267-282, DOI: 10.1080/09515070.2010.505748

with the arrival of new immigrants who bring with them newer forms of health and mental health care practices. For communities and cultures that “bring along” their indigenous healing methods, “in reformulated and un-constituted ways in the West...away from the public gaze and sometimes in the silence of the night, these practices appear to address some of the many short comings of conventional medicine and health care”.⁵

Long ago, even before the advent of modern medicine, Africans plucked and used various efficacious herbs for healing many sicknesses. Herbs such as “madze” “wodoegbugbor” “afla”, and others were known to possess supernatural powers and were prepared into medicines. Some of the potent herbs are believed to react favourably to speeches, especially when they are contacted with speech at dawn. Traditional healers for a long time have used verbal acts in the process of healing their patients and these verbal acts or words which come in different forms like chants, songs, etc. are presumed to be ways through which these healers communicate with a higher power for help to be able to successfully heal their patients. Contemporary anthropology has in recent years become aware of the relevance of linguistics for its theoretical advance and while the orthodox anthropological approach devalued the role of words in ritual which was seen as stereotyped behavior consisting of a sequence of non-verbal acts and manipulation of objects, recent literature has again shown appreciation of the role of words.

Words are considered very effective and powerful and this belief accounts for certain practices in some religions. For instance the “tibb al nabi”, the reading of a verse from the Koran and even drinking water washed off verses in the Koran (El Tom 1985) for healing purposes is popular throughout the Muslim community and likewise the Jewish mystical texts such as the Zohar have been used in healing processes. In his seminal article "The Magical Power of Words," Tambiah (1968) points out the importance of words in the effectiveness of ritual. Words exist in many ritual contexts: the recitation of prayers, blessings, spells, myths, sacred words, and passages from religious texts. Recitations may include single words, sentences, passages, and, at times, complete texts. Similarly, McGuire (1983) reveals the power of words in healing rituals. According to him, ritual language is an element of empowerment both representing and objectifying power.

Religious words may be repeated with the explicit aim of going into an altered state of consciousness and communing with a higher power (see Katz 1992). They are "effective" in a phenomenological sense. An example is the use of mantras in the Buddhist tradition (Zysk 1991). Among Lubavitcher Hasidim, the Rebbe regularly communed with the soul of his dead father-in-law, at which time he appeared to be in an altered state of consciousness, although the words he recited to achieve this are unknown. These sacred utterances may or may not convey meaning in ordinary language, may serve secular and magical purposes, and may play an important part in healing rituals.

In religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism, worshippers repeatedly mention the names of their sacred beings especially in healing sessions and the mere saying “you are healed” in some groups and especially among Christians is believed to automatically bring about healing to a person. From a perspective view, words used in healing rituals or services makes the healing process effective because they have a psychological impact on the patient, positive sayings of a healer to a patient takes off some stress of thinking worse of his or her situation and

⁵ Ibid

negative words do otherwise and either way, the healing process is affected. Malinowski however argued that the repetitive statement of certain magical words produced the reality which was not the case for ordinary language. The Jewish belief in Genesis chapter 1:3 where God spoke and there was light shows the use of words to really bring things into reality.

Words as they say can make or unmake a person. The anthropology of prayer (words) in healing remains an understudied area, and there is a need to further outline the types of prayer in the world's religions. Apart from studies of Hopi and Navaho ritual, which conceptualize prayer as a performative ritual that evokes "a network of images related to sense experience, mood, emotions and values" (Gill 1987), there are few phenomenological studies of prayer. Those studies attempting to demonstrate its biomedical efficacy by means of a double-blind clinical trial produce inconclusive results (Harris et al. 1999; Joyce and Welldon 1965). Knowledge on the importance of words is necessary but studies of this nature have not been fully covered in Ghana. If further and more researches are not done in this field, knowledge of the importance of words in making healing successful in all kinds of healing will not be acquired. This research therefore seeks to unveil the use of words in traditional healing, how they have impact on the patient and the extent the words of the spiritual or indigenous healer speeds up the healing process using Hohoe traditional area in Ghana as a case study.

1.1 Approach

Using a sample of fifty people, including ten healers and forty past and current patients, qualitative data retrieved from close and open ended questionnaire was analyzed. This was processed using description and content analysis. By using this type of questionnaires the people were able to respond to the questions in their own words and also choose from possible options about practices in the area words in the healing processes they have undergone and how it has impacted their health. This is also because data analysis in qualitative research provides ways of discerning, examining, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting meaningful themes in research results. The questionnaire was administered to both the indigenous healers and the people who have been to these healers to seek healing before and those who are currently patients. Different sets of questions were administered to both the healers and the patients. The questionnaire was translated into Ewe in order for the people to be able to understand the questions and respond to them well. The questionnaire survey was used mainly to collect data about the experiences and opinions of the past and current patients of the healers in Hohoe. Relevant or related information from articles, journals, internet, and many more were also used in this research.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Words in Healing: The Narrative Thus Far

Before discussing the impact of indigenous healing, it will be helpful first, to define Indigenous knowledge. A definition offered by the Institute of Advanced Studies Traditional Knowledge Initiative (United Nations University 2008) suggests that:

Indigenous knowledge refers to the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world. Indigenous knowledge includes the know-how, skills, innovations, practices and learning that form part of traditional knowledge systems, and knowledge that is embodied in the

traditional lifestyle of a community or people, or is contained in codified knowledge systems passed between generations.

