

Corruption is a big issue: A corpus-assisted study of the discursive construction of corruption in Ghanaian parliamentary discourse

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Submitted: February 12, 2018 / Accepted: May 15, 2018/ Published: June 8, 2018

Abstract

The paper examines the discursive construction of corruption by Ghanaian parliamentarians. It uses as dataset a 1.9 million-word corpus of Hansards of debates and committee reports between 2005 and 2016. It draws on the frame theory and employs a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach to explore the language of parliamentarians (MPs) in order to investigate how Ghanaian parliamentarians frame corruption. The paper attempts to answer the question: how do Ghanaian parliamentarians construct the subject of corruption in their debates and interactions? The paper finds that MPs discursively construct corruption as a huge systematic social canker that hinders socio-politico-economic development of Ghana. This suggests that stronger measures and more formidable parliamentary commitment are needed to fight corruption. The paper has implications for parliamentarians' fight against corruption in Ghana.

Keywords: frame, discursive construction, corruption, corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS), Ghanaian parliamentary discourse

Introduction

Based on the assumption that 'language does not just passively reflect a pre-existing social reality [but] is an active agent in constructing that reality' (Christie, 2002, p. 16), this paper examines how Ghanaian parliamentarians construct corruption through their discourse on the floor of Parliament and in committee reports. Corruption in Ghana has attracted increased attention from politicians, the media, stakeholders, civil society organisations and the Ghanaian public. In the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of 2012, Ghana scored 45%. It scored 46%

in 2013; 48% in 2014; 47% in 2015 and 43% in 2016 on perceived levels of public sector corruption. The 2016 score was the lowest, for which Ghana became the ‘second worst decliner’ in the index (Transparency International, 2017; Ghana Integrity Initiative, 2017; Starr FM, 2017). In 2015, Ghana was said to be the second most corrupt country in Africa (*Starrfmonline*, 2015). Corruption is perceived as highly pervasive in both public and private sectors of Ghana. Ghana’s legislature, the institution mandated to fight corruption, has been accused of corruption by some of its own MPs and other citizens (Ballentine, 2015; Gadugah, 2017; *Graphic Online*, 2017). In fact, it is suggested that Ghanaians voted out the incumbent president in the 2016 elections due to rampant corruption (Transparency International, 2017, p. 3).

The Parliament of Ghana is considered ‘the accountability institution in the fight against corruption in Ghana’ (Kan-Dapaah, 2015, p. 1). In other words, the Parliament of Ghana is mandated to check and fight corruption ‘and make its practice a high risk, low-gain activity’ (Kan-Dapaah, 2015, p. 17). But what does ‘corruption’ mean and how is it constructed in the Ghanaian political or legislative context? It is believed that national and cultural differences affect how different countries and people perceive and define corruption (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka 2011, pp. 233-272). The way corruption is defined and constructed is important because how it ‘is defined affects how it is viewed, which policy approaches are adopted, and which approaches are deemed to be legitimate’ (European Commission, 2011, p. 5). This is because the course of action one adopts to deal with a given problem is largely a function of one’s world-view.

Using a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach and the frame theory, this paper examines the ways in which Ghanaian MPs construct corruption in their discourse. The paper addresses the following questions:

1. In what ways is corruption linguistically defined, described and constructed?

2. What are the frequent topics or themes that emerge from the construction of corruption by MPs?
3. Are there any cross-genre variations in terms of the description of corruption in the sub-corpora used for the study?

Answers to these questions will help unearth the importance Ghanaian parliamentarians attach to the issue of corruption in Ghana, given that they claim to fight it.

Some studies on corruption

In its 2015 world development report, (World Bank Group, 2015, p. 60) defines corruption broadly ‘as the use of public office for private gain’. The report further states that corruption exists in many forms:

Bribery, fraud, extortion, influence peddling, kickbacks, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, embezzlement, vote buying, and election rigging are all examples of actions that fit under that umbrella term ... A common response to all forms of corruption is to view them as acts committed by autonomous individuals: a bureaucrat takes a bribe; a traffic cop shakes down a driver; a judge sells his decision World Bank Group (2015, p. 60)

These perspectives on corruption are shared by Lambsdorff (2007, p. 16). For his part, Klitgaard (1998) defines corruption as:

the misuse of office for unofficial ends and includes Bribery, Extortion, Influence Peddling, Nepotism, Fraud, Embezzlement and the use of Speed Money which is money paid to government officials to speed up their consideration of a business matter falling within their jurisdiction¹.

