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# STUDIES IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES


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## Editorial Board

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University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28
PL 00-927 Warsaw. POLAND
E-mail: salc@uw.edu.pl

**Cover design**

Anna Gogolewska

**English Language Editor**

Agnieszka Kotula-Empringham

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## FROM THE EDITORS

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# ARTICLES

**Kofi Agyekum**
Department of Linguistics
University of Ghana – Legon
ORICD 0000-0002-6177-2819

## Cultural values and human cognition in the Akan proverbs on lying

### Abstract

This article investigates the Akan proverbs on the concept of lying aiming at filling the gap in understanding the concept from the perspective of individual languages. The article looks at the situations and thematic areas where proverbs on lying are encountered. The data collection was done using both primary and secondary data. The primary data was captured through socio-cultural situations such as funeral rites, marriage engagements, local arbitrations, daily conversations, travelling, etc. The data will be interpreted by employing Language Ideology and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, coupled with semantic and pragmatic tools. The finding of the article is that the Akan proverbs help to categorize lying into thematic areas which include understanding lying as a morally unacceptable act, as an opposition to telling the truth, as a "double-edged sword" and as a threat to individuals and a state. Metaphors extracted from the proverbs indicate cognitive associations with lying in the Akan society.

**Keywords:** lying, white lying, proverbs, Language Ideology, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Akan

## 1. Introduction

Lying is recognized as part of human life in history, religion, culture, business, politics sociology, communication, justice, etc. My research has shown that most of the publications on lying investigate its definitional framework that incorporates perspectives from various disciplines, such as philosophy, cognition, management studies and psychology (see Meibauer 2018). Research into the linguistics of lying is crucial since lying is part of language and prevalent in our daily interactions. However, publications and research on lying in Akan ethnolinguistic studies are very scanty, the sources for this research are also small, apart from few narratives in history. It is on the backdrop of this huge gap that the main objectives of this article is to research into the concept, language, ethnosemantics and pragmatics on Akan proverbs of lying. The investigation includes reviewing papers on lying referring to other societies especially in Africa. The data collected for Akan will be subjected to language ideology, conceptual metaphor, semantic and pragmatic analysis.

### 1.1. The Akan people and language

The word *Akan* refers to the people as well as their language.[1] Akan can be considered from two perspectives: ethnographic and linguistic. Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. Ethnographically, the Akans include the Ahanta, Aowin, Nzema, and Sehwi groups who do not speak Akan as L1, but share cultural similarities with Akans. Based on the linguistic criterion, Akans are those who speak Akan as their L1. In the 2021 national population census, 45.7% of the Ghanaian population (about 14.1 million) were identi-

[1] There is a proto-Akan language common to all the 13 linguistic Akan ethnic groups. Linguistic evidence suggests that the Akan-speaking people likely originated somewhere from Old-Ghana to the present-day Ghana and Ivory Coast. Over time, as the Akan people migrated southwards and westwards and settled in different areas, their language evolved into the various Akan dialects spoken today, especially Twi, Fante, and Akuapem. Dolphyne (2006: xi-xii) states that "The name Akan is also used to refer to the people who live in most of the coastal and forest areas of Ghana and the Ivory Coast. They speak languages/dialects which include Baule, Anyi (Aowin), Sehwi (Sanvil) Nzema, Ahanta, Fante, Akuapem, Asante, Brong, Wassaw, etc. The ethnographic non-Akan L1 groups speak their respective languages which have traits of the proto-Akan language under the Tano language family. These languages/dialects are all closely related, and have a number of vocabulary in common". In Ghana, the non-Akan L1 speakers share common geographical boundaries with the Akan, and are potentially bilingual; they speak Akan as L2 in addition to their respective L1. This accounts for Akan L1 versus non-Akan L1 forms.

fied as Akans and about 44% of non-Akans used Akan as a lingua franca (see Agyekum 2023).

The Akans inhabit the greater part of southern Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in nine (9) out of the sixteen (16) regions in Ghana, namely Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Central, Eastern, Oti, Western and Western North Regions. The Akan speaking communities in the Oti region are surrounded by the Gbe language communities of Ewe, Guan and Gur. There are thirteen (13) Akan dialects: Agona, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Asante, Assin, Bono, Buem, Denkyira, Fante, Kwawu, Twifo, and Wassaw. Some Bono speakers are found in Cote d'Ivoire. Akan is studied from primary school up to the university level (Agyekum 2023).

## 1.2. Aim and scope of the study

The article is aimed at opening gates for further studies on lying and contributes to proceedings on the concept of truth, which is important for further studies in Akan and other Ghanaian languages. Attention should especially be on political and mediatized lying, which has been very profound in Ghanaian contemporary politics since 1992. The article will examine if the Akan concepts of proverbs on lying are related to the individuals' communicative competence on Akan norms of socio-cultural interaction.

The rest of the article is organized as follows: section 2 discusses the methodological aspects of studies on lying in Akan, taking into account the primary and secondary data and reference to their source. This attitude determines research questions formulated for this study. Section 3 seeks for the definition of lying, which functions in different contexts. Section 4 presents the theoretical framework of the research and outlines the basis for applying the Linguistic Ideology and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory to this research. Section 5 discusses the ethnosemantics of *ɛtorɔ*, 'lying', presenting both the etymology and semantic scope of the lexical equivalent for lying, as well as the African perspective of the proverbs on lying. Section 6 is devoted to data analysis. Subsection 6.1 discusses thematic areas of Akan proverbs on lying which manifest their cultural understanding. Subsection 6.2 presents social and pragmatic implications of lying. In the analysis, the proverbial expressions are interpreted in terms of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Section 7 comments on the need to conduct studies on lying in other Akan literary genres and section 8 is the conclusion.

## 2. Methodological aspects of studies on Akan proverbs on lying

The article employs both primary and secondary data with the emphasis on the latter. Akan books on proverbs were consulted and proverbs on falsehood, lying, deception, treachery were selected. The expressions *ɔtorofoɔ/kontomponi* 'liar', *daadaafoɔ/dabrabani* 'deceiver/liar/swindler' were sorted out (see Cofie 2011: 89). Some of the proverbs from books had English translations which were examined to find their suitability in Akan contemporary society. Several Akan graduate students, faculty members and professors from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana, evaluated and authenticated the proverbs from the Akan books.

The interviewees were asked the following questions:
1. What are the Akan indigenous concepts and terms for lying?
2. In which Akan sociocultural contexts do people lie?
3. What expressions do people use when lying in social events like funerals, durbars, marriage contracts, and meetings?
4. List as many Akan proverbs on lying as you know.
5. Provide the literal and extended meanings of these proverbs.

I used my phone to record the data from the interviews and participant observation during arbitrations, funeral donations and traditional marriage engagements. I wrote the relevant portions of the discourse and crosschecked them later. I transferred the data from my phone unto my laptop and transcribed the interviews and recordings. I meticulously checked the voice with the transcribed data to ensure accuracy. The interpretations of the proverbs on lying were first considered from their literal meanings and then their semantic and pragmatic properties and usage were examined.

The article employed the ethnopragmatic approach coupled with Conceptual Metaphor Theory to analyse the Akan proverbs on lying. It looked at the core meanings of the proverbs, contexts of usage and their impact on the liars, and the society. Goddard and Ye (2015: 66) stated that, "Ethnopragmatics designates an approach to language in use that sees culture as playing a central explanatory role, and at the same time opens the way for links to be drawn between language and other cultural phenomena". The ethnopragmatic approach helped in the discussion and interpretation of the proverbs on lying from Akan "inside-perspectives" and cultural knowledge (Goddard 2006: 3, 15).

This article asserts that the Akans are the best to explain the indigenous terms and proverbs on lying based on their shared epistemology, experiences, and

environment. The article examines why people use harmful or white lies in specific situations (see section 4.5).

### 2.1. Data source

Seven Akan books on proverbs were consulted, namely Adu Gyamfi (1999), Akrofi (1958), Appiah et al. (2000), Asare Opoku (1995), Bannerman (nd), Ofei Ayisi (1966) and Rattray (1914). The search was meant to identify proverbs on lying and select those that are fit for this article. Again, literature on African proverbs from renowned scholars of African oral literature were consulted. These included Agyekum (2021; 2016), Agyekum & Arhine (2022), Finnegan (2012), Okpewho (1992), Oluwole (1997), Ssetuba (2002) and Yankah (1989). These works provided insight into proverbs and their sociocultural functions.

## 3. The problematic question of the definition of lying

Lying is any communicative act that causes the receivers to adopt, or persist in a false belief. Williams (2002: 96) defined lying as "an assertion, the content of which the speaker believes to be false, which is made with the intention to deceive the hearer with respect to that content". Lying as part of the speech act of assertion must have the liar's intention to cause the target person(s) to believe and accept the content of the assertion as true (Primoratz 1984: 54). Simpson (1992: 625) posited that: "In a lie, we act to deceive someone regarding our belief in some proposition, and that we have the primary intention that they would be deceived. This appears to give us an account of lying as intentional untruthfulness". The structure of lying is as follows:

liar ----------> falsehood ----------> the one lied to

The liar sends a powerful, unidirectional, falsehood message to the person lied to.

Simpson (1992: 630) further asserted that:

> "In lying, we directly or indirectly represent some state of affairs, present ourselves as believing that representation to be true, and act on the intention that the one or ones to whom we lie have reason to think that we intend them to take this as a sincere presentation of our belief-but we lack the requisite belief".

Simpson (1992) emphasised the morality principle where the liar assumes his actual beliefs are opaque to the lied as follows: "When I lie to you I do not just treat you as an object to be deceived, regarding you as an obstacle or a means to an end. When I lie to you, I engage at the core of the lie, the mutuality of our

personhood. I do not just dismiss you as a person; I appeal to you as a person, and then use that against you. Lying has the moral intensity it does, because it draws on and abuses the core of interaction and communality" (Simpson 1992: 637).

Lying could be verbal or nonverbal. Misleading nonverbal behaviours can be lies deliberately intended to deceive the addressee. Removing one's wedding ring to imply that one is unmarried would be an example of nonverbal lie. In drama, dramatic irony and anachronistic performances could be forms of non-verbal lying.

Bok (1989) categorised lying into three groups: harmful and white, planned and unplanned, and repeated and single lies. These groups are clearly opposing types of lies: harmful lie is the opposite of white lie, planned vs. unplanned and repeated vs. single, etc. Most of the lies encapsulated in the Akan proverbs in this article are normally planned, harmful and repeated lies that are morally disapproved of in the society and affect the liars themselves. We will, however, look at white lies in section 6.5.