Indigenous healing therefore, as the name and meaning denotes, has been with man right from the dawn of existence. Indigenous healing practices involved the healers calling unto their deities for divine power to heal their patients and they did this with songs, poetry, incantations and many other forms of spoken literature and in different languages, some of which was not known to the healer himself.⁶

The study of indigenous healing may be important to the general anthropologist for the light it throws on a particular culture, and important to the medical anthropologist for the understanding it provides of a given society's system of health care.⁷ Addy argues that the health of an individual has a link with the metaphysical and supernatural world; with the creator, divinities and ancestral spirits. Traditional healers have contributed a great deal to the development of the health of Ghanaians. Many respondents to the topic referred to the pluralistic system of health care in Ghana, in which traditional and faith healers are major providers, alongside more 'conventional' practice.⁸ People go to traditional healers, not just because they give answers to the physical causes of illnesses, but because they also identify the supernatural causes. Based on this, they are able to allay the fears of people who suffer from various forms of ailments. Knowledge about where the person seeking healing comes from, his psyche, among other things is useful to allow the practitioner to use "potent" words to deal with the distressed patient. This has the tendency or the proclivity to rekindle the health of the patient and bring him back to normalcy, sometimes even without medication.⁹

2.2 Ewe Indigenous Healing Practitioners in Ghana

Much attention is paid here to the work of Nukpe (2007), who described at length, the healing practices, the practitioners and the shrines of the Ewe of the Volta region of Ghana. The Ewes are amongst the least documented ethnic groups in West Africa, even though there are various interesting subjects about the group.¹⁰ The Ewe indigenous healing practitioners are not very different from other practitioners in other ethnic groups. In the Ewe community, there are various types of indigenous shrines, different acquisition processes, different sources of shrine power and the healing practitioners in this community are endowed with specific shrine power, depending on the type of shrine and the source of the power.¹¹ An indigenous health practitioner

⁶ Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Vol. 3, no. 2 (Jun., 1968), pp. 175.

⁷ Kleinman, Arthur and Lilius, H. Sung. "Why do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?" University of Washington School of Medicine and National Taiwan University. Pergamon Press Ltd. (1979).

⁸ Kenneth AE-Ngibise, Sara Cooper, Edward Adiibokah, Bright Akpalu, Crick Lund, Victor Doku and the MHAPP Research Programme Consortium, "Whether you like it or not....." Kintampo Health Research Centre, Ghana, and Department of Psychiatry and Mental Health, University of Cape Town, South Africa. *International Review of Psychiatry*, December 2010; 22(6): 558-567

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Daniel K. Avorgbedor, "Dee Hoo! Sonic Articulations in Healing and Exorcism Practices of the Anlo Ewe". *The World of Music*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Spirit Practices in a Global Ecumene (2000), pp.9-24.

¹¹ Nupke L.Y.F.L. "The Indigenous Ewe Shrine as a Spiritual Storehouse for Healing, in Ghana," *Journal of Science and Technology* 27, no. 1 (2007), pp. 131.

or the 'tronua' as popularly known is associated with his shrine and his ability and power to heal.

Most Ewe practitioners choose to situate their shrines close to, or at their place of residence. They do this so as to feel closer to their deities and be in constant communication with them, for quick consultation, diagnosis and healing the moment their services are needed, especially in cases of mental derangement.¹² The various sources of power of these medicine men include powers from the stool house of the community, power from spiritual dwarfs, power spirits of the dead, herbal healing power, spiritual power from the cemetery and many others.¹³ Some, if not, most of these powers come with rules and regulations and some sacrifices to be made and these powers are passed on from parents to children or sometimes to the apprentices of the shrines. When it comes to the healing processes, it is the 'tronua' who performs the necessary nocturnal rites associated with the passing or engaging the spirits in secrecy.¹⁴ Most of what they say or whisper in the presence of their patients are incantations that do not have strict rules attached to them. They remain in secrecy, observing certain taboos like not eating certain foods, not seeing certain people and are in constant communication with their deities without interruption. These medicine men usually appear before their patients in peculiar outfits, usually brown smock studded with beads, cowries and talismans, which in itself psychologically tunes up the faith of the patient directly toward developing the needed confidence in the healer.¹⁵ To promote this phenomenon, various forms of the body arts are employed to attract the attention of the spiritual forces which are able to identify and respond to the dictates of their master, the medicine man during the process of preparation and healing. Nupke however believes that the medicine men or priest or priestesses are the masters of the spirit forces and that is why they always act when they are summoned. He believes that the wearing of the anklets, beads around the neck and wrists and sometimes tattoos are all ways of telling or communicating to the spirit forces that their master is ready to perform and they must assist him. Traditional healers in the Ewe community are collectively known as 'ewemachi wolawo' but each is called or addressed according to his specialty, like 'vixela' for one specialized in childbirth, 'funela' for one specialized in bone health, 'gbedala' for a herbalist and many others.¹⁶ The ideologies about these healers being brutal and extorting from patients are in most cases incorrect as they are punished by their deities for irresponsible morals. They form a body or system of the individual's wellbeing for the promotion of health for the development of the society.