¹ See also UNDP 2008 for full typology of corruption

Andvig, Fjeldstad, Amundsen, Sissener & Soreide (2000, cited in Rohwer, 2009, p. 42) have also identified four kinds of corruption, namely: (i) bribery – payments in money or kind, including kickbacks, commercial arrangements or pay-offs, which are usually made for the purposes of influencing decisions of public and private officials; (ii) embezzlement – the theft or stealing of resources; (iii) fraud – ‘an economic crime that involves some kind of trickery, swindle or deceit, ... manipulation or distortion of information, facts and expertise by public officials for their own profit’; and (iv) extortion – extracting money and other resources by using coercion, violence or threats of force. Contributing to the debate, Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016, p. 8) have identified nine forms of corruption:

- i. bribery – direct exchange of money, gifts or favours which violates rules relating to performance of duties, among others;
- ii. extortion – demanding bribes or favours before performing official duties;
- iii. exchange of favours – exchange of one broken rule for another;
- iv. nepotism – favouring one’s relatives or close associates;
- v. cronyism – preferring members of one’s group;
- vi. judicial fraud – judicial decisions based on the above-mentioned corruption types;
- vii. accounting fraud – deception regarding sales or profit;
- viii. electoral fraud – manipulation of electoral results;
- ix. public service fraud – any activity that undermines legal requirements of public service delivery.

Corruption can be characterised as ‘grand’ or ‘petty’ based on the value of the transaction involved. ‘Grand’ corruption (also called ‘political corruption’) occurs inside the high corridors of political power and at senior management levels; while ‘petty’ (also called ‘administrative’) corruption occurs at the lower levels of power and implementation of policies, where public officials and the public meet (U4, 2017, pp. 1-2). The former usually involves large amounts of money and benefits, while the latter involves petty sums of money and other essentials.

Ghana’s legislature, through the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP), proposes a definition of corruption that improves upon the existing ones, viz: ‘the misuse of entrusted power for private gain’² (see Report of the Committee on Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on the NACAP (2012-2021)). The Committee recognises that even though this definition is ‘an improvement on the World Bank’s definition, [it] is not comprehensive enough to cover all types and instances of corruption’. This acknowledgement is crucial since there is also corruption in the private sector. The definition (including the others given above) says little or nothing about the dynamics of private sector corruption, and the intertwining nature of state and private spheres in relation to corruption (Brown & Cloke, 2011, p. 118). The definition ‘does not fully communicate the sense in which corruption can be thought of as a danger to the political community’ (Bukovansky, 2006, p. 199). The difficulty in getting a comprehensive definition of corruption stems from definers wanting to have a simple straightforward definition. While this paper does not offer a specific definition of corruption, it proposes the following. The definition of corruption should go beyond a simple-sentence construction. Definers should aim at giving not only all-encompassing simple-sentence definitions but also sub-definitions that cover specific forms and instances of corruption. Again, definitions of corruption must capture private sector corruption as well as draw the lines between public and private sector corruption.

2 This definition was borrowed from Transparency International (2010). Cf. Brown and Cloke (2011, p. 118)

This is necessary because there are people in the private sector, including ‘members of political parties who do not hold office but still have significant influence’ on the decisions of public officials (Bukovansky, 2006, p. 192).

Corruption has been studied from different perspectives, including perceptions and experiences of it (for example, Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 2016, 2017); and its measurement (Rohwer, 2009; Heinrich & Hodess, 2011). It has also been studied from governance, prevention and control standpoints (Gray, 2011; Joutsen, 2011; Michael Koker, 2011). The effects of corruption on national development have been assessed (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016, p. 29), and corruption has been described as having ravaged the African continent (Lawal, 2007, p. 7). Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016) have investigated the frequency, forms, causes and consequences of corruption. Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016, p. 29) state that ‘countries with higher levels of corruption have lower levels of human development’, while the UNDP (2008, p. 14) asserts that ‘corruption and underdevelopment are intrinsically linked and likely to reinforce each other’. There is a strong correlation between corruption and economic growth and productivity (Lambsdorff, 2003, 2004). One thing is clear from the various studies on corruption: they indicate that corruption hinders development.

In Ghana, corruption has been studied and discussed variously: the perceptions of corruption (e.g. Transparency International, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015); the causes, consequences and control of corruption (Afesorbor, 2016); and the effects of corruption on economic growth and development (Abbey, 2005; Sakyi, 2011) and the fight against corruption (Gyimah-Boadi, 2002; Kan-Dapaah, 2015). In his study of the *Role of Parliament in the fight against corruption*, Kan-Dapaah (2015) concentrates on Parliament’s role in scrutinising, debating and approving the government’s budget statement, including the subsequent monitoring of how budgetary allocations to ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) are expended.

While the above-mentioned studies provide strong evidence of the perception of corruption around the world, including Ghana, and indicate measures being put in place to fight it, with the exception of Bukovansky (2006), none has looked at corruption from a linguistic/language point of view to enable us to see how corruption is framed or constructed. Lack of such studies deprives us of access to the thought processes and the mind-sets of the legislators who make anticorruption laws. Having access to legislators' mind-sets will inform us about their understanding of corruption. This is crucial because one thing to consider when assessing whether existing measures for fighting corruption are effective is the legal framework (UNDP, 2015, p. 77). Therefore, assessing how Ghanaian parliamentarians, as lawmakers, frame corruption is essential.