Lying falls under the speech act of assertion and is a part of the Grice's cooperative maxims in pragmatics (Grice 1979, following Meibauer 2018). The Gricean cooperative maxims include a super maxim, (1) "Try to make your contribution one that is true", and two submaxims, namely (a) "Do not say what you believe to be false" and (b) "Do not say what you lack evidence" (see Meibauer 2018: 3). A good analysis of lying should encompass both semantic and pragmatic properties (Meibauer 2005: 373).[2] Turri &Turri (2015) averred that "The standard view in social science and philosophy is that a lie is a dishonest assertion. You lie if you say something which you think is false in order to deceive your audience into believing it. Lying does not require your assertion to be objectively false, only that you believe it is false (Turri & Turri 2015: 161).

In discussing lying from the pragmatic perspectives, Meibauer (2008: 362) stated that the theoretical approaches to lying assume that lying is an insincere assertion (see Searle 1979: 74). When speakers are insincere, they doubly deceive hearers about their commitment with respect to (1) the truth of the expressed proposition, and (2) their belief in that truth (see Stokke 2014). If truth is a moral behaviour in society, and the speaker respects the personality and sensibility

[2] Meibauer (2008: 358) indicated that from a "deceptionist" perspective, lying is an act of verbal deception, by deliberately leading someone into a false belief" (see Faulkner 2007; Turri & Turri 2015: 167).

of the addressee, then lying is, an assault on morality.[3] We will discuss the conceptual metaphor LYING IS A MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE ACT in section 6.1.1.

## 4. Theoretical framework

The article employs Language Ideology (hereinafter LI) and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in the analysis of the proverbs.

### 4.1. Language Ideology (hereinafter LI)

Ideologies are shared and predictable beliefs and ideas of a people that are real and implicit in their everyday life situations within a period of time (see Agyekum 2016; 2010). This article investigates the cultural values of Akan proverbs on lying from the perspective of LI. One can better understand the proverbs on lying by applying the people's LI, and their perception of lying as a violation of Akan cultural norms and values. The proverbs on lying are based on the time-tested experiences of the Akans based on their shared LI. Silverstein (1998: 123) averred that "Language ideologies are sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (see Verschueren 1999: 198).

Language use and the interpretation of Akan proverbs on lying, are based on the Akans LI. Speakers' awareness about the structure and nature of their language affects their social and rational behaviour. It includes the choice of appropriate proverbs on lying in identifiable ethnographic contexts, namely the situation, the participants, and the purpose. Irvine (1989: 255) posited that "Language ideologies are the cultural systems of ideas about social and linguistic relationship, together with their loading of moral and political interests". The Akan proverbs on lying are based on their cultural concepts, ideologies, worldview, sociocultural norms, their environment and history. Rumsey (1990: 346) postulated that "linguistic ideologies are shared bodies of common-sense notions about the nature of language in the world." Since the beliefs are shared, they are predictable; these include respective proverbs on lying.

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[3] Mahon (2015: 2) identified at least four necessary requirements for lying as:
1. a person makes a statement (statement condition);
2. the person believes the statement to be false; that is, lying requires that the statement be untruthful (untruthfulness condition);
3. the untruthful statement be made to another person (addressee condition);
4. the person intends that the other person believes the untruthful statement to be true (intention to deceive the addressee condition).

LI provides a sociocultural understanding and interpretation of the political, cultural, economic, legal and religious processes and people's behaviour that inform the local beliefs about language and culture (see Agyekum 2016; 2010; Fairclough 1989; Kroskrity 2006; Silverstein 1998: 126). Irvine and Gal (2000: 35) posited that "Linguistic ideology refers to the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them." In this article, the Akans frame their understanding of the various proverbs on lying based on their LI and sociocultural norms, values, experiences and conceptual metaphors. The article will reveal that the cultural norms, values and experiences of the Akan people match with their proverbs that disapprove of lying and consider it as immoral.

## 4.2. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Let us briefly look at the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as one of the most common analytical frameworks employed by cognitive linguistic researchers. The CMT was asserted by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 77) as follows:

"Many aspects of our experience cannot be clearly delineated in terms of the naturally emergent dimensions of our experience... Though most of these can be experienced directly; none of them can be fully comprehended on their own terms. Instead, we must understand them in terms of other entities and experiences".

Kövecses (2006: 367) postulated that:

"In conceptual metaphors, one domain is understood in terms of another conceptual domain. This understanding is achieved by setting a set of systematic correspondences, or mappings between two domains. Conceptual metaphors can be given by means of the formula A IS B or A AS B, where A and B indicate different conceptual domains".

In CMs, concepts expressed in metaphors, idioms, and proverbs correspond to cultural traits, sociocultural interactions, natural experiences, and basic domains of human life, including bodily perception and movement, basic objects, and the environment (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Semino (2008: 5) posited that "conceptual metaphors are defined as systematic sets of correspondence, or 'mappings', across conceptual domains, whereby a 'target' domain is partly structured in terms of a different 'source' domain". In this article, the proverbs on lying, are matched with elements in the environment that will give concrete pictures for clear understanding of the proverbs and their effects (see section 5.1).

## 5. The ethnosemantics of *ɛtorɔ* lying in Akan

The two most popular Akan expressions for lying are *nkontompo* and *ɛtorɔ*. Christaller (1933: 253) glossed *nkontompo* as 'falsehood, perversion of truth, dishonesty, slanderous lie, perversion of truth, duplicity, double-dealing, dissimulation, hypocrisy' and *kontomponi* as a 'liar, dishonest person, slanderer, etc.' Christaller (1933: 529) glossed *ɛtorɔ* as 'lie, untruth, falsehood', and its agentive form *ɔtorofoɔ* as 'a liar, a person who is untruthful and engages in falsehood.' Christaller (1933: 59, 251, 253) gave the synonyms of *nkontompo* and *ɛtorɔ* as *nnaadaa, nkɔnkɔnsa*, *nnabraba* and *akohwi* (Fante).[4] The agentive forms are: *ɔdaadaafoɔ, nkɔnkɔnsani, nnabrabani*, and *okohwinyi.* Their English glosses are 'swindler, slanderer, liar, backbiter, talebearer, deceiver, impostor and rogue' (Christaller 1933: 59). The words liar, deceiver and untruthful person dominate. The four Akan expressions for lying may have some semantic extensions; they are all accepted as suitable Akan equivalents that may be used interchangeably in similar contexts.

The nominal *ɛtorɔ*, 'lie', is derived from the verb *toro*, meaning 'to be slippery/slimy', and we have the following expressions with their literal meanings that can be deduced from their respective contexts.

(a) *ɛkwan no mu yɛ toro*
'the road/path is slippery'

(b) *nkwan no yɛ toro*
'the soup is slimy'

(c) *nkuruma yɛ toro*
'okra is slimy'

(d) *adeɛ no ho yɛ toro*
'the thing is slippery'

We can generate the expression *X ano yɛ toro*, 'X's mouth is slippery'. Sometimes it is expanded to *X ano yɛ toro sɛ nkruma*, 'X's mouth is as slippery as *okro*'. The figurative meanings of these expressions cannot be deduced directly from the words unless through metaphorical thinking and pragmatic contexts.

The noun *ɔtorofo* means a 'liar' and it figuratively means a 'smooth-tongued' or 'oily tongued'. The implication is that X cannot keep secrets, his mouth is so

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[4] The word *akohwi* 'lying' and the agentive *okohwinyi* are restricted to the Fante dialect of Akan. In the Asante dialect, a closer word *ahohwi* refers to reckless spending and *ohohwinyi* is 'a spendthrift, profligate'.

slippery that words easily fall out from his mind via his mouth unto the public domain. X gossips and easily divulges information to the public. In lying, the conceptual slippery mouth can always fabricate untrue issues that quickly fall off the mouth as if they are the truth; the conceptual metaphor reads: LYING IS A SLIPPERY MOUTH. Akans can negate the expression *X ka nokorɛ*, 'X speaks the truth', to get *X nka nokorɛ*, 'X does not speak the truth'; the expressions *X boa,* or *ɛnyɛ ampa*, also imply 'X is lying, it is not true.'

## 5.1. African perspective of the proverbs on lying

In discussing Akan proverbs, Brookman-Amissah (1985: 75) stated that

"The use of proverbs in Africa is mainly an oral art which serves as a rhetorical device to add spice to speech and human discourse but, more importantly, as a means of conserving and conveying the society's traditions, institutions, values, and culture. In a culture which depends so much on oral tradition, proverbs perform the important task of encoding the philosophical outlook, religious conceptions and worldview of society in a digestible form".

Researchers into African proverbs include, Agyekum (2021; 2016); Agyekum et al. (2020); Appiah et al. (2000); Asare-Opoku (1995); Finnegan (2012); Hussein (2005); Okpewho (1992); Oluwole (1997); Ssetuba (2002) and Yankah (1989). These scholars generally place proverbs at the apex of oral communication in Africa. Oluwole (1997: 100), postulated that in Africa, "proverbs are the analytic tools of thought, when thought is lost, it is proverbs that are used to search for it". Similarly, Ssetuba (2002: 1) posited that in Africa "The proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people's wisdom and philosophy of life". Agyekum & Arhine (2022: 333) working on highlife songs, stressed that:

"Proverbs are brief and witty sayings that embody general truths or principles and ways of life based on people's past experiences. Proverbs are the mirror to African worldview, thought, philosophy and indigenous knowledge, perception, ideology and socio-cultural concepts. Proverbs portray the wits, intellect, environment and the sociocultural and political experiences of African".

From an African philosophical perspective, Mommoh (2000: 362) postulated that:

"For anything to be known it has to be put into proverbs and for anything to be unknown it has to be removed from proverbs. Proverbs represent the last authority on the communal or public aspect of a people's beliefs or philosophy on any concept or issue.

In short and in summary, for the traditional African, to be is to be in proverbs and not to be is not to be in proverbs".

All the above portray the indispensability of proverbs in African socio-cultural life.

## 6. Data analysis and discussion of Akan proverbs on lying

In this section, the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) is employed as a tool for analysing, discussing, and interpreting the Akan proverbs on lying (see section 4.2). The analyzed proverbs were divided into thematic groups within which lying functions as a cultural code. The two well-known Akan words *ɛtorɔ* and *nkontompo*, 'lying' and 'falsehood' respectively, will feature more prominently in the discussion of the proverbs.