¹² Nupke L.Y.F.L. "The Indigenous Ewe Shrine as a Spiritual Storehouse for Healing, in Ghana," *Journal Of Science and Technology* 27, no. 1 (2007), pp. 138.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Nupke L.Y.F.L. "The Indigenous Ewe Shrine as a Spiritual Storehouse for Healing, in Ghana," *Journal of Science and Technology* 27, no. 1 (2007), pp. 139.

¹⁶ Ibid

2.3 Meaning, Power and Effects of Words in Healing Processes

Contemporary anthropology, as stated by Tambiah, has in recent years become aware of the importance of the study of language for its theoretical advance and while the orthodox anthropological approach devalued the role of words in ritual which was seen as stereotyped behavior consisting of a sequence of non-verbal acts and manipulation of objects, recent literature has again shown appreciation of the role of words. Malinowski argued that the potency of Trobriand magic was felt by the Trobrianders to lie in words (spells). In many of his works, particularly in Volume 2 of *Coral gardens and their magic*, he provided an unusual amount of supporting linguistic data. This evidence has had some influence on linguists, but it has never been critically examined by anthropologists.¹⁷ Leach (1966: 407) also states that 'Ritual as one observes it in primitive communities is a complex of words and actions ... it is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another. The uttering of the words itself is a ritual.' The ritualist, healer or priest, believes in the words that he speaks, he believes that the words carry strong spiritual backings that effect what they ask for from the spiritual realm. It is however unfortunate to know that even though most of the healing philosophies, incantations exist in their pure and strong forms, the meaning and significance of some of these are no longer clearly understood by many who currently use them. The Trobriand islanders are a group of people who cannot be outplacred when it comes to magic. They believe in the power of their deities and the words which they speak. The meanings of some of the magical and loanwords were unknown to ordinary people and sometimes even the magicians or healers themselves.¹⁸ With reference to Gunter, emphasis is made on the part played by the introduction of Christianity to downgrade the old magical practices of the Trobriand Islanders. He ascertained that this to a larger extent, caused the traditional leaders to accept the roles Christianity and Christian prayer made in controlling the physical environment.

Words were not simply vehicles for showing or projecting ideas, concepts or categories, they achieved practical effects and speech was attached to and inseparable from bodily activities.¹⁹ There exist several words, spells, incantations, magical formulae, poetry, that is used in healing processes to effect healing of illnesses. There have been a number of specialized studies on the effect of words in healing but that of the Ewe need further studies because virtually nothing has been done on it. There exist however, different documents on the Trobriand Islanders and their healing magic and how the process is effective with the use of the various magical formulae. The magical formulae, either being inherited or acquired from powerful ancestors will most definitely not have the desired effect if the magician does not always recite them in the same unchanged wording in which they had them.²⁰ In as much as these words are effective, they would not attain the desired goals if said any differently from what the first ancestors knew.

¹⁷Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* Vol. 3, no. 2 (Jun., 1968), pp. 175.

¹⁸Samuel Adu-Gyamfi and Charles Marfo, "The Efficacy of Words in Ghanaian Indigenous Healing": Some Ethnographic Observations, *Linguistics Studies Association*, no. 282029618. (2014):2, Accessed on November 20, 2015. www.researchgate.net/publication.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ Senft, Gunter. "Magical Conversations of the Trobriand Islands", *Anthropos* 92. 1997: 369-391.

Gunter records various magical formulae of the Trobriand Islanders and their literal meanings, which denotes a strong sense of power and believes on the part of the healer;

Matala dakwadakwa
Matala matala
Lalakwia matala
Keidauta matala
Kemakodakemakoda

This is a part of a healing magical formulae associated with the Trobriand Islanders which calls upon the deity to attend to the sick. According to McGuire (1983), ritual language is an element of empowerment both representing and objectifying power. Religious words may be repeated with the explicit aim of going into an altered state of consciousness and communing with a higher power (Katz 1992). They are "effective" in a phenomenological sense. An example is the use of mantras in the Buddhist tradition (Zysk 1991). Among Lubavitcher Hasidim, the Rebbe regularly communed with the soul of his dead father-in-law, at which time he appeared to be in an altered state of consciousness, although the words he recited to achieve this are unknown. These sacred utterances may or may not convey meaning in ordinary language, may serve secular and magical purposes, and may play an important part in healing rituals.²¹ Also, Among Christians, the name Jesus is commonly repeated in healing services. In Jainism, specific mantras are deployed for different parts of the body or for specific social and emotional needs. In some metaphysical groups, the recitation of words such as "You are healed" is automatically held to bring about healing. According to Kleinman, medicine and for that matter traditional medicine can be viewed as a cultural system of symbolic meanings anchored in particular arrangements of social institutions and patterns of interpersonal interactions.²² He went ahead to say that, in every culture, illness, the responses to it, individuals experiencing it and social institutions relating to it are all systematically interconnected. The totality of these relationships is what he refers to as the health care system. By this, Kleinman sought to portray that, traditional healing or medicine cannot be effective without the consent of the individual experiencing it, certain positive social factors.