Theoretical framework: Frame theory

The paper is underpinned by frame theory. According to Oliver and Johnston (1999, p. 2), frame theory originated from Gregory Bateson (1954) through his study of communicative interaction and was later introduced to sociological research by Ervin Goffman (1974; 1981). Whereas Bateson was concerned primarily with non-verbal encounters, Goffman was more interested in linguistic encounters (Hale, 2011, p. 2). For Oliver and Johnston (1999, p. 1), 'frame theory is rooted in linguistic studies of interaction, and points to the way shared assumptions and meanings shape the interpretation of any particular event'.

From the sociological and linguistic perspectives, 'frame' has been defined variously. Also called interactive frame, it 'refers to a definition of what is going on in interaction' (Tannen & Wallat, 1993, p. 59), based on which we interpret what people are saying or doing. It is a mental representation of events (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007, p. 24). A frame indicates the context of an interaction (Hale, 2011) as a serious matter or a play, a joke or a fight. It emerges in and is constituted by verbal and nonverbal interaction (Tannen & Wallat, 1993, p. 60). The definitions conceptualise 'frames as fundamental cognitive structures which guide human understanding

and construction of reality’ (Mchakulu, 2011, p. 23). The suggestion is that without frame, it will be difficult to understand interactions, for interactions are understood based on our knowledge of how things are organised.

According to Gitlin (1980),

Frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters ... persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual. (p. 6)

This quotation implies that people can select, emphasise and exclude aspects of objects of interests so as to satisfy specific interests. People can legitimise and illegitimise issues of concern. Similarly, by framing corruption in particular ways, MPs are either legitimising or illegitimising corruption.

For the purpose of this paper, I will adopt Entman’s (2004, p. 5) definition of framing as ‘selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution’. In this sense, frame refers to the presentation of ‘an issue in a specific light and from a specific perspective’ (Anne-Katrin, 2009, n.p). This definition is appropriate for my study because of the assumption that by selecting, highlighting, elaborating or excluding some aspects of corruption and its practice in Ghana, MPs are promoting particular interpretations, evaluation and the kind(s) of solution needed to fight corruption. Again, ‘framing affects what we pay attention to and how we interpret it’ (World Bank Group, 2015, p. 28). The use of the frame theory will allow us to appreciate the thought processes of Ghanaian parliamentarians with respect to corruption.

Because of its concerns with discourse, frame theory can be and has been applied to a variety of discourses, including media and

political discourse/communication (Matthes, 2009; Carta, 2015) and parliamentary discourse (Mchakulu, 2011). In the news media, frame is considered to be ‘an abstract principle, tool, or schemata of interpretation that work through media texts to structure social meaning’ (Reese, 2001, p.14). Whereas Tuchman (1978) is credited with the introduction of frame theory into news media, Entman (1991, 1993, 2004, 2010) is considered the ‘foremost theorist on media framing’ after his ‘study of US news treatment of two plane crashes’ and his explications of media framing thereafter (Lilleker, 2006, p. 82). One key study that gives a fair idea of the extent of research in media framing is Matthes’ (2009) content analysis of media framing studies in the world’s leading communication journals in which he analyses 131 studies of framing in fifteen (15) different journals. The study indicates that media framing research has known phenomenal success in the West in general and the United States in particular. Political framing has also been quite extensive in Europe and elsewhere. Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) content analysis of press and television news of framing European politics, and Vreese, Peter and Semetko’s (2001) cross-national comparative study of frames in the news about the launch of the Euro further reveal the considerable amount of framing research in European politics.

While frame theory may not have been applied so vigorously in the African context, as compared to the West, a few researchers have employed the theory in their studies in the African media context (Eko, 2004; Alozie, 2007; Chuma, 2007; Jacobs & Johnson, 2007; Mchakulu 2011). However, the same cannot be said about research on framing in Ghana. More specifically, hardly has any research employed frame theory and corpus linguistic analytical tools to study the construction of corruption in an African context. This paper, thus, makes an important contribution to the literature on corruption and framing.

Data and method of analysis

The study uses as data four sub-corpora of Hansards (official, near verbatim reports of proceedings of parliament) and reports,

namely: (1) State of the Nation Address debates (SONADs), (2) debates on bills, (3) questions to ministers and (4) committee reports. They cover the nine-year period 2005- 2016. Three reasons account for the choice of the period, namely: (1) the availability of data; (2) corpus representativeness, that is, having enough data that could reasonably be representative of parliamentary debates and committee reports; and (3) its capacity to ensure intra- and cross-genre diversity and variability.

Table 1: Data size

Sub-Corpora	Tokens
Debates on bills and other issues	1,142,213
State of the Nation Address Debates (SONADs)	626,336
Committee reports	233,287
Oral questions to ministers	160,160
Total	1,909,058

Debates on bills and other issues: when a bill (proposed law) is submitted and laid before Parliament and given the first reading (where the Speaker of Parliament reads out the full title of the bill), the bill is referred to the relevant committee of Parliament. The committee examines the contents of the bill and submits to Parliament a report on the bill. When the committee submits the report, Parliament debates the principles of the bill presented in the memorandum accompanying the bill and the report of the relevant committee (see Sagoe-Moses, Armah & Sarfo-Kantankah, 2016). Apart from scrutinising bills, committees also investigate issues of national interest and submit the reports for parliamentary debate. Forty-three (43) of such debates form the corpus of the debates on bills and other issues.