### 6.1. Thematic areas of Akan proverbs on lying

In Akan, the concept of lying can be captured through proverbs. The proverbs on lying are analysed using the Conceptual Metaphor approach where X is Y, because in most of the proverbs, there are figurative expressions where abstract notion (i.e. lying) is represented by concrete entities. Akan proverbs have been time-tested, and their veracity and authenticity are incontestable. Asare Opoku (1995) devoted a section of his thematic works on proverbs to truth and falsehood; and some of the proverbs are used in the discussion of lying.

(1) *Woka ntam gu amena mu a, ɛpue*
'If you swear an oath into a hole it resurfaces'

Proverb (1) advises people that they can use some clandestine ways to tell lies, extort money, fabricate stories, and put up several immoral behaviours that violate Akan values and norms. Notwithstanding all these, liars must remember that ultimately, the truth will pop out. You can bury the lies or the immoralities now, but they will resurface in future to affect you or your family; the CMs is LIES ARE REGENERATIVE PLANTS.

#### 6.1.1. Lying as a morally unacceptable act

There are Akan traditional sayings on lying that picture lies as morally and highly disapproved of. These are captured by the CM, LYING IS A MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE ACT. The society reacts negatively to "lies and the liars" (Franken 2003; Turri & Turri 2015: 161).

(2) *Wode nkontompo pɛ adeɛ mfeɛ apem a, nokwafo de dakoro gye wo nsam* (see Rattray 1914: 156; prov. no 608)
'If you use a thousand years to acquire properties through untruthful ways, the truthful person uses one day to snatch them from your hands'

Proverb (2) hammers on the effects of lying. One can employ lying to acquire wealth, get promoted, get a position, and be successful. As proverb (2) says, you can use a metaphorical 1000 years to dubiously amass wealth because you are a liar. The virtuous and truthful person will, however, use one metaphorical day to snatch all the unlawfully acquired properties. The liar's booty gained in a longer period will be lost very fast. The proverb indicates that no matter how long the liar would hold on to the untruth, the truthful person would expose him very fast, hence the use of one day in the proverb. Since metaphors about lying often refer to values, they are phrased using adjectives rather nouns. Therefore, the CMs are A LYING LONG LABOUR IS FRUITLESS and AN HONEST SHORT LABOUR IS FRUITFUL.

### 6.1.2 Lying as an opposition to telling the truth

A proverb that contrasts the truthful person and the liar was recorded by Rattray (1914: 156) and Ofei Ayisi (1966: 147) as follows:

(3) *ɔtorofo de mfe apem tu kwan a, nokwafo de dakoro tiw no to no*
'Whereas the liar takes a thousand years to go a journey, the truthful person follows and overtakes him in a day'

This proverb differentiates between truths and lies. The concept of *tu kwan*, 'to travel', among Akans is usually for greener pastures to eventually bring wealth back home. This is supported by a popular proverb, *wote faako a, wote w'adeɛ so*, 'if you stay at one place, you sit on your wealth'. Travelling and being adventurous are parts of the Akan culture; hence the CM, TRAVELLING IS WEALTH.

In proverb (3), the liar who travels with malicious and scandalous intentions to deceive people will stay in his new place for a metaphorical thousand years but will not acquire much wealth. On the contrary, the truthful person will travel to the same place and use just one metaphorical day to genuinely acquire what the liar used 1000 years. Using 1000 years and one day in the proverb is metaphorical and may seem hyperbolic; however, the essence is that truth conquers: truth outweighs lies, hence the CM – ONE TRUTH IS MORE THAN 1000 LIES. Other CMs that can be generated from the proverb on *ɔtorofoɔ* 'liar' are:

- TRUTH IS A CONQUEROR OF MANY LIES
- TRUTH IS WEALTHIER THAN A THOUSAND LIES
- TRUTHFUL JOURNEY OUTWEIGHS DUBIOUS JOURNEYS
- 1000 LIES ARE WORTHLESS

(4) *ɔtorofoɔ na ɔse me danseni wɔ Aburokyire* (see Rattray 1914: 156; Akrofi 1958: 158)
'The lair/smoothed tongue one says "my witness is in overseas"'

In Akan local arbitration, the role of the witness is crucial: cases are not finally judged when witnesses of both parties in the suit have not testified. A party to a case in proverb (4) who tells the jury that his/her witness is overseas and cannot produce him/her is telling a lie, or intentionally wants an adjournment of the case. The CM can be A LIAR'S WITNESS IS REMOTE. However, there is an Akan proverb to counter this. Proverb (5) implies that every case in Akan arbitration must definitely have a witness, either in person or virtual.

(5) *Asɛm a ɛnni adanseɛ no, yɛtwa asɛm no fa de yɛ adanseɛ*
'A case that has no witness, part of the issues is extracted as witness'

Even though truth conquers as seen in proverb (3), lies can depict their strong negative power as in proverb (6).

(6) *Atokoro sɛe nokwapem* (see Rattray 1914: 156; Akrofi 1958: 157)
'One lie/falsehood spoils thousand truths'

The two underlined words can be morphologically analysed as follows: *atokoro* comes from *ato(ro)+ koro*; *atoro* is truncated into *ato-* and combined with *koro*, 'one' to get 'a single lie'. Similarly, *nokwapem* is made up of *nokwa(re)* 'truth', which is truncated into *nokwa-* and combined with *apem*, 'thousand.' The Akan CMs from proverb (6) are:

- LYING IS A DESTROYER/RUINER OF MANY TRUTHS
- LYING IS A KILLER OF MANY TRUTHS
- LYING IS A TARNISHER OF MANY REPUTATIONS

According to Akrofi (1958: 157), the proverb implies that an honest man may ruin his reputation by telling a single lie.

The proverb advises people to refrain from falsehood, because no matter how virtuous you are, a single grievous falsehood can tarnish your reputation in the society. The Akans metaphorically put this as *X ane kotebini,* 'X has eased lizard

feces'. From the Akan ethno-zoological knowledge, and language ideological standpoint, lizards start easing with whitish or plain feces but end with dark, black or brown feces. Proverb (6) is synonymous to proverb (7) from Appiah & Appiah (2000: 608).

(7) *Nkontompo bunkam nokorɛ so*
'Falsehood overshadows the truth'

In all aspects of life, the CM - TRUTH IS AN ASSET is well accepted and truth conquers lies, but in proverbs (6) and (7), falsehood/lying overweigh the truth. This is one of the maxims in journalism where people think that bad news spreads faster. We mentioned the lizard's feces where the little black at the end spoils the longer whitish portion. It implies that falsehood travels very far and faster, and sometimes the truth portrayed by a virtuous person is overshadowed by the little falsehood. The CMs are FALSEHOOD IS A SUPERSEDER OF TRUTH and FALSEHOOD IS A FASTER TRAVELLER.

### 6.1.3. Lying as a double-edged sword

This section presents the results of the analysis using the conceptual metaphors LYING IS A CAUSE TO LIAR'S FEAR, LYING IS SUFFERING and LYING IS FATIGUE. The fear in lying is bi-directional and a double-edged sword; people who interact and work with liars are afraid of them because of their scandalous behaviour. In some situations, the liars are also afraid because the truth will come out eventually. Liars normally take on obligations they cannot discharge and are thus stressed out (see Owens 2006: 563). Again, the proverbs highlight the fatigue and suffering liars encounter in achieving their dubious means.

(8) *Wotwa nkontompo ma wo safoa yera a, kae sɛ woda abɔntene so*
'If you lie and your key gets lost, remember that you will sleep on the street'

Proverb (8) implies that the liar will eventually get punished and suffer, no matter how long the effect would take. This mean that no one will help a liar. This implies that the lie comes back to the liar in the form of negative effects on him. The CM can be captured from the above proverb as follows: LYING IS BAD/HARMFUL FOR THE LIAR.

The implication is that lying is morally wrong even when the liar thinks that he/she was deceiving the addressee.

(9) *Wode nkontompo ka asɛm a, wobrɛ* (see Rattray 1914: 156, prov. no 607)
'If you settle a case using lies and untruth, you suffer'

The CM in proverbs (9)-(11) is LYING IS THE CAUSER OF LIAR'S FATIGUE. Lying needs some planned strategies for its execution, and these include circumlocution. For a lie to be convincing and persuasive, the liar should spend time on machinations, choice of words, propaganda, and should get sharp memory and abilities to evaluate and persuade his audience to succeed. A corollary to this proverb is (10) below.

(10) *Wosum kontompo afidie a, woyi kasabrɛ*
'If you set up a false trap, you ensnare long talk'

Proverb (10) implies that if you employ dubious lies to get a booty, you will spend much time to explain why you had it. This is buttressed by a popular Akan proverb *asɛmpa yɛ tia*, 'Good news is short.' The CMs are LIES ARE CROOKED STATEMENTS and LIES ARE ALWAYS LONG. Appiah & Appiah (2000: 608) recorded a similar proverb as follows:

(11a) *Nkontompo ne brɛ na ɛnam*
'Falsehood and fatigue go together'

There is an equivalent proverb using the word *kɔnkɔnsani* (see Adu Gyamfi 1999: 77).

(11b) *Kɔnkɔnsani bɛbrɛ*
'The treacherous/liar will suffer'

In proverbs (11a) and (11b), one can employ falsehood but because of the long and circuitous manner, one will find it difficult, one belabours himself; and the one will suffer in future. Truth is straightforward and one does not suffer much in telling the truth, but when one lies, she/he might forget what has been said at different times, different places and to different people. To remember everything, the person struggles. Liars will eventually suffer, no matter how long it will take for the truth to emerge.

(12) *Kontomponi bɔ birim daa*
'A liar is always shivering/startling'

Proverb (12) emphasizes the negative emotional state of liars after they have lied. The lies cast their shadows on liars and they are unsure of where, when, and before which participants the truth will strip them naked. They live under the states of fear and uncertainty. The CMs are LYING IS THE CAUSER OF SHIVERING and

LYING IS THE CAUSER OF FEAR. A similar proverb, (13) below, indicates the emotional states liars go through.

(13) *Wotwa nkontompo a, wosuro Kumase* (Rattray 1914: 155, prov. no 603)
'When you tell a lie, you fear Kumase'

This proverb has both temporal and spatial deixes based on history. Kumase is the headquarters of the Ashanti nation where the Asante King resides and all important and high level criminal and civil cases were/are sent for adjudication. If one told a lie, depending on the gravity, one could be fined and executed in the olden days (see Rattray 1914: 155). A liar was therefore afraid and lived in a state of uncertainty, fear and panic thinking that she/he could be sent to Kumase, and be heavily punished.