The anthropology of prayer however, remains an understudied area, and there is a need to further delineate the types of prayer in the world's religions. In modern health institutions, the patient's mind can be put to rest in critical situations by the simple assuring words from the doctors. This goes a long way to ease the stress on the patient which might have, in the absence of the soothing words, caused a more grievous health implication. Words act on our minds and when they are good words, they take positive effects in our lives. It is therefore not only in indigenous healing practices that words play a role in healing patients. Prayer is widely acknowledged in both ancient and modern times as an intervention for alleviating illnesses and promoting good health. There is increasing attention on prayer in health care, in both popular

²¹ Simon Dein, "The Power of Words": Healing Narratives among Lubavitcher Hasidim, *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* Vol. 16, no. 1(Mar., 2002), pp. 43.

²² Kleinman, Arthur and Liliias, H. Sung. "Why do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?" University of Washington School of Medicine and National Taiwan University. Pergamon Press Ltd. (1979).

and serious discourse. Advocates exalt the healing power of prayer in health care, some generally call it the 'placebo effect'.²³

A US study found that 77% of Americans expected that physicians respond to patients' spiritual need as part of their medical care (King and Bushwick, 1994). It is reported in a qualitative study on spiritual coping mechanisms in chronic illness, that patients expressed feelings of being connected to God through prayer (Narayanasamy, 2006).

These findings have brought to light that indeed, words, spells, incantations or in a whole, prayer, does have a good effect in healing the sick in different religions. Prayer cannot be singled from healing practices. At one extreme is the case of rituals performed with words alone and at the other, the case where actions dominate though, perhaps words are not excluded. Most rituals fall in between but yet may show distinct differences in the proportion of words to acts. Thus a healing ritual or an initiation rite may dwell on words while a collective rite in which there is mass participation may rely less on auditory communication and more on the display of conspicuous visible material symbols.

In most cases, it would appear that ritual words are at least as important as other kinds of ritual act; but besides that, and this is a fascinating point, very often, though not always, if the ethnographer questions his informants 'Why is this ritual effective?' the reply takes the form of a formally expressed belief that the power is in the 'words' even though the words only become effective if uttered in a very special context of other action.²⁴ Rituals exploit a number of verbal forms which we loosely refer to as prayers, songs, spells, addresses, blessings, etc. It is necessary however, to study whether a ritual is composed of such recognized categories and to analyze their distinctive features in terms of their internal form and their sequence. The fact that such a battery of verbal devices may appear in a single rite should not only give us insights into the art of ritual but also dispel any lingering traces of doubts. Words contain power, rising from the belief of the person reciting them and they have effects, good or bad, rising from the belief of the person it is directed to. A review of these works of these various writers on the subject clearly gives an understanding, though more can be done to the topic of efficacy of words in healing practices.

Traditional medicine is effective, but it does not just give the desired results acting alone, there is a principal factor that makes the medicine effective and whole. This principal factor is the prayer offered, the words spoken. Most of these researchers dwelled much on the practices of the healing, the sources of power, modes of administering medicine to patients and the fact that words have been used in all these processes but failed to educate us on the specific meanings and powers these words have in effecting healing processes. Attitudes towards traditional or indigenous health care practices are changing for the better all over the world due to the efforts of modern and contemporary anthropologists and scientists who believe in evidence rather than impressions by heavily biased and casual observers and Ghana is no exception.²⁵ There is the need to understand the ways and methods of these traditional indigenous healers in order to be

²³ Aru, Narayanasamy and Mani, Narayanasamy. "The Healing Power of Prayer and its Implication for Nursing", (Feb., 2008), pp. 1-5.

²⁴ Stanley J. Tambiah, "The Magical Power of Words," Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Vol. 3, no. 2 (Jun., 1968), pp. 175.

²⁵ E.N Mensah, "Status of Traditional Medicine Development in Ghana". Presentation at the SGWMDP meeting, GMA hall, Accra, (Apr. 27, 2011).

able to appreciate the work they do in developing our health issues and to understand these processes, there is the need to understand their philosophies and other wordings and prayers, to know what they actually mean when they speak these words, to know the kind of powers they believe to be backing these words which they speak. Thus far, information from the literature serves as basis for take-off in this study. Of seminal importance are the aspects that focus on the words of the healers and the impact they make during the healing process to improve the health and well-being of patients and a people within respective communities.