SONADs: the president of the Republic of Ghana annually presents an address (State of the Nation Address (SONA)) to the Parliament of Ghana on the socio-politico-economic wellbeing of

the country. After the address, MPs debate the content of the address. The SONADs are transcripts (38 instances) of parliamentary debates on the SONA.

Committee reports: these are reports on bills and other issues of national interest. This sub-corpus consists of 97 reports from 22 different committees of parliament.

Oral questions to ministers: as part of their rights and privileges, MPs can ask questions of ministers. The Standing Orders of Parliament (2000, see Orders 60-69) allow MPs to ask ministers questions of public interest with which the ministers are officially connected or for which they are responsible, among others. After a question has been answered, starting from the MP who asked the question, MPs can ask supplementary questions regarding the answer/response that was provided by the minister. The *oral questions to ministers* sub-corpus consists of 31 instances of questions to ministers.

The different sub-corpora were used to investigate the relative frequency of *corruption* (and its variants) in the different sub-corpora, and further examine variations within the Ghanaian parliamentary discourse genre. The data were cleaned to exclude ‘stretches of text which do not correspond to any uttered statements in the actual proceedings’ (Mollin, 2007, p. 191), that is, metafunctional information, including headers, time and non-linguistic information to indicate particular forms of behaviour (such as *rose*, *applause*, *interruption*).

The paper employs a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach, a discourse study approach that makes use of corpus methods and tools as and when necessary (Partington, 2010). Combining the discourse analysis approach with the corpus approach helps to shift between the linguistic context and ‘the social, political, historical and cultural context of the data’ (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008, p. 33), or the ‘textual, the situational and socio-cultural environment of linguistic expressions’ (Bednarek, 2006, p. 10). It, thus, helps to ‘uncover linguistic patterns which can enable us to make sense of the ways that language is used in the construction of *discourses* (or ways of constructing reality)’ (Baker, 2006, p. 1).

The study uses *Wordsmith Tools version 6* (Scott, 2012) to analyse the data through wordlists, keywords and concordances. Whereas wordlists and keywords provide a quantitative analysis of a corpus, concordances afford us a qualitative analysis (McEnergy & Hardie, 2012).

A wordlist/frequency list is a list of ‘all words appearing in a corpus’, specifying ‘for each word how many times it occurs in that corpus’ (McEnergy & Hardie, 2012, p. 2). The wordlist tool enabled the researcher to obtain the number of running words (tokens), including the frequency of each word, in each of the sub-corpora. The wordlist for each of the sub-corpora also helped the investigator to perform a keyword analysis by comparing the various wordlists. Keywords are words that are statistically more frequent than expected when one wordlist is compared with another (Baker, 2006). Keywords indicate the ‘aboutness’ of the corpus, or what the corpus is about (Bondi, 2010, p. 7). Concordances helped to qualitatively analyse the word *corruption* in context by examining its collocates. Concordance is a ‘display of every instance of a specified word or other search term in a corpus, together with a given amount of preceding and following context for each result or “hit”’ (McEnergy & Hardie, 2012, 241). Collocates are words that typically co-occur with a specified word; collocates form the context/co-text of a specified word (the node). Examining the co-text of the node in a concordance line provides the semantic/discourse prosody of the node word. Semantic/discourse prosody refers to the ‘consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates’ (Louw, 1993, p. 157). Thus, in this study, *corruption* was concordanced in order to examine its collocates and associated semantic prosody and make it possible to explore the ‘subtle element of attitudinal’ and ‘semantic meaning’ associated with *corruption* (Sinclair, 2004, p. 145).

Analysis and discussion

This section is structured into five parts, namely: the frequency of the word *corruption* in the corpus, the description of *corruption*, the collocates of the adjectives *corrupt* and *anti-*

corruption and the causes and types of corruption, as found in the corpus.

Frequency of the occurrence of *corruption* in the data

The word *corruption* with its variants occurred 453 times in the corpus (Table 2): *corruption* (361), *anti-corruption* (61), *corrupt* (26), *corrupted* (03), *corrupting* (01) *corruptly* (01).

Table 2: Frequency of ‘corruption’ in the sub-corpora

Corpus	raw frequency	normalised frequency (%)
Debates on bills and other issues	91	8.00
State of the Nation Address Debates	260	41.51
Committee reports	99	42.44
Oral questions to ministers	03	1.87
Total	453	93.73

In order to indicate the frequency of *corruption* in each of the sub-corpora, normalised or relative frequency using 100,000 as the base of normalisation was employed. The normalised frequency was calculated as follows (see McEnery & Hardie, 2012, p. 49):

$$NF = (\text{number of examples of } \textit{corruption} \text{ in each corpus} \div \text{size of each corpus}) \times (\text{base of normalisation})$$

For example, the normalised frequency of *corruption* in the SONADs is calculated as:

$$NF = 260 \div 626,336 \times 100,000 = 41.51.$$

This means that *corruption* (with its variants) occurred 41.51 per 100,000 running words in the SONADs. Table 2 shows that *corruption* occurred mostly in committee reports (42.44/100,000 words), followed by SONADs (41.51/100,000 words), then debates on bills and other issues (8/100,000 words) and questions to ministers (1.87/100,000 words).