(14) *Wokyea w'aso di asɛm a, wode wo tiri te dwaha*
'If you use prejudice to settle a case, you pay the price with your head'

Proverb (14) emphasizes justice; if an untruthful member of the jury twists the truth during arbitration based on bribery or nepotism, the veracity of the case would be revealed later. The CMs are LIES ARE CROOKED LINES and TRUTHS ARE STRAIGHT LINES. The person would be disgraced, punished or deposed of his position; perjury could attract execution depending on the gravity of the offence. Proverb (14) comments on prejudice in adjudication which can result in death, hence the metonymic reference is to one's head, but not any other body part, nor one's property. It implies paying dearly for prejudice.

(15) *Wode nnabraba tu kwan a, woduru na mmom, wonsan w'akyi bio*
'If you travel with fraud, you will reach your target but you cannot come back'

In all the above proverbs, we can infer that if you embark on falsehood, fabrication, insincerity, your dealings may be rosy. You may initially gain what you want, but you will finally regret of your misdeeds.

Proverb (15) provides a metaphorical journey full of fraud and insincerity, you may meander your route to arrive at your destination, but if you want to return, since the route was not straight, you cannot find your way. The road is metaphorically blocked; it is impossible to bring any booty. The CMs for proverb (15) are LYING IS A NO RETURN JOURNEY and LYING'S JOURNEY IS A FAILURE. Let us now consider one of the direct sufferings that impinges on the liar.

(16) *ɔkɔnkɔnsani ntoma nyɛɛ mmienu da*
'A treacherous person never has two cloths' (see Appiah & Appiah 2000: 604)

The outcome of the activities of the liar/treacherous person is put in the metaphor of a single cloth, indicating poverty, hence LYING IS HAVING A SINGLE CLOTH. The liar cannot add anything to his/her property and would always be wearing a single cloth. This metaphor of lying which means the lack of alternative (i.e. the lack of the second clothes) is the consequence of lying. Instead of working very hard, the treacherous person walks round, talks about people and wastes time on strategies to harm others. If you embark on treachery you will never prosper TREACHERY IS POVERTY. People would be scared of your treacherous behaviour and shun you.

Let us look at another proverb on lying (lines 1-2 below) from a popular highlife song by the late A.B. Crentsil.

(17) *Kɔnkɔnsani dua aburoo a,*
'If the liar plants corn,'
*Ofifiri ne nan ho*
'It germinates along his legs'
*Wowɔ wiase na wonka nokorɛ, a.*
'If you stay in the world and refuses to say the truth'
*Wo ara wobɛte wo piga*
'You will hear about your piga "suffering"'
*Wobɛte wo piga o*
'You will hear about your *piga* "suffering"'
*Wo ara wobɛte wo saafa*
'You will hear your *saafa* "predicaments"'
*Wo saafa o,*
'Your predicaments'
*Wo ara wobɛte wo piga.*
'You will hear about your *piga* "suffering"'

The literal meaning of the song is that if the liar sows corn, it germinates along his legs; it pragmatically implies that the outcome of the lies moves along with him. The CM is thus LIES ARE REGENERATIVE PLANTS. The shadows of the liar's misdeeds follow him wherever he goes. He will suffer and experience the predicaments of the results of his lies. The CM is LIES ARE SOURCES OF PREDICAMENTS. The expressions *piga* and *saafa* are not Akan, they are borrowed from some Gur languages of Northern Ghana and they imply suffering.

(18) *Woretwa nkontompo a, twa deɛ mpoma da ho na yɛrekye wo a, woahuri afa mu*
'If you are lying, target a window so that when you are chased you will have an outlet'

Proverb (18) warns the liar that lying is bad and he will definitely be caught and suffer, it is better to have a loose lie so that there can be an outlet to save yourself. The CM is A LOOSE LIE IS A HAVEN. This will match with white lies that are not very harmful.

### 6.1.4. Lying as a threat to individuals and the state

Some Akan proverbs emphasize how detrimental and vicious lying is to individuals and generally to the state. Sarpong (2029: 46) quoted the Akans who say that "A liar is a murderer". Liars do injustice, first to themselves and then to others, since their words do not reveal the reality in their heads." One of my informants agrees that if a liar fabricates a false accusation against another person that can send him to court, and be charged with murder, it is the liar who has caused the death. The CMs are LYING IS MURDER and A LIAR IS A MURDERER. Some of these proverbs on *kɔnkɔnsani* 'liar/treacherous person' were tapped from Akan proverbs' books especially, Appiah & Appiah (2000: 604). See below:

(19) *Kɔnkɔnsani ho yɛ hu sene aboa ɔwɔ*
'The treacherous person is more terrible than a snake'

(20) *Kɔnkɔnsani tena kurom a, kuro bɔ*
'If a treacherous person stays in the town, the town spoils'

(21) *Kɔnkɔnsani ankɔ ɔko a, ɔdɔmmarima nko ntɔ*
'If a treacherous man does not go to war, a great warrior does not fall/die'

(22) *Kɔnkɔnsani repɛ ɔhene adi na wannya anni a, ɔsuae ɔman fidie*
'If a treacherous person wants to become a chief and he is unable to do so, he sets a trap against the state'

In proverb (19), the liar is compared to a snake and the simile is: "the liar is more dangerous and scary than the snake", hence the CM is A LIAR IS A POISONOUS SNAKE. It has venomous poison that can be spewed unto individuals and the nation, and eventually ruin the community or kill people. The negative impact of the liar is in proverb (20), where the liar can destroy a whole town through his nebulous and clandestine activities.

Proverb (21) comments on the serious effects of the activities of a liar who can be a traitor during wars; the CM is A LIAR IS A TRAITOR. He can conspire with the enemies, reveal some secrets and war tactics of his army for the enemies

to conquer them. It is a delight if the treacherous person/liar is unable to participate at the battle front due to some circumstances like sudden sickness or death, and his warrior and the community will win.

Finally, in proverb (22), one of the requirements of a new chief is to be truthful. A royal family will never nominate a treacherous person/liar to the throne. The rejected treacherous candidate will thus find strategies to harm the elected chief and the state. Bannerman (X: 160) explains that "the defeated pretender to a chieftainship continues to scheme not just against the new chief but against the whole community". He is an enemy to the state and the citizens and the CM is A LIAR IS THE STATE'S ENEMY.

## 6.2. Social and pragmatic implications of lying

This section discusses the mistrust of liars and the need and motives for (white) lying as sociopragmatic implications of lying to the liars, individuals, and the society.

### 6.2.1. Mistrust of liars

Lying puts a higher degree of mistrust on the liar as in the CM A LIAR IS AN UNTRUSTWORTHY/SHIFTY PERSON. In lying, A LIAR IS A SPEAKING MACHINE instead of behaving as a responsible member of the society, he abuses his own faculties. The liar is not only deceiving the addressee but is rather reducing his personality as a trustworthy person (see Kant 1996: 183). This is captured in a popular Akan maxim, *wosisi Ananse a, wosisi wo ho*, 'If you cheat the spider, you cheat yourself'. Let us look at the proverbs in this section that depict the mistrust by people.

(23) *Kontomponi se ɔne wo bɛforo dua a, ma no nni kan*
'If the liar says he will climb a tree with you, let him start first

Proverb (23) means that in Akan culture a liar is not trustworthy. He says one thing and means another, he is a shifty person. Even though he may be talking about the climbing of a tree, he may mean another activity. It is scary, you cannot be sure of the type of tree, the harmful insects on the tree, and what will happen when you climb it. If you climb first and he cuts the tree, you will not know what will happen to you. It is prudent to let the liar climb first so that the outcome will inform you on what to do. This proverb advises on how to deal with scammers and fraudsters because they are unpredictable. The CMs are LIARS ARE UNPREDICTABLE and LIARS ARE DOUBLE-TONGUED.

In the Akan society, the liar is untrustworthy, a dangerous and treacherous person. The proverb that supports this is:

(24) *Kontomponi se hwɛ soro a, hwɛ fam, ɔka sɛ hwɛ fam nso a, hwɛ soro*
'If a liar tells you "look up", look down, and when he says "look down", look up'

Proverb (24) implies that you should not trust the instructions of a liar. The liar must be listened to at least twice with some higher level of circumspection. The fuller version of this proverb is "if the liar says look up, you should better look down, for there could be a snake that can bite you". On the contrary, "if he says look down, you should better look up", to protect your head from a falling beam onto your head. Do not ever trust a liar.

(25) *Kontomponi dan, wɔpa; na wɔnhyew*
'The deceitful man's house, you take off the roof, you do not burn it'

Proverb (25) is from Akrofi (1958: 98) who explained that "if you patiently watch the deceitful person, you see through his deception." The liar is dealt with in a very tactical and prudent way because of mistrust and his/her swindling nature. If you burn his house, he will overestimate the contents in the house that you cannot pay. If you just strip off the roof, the contents would be known and he cannot accuse you of stealing his property.

## 6.2.2. The need and motives for (white) lying

Even though lying is abhorred, sometimes lying is a better option based on relevance and the need assessments, and this is termed as white lies, when we are permitted to deceive in other ways (Owens 2006: 561). White lies are also called "harmless or face-saving lies" since they are not grievous, may not harm anyone, or cause any disharmony, but rather to smoothen communication between the liar and the addressee(s). Tovmasyan (2020: 10) stated that "white lies are lies that are told in order to be polite or to stop someone from being upset with the truth". They are normally used in crucial situations where giving the truthful information might harm rather than help.

White lies can be cooked instantly to save situations that could be unpleasant if such a lie is not crafted, and the speaker is potentially silent.[5] In some soci-

[5] For example, if you are late to a meeting, it is often tempting to manufacture a face-saving excuse, such as "Traffic was bad today," or "I got a last minute call that I had to take…". If you don't want to talk to someone, you can ask your secretary to tell the person that

eties, some types of deceit are acceptable because they are relatively minor, or harmless puffery. In Ghana, we often encounter the following:

A colleague X who has not called his friend Y for months is now called by the friend Y. In shame, X would throw a white lie and say *oh anka merebɛfrɛ wo o,* 'Oh, I was just about to call you'.