3.0 Discussions

The discussions below focus on healing practices in the Hohoe traditional area of Ghana with much emphasis on how the healers, through the use of their words in their healing processes, bring healing to the sick. It is worthy to note that, the definition of health by the World Health Organization (WHO), that health is the state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity, brings to light, not only the importance of physical well-being but also social and mental well-being.²⁶ The state of the individual's mind however, could have the propensity to affect his physical well-being and it is certain that emotional and psychological issues worsen the plight of a sick person.²⁷

3.1 Significance of Words in the Healing process

The use of language or words have the propensity to shape the future of the sick person who is under the healing process, the future of this person could either be positive or negative based on the content of the message being delivered or said to the one seeking the healing or the sick person.²⁸ According to Susanna E. Bedell and her colleagues, language reinforces the tendency of the patient to succumb to the authority of the physician, and also a way in which the physician unconsciously distance himself from the patient.²⁹ This in short means that what the healer communicates to the patient can either bring about a positive or negative output.

Like in any other part of the Ghanaian traditional society, the training of traditional healers in the Hohoe traditional area places emphasis on both physical and spiritual healing. Our words have effects on the outcomes of all aspects of our lives. Traditional healers believe that the words that we utter, no matter how short or lengthy they may be, are carried by certain spiritual forces around us who act upon these words and make what is said come to pass. According to Madam Esenam Mercy Akom, a traditional healer, traditional healers like herself believe they do not have any power of their own to help or heal people so they need to pray, chant and communicate with their source of power, their God/god, to give them the power, or to work through them to bring healing to the sick.³⁰ She went further to explain that, these spiritual super powers are believed to be pure and holy and therefore, one cannot go before them without consecrating himself. The prayers they offer, sometimes helps them to purify themselves first before asking to be used to help the sick. The words they utter, or the incantations they make

²⁶ Samuel Adu-Gyamfi and Charles Marfo, "The Efficacy of Words in Ghanaian Indigenous Healing": Some Ethnographic Observations, Linguistics Studies Association Conference, no. 282029618. (2014):2, www.researchgate.net/publication.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ Susanna E. Bedell, MD; Thomas B. Graboys, MD; Elizabeth Bedell; Bernard Lown, MD, "Words that Harm, Words that Heal" *Arch Intern Med.* 2004; 164(13):1365-1368.

³⁰ Esenam Mercy Akom, Traditional Birth Attendant, Atabu, Hohoe.

sometimes also helps to overcome all counter forces that might be working against either themselves or the patients receiving healing.³¹ These traditional healers are people who have undergone intense preparations and training and are possessed by different spiritual forces, from which they obtain their powers to heal the sick. For instance, having completed their apprenticeship, the traditional healer is called upon to exercise his gift of spirit possession at different places or during specific traditional events, where he is made to act as the mouthpiece of the deity being called upon, to communicate the words of the deity to the people who are seeking help from him.³² During the healing process, words spoken, most of which are not understood by the ordinary person or the patient, creates an impression of great supernatural works taking place and this stirs up the confidence of the sick person. Samuel Adu-Gyamfi agrees to this when he said in his work that, “in administering healing to the sick, the IPH in Asante spoke words and these words which were either intelligible or unintelligible stirred the confidence of the recipients of such healing and in most instances because these words were/are believed to be backed by some supernatural force, healing is procured through that”.³³

In the *legba* shrine of one traditional priest for instance, it was observed how no action was taken without the priest making certain utterances. In attending to his patients as he made his concoctions, he said something, when he touched anything at all, he always said something and anytime he touched the body of the sick person, he made inaudible utterances that made the body of the sick person move in a peculiar manner and it was obvious that whatever word he was speaking upon the sick person was really having an effect in his body.

of Before the introduction of Christianity into the region, and the acceptance of same by the indigenous people, healers were believed to receive their source of power from their ancestors and other deities but after they accepted the Christian faith, they began to acknowledge God in their healing practices. According to them, words said in their past to heal people and the ones said now have changed. Even though they acknowledge God in their practices, they occasionally invoke the spirits of their ancestors or certain deities to help in specific situations.³⁴ All these traditional healers believe that, their medicines, concoctions and herbs would have no effect on the patient if the Supreme Being does not bless it to be so. The ones who are not necessarily traditional priests therefore pray or utter certain words to the Supreme Being, to ask for his blessings upon the medicine they administer to patients to facilitate the healing process. In the Ewe community of the Volta region however, words like *amakyi si nawo mele la, ne mawu ga lo la, nakpo doyoyo*, this means that ‘if the great God blesses this medicine I am giving to you; you shall receive your healing’.³⁵ To explain this idea; traditional healing will not be effective if prayer, uttering specific words to a Supreme Being, is absent.