Characterising corruption through its collocates

This section explores the collocates of *corruption* in order to explicate how corruption has been defined by Ghanaian MPs. The analysis is based on noun, adjective and verb collocates which characterise corruption. The assumption is that, by selecting and highlighting certain words and expressions that describe or define corruption (Entman, 2004), MPs are promoting certain kinds of interpretation and meaning of corruption. How MPs frame corruption will affect the attention they pay to it and how they deal with it, for ‘framing affects what we pay attention to and how we interpret it’ (World Bank Group, 2015, p. 28) and ‘the way a problem is defined has a major effect on the kinds of “solutions” that are proposed to cope with it’ (Mayer, 1996, p. 444). The section, therefore, examines the phraseology of corruption by studying its collocates, as represented in Table 3. The table contains those collocates that appeared three or more times in the corpus.

Studying the collocates of *corruption* is important because a central factor that influences ‘what readers understand and remember (i.e., their interpretations) is the frequency of specific collocations and the semantic/discourse prosodies they communicate’ (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008, p. 21). The collocates in Table 3, especially the adjectives, prosodically construct corruption negatively and draw attention to the negative aspects and dangers of corruption.

Table 3: Noun, adjective and verb collocates of corruption

Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	Frequency	Collocate	Frequency
Nouns					
<i>Corruption as a problem</i>		<i>Fight against corruption</i>		<i>Attributes of corruption</i>	
Issue(s)	29	Fight	70	Perception	4
Canker	9	Measures	15	Allegations	3
Menace	3	Action	8	<i>Definition of corruption</i>	
Nation-wrecker	3	Initiatives	8	Definition	4
Enemy	3	Commitment	7	Abuse	3
Threat	3	Plan	6	<i>Others</i>	
Bane	3	Transparency	6	Drug(s)	9
<i>Entities/agents of corruption</i>		Information	5	Activities	6
Government	21	Accountability	5	Laundering	6
President	13	Law	4	Convention	5
Institution	9	Steps	4	Service	4
Agencies	8	Strategies	3	Judgement	4
People	8	Ethics	3	Terrorism	4
Ghana	6	Education	3	Talking	4
Country	17	Programmes	3	Rights	4
Media	5	Policy	3	Duty	3
Companies	4	Mandate	3	Governance	3
Society	4	Protocol	3	Activity	3
Nation	4	Commission	3		
CHRAJ	4	War	3		
Officers	4	Power	3		
Officials	3				
<i>Object of corruption</i>					
Money	8				

Adjectives		Verbs
<i>Magnitude/degree of corruption</i>	<i>Effects of corruption</i>	<i>Fight against corruption</i>
High 6	Public 19	Fight(ing) 92
National 6	Harmful 4	Combat(ing) 17
Global 3	<i>Behaviour</i>	Tackle 9
Endemic 3	Concerned 5	Talk 9
Extensive 3	Committed 5	Deal 6
Widespread 3	Perceived 3	Report 6
Complex 3	<i>Others</i>	Address 5
Systematic 3	Private 3	Preventing 4
Multidimensional 3	Legal 3	Eradicate 3
Serious 3	Civil 3	Wage 3
Institutional 3		<i>Empowering agencies</i>
Critical 3		Strengthen(ing)10
		Foster 5
		Empower 4

The majority of the adjectives indicate the magnitude, that is, levels of corruption and extent of spread (it is ‘high’, ‘national’, ‘endemic’, ‘extensive’, ‘widespread’, ‘complex’, ‘systematic’, ‘multidimensional’, ‘serious’, ‘institutional’ and ‘critical’). Considering corruption as ‘complex’ and ‘multidimensional’, for instance, implies that there is some difficulty in fighting it and calls for a high level of commitment to fight it. ‘Systematic’ implies that corruption exists in a methodical and organised manner. It means corruption has been ‘institutional[ised]’ and it is perpetrated deliberately, which reinforces its complexity. Also, ‘widespread’ and ‘extensive’ suggest a high incidence of corruption in Ghana, as ‘endemic’ presumes its permanent presence.