People should just be factual and give straightforward apologies instead of using white lies. However, human beings are inclined to lying for a variety of reasons. Psychologists have identified a number of motives for lying, chief among them are the need to preserve self-esteem. Empirically, it supports the claim that the presumption of relevance motivates both the speaker to lie and the addressee to process lying in the first place (see Li & Yuan 2020). The Akan proverbs which support the relevance of lying include:

(26) *Nkontompo yɛntwa no kwa*
'We do not tell lies for no reason'

(27) *ɛtoro yɛdi no ohia.*
'Telling lies is done out of need'

Lies may be crafted to save the speaker's face and maintain a good relationship between the interlocutors. To Appiah et al. (2000: 1087), "you lie to protect yourself or to obtain help when in real want". There are certain life situations where lying will be the ideal option to serve the general purpose more effectively than telling the truth. There are crucial times that we are compelled to be dishonest to save the situation. Individuals may lie with non-exploitative intentions, but rather harness social cohesion. Such lying does not destroy the mutual trust between the liar and the addressee.

DePaulo et al. (1996: 983) classified lies into self-serving lies and other-oriented lies. The former is to "protect or enhance the liars psychologically, to advantage or protect the liars' interests, or to elicit a particular emotional response that the liars desired", and the latter is to "protect or enhance other persons psychologically or to advantage or protect the interests of others". It implies that needful lies are bidirectional.

There is the desire to manipulate others to behave in ways that are in one's self-interest. We can craft lies to avoid conflict and create a conducive atmos-

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"you are out of the office or in a meeting".

phere for social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. Tovmasyan (2020: 19) listed some common reasons why people lie from the work of Ekman (2003). The reasons include (a) to avoid being punished, (b) to protect someone from harm, (c) to be polite, (d) to flatter people, (e) to influence others, (f) to achieve a positive outcome, (g) to win the admiration of others, etc. We will not go into the details here, for that is not our focus.

## 7. Other Akan literary genres as sources of "literary lying"

Apart from proverbs, there are other oral literature genres that have ingredients of lying. Among the Akan, lying is very profound in folktales, fiction and drama. In folktales, the use of indirection where human beings are often represented by animals can be argued as part of "literary lying". Indirection is used to pave the way to comment on human behaviour using animal characters without having problems, especially with those in the community. It is thus not surprising that in most Akan and Caribbean folktales we have *Ananse*, 'spider' as the "super trickster" who is able to use lying and scandalous means to outwit bigger and faster animals in the animal kingdom.

In other popular narratives, like the discourse in funeral donations and contract in traditional marriages, some white lies are accepted.[6] For instance, a donor's oratory rhetoric and sophistry do not match the amount donated. These types of white lies are beyond the scope of this article which concentrates on proverbs on lying.

## 8. Conclusion

The article has discussed and analysed the Akan concept of lying using Language Ideology and the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as the theoretical frameworks. The article concentrated on 27 Akan proverbs to discuss how the Akans conceptualise lying via proverbial lenses. The proverbs were subjected to the Conceptual Metaphor frame of X IS Y, as in the examples: LYING IS A NO RETURN JOURNEY, LYING IS MURDER and A LIAR IS THE STATE'S ENEMY (See Appendix 1 for 44 examples of Conceptual Metaphors on lying in this article.)

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[6] As part of the collectivist nature of the Akans, mourners at a funeral must donate normally in cash or in kind to support the bereaved family so that the family will not incur huge debts after the funeral.

The proverbial image of lying reflects cultural conceptualizations and cultural values of lying. We have found out that in Akan, lying goes contrary to morality and trust. The proverbs in this article suggest that lying is wrong and must be abhorred. Again, the liar is seen as a miscreant, a treacherous individual, a murderer, someone more poisonous than a snake, and a dangerous person who should not be trusted. The behaviour of the liar goes contrary to the acceptable norms and values of Akans. We agree with Carson (2006: 302) that "lying involves a breach of trust. To lie, is to invite others to trust and rely on what one says by warranting its truth, but, at the same time, to betray that trust by making false statements that one does not believe".

This article has seen lying as unacceptable and dangerous in social interactions. The mistrust in lying violates some of the Gricean cooperative principles, and we strongly agree with Meibauer (2005: 1396) who aptly states as follows:

> "From the point of view of implicate theory, it may be argued that lying is not a cooperative action at all, and thus not submitted to the operation of the cooperative principle. After all, the liar does not observe the maxim of quality, and, consequently, he is opting out from the observation of the cooperative principle".

We have recognised that in some identifiable contexts lying is essential and needful to create social harmony, to save one's face, to show politeness, to flatter, among others. We noted these as white or harmless lies that are not meant to deceive the addressee.

Out of proverbs, there are other ethnographic situations where lying is accepted but those were not the focus of this article. They are reserved for further studies. These include white lies in the announcement of funeral donations, where a donor promises to pay all outstanding debts in the funeral but this is a vain promise. There are some pronouncements during traditional marriage by the bridegroom that are not true. We can mention lying in campaign promises in politics, which is very profound in Ghanaian contemporary politics.

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## Appendix 1: Examples of Akan Conceptual Metaphors on lying

| SR NO | Conceptual Metaphor | Section | Proverb no |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | LYING IS A MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE ACT | 6.1 | 1 |
| 2 | LYING IS A SLIPPERY MOUTH | 6.1 | |
| 3 | LIES ARE REGENERATIVE PLANTS | 6.1 | 1 |
| 4 | A LYING LONG LABOUR IS FRUITLESS | 6.1 | 2 |
| 5 | AN HONEST SHORT LABOUR IS FRUITFUL | 6.1 | |
| 6 | TRAVELLING IS WEALTH | 6.1.2 | 3 |
| 7 | ONE TRUTH IS MORE THAN 1000 LIES | 6.1.2 | 3 |
| 8 | TRUTH IS MORE FRUITFUL THAN MANY LIES | 6.1.2 | |
| 9 | TRUTH IS HEAVIER THAN MANY LIES | 6.1.2 | |
| 10 | TRUTH IS WEALTHIER THAN A THOUSAND LIES | 6.1.2 | |
| 11 | TRUTHFUL JOURNEY OUTWEIGHS DUBIOUS JOURNEYS | 6.1.2 | |
| 12 | 1000 LIES ARE WORTHLESS | 6.1.2 | |
| 13 | A LIAR'S WITNESS IS REMOTE | 6.1.2 | 4 |
| 14 | LYING IS A DESTROYER/RUINER OF MANY TRUTHS | | 6 |
| 15 | LYING IS A KILLER OF MANY TRUTHS | | 6 |
| 16 | LYING IS A TARNISHER OF MANY REPUTATIONS | | 6 |
| 17 | TRUTH IS AN ASSET | | 7 |
| 18 | FALSEHOOD IS A SUPERSEDER OF TRUTH | | 7 |
| 19 | FALSEHOOD IS A FASTER TRAVELLER | | 7 |
| 20 | LYING IS A CAUSE TO LIAR'S FEAR | 6.1.3 | |
| 21 | LYING IS SUFFERING | 6.1.3 | |
| 22 | LYING IS FATIGUE | 6.1.3 | |
| 23 | LYING IS BAD/HARMFUL FOR THE LIAR | 6.1.3 | 8 |
| 24 | LYING IS THE CAUSER OF LIAR'S FATIGUE | 6.1.3 | 9 |
| 25 | LIES ARE CROOKED STATEMENTS | 6.1.3 | 10 |
| 26 | LIES ARE ALWAYS LONG | 6.1.3 | 10 |
| 27 | LYING IS THE CAUSER OF SHIVERING | 6.1.3 | 12 |

| SR NO | Conceptual Metaphor | Section | Proverb no |
|---|---|---|---|
| 28 | LYING IS THE CAUSER OF FEAR | 6.1.3 | 12 |
| 29 | LIES ARE CROOKED LINES | 6.1.3 | 14 |
| 30 | TRUTHS ARE STRAIGHT LINES | 6.1.3 | 14 |
| 31 | LYING IS A NO RETURN JOURNEY | 6.1.3 | 15 |
| 32 | LYING'S JOURNEY IS A FAILURE | 6.1.3 | 15 |
| 33 | LYING IS HAVING A SINGLE CLOTH | 6.1.3 | 16 |
| 34 | LIES ARE SOURCES OF PREDICAMENTS | 6.1.3 | 17 |
| 35 | LOOSE LIE IS A HAVEN | 6.1.3 | 18 |
| 36 | LYING IS MURDER | 6.1.4 | 18 |
| 37 | A LIAR IS A MURDERER | 6.1.4 | 19 |
| 38 | A LIAR IS A TRAITOR | 6.1.4 | 21 |
| 39 | A LIAR IS THE STATE'S ENEMY | 6.1.4 | 22 |
| 40 | A LIAR IS AN UNTRUSTWORTHY/SHIFTY PERSON | 6.2.1 | |
| 41 | A LIAR IS AN UNTRUSTWORTHY/SHIFTY PERSON | 6.21 | |
| 42 | A LIAR IS A SPEAKING MACHINE | 6.2.1 | |
| 43 | LIARS ARE UNPREDICTABLE | 6.2.1 | 23 |
| 44 | LIARS ARE DOUBLE-TONGUED | 6.2.1 | 23 |

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**Chidimma Ugomma E. Inyima**
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria
ORCID: 0000-0002-1572-2896

**Onyebuchi Nwosu**
Alex Ekweme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria
ORCID: 0009-0006-0261-1288

# Making African names trendy: sociolinguistic implications of the Englishisation of indigenous Igbo names

## Abstract

This study examines an aspect of linguistic globalization known as Englishisation (Kachru 1994; Boussebaa & Brown 2016; Mensah 2021) by adopting the sociolinguistic approach to investigate the creative modifications of some Igbo indigenous names with the aim of ascertaining their underpinnings and implications for linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world. The findings reveal that in addition to contact and assimilation, the quest for global relevance and integration underlies the linguistic modifications of African (Igbo) names. The study concludes that Englishisation is posing a threat to linguistic and cultural diversity and recommends deliberate concerted reorientation in order to check the trend.