Words in traditional or indigenous healing practices can therefore be classified into two branches; words communicated to the source of power or the spirit world to receive strength

³¹ Ibid

³² Samuel Adu-Gyamfi and Charles Marfo, “The Efficacy of Words in Ghanaian Indigenous Healing”: Some Ethnographic Observations, Linguistics Studies Association Conference no. 282029618. (2014):2, www.researchgate.net/publication.

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³⁴ Lawrence Atikpo, Traditional Healer, Hohoe.

³⁵ ibid

and power to heal the sick, and also words communicated to the sick person, to calm him down and prepare him mentally to receive healing. Some words said to the patients include *mega vo wo*, meaning 'do not fear', *bobo dokuiwo*, meaning 'be humble'. Most often however, it is the 'do not fear' that is repeated to them. This is done because of the believe that, fear on the part of the sick person delays or even totally prevents healing to take place and so by constantly telling them not to fear, they tend to overcome the fear in their minds and successfully receive their healing.³⁶ This can be said to be an effective way of preparing the minds of the sick to receive without hindrances. It is known that fear causes us to hold back in circumstances when we can actually prevail and be triumphant so it is not strange that this idea is fused into the healing process to bring a good effect into the process. It is also taught that healing words, when said at a subtle level of mind can do several things. They can clear the mind of negative thoughts by generating a more positive one, a healing word has the tendency of bringing comfort, and it can improve your mood and the entire tone of your demeanor.³⁷ The significance of language or words in the healing process can however not be over emphasized because words have proven to be of immense help, when they are positive, and of great destruction and hindrances, when they are negative in the life and healing process of the sick person.

3.2 Factors Affecting Words for Effective Healing

Aside the supernatural powers believed to be backing words that cause them to be effective in the healing process, there are other factors that also let these words have the desired impact. Faith in the spoken words and obedience to the words of the traditional healer is very essential. The healers themselves believe that faith of the patient is a key tool that aids in the healing, it is the first stage of the healing process and obedience to instructions also help achieve desired results.³⁸ The brain controls every aspect of our bodies, so how we think affects how our bodies work.³⁹ Faith in the utterances of the healer, the belief that what he is saying actually has power to heal that very moment already starts the effective healing process. Some of the healers also believe that, their own faith is enough to fuel the process. When asked, one healer who specialized in bone setting said that the faith of the patient is not really a factor when it comes to how effective the process is going to be. He believes that once he as a healer had faith in his source of power and his incantations and prayers, all the patient needed to do was to be humble and follow his commands and directions and healing will take place. Faith to him, was not a delicate factor for once the sick person had come to him, it meant that he already had at least, an iota of belief and that was enough to begin with.⁴⁰

The tone and mode of delivery of these words go a long way to determine the outcome of the healing process. According to these traditional healers, some patients come to them, heavily burdened emotionally by their ailments and in situations such as these, they explained that much

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Deepak Chopra, "Words that Heal" http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/words-that-heal_b_427055.html. Accessed on Sunday May 8, 2016.

³⁸ Esenam Mercy Akom, Traditional Birth Attendant, Atabu, Hohoe.

³⁹ Rob Moll, "The Surprising Links Between Faith and Health". www.relevantmagazine.com/life/surprising-links-between-faith-and-health. Accessed on Sunday, May 8, 2016.

⁴⁰ Charles Adzaglo, Specialized Bone and General Health Herbalist, Godenu, Hohoe.

care is needed to ensure the mental and emotional stability of the patient. Offering reassurance in an anxious situation settles people, reminding them that all hope is not lost and everything is going to be alright sets them back on track.⁴¹ The spiritual or traditional healers when confronted with such situations make sure their mode of communication with the patient is warm and comforting, they take their time to encourage and speak to the patient until the patient is ready in the mind to undergo further treatments. This however brings to light that these healers must possess the quality of patience and tolerance, in order to deal with such situations.

Some of the patients attested to the fact that they visited some of these traditional healers and were well taken care of, not just through the administration of medicines but also through the mere words they spoke to them. Sometimes, they did not even need medicine in the form of concoctions and herbs to heal, the words they spoke unto them were in themselves medicine to them, and set their hearts at peace. To be able to have such control over words, the traditional healers explained that they are expected to always be in constant communication with their god or source of power, in order not to ever leave the realm of the spirit lest, they fall prey to counter forces which prevents their words to have any impact on their patients.⁴² Utterances of traditional healers are not just mere words spoken at random. Most of these words, especially the incantations or healing formulae need to be carefully rehearsed and recited as it was handed down to them, to acquire the desired results. Perfecting these words on the part of the healer takes a lot of practice and as usual, constant communication with the spirit world.

For traditional healing to be effective, it is evident that it depends to some extent on the efforts of both parties involved; the healer and the patient. They both need to participate fully in the process to bring about the desired results. Traditional healing is not a new practice in the Ghanaian society. It has been with us from time immemorial and has gone through a lot of challenges and transitions and transformations and improvements. The system till now, is still very prominent in almost all the Ghanaian societies.