A number of nominal collocates index corruption as a hindrance to the quest for development: it is seen as a ‘canker’, a ‘menace’, a ‘nation-wrecker’, a major ‘bane’ of, an ‘enemy’, an ‘impediment’ and a ‘threat’ to Ghana’s socio-politico-economic

development. These negative characterisations of corruption ‘represent losses’ (Krishen et al., 2014, p. 744). The associated terms of corruption suggest that ‘curbing systemic corruption is a challenge that will require stronger measures, more resources and a longer time horizon’ (Langseth, 2016, p. 39). When problems are enormous, stronger measures are needed to solve them. Verbs such as ‘fight(ing)’, ‘combat(ing)’, ‘tackle’, ‘eradicate’, and ‘wage’ war appear to measure up to the enormity of the problem of corruption. For example, ‘fight(ing)’ and ‘combat(ing)’, which are the most frequent verbs in the dataset for this study, suggest, metaphorically, battle/warfare, struggle and a major and sustained effort in dealing with corruption. The instruments needed to fight corruption include transparency, right to information, accountability, law, ethics and education. Other nouns index corruption in terms of entities/agents/agencies of corruption, that is, perpetrators of corruption and those mandated or supposed to fight it. These are the ‘government’, the ‘president’, ‘institution(s)’ such as ‘CHRAJ’, ‘agencies’, the ‘people’, the ‘media’, ‘companies’, the entire ‘society’, among others.

The June 2014 report of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2012-2021) states that

The Committee is convinced that corruption exists in both the public and private sectors of our country. It operates and exists in dark and opaque systems and societies. It hates light, participation, and accountability. It frowns at questions or scrutiny. It is an enemy to openness, transparency and suitability. It befriends greed, avarice and selfishness. It cannot survive in a system of good governance or a clean and just society.

The Committee further recognises that ‘corruption is one of the most severe impediments to development and growth in transition

and emerging economies'. From the data above, it appears that the MPs recognise that Ghana's underdevelopment is (partly) due to 'massive' corruption. They acknowledge in their discourse the view that there is a strong connection between corruption and economic growth and productivity (Lambsdorff, 2003, 2004; UNDP, 2008; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In this sense, the MPs appear to appreciate the need to protect the public good, which brings to attention a republican political thought, namely, "'political virtue" entails that one's love and ambition is thoroughly linked with the good of one's city [country]' (Sparling, 2016, p. 161). This suggests that the MPs have a virtuous desire to fight for and safeguard the good of the country, for 'when people have virtue, they consider all their actions to be for the republic' (Sparling, 2016, p. 161), even though, as we will see later, such show of commitment by MPs appears to be superficial.

Corruption is a public policy issue. Therefore, how the MPs frame corruption is important, because 'public policy manipulates framing by stressing values or facts with apparent relevance to an issue' (Krishen et al., 2014, p. 744). For de Vreese (2005, p. 60) 'emphasizing positive or negative aspects of an issue [has] the ability to influence public support for policies'. The negative framing of corruption points to the urgency of the issue of corruption and is a call to action. According to Anne-Katrin (2009, n.p), 'negative frames are possibly better able to elicit strong reactions from the audience than positive frames'. Framing corruption negatively is to draw MPs' attention to the issue of corruption and admonish fellow MPs to take it seriously, as 'negative information attracts more attention from the recipient than positive information' (Krishen, Raschke, Kachroo, LaTour & Verna, 2014, p. 745, p. 752). Consequently, one can argue that describing corruption in strong negative terms discursively demonstrates that corruption is a big problem, and shows a high level of commitment to stamp it out, because 'messages that are designed to make the audience feel guilty can have the effect of making people think more carefully about an issue' (Anne-Katrin, 2009, n.p). This is crucial for the

identification and employment of specific means of engaging corruption.

Whereas there is a sense of commitment on the part of MPs to deal with corruption, there are certain other expressions that question such a commitment. To refer to corruption as ‘alleged’, an ‘allegation’, a ‘perception’ or an ‘indiscretion’ suggests some doubt about its actual existence, and suggests a weak commitment to fight it. It further suggests the complexity and legal implications of dealing with the issues of corruption.

Even though there appears to be a general consensus that corruption exists in Ghana, MPs seem to have difficulties agreeing on which institutions are corrupt. For instance, in a reaction to a statement by Mr. Emmanuel A. Gyamfi (NPP MP, Odotobiri) that ‘corruption [was] everywhere’, Mr. Governor K. Agbodza (NDC MP, Adaklu), on a point of order, said: ‘Mr Speaker, the Hon Member just said that there is corruption everywhere. Is there corruption here in Parliament as well?’ (Hansard 28 November 2013/Col. 1627). The reaction from Mr. Agbodza draws attention to critical statements and sweeping statements about corruption. This reaction reflects the paradox of the discussion of corruption in Ghana. Even though people (including political leaders) complain about corruption and its dangers to national development, the same leaders have often called for evidence when people allege corruption. As Mr. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu (the then Minority Leader) puts it ‘if a person alleges corruption, the burden is on him to prove [it]’ (Hansard 17 July 2014/Col. 1843). Often this burden of proof is too heavy for those who allege corruption. In another instance, the Speaker of Parliament maintains that the accusation of corruption ‘must be scientific and statistical, if there is any such research’ (2 March 2011/Col.1930), and that ‘to say on the floor that somebody is corrupt without substantiating is not proper on the floor of this House’ (17 July 2014/Col.1843). This brings into focus the legal implications of the exposure and the fight against corruption. Of course, in the legislative context, MPs’ statements must be based on facts, proof and truth. MPs making sweeping statements may

be attributable to the fact that they have parliamentary immunity, which allows them to say pretty much anything that they would not be able to say or do outside Parliament³.