**Keywords:** globalization; Englishisation; Igbo names; cultural diversity; language endangerment

## 1. Introduction

As desirable as globalization may be as a guarantee of equitable access to resources, with improved international contacts and connections, enhanced participation, shared knowledge and increased mobility of labour, linguistic globalization has grave implications for linguistic and cultural diversity which are fundamental threads in the tapestry of human experience. Linguistic globalization favours the pervasive and rigorous promotion of the English language at the expense of the indigenous languages in multi-lingual post-colonial spaces like Nigeria leading to the endangerment, moribundity and loss, selective or total, of indigenous linguistic forms. Scholarship in the last three decades has established that global linguistic diversity is under threat (Krauss 1992; Crystal 2000; UNESCO 2003) and concerted efforts towards recognizing, documenting and supporting it have intensified in recent years. UNESCO (2006: 1) and Bromham et al. (2022: 63) attribute this gradual erosion of over 50% of the world's 6700 languages to colonialization, modernization, globalization and the resultant economic and cultural expansion of a dominant culture which has occasioned such predictors of language endangerment as population movement, greater access to formal education and declining inter-generational transmission. Ohiri-Aniche (1997) and Lewis et al. (2016), note that Nigeria, the most populous country in West Africa, is not spared from this "extinction debt" (Kuussaari et al. 2009). This is a matter of serious concern because languages do more than transmit messages: they "encapsulate a vision of the world" being "vehicles of the intangible cultural heritage". As such languages especially "transmit cultural and social experiences and practices; are vehicles of memories, traditions, knowledge and skills and are determining factors of identity" (UNESCO 2006: 1). One of the underlying principles of the philosophy of the Nigeria National Language Policy (2022) is the fact that languages are tied to culture and as such serve as marks of identity and repositories of the traditions, norms and values of the different peoples of Nigeria. The "identity-forming expressions" of a linguistic group can thus be seen in the lexicon of its language as names are lexical items and thus part of a community's lexical inventory (Anderson 2007) so that when indigenous names and naming systems are lost, an integral part of a language and culture is lost.

This article investigates the threat to linguistic diversity posed by Englishisation which involves a gradual erosion and loss of indigenous African (Igbo) personal names to the marauding influences of the English language. The focus on indigenous Igbo personal names stems from their being containers of not just the community's identity, values, and vision of the world but especially

of information on the structures and processes of the language (Mphande 2006 as cited in Emeka-Nwobia et al. 2019: 24). It is thus a contribution to the on-going discourse on language contact, change and language endangerment especially on global linguistic and cultural diversity. As Kishe (1994: 185) notes, "Englishisation is a term used to refer to the linguistic influence of English on another language". Explaining further, she asserts that "(W)hat brings about change in language form is the transfer of linguistic items as a result of language transfer". To this end, the article is divided into six segments. While the first part introduces the issues under discussion, the second part gives an overview of the Igbo cultural milieu, the central location of the study. Next is the third part where attempt is made to give a brief literature review on the various perspectives that have been applied to the study of names and naming patterns in Igbo land. It also discusses the phenomenon of language loss and erosion as it relates to Igbo names and naming. The fourth part is the conceptual framework where the concept of Englishisation is explained and the methods applied in the study highlighted. The fifth part presents results which detail discussions on the motivations for the adoption of trendy names, attitudes to indigenous Igbo names as well as their implications on the preservation of the Igbo culture. The sixth part looks at the linguistic impact and implications of making some Igbo personal names trendy through Englishisation while the last part is the conclusion.

## 2. The Igbo: people, location, and language

The language of the Igbo (Ndi Igbo) people represents the Igboid language sub group of the Volta-Niger, a major branch of the Volta-Congo within the Benue-Kwa in the Western Benue-Congo (formerly Eastern Kwa) language family (Williamson & Blench, 2000; Ikegwuonu 2019; Good 2018). Earlier classifications had however identified the Igbo language under the larger Kwa language sub group with most other Western African languages (cf. Greenberg 1963; Amadiume 1996). Other Igboid languages include Ikwere and Ekpeye. Their indigenous homeland (Igboland) is situated on both sides of the River Niger in South-East Nigeria on the west coast of Africa. The Igbo is a major indigenous African ethnic group. Igboland has an area of 41,440 $km^2$ and a population of about 22 million (Merem, Twumasi & Wesley 2019) covering five core Igbo states, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Igboland, however, in addition to these core states includes major parts of Delta and Rivers states and minor parts of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Edo and Kogi States. Ndi Igbo are highly enterprising, economically mobile, educationally inclined and accommodating

of non-indigenous peoples and cultures. This predisposes them to increasing "predatory influences" (Igboanusi 2006; Emeka-Nwobia 2019).

The Igbo language is the mother- tongue of the Igbo people, at home and in the diaspora. By virtue of being, supposedly, the mother tongue of 15%-18% of the population of Nigeria (Rewford, 2018; Statista, 2022), it has the status of a language of wider communication and lingua franca along with Yoruba and Hausa (Federal Republic of Nigeria National Language Policy 2022). The National Language Policy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2022) additionally provides that "English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba shall be languages of deliberation at the National Assembly and adequate arrangements shall be made accordingly" (section 115). Although this provision reiterates the provisions of section 51 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria retained in section 55 of the 1999 constitution and amended in 2011, it is mostly a two-tier response: firstly to the failure in implementation as "adequate arrangements" for the implementation of the constitutional provisions were never made, and secondly, to UNESCO's 2006 prediction of the Igbo language going extinct by 2050 (Asonye 2013). UNESCO's prediction was made upon some observed language death predicators, especially inter-generational language transmission, language policy, and implementation, language shift and dwindling domains of use in respect of the Igbo language. As a matter of fact, the 2022 Language Policy is the first policy document to exclusively address language and language development and preservation issues in Nigeria. The language co-exists with 527 languages, 520 of which are living and 7 extinct. 10 of the 520 living languages are non-indigenous, 20 are institutional, 78 are developing, 351 are vigorous, 27 are threatened and 44 dying (Lewis, Simons & Fennig 2016 as cited in Ismail & Igboanusi 2023: 2). The Igbo language has about 20 dialects and a well-documented written standard variety, Igbo Izugbe, which is based on the 1962 *onwu* alphabet (Asonye 2013; Ikegwuonu 2019). It also has a well-structured curriculum and is learnt and taught at all levels of formal education in Nigeria (Asonye 2013; Emeka-Nwobia 2019). Recent scholarship however reveals an increasing decline in the domains of use of the Igbo language and in the number of Igbo as L1 child (young) speakers as well as the pride of place given to English in the intellectual development of the Igbo child (Igboanusi 2006; Ugwu 2020; Mensah 2021) such that the endangerment status of the Igbo language is now somewhere between Wurm's (2003) "definitely endangered" and Crystal (2000) and UNESCO's (2003) "unsafe" (Odionye & Odoinye 2010).

The earliest contact of the Igbo with the English language dates back to between the 15th and 19th centuries through British economic, missionary and colonial

interests (Odumuh 1987; Taiwo 2009; Jowitt 2019; Igboanusi 2002). Together with Western Nigeria, South-Eastern Nigeria provided a gateway for the encroachment of English on Nigerian soil. Its spread and subsequent entrenchment on the psyche and linguistic behavior of the indigenous population has however been propelled by favourable attitudes towards the English language, government policies, religious doctrines and Western economic and technological imperialism (Unuabonah & Oladipupo 2020).

Unlike the northern part of Nigeria that was conservative in its reception of English and western education, the South-East was very receptive after the initial apathy towards the language and so leaned towards it especially as it was perceived as the language of civilisation, progress, prestige, social influence, "language of God" and a guarantee of paid employment (Omolewa 1979). This attitude towards the English language, described by Anyokwu (2022) as the "fetishisation" of English, has persisted and in fact gained momentum in the post-independence era with the resultant prioritization of English, decline in an interest in the Igbo language, especially by the younger generation, decreased domains of use and deficient intergenerational transmission (Igboanusi 2006; Asonye 2013; Anyokwu 2022). The English language is seen as not only the language of civilisation, social mobility, influence and progress but also as a status symbol and indicator of social class. Anyokwu (2022) elaborates: "He who is able to demonstrate facility in the English language is regarded as enlightened, educated, very powerful…." As a result of this close tie with power and social class, an appreciable number of upper- and middle-class parents, South-Eastern Nigeria's urban elites, speak only English at home to their children and enroll them in prestigious and highbrow private schools where precedence is given to English and their children's competence in the language highly prized, respected and celebrated. These days, they additionally give their children "Englishised" indigenous names or outright English names (Emeka-Nwobia 2016; Emeka-Nwobia, Onuigbo & Ogenyi 2019).

Kuju (1999) decries this situation observing that the English language is steadily displacing the Igbo language as a medium of communication. In this connection, Onyemelukwe (2019) and Unuabonah & Oladipupo (2020) observe a community of speakers among the Igbo people to whom English is both a first language and the sole medium of communication, an indication of social change, social dislocation and language shift (Fishman 2006). The pervasive influence of English has thus infiltrated the indigenous cultural and linguistic forms including indigenous names and naming systems. This has grave implications for linguistic and cultural diversity because "African names are not just ordinary labels for

the identification of their bearers; they mirror the [collective] culture, tradition, [history] and worldview [and value system] of the people [name givers and name bearers]… they embed deep cultural insights that reflect social ties, philosophies, religion… ecological knowledge, gemology(ies)" (Mensah 2021: 1). Indigenous Igbo names in addition are a lens through which the structure and grammar of the Igbo language may be seen (Ubahakwe 1981). All these brilliant diversities in the global linguistic and cultural landscape are being threatened by Englishisation, the conversion of indigenous linguistic forms, and identities, into English or else the hybridization of indigenous and English forms.

## 3. Names and naming in Igboland

The literature is replete with studies on names and naming in Igboland. From the structural investigations of Ubahakwe (1981), through culture-content (Ubahakwe 1982), to typology (Kammelu 2008), linguistic and cultural studies (Anyachonkeya 2014), and semantic and pragmatic investigations (Onumajuru 2016). The typology of indigenous Igbo names identified in the literature include: theophoric, ideational, testimonial, circumstantial, value, kinship, flora and fauna, and nicknames. Onumajuru (2016) identifies 3 basic structures: lexical, phrasal and sentential. Scholarship reveals that indigenous Igbo naming systems evince systems of assigning identities which are informed by the Igbo culture, value system, and worldview so that a name is not just "a tag of identity or personal label but a story…" (Onumajuru 2016: 307). A name personifies the individual and highlights the values of the society (Ubahakwe 1982: 27). The traditional naming ceremony is a spiritual and solemn affair and name givers are clan heads or the eldest man in the kindred. Indigenous names are given based on such criteria as kinship, circumstances of birth, physical appearance, flora and fauna, calendar or else God and deities (Emeka-Nwobia 2016). The extended family is given top priority. Indigenous Igbo names are thus "symbolic resources that provide a lens for accessing the [Igbo] view on life, the world and humanity and sources of [their] ethnic, religious and linguistic realities" (Fakuade, Friday-Otun & Adeosun 2019: 266).