3.3 Indigenous Healing System and Modern or Orthodox System

Out of the forty past and current patients of traditional healers interviewed, thirty-four of them who constitute 85% of the total number preferred the indigenous healing systems. Various answers as to why they preferred this system showed that, the indigenous healing system really paid attention to their total needs when undergoing treatment. According to the respondents, they have sought for medical attention from both orthodox and traditional medical systems and were satisfied to some extent by both systems but realized to a larger extent that the traditional system paid more attention to their total well-being. This brings us to the question, why do traditional healers successfully heal people? Answers to this question were sought, not to compare orthodox and traditional medical systems to know which is better, but rather to understand the basis for effectiveness in both systems, in order to generate measures for the two systems to be able to work hand in hand to bring absolute healing or a total condition of good health to the sick. There seems to exist a radical discontinuity between the modern clinical care and traditional systems of healing and the historical studies of medicine disclose two separate but interconnected healing functions; control of the sickness and the provision of meaning for

⁴¹ Deepak Chopra, "Words that Heal" http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/words-that-heal_b_427055.html. Accessed on Sunday May 8, 2016.

⁴² Esenam Mercy Akom, Traditional Birth Attendant, Atabu, Hohoe.

the individual's experience of it.⁴³ The modern system however only attends to the former and leave the latter unattended to and this, according to Arthur Kleinman leads to the well-known display of problems in clinical management.⁴⁴

Traditional healers have been tagged as people possessed by evil spirits and this deters some part of the population from going to them to seek healing. The remaining 15% of the people interviewed hinted that the incantations (words or accompanied with words) of these spiritual healers would lead to spirit possession that is detrimental to the health and well-being of the patient. The healers argued that the spirits they called upon only manifested to perform their tasks and do not possess the body of the sick in any way, they only come to heal and bring peace to the body and mind of the patient. Some of them even had modern clinical equipment such as scanners, to complement their practice and these ones are the ones who are mostly sought after. It is partly the case that the quality of physician-patient communication is a major determinant of the effectiveness of the healing process. It is therefore the attention to communication and the caring aspects of traditional healers that has led patients to prefer their system of health care.

3.4 Magical Formulae in Ewe Healing Traditions and their Meanings

The Ewe, the people of the Volta region of Ghana have always been famous for performing rituals of various kinds in different shins and in different circumstances. It is worthy to note however that these famous notions about the Ewe people are no different from other happenings in other Ghanaian societies. Like other societies in Ghana, the Ewe people have various forms of magic they perform for various reasons. Amongst the many magical formulae existing, the most famous ones are the healing magical formulae, the black magical formulae and love magical formulae. Amongst the Ewes, it is believed that these powers or magic are personal properties and so can be handed down from generation to generation. It is believed that the ancestors of the people handed down these formulae to them, to protect them from various ailments and spiritual forces.

Healing formulae in the Ewe tradition takes two forms; healing formulae used by indigenous traditional medical practitioners and healing formulae used by the traditional healers who have been affected by the teachings of Christianity. Both healers are very careful when reciting their formulae because they believe that when something is said wrongly or when a part of the whole is omitted, the whole process goes wrong and healing is not achieved. While reciting these in the healing processes, the healer's accentuation of the words creates a significant rhythm, which is interpreted by Malinowski as text formation signals. Like the people of the Trobriand Islands, the Ewe healers perform their rites on request and until recent times, petty items or foodstuff were used to pay for their services. Usually, these healers have to observe certain food taboos at least a day before they start their healing process and also during the process.⁴⁵ Because of the power possessed by these healers, they are held in high esteem, feared and obeyed.

⁴³Kleinman, Arthur and Liliias, H. Sung. "Why do Indigenous Practitioners Successfully Heal?" University of Washington School of Medicine and National Taiwan University. Pergamon Press Ltd. (1979).

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Senft, Gunter. "Magical Conversations of the Trobriand Islands", *Anthropos* 92. 1997: 369-391.

On the basis of the background given, this section presents, translates and comments on a few of the healing formulae existing in the Ewe traditional healing system, which are used by the indigenous priest healers and ones also used by the Christian traditional healers to attain an effective healing. The section will also at certain points, describe some rites these healers have to perform before and or during the recitation of these formulae. According to the traditional Ewe people, this interaction between the healer and their addressees serves as a way of taking some sort of tension off the patient to procure healing. All these are done through the use of words.

3.4.1 Adzaglo's *Afla* Healing Words

This healing formula was obtained from Charles Adzaglo, a man of about 47 years of age, in January 2016. He lives in Kpoeta and he is herbalist who specializes in bone setting using spiritual means and herbs as well. The name of the magic is *afla*. According to him, this formula is recited during the process of healing the sick person, precisely getting to the end of the process. He fetches water, adds some herbs to the water and ash from fire is added to the water before this prayer is said. This prayer is meant to sanctify the water and give it the ability to cleanse the wounds of the sick person, physically and spiritually. The water containing the herbs and ash is first of all sprinkled on the affected area and then thoroughly used to wash and clean the wound. This process is repeated until desired results are seen.