Noun/nominal collocates of the adjective *corrupt*

An examination of the data indicates that *corrupt* as an adjective collocated with several different kinds of nouns to index various themes of corruption. Twenty-six (26) instances of the use of *corrupt* were found in the data.

Table 4: Noun collocates of the adjective *corrupt* and the categories they index

Category, Noun collocates	Frequency
Behaviour/activities	
Practices	09
Conduct	01
Acts	01
Means	01
Entities/agency	
People	02
Government	04
Company	02
Somebody	02
Institution	01
Corporate entity	01
Everything	01
Workers	01

Two main topics are indexed by the use of *corrupt* as an adjective. These are behaviour (deed) (‘conduct’, ‘practices’, ‘acts’) and an entity/agency (‘people’, ‘somebody’, ‘presidency’, ‘government’, ‘institution’, ‘company’, ‘corporate entity’, ‘workers’), that is, the deed and the perpetrator. The most

³ Over the years, parliamentary majority-minority has alternated between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP): 2nd Parliament 1997-2001– NDC 133, NPP 61; 3rd Parliament 2001-2005 – NPP 100, NDC 92; 4th Parliament 2005-2009 – NPP 128, NDC 94; 5th Parliament 2009-2013 – NDC 115, NPP 108; 6th Parliament 2013-2017 – NDC 151, NPP 120. Note that the NPP boycotted the 1st Parliament, 1993-1997..

frequent collocate is 'practices'. The noun 'practices' indexes corruption as an established or habitual way of doing things, which corroborates 'endemic' as a collocate of corruption. In other words, the performance of duties has become corrupt in an established manner, as in: 'corrupt practices in this country', 'corrupt practices in the district', 'all manner of corrupt practices'. The way things are managed and people's behaviour (*conduct, acts*) is described as corrupt. The perpetrators, that is, agents of corruption, include the presidency (e.g. 'the Presidency is the second most corrupt institution'), the government ('the Government is corrupt'), other corporate entities ('describing that corporate entity as corrupt', 'the company is corrupt') and people ('people are corrupt', 'somebody is corrupt'). These collocates brand people's behaviour and entities as corrupt.

Out of the 26 instances of *corrupt*, 24 appeared in debates on the floor of parliament, while only two (2) occurred in committee reports. This implies that the characterisation of entities/agencies and conducts as corrupt appears more in debates on the floor of parliament than in committee reports, which suggests that MPs' debates on corruption personalise the issues more than in committee reports. This could be attributed to the dialogic nature of the debates.

Collocates of *anti-corruption* and topics they index

Anti-corruption describes anything that is designed to oppose, inhibit, eradicate, discourage, combat or prevent corruption, especially in political contexts. The categories and collocates of *anti-corruption* indicate the presentation of ways of fighting corruption, namely, initiatives, agencies and instruments needed to combat corruption. While the first looks at activities, programmes and projects needed, the second pays attention to the agencies that are mandated to fight corruption, and the last recognises the legal approach to combating corruption.

Table 5: Noun collocates of anti-corruption and categories they index

Category, collocates	
Initiatives	
Measures	10
Initiatives	7
Action plan	4
Mandate	3
Strategies	2
Activities	1
Education	1
Programme	1
Function	1
Work	1
Agencies	
Agency/agencies	8
Institutions	4
Body/bodies	3
Coalition	3
Section	1
Instruments	
Laws	2
Legislative framework	1
Systems	1

Among the sub-corpora, *anti-corruption* appears more frequently in debates on bills (28 occurrences) and committee reports (21), but less frequently in the State of the Nation Address debates (SONADs) (12). This could be attributed to the fact that anti-corruption measures are considered to be more formal and official in the committee reports and debates on bills than in the SONADs.

Causes and types of corruption as observed by MPs

In their debates and committee reports, Ghanaian parliamentarians have identified several causes of corruption. They include the following:

- i. facilitation payments (GAN Integrity, 2016, p. 1), such as clients buying fuel or hiring vehicles to take Lands Commission officials to the field to work (Hansard 20 November 2013/Col.1245).
- ii. lack of the country's capacity to manage finances and execute programmes for which funds have been borrowed. In other words, excessive borrowing leads to corruption (Hansard 22 July, 2015/col.3331).
- iii. Parliament's inability to 'exercise proper scrutiny over public procurement processes', as 'public procurement is the biggest avenue through which corrupt practices take place in every country' (Hansard 26 November 2013/Col.1403).
- iv. sole-sourcing, which is said to have 'become the norm' and 'an avenue through which all manner of corrupt practices are being undertaken on the blind side of Parliament' (Hansard 26 November 2013/Col.1403), for where procurement is sole-sourcing, it creates a recipe for serious corruption (Hansard 25 February 2011/Col.1692)
- v. lack of transparency and accountability in the oil industry (Hansard 27 February 2012/Col.1544), where vast oil and gas resources have driven corruption and exploitation in countries such as Nigeria (Hansard 4 March 2010/Col.1638).
- vi. manual admissions in secondary schools, which the computerised placement system sought to eliminate (Hansard 4 March 2011/Col.2133/4).