Furthermore, indigenous Igbo names are not semantically opaque but communicative tools with tons of semantic, pragmatic and socio-cultural information and mete out the ethos of the people being semantically and pragmatically portentous (Mbonu 2010; Emeka-Nwobia 2016). Emeka-Nwobia (2016: 100) and Chiluwa (2010: 35), however, observe a new trend, "glocalization" where names are mainly "European in form but [Igbo] in content". These hybridized forms are informed by contact, education, religion, Westernization, urbanization and

globalization underscoring a preference for foreign and Western culture, including names, so that indigenous names and naming systems are now regarded as "primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain" (Arowolo 2010: 2). Igbo personal names, especially given names, are now mostly semantically, culturally and pragmatically empty reflecting mostly religious inclinations and ideologies, and personal knowledge and contact with Western culture. Also, naming is now solely the responsibility of the nuclear family. Arowolo (2010: 2) terms this "the precarious contamination of African values" and warns against the attendant "cultural emptiness", "cultural draught" and "extinction of African values" especially since the name bearers, most times, "lack a good mastery of his [their] own language and possess only a working understanding of [English]" (Emeka-Nwobia 2019: 5) and so are culturally and linguistically ambivalent. English is the world's most dominant language and there is growing evidence that it is displacing many other languages (Boussebaa & Brown 2016: 4). Thus, some critical studies by some scholars see Englishisation as both a hegemonic and imperialistic domination of other languages (Boussebba et al. 2014). This has positioned the English language on the path to becoming the working language for all those who aspire to the heights of the system or, indeed, those who simply strive to survive within its borders and in the process, other languages are pushed out. (Boussebba & Tienari 2019: 5). This article intends to build on existing studies and interrogate the sociolinguistic implications of the Englishisation of indigenous Igbo personal names on the Igbo socio-linguistic landscape and the implications for global linguistic diversity.

## 4. Conceptual framework and methodology

A qualitative sociolinguistic approach is applied in this study. The approach is concerned with the ways speech communities deploy the resources of language to make progress and represent themselves in the world. Langman (2020) observes that its focus is the interrogation of the richness of language use in particular contexts in order to understand the relationship between language and the social world. It especially seeks to understand how differences in language both reflect and help to create differences in how individuals and groups use language and are judged as a result of their language use by others. This approach is therefore especially implicated in the phenomenon of Englishisation which is the major conceptual frame that underscores the discussions in the study. Englishisation connotes the underpinnings of Englishised indigenous Igbo names and their implications for linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world.

According to Kishe (1994: 186) "when languages come in contact, they affect one another through the transfer of linguistic item from one language to another. Englishisation results from the transfer of linguistic items in this case from English to [another language]". As Carbaral-Cardoso (2020: 1230) citing Coleman (2006) notes, "Englishisation represents an extension of the global threat to minority languages" as it can lead to the "unmanaged expansion of English perceived as a "killer" language which gains from the extinction of other languages." This makes the presence of English as a global language to pose a serious threat to other languages as it is evident that it is difficult to resist the overwhelming pressures of the English language that come with globalization and the threat of cultural blending.

No discussion on Englishisation has looked at its naming and nomenclatural dimensions (on indigenous Igbo personal names) so the aim of this study is to look at the influences of English on contact with the Igbo language especially with Igbo naming patterns and systems. Such study is important in determining the nature and state of language contact and changes that emanate thereafter for as Kachru (1994: 150) notes, "the cross-cultural acculturation of English, its manifestation in various varieties […] provide a goldmine of data for the study of contact, change and language". Data for the study consists of 100 Englishised or Anglicised Igbo personal names purposively sampled from Alex Ekwueme Federal University (a federal university in South-East Nigeria) where the two researchers teach courses in English language. They utilized students' nominal rolls, students' and staff's WhatsApp profile names, personal interaction, responses to a semi-structured but experts-validated questionnaire to elicit information to answer these research questions:

i. What are the motivations for the Englishisation of indigenous Igbo personal names?
ii. What is the prevalent perception of Englishised indigenous Igbo personal names?
iii. What are the prevalent attitudes to indigenous personal names vis-à-vis Englishised names?
iv. What are the prevalent opinions on the implications of Englishisation of Igbo names especially on the preservation of indigenous cultures and linguistic forms and cultural and linguistic diversity in the global space?

The questionnaire was complemented by semi-structured interviews of the participants and participant observation where the researchers were involved. The choice of a semi-structured questionnaire and interview was informed by the need to garner guided but unrestricted information.

The questionnaire was administered to 150 respondents: 100 Englishised name bearers (students), 25 non-Englishised name bearers (students), and 25 name givers (family heads) who are staff of the institution. The participants were aged 18-45. Age was a major criterion in the purposive sampling of the study participants. This is because the literature has established "Englishisation" as trending especially among the younger generation (Mensah 2021; Emeka-Nwobia 2016). 142 questionnaires were returned fully completed, 5 were returned partially completed while 3 were not returned. Altogether, all 25 copies of the questionnaire were returned by the name givers duly completed; 24 from the non-Englishised name bearers and 93 from the Englishised name bearers. The name givers were aged 30-45 and the name bearers and non-name bearers aged 18-30.

The data were analyzed using the qualitative sociolinguistic approach under five labels:
1. Spelling alternations
2. Morpho-syntactic (blending/clipping) alternations
3. Phonetic alternation
4. Loan/literal translations
5. Homonymic (substitution) alternations

The limitation of the study was that some of the "supposedly" Igbo names had undergone several generations of clippings, and other morphological and phonetic mutations that the original meanings of the names are now lost and could not be ascertained.

**TABLE 1.** Percentage incidence of forms of Englishised indigenous Igbo names

| Form | No of occurrences | % number of occurrences |
|---|---|---|
| Spelling alternations | 19 | 13% |
| Blending/clipping | 48 | 34% |
| Phonetic alternation | 7 | 5% |
| Literal translation | 54 | 38% |
| Homonymic alternation | 14 | 10% |
| Total | 142 | 100 |

**TABLE 2:** Sample data - spelling alterations

| Indigenous form | Meaning | Englishised form |
|---|---|---|
| *Eke* | 2nd Igbo market day or one's destiny | Ekeh |
| *Ugo* | eagle | Ugoh |
| *Uga* | precious tree | Ugah |
| *Eze* | king | Ezeh |
| *Odo* | goodness | Odoh |
| *Ude* | aura | Udeh |
| *Ama* | lineage/way | Amah |
| *Ike* | power/strength | Ikeh |
| *Uka* | talk | Ukah |
| *Ife* | light | Ifeh |

**TABLE 3.** Sample data - blending/clipping

| Indigenous form | Meaning | Englishised form |
|---|---|---|
| *Sowechi* | walk with God | Sowee |
| *Ejikemeuwa* | patience is a virtue | Ejyke |
| *Osinachi* | gift from God | Sinach |
| *Ekwutosilam* | speak no ill of me | Equitos |
| *Chisimdiri* | God said I should live | Simdy, Sim |
| *Kambirinachi* | let me live in God's [place] | Kamby |
| *Chimmaihe* | mine is a wise God | Maihe |
| *Kosisochukwu* | as it pleases God | Kossy |
| *Chikanyima* | we rely only on God | Kaima |
| *Chibuzo* | God is the way [to go] | Buzzo |
| *Ezinne* | good mother | Zinny |

**TABLE 4.** Sample data - phonetic alternation

| Indigenous form | Meaning | Englishised form |
|---|---|---|
| *Unwara* | light | Uwana |
| *Obinna* | father's delight | Obaino |
| *Chibuike* | God is strength | Chibyke |
| *Ugochukwu* | God's aura | Yugos |
| *Uchenna* | God's thought | Youcee |

**TABLE 5.** Sample data - literal translation

| Indigenous form | Meaning | Englishised form |
|---|---|---|
| *Ngozi* | blessing | Amblessed/Blessing |
| *Uchechukwu* | God's will | God'swill |
| *Kelechukwu* | thank God | ThankGod |
| *Ozioma* | good news | Gospel |
| *Chidimma* | God is good | Godisgood |
| *Chinyere* | God's gift | God'sGift |

**TABLE 6.** Sample data - homonymic (substitution) alternations

| Indigenous form | Meaning | Englishised form |
|---|---|---|
| *Chidebelu* | (what) God keeps | Derby |
| *Obiageri (Oby)* | my visitor must be fed | Gerry |
| *Oluchiamaka (Luchy)* | God's handiwork is awesome | Lucy |
| *Adaeze* | first daughter of a King | Derby |
| *Uchenna (U. C.)* | father's desire | Urch |
| *Ewa* | a companion has come | Wally |

# 5. Results and discussion

## 5.1 Motivation for and perception of Englishisation

**TABLE 7.** Motivation for Englishisation

| Extrinsic | Intrinsic | Indifferent |
|---|---|---|
| 77% | 23% | - |

## 5.2 Attitudes to indigenous personal names vis-à-vis Englishised names

**TABLE 8.** Attitudes towards Englishisation

| Name bearers | | Name givers | | Non-name bearers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative |
| 93% | 7% | 77% | 23% | 88.7% | 11.3% |

## 4.3. Implications of Englishisation on the preservation of Igbo indigenous culture and linguistic forms.

**TABLE 9.** Opinions on the implications of Englishisation on the preservation of indigenous cultures and linguistic forms

| Frightening | Welcomed | Unsure |
|---|---|---|
| 100% | - | - |

The data reveal varying forms of Englishisation of some Igbo names. Literal translations of indigenous names are on top of the list followed by blending/ clipping. Modifications in the phonetic form of indigenous names constitute a mere 5% (7) of the data. Explaining this, a respondent, Amblessed, opines that this is because literal translations and blending are "more English in form" and as such trendier. The prevalent attitude with regard to literal translations appears to be that since literal translations are merely transliterations of the indigenous names, their bearers have a sense of "I have not really betrayed or abandoned my race". The data suggest that name givers/bearers are torn between identities. They neither want to let go of their indigenous identities nor

do they want to keep it. The responses from the questionnaires also confirm this. 93% (86) of Englishised name bearers aged 18-30 prefer it to the indigenous variants because they are "trendy", "English", "easy to pronounce", and "mask" their ethnic identity, especially in a deeply ethnically conscious multilingual state like Nigeria. 57% (49) of this population aged 27-30, however, did not feel comfortable about the "strangeness" of the Englishised forms while 20% of them (17) aged 18-25 had adopted the Englishised variants of their names on their own volition and were comfortable with their new identities. 23% (20) aged 18-30 bear the names because their parents had given them the names and so had no personal preferences. 77% (19) of the name givers have positive attitudes towards Englishisation, while 23% (6) have negative attitudes. 88.7% (21) of the non-Englishised name bearers aged 18-30 have a positive attitude towards Englishisation and bear at least one "pure" English name, and 11.3% (3) aged 18-30 have a negative attitude toward English names; seeing everything in "Anglicizing" Igbo names as a form of "identity theft".