<i>Miatowo meyomi</i>	Great fathers I call upon you
<i>Afakala ga wo meyomi</i>	Great priests I call upon you
<i>Miatowo megayomi</i>	Great fathers again I call upon you
<i>Fiagawo miawo ha</i>	Great chiefs you as well
<i>Mixo anyino mia wodo</i>	Have your seats and work
<i>Avadzo, meyomi</i>	War has come, I call upon you
<i>Midemiadokui fia</i>	Reveal yourselves
<i>Mi yodo nutila sia</i>	Heal this body before you
<i>Miga woeke</i>	Do it again
<i>Miawoe wonee</i>	You do it
<i>Mide asi bublu sia me</i>	Put your hands in this mixture
<i>Afakala ga wo meyomi</i>	Great priests I call upon you

In the first stanza of the formula, the healer summons the spirits of his ancestors to be present. The ancestral fathers, ancestral priests and ancestral chiefs. The summoning of these spirits signifies the importance and severity of the situation at hand. He goes ahead to justify this in the first line of the second stanza when he says '*avadzo, meyomi*', meaning 'war has come, I call upon you'. He describes the circumstance in which they are at 'war'. He calls upon them because he needs their help to win the war, a spiritual war. He then pleads with them to heal the sick person through the water he has prepared. He praised them for their power and ability to do it all and again in the end, calls upon them. This recitation, as short as it is, invokes great power into the body of the sick and heals them within some days of continual practice.

3.4.2 Akom's Vixexe Gbedododa

This is a healing formula recited by a traditional birth attendant whose healing system has been influenced by Christianity. Esenam Akom lives in Atabu and specializes in taking care of pregnant women and all issues related to them. According to her, she makes all her concoctions from herbs shown her by God. Under the guidance of the spirit, she prepares different kinds of medicines that will serve different pregnant women with different issues. Due to her constant communication with the spirit of God, she is able to see the problem spiritually and hear instructions as to how to minister the medicines to the pregnant women. Before going ahead to administer healing or good health, she prays to appreciate the spirit and ask for his help to achieve the desired purpose.

<i>Papa ga</i>	Great Father
<i>Nusekatato fofo</i>	Almighty Father
<i>Woeyom ya meto</i>	You have called and I have listened
<i>De dokwuiwo fia le viwo fe agbe me</i>	Reveal yourself to your child
<i>Yodo nutila sia</i>	Heal this body
<i>Na fafa ne va me</i>	Let there be peace in this body
<i>Na klo sia klo ne gye anyi</i>	Let every knee bow
<i>Gbogbo sia gbogbo ne tsitsi</i>	Let every spirit depart
<i>Kpo devi si le dosiame dzi</i>	Take care of the baby in the belly
<i>Dee tso futo fe asime</i>	Protect him from the enemy
<i>Yodo nutila sia</i>	Heal this body
<i>Esia ya mebia tso asiwome!</i>	This is what I ask from you!
<i>Akpe na wo</i>	Thank you
<i>Fofo ga akpe na wo!</i>	Great father I thank you!
<i>Amen!</i>	Amen!

This formula is similar to a Christian prayer for help from God. This traditional healer, from the beginning, calls upon God and acknowledges Him as the almighty God and goes ahead to put her petition before Him. She asks for healing and peace for the pregnant woman in the first stanza. Moving forward, she prays for the destruction of all evil forces against mother and child and asks that the baby in the womb be protected and shielded from the enemy. In the end, she thanks God just like all Christians do after they pray and show her belief and hope that her desires will be granted, by saying 'Amen'.

It can be seen from the above formulae that, in invoking the spirits, the healers make it clear that they are powerless before them and they need their help in the healing process. They acknowledge the mighty nature of their sources of power and this humility they portray makes it easier for their wishes and desires to be granted. Without these prayers (words), the spiritual backing of these supernatural forces would be absent. It is strongly believed that the healers could not heal with their natural abilities per se.

4.0 Conclusion

From the study it was found out that words in the form of prayers, incantation, songs, encouraging words, among others do have great impact on the healing process of the sick

person. Majority of the respondents stated that they benefitted a great deal from the system and their health improved tremendously. The study shows that words are backed by certain supernatural forces which effects healing on the patients and also that, traditional healers go through a lot of practice and training to be able to say what they say, go through or adhere to various taboos in order to be able to be good enough to bring healing to their patients.

The study pointed out that the efficacy of words in healing cannot be over emphasized. However, it goes ahead to reveal that both healers and patients have a part to play in order for the words to bring about the desired results. The study unveiled that majority of the respondents stated that they have never regretted seeking help from these traditional healers. Hence majority of the respondents agreed based on different opinions concerning how the system has improved their health conditions and health status. It has been established that in an attempt to find out the impact or efficacy of words in the traditional healing system in the Hohoe traditional area, words to a large extent contribute significantly to aid the healing process of people with health conditions.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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