- vii. the governance systems in Ghana, which ‘breed bureaucracy, corruption and abuse of power and poverty’ (1 March 2011/Col.1769).
- viii. ‘appointments or state capture of appointments’ where political activists are appointed ‘to certain positions which invariably leads to abuse of office or misuse of office’ (3 March 2011/Col.1999/2000).
- ix. the leakages, known as quiet corruption, in certain institutions like the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, leakages in some financial dealings and so forth (3 March 2011/Col.2000).
- x. judgement debts (2 March 2012/Col. 2080).
- xi. hiding identities of beneficial owners of companies, which ‘has the tendency of fuelling global corruption, money laundering, movement of illicit money inflows into countries and terrorism financing’ (Report of the Committee on Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on Companies (Amendment) Bill, 2016).
- xii. the public copying the behaviour and practices of corrupt leaders, for ‘corruption is actually a function of what people do; it is the action and inaction of people and when they see their leaders doing good things, they will do good things, when they see their leaders doing bad things, they will do bad things’ (Hansard 10 March 2015/Col.1548/9).
- xiii. Ghanaians’ tolerance and lack of condemnation of corrupt practices and corrupt officials.
- xiv. lack of understanding of actual levels of corruption both in the private and public sectors.
- xv. inadequate appreciation of the complex mix of factors implicated in corruption.
- xvi. lack of public participation in the development and

implementation of anti-corruption measures.

- xvii. failure to foster local ownership in the formulation and implementation of the various strategies.
- xviii. lack of effective and sustained coordination in the implementation of anti-corruption measures.
- xix. lackadaisical government commitment to, and limited support for the implementation of Anti-Corruption Strategies.

(for points ix-xv, see Report of the Committee on Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (2012-2021))

The various causes outlined here suggest different kinds of corruption (see Andvig et al., 2009; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016), including: bribery and extortion (e.g. (i) above) or petty corruption, political corruption ((ii)-(v) (see U4, 2017, pp. 1-2)), nepotism and cronyism (e.g. (viii)), public service, institutional or accounting fraud (e.g. (ix)), fraud through judgment debts (x). One observation from the debates and committee reports is that MPs have not been able to identify and give an elaborate list of the types of corruption as they pertain to the Ghanaian cultural context and situation.

Conclusion

By examining parliamentary debates and committee reports, this paper has sought to examine the ways in which Ghanaian parliamentarians discursively construct corruption. Parliamentarians acknowledge that corruption is prevalent in Ghana. They describe corruption through linguistically negative expressions that construct corruption as evil, wide-spread and difficult to eradicate from the Ghanaian society. They admit that corruption has major negative impacts on Ghana's socio-political-economic development and that it needs to be combatted. However, the MPs appear to be silent on corrupt practices relating to vote

buying, electoral integrity and political financing, among others, which directly affect them. The strong negative descriptions of corruption imply that completely combating corruption requires stronger, sustained measures, more resources and a longer time frame. The thematic areas of corruption broached by MPs are, among others: objects of corruption (behaviour/deed, money and agents/perpetrators of corruption); causes and types of corruption in Ghana; ways of fighting corruption, including the activities, agencies and instruments needed to fight it.

While there appears to be no difference in terms of how MPs see corruption across the different sub-genres considered for this study, one main difference is that, in their debates, MPs seem to personalise the issues of corruption (that is, government/majority and opposition/minority MPs attack each other as being corrupt), something which is absent in committee reports. This could be attributed to the fact that whereas the committee arena is characterised by ‘consensus and national interest’, the plenary arena (e.g. debates in the chamber) is typified by partisanship and ‘the inherent trait of politicians to (for the purposes of retaining their seats) show concern for the interests of constituents and gain personal reputation and popularity’ (Srem-Sai, 2014, n.p). In other words, the attacks are the result of political point scoring. Again, references to anti-corruption measures are more frequent in committee reports and debates on bills as compared to the state of the nation address debates (SONADs). This could be because committee reports and debates on bills appear to be more formal than the SONADs. The implication is that a more serious parliamentary work occurs during committee meetings than in the debates in the parliamentary chamber. One thing that comes up in this study is that MPs have not been able to give an elaborate list of the types of corruption based on Ghanaian cultural norms and/or jurisdictions elsewhere. In other words, MPs must be able to state the specific types of corruption that can be found in Ghana. MPs should also be able to present a comprehensive definition of corruption that captures private sector corruption since in their

own words ‘there is also corruption in the private sector’⁴. In doing so, MPs should define the boundaries between public-sector and private-sector corruption. This will immensely help in the fight against corruption.

⁴ See Report of the Committee on Constitutional, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs on the NACAP (2012-2021))

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