Interestingly, all the respondents were scared at the thought of permanently losing their Igbo indigenous cultures and linguistic forms through the anglicizing of their names. The researchers additionally observed a difference in the value system and worldview of the Englishised name bearers and the non-name bearers: the "trendy" name bearers tilted towards English ideals and compromised Igbo values, especially of moderation, enterprise, honesty and hard work. The interview responses of the name givers corroborate the observation. This confirms that the values of a community are intrinsically tied to its language. Indigenous Igbo names embed, reiterate and reinforce cultural and spiritual values and ideals and serve as a constant reminder to the name bearers of the expectations of the society. The Englishised names are in the main semantically, culturally and pragmatically "empty", being mirrors of neither individual nor group cultural, ethnic, or linguistic identity. More importantly, 81% (93) of the Englishised name bearers do not have Igbo as their L1. 46.4% (43) of this population understand but cannot speak the language, 11.3% (11) can understand and make simple sentences while 42.3% (39) can understand only basic sentences but not speak the language. This underscores an inadequate intergenerational transmission reflected even in the given names. The findings additionally reveal that in addition to being products of language contact, acculturation and assimilation (Unganer 2014), the need for global relevance and integration, uncertainty of the relevance of an Igbo identity in the national and global space, national and international prejudices, positive attitudes towards the English language, a helpless acceptance of English for a global identity and a quest for contemporary relevance underlie the Englishisation of Igbo names.

Though Kishe (1994: 186) asserts that "some aspects of Englishization are salutary and welcome while some are predatory and crushing", the study discovered only a loss of the indigenous linguistic, cultural, social, religious and ethnic identities, ecological knowledge, genealogies, cosmology, value system, and philosophies in the Englishised names. This indicates that English is strongly preying on the systems and patterns of Igbo names which constitute important lexical structures of the Igbo language. While this seems to promote a monolingual global identity, it deprives the global linguistic landscape of the symbolic linguistic and socio-cultural resources which Igbo names are repositories of and erodes the individual and group identity of Ndi Igbo. It reveals that Englishisation of Igbo names should be discouraged or resisted as it is capable of eroding the structural nuances of Igbo names. The overwhelming inclination to Englishisation notwithstanding, findings reveal a population that is resistant to the corrosive effects of globalization. This population could be a springboard for a reversal of the trend especially with indigenous revitalization efforts like the 2022 National Language Policy, the annual *Ahiajoku* lecture organized by the government of Imo state and the annual faith-based *Odenigbo* lecture series organized by the Catholic Archbishop of Owerri, Imo state among others.

## 6. Implications of making some Igbo personal names trendy through Englishisation

The modification of some Igbo personal names as a result of Englishisation as discovered in this study has some startling revelations and implications for bearers of Englishised names as well as the Igbo language in general. Below are some of them:

### 6.1. Easier pronunciation

In the course of the research, most respondents acknowledged that one of the main reasons for the modification of some Igbo personal names through Englishisation is the need to make them easier to pronounce. They argue that many Igbo personal names are long-winded and jaw-breaking, especially phrasal and sentential structure names, and as such are often difficult to be pronounced, especially by the non-Igbo and the younger native population many of whom have English as their first and only language. They argue that people these days prefer names that are easy to pronounce as this would give them a "global identity" and help to register the names on people's memory for quick recollection. They therefore resort to anglicizing the names, especially through clipping, blending,

phonetic alternation and homonymic substitution. Instances of this are given with some names in Tables 3, 4 and 6. We shall go into some forms of transcription to explain this phenomenon better. In Table 3, there are instances of vowel blending and consonant clipping resulting in the large-scale shortening of the structure of the names, thus leading to easier pronunciations. For example the Igbo name *Ejikemeuwa* /ejike:me:uwə/ is Englishised Ejyke /e:jaik/; *Osinachi* /əusi:na:ʧi/ is Sinach /si:na:ʧ/; *Ekwutosilam* /ekwu:tɔ:si:la:m/ is Equitos /e:kwu:tɔ:s/; *Chimsimdiri* /ʧɪ:msimdɪ:rɪ:/ is Simdy /sɪ:mdɪ:/.

The same thing applies to the Igbo name *Kambirinachi* /ka:mbɪ:rɪ:na:ʧɪ:/ which when anglicized and made trendy takes the form Kamby /ka:mbɪ:/. The same thing goes with *Kosisochukwu* /ka:eusɪ:sɔ:ʧu:kwu:/ which takes the form of Kossy /kəusɪ:/; *Chikanyima* becomes Kaima /kaimə/ and *Chibuzo* /ʧɪ:bu:zɔ:/ turns to Buzzo /bu:zəu/.

This is the same thing with some names in Table 4 where there is a phonetic alteration to make the names sound melodious, easier to pronounce and 'English'. An example is the Igbo name *Obinna* /eubɪ:nna/ which becomes Obaino /eubaineu/; *Ugochukwu* /u:geutʃu:kwu:/ which is shortened to Yougos /ju:gus/; *Chibuike* /ʧɪ:buɪke/ which becomes Chibyke /ʧɪ:baik/ and *Uchenna* /u:ʧenna/ that the form is shortened to Youcy /ju:si:/. The same thing applies to some names in Table 6 where there are homonymic alterations such as the transformation of the Igbo names *Chidebelu* /ʧɪ:debe:lu/ to Derby /deibɪ/, *Obiageri* /ɔ:bɪageɪɪ:/ which becomes Oby /ɔ:bɪ:/, and *Uchenna* /u:ʧe:nnə/ that the form is reduced to Urch /ɜ:ʧ/. These multi-syllabic names are usually reduced to mostly one- or two-syllable forms in their Englishised version.

## 6.2. Loss of meaning

The study equally revealed that most Igbo personal names lose their meaning completely as they embark on the journey of Englishisation. The Igbo name *Uchenna* 'father's wish/will' when Englishised to be trendy takes the form Urch which has no meaning in English or Igbo. To spike up its trendiness, some younger Igbo boys who bear the name *Uchenna* would prefer to be called Urch-Man, a compounding of "Urch" and "man", but still the meaning is not clear unlike its Igbo variant *Uchenna* which literally means 'father's wish'. The same thing applies to the Igbo name *Obiageri* which means 'a child that arrives in the midst of plenty', especially a female child. In a bid to westernize the name, it is usually transformed to Gerry or Oby which neither has an identifiable meaning in Igbo nor does it in English. Yet another example is the Igbo name usually borne by boys Obinna 'father's will or delight' which when anglicized to be

popular is turned to Obaino; a word that is neither English nor Igbo and has no meaning in both languages. It is the same with the Igbo name *Kosisochukwu* which literally translates to 'that's how God wants it' which when transformed through Englishisation becomes Kossy, which has no meaning in Igbo or English except that the bearer revels in the fact that the name is a homophone of 'cosy' which means 'giving or getting a feeling of relaxation or comfort' in English. The same thing goes for *Ugochukwu* 'God's aura', which changes to Yougos and *Ejikemeuwa* 'follow the world gently' which becomes Ejyke. The only remarkable importance in the Englishisation of these names is that their forms change from Igbo to English with the names sounding popular, "English" and fashionable. More important, however, is the loss of meaning and cultural identity which are the hallmarks of African names.

## 6.3. Introduction of a new lexicon into the Igbo naming vocabulary

In the course of this study, it was also observed that Englishisation has led to some spelling alterations of some Igbo names and, shockingly, this has been accepted as the norm. There is currently the addition of the letter 'h' in the ending forms of some Igbo personal names in order to make them look trendy and English-like. Such Igbo personal names that have taken "h" in their final positions in tune with Englishisation as shown in Table 2 are *Eke* - Ekeh, *Odo* - Odoh, *Ude* - Udeh, *Ama* - Amah, *Uga* - Ugah, *Ife* - Ifeh, *Uka* - Ukah, *Eze* - Ezeh, *Ugo* - Ugoh and *Ike* - Ikeh. This trend of spelling alteration in Igbo personal names is also noticeable in some Igbo city/town names. The spelling of some Igbo city/town names have also been Englishised as we can see in city/town names that are currently in use in most parts of Igbo land. Such town names are *Elugwu* - Enugu, *Onicha* - Onitsha, *Ahaba* - Asaba, *Oka* - Awka, *Owerre* - Owerri, *Okigwi* - Okigwe, *Ehugbo* - Afikpo, *Unwara* - Unwana. The names of these Igbo towns became anglicized due to colonial conquest and imperialism, but they have become acceptable among the people although the names in undergoing Anglicization have, apparently, lost their original meanings. The same thing, loss of original meaning, applies to the trendy Igbo names whose spellings have been modified or distorted.

## 6.4. Making some Igbo names look quite trendy

The study additionally revealed that Englishisation makes some personal Igbo names look trendy and quite contemporary. By modifying and "upgrading" (a respondent, Simy, a clipped version of *Chisimdiri* 'God has approved my

being', had actually used the term "upgrade") the structure of the Igbo names, it is evident that being Englishised inheres in the name bearers a new aura. Most of the respondents who are students indicate that they feel more at ease bearing their "upgraded" and Englishised Igbo names such as Derby for *Chidebelu*, Amblessed for *Ngozi*, Godswill for *Onyemaobichukwu*, Gospel for *Ozioma*, ThankGod for *Kelechukwu*, God's Gift for *Onyinyechi* among others. It is the opinion of most respondents that they would prefer to bear the English version of the literal translation of their names rather than their core Igbo names. Some of them even begrudge their parents for giving them non-popular and "local" Igbo names. These observations restate the reality of Englishisation as it is established that the English language is exerting enormous influence over not just Igbo personal names and naming systems but more worrisomely, the psyche of the young indigenous population. This reinvigorates the argument of this article that speakers (users) of most indigenous languages that are in constant interface with internationally globalised languages like English should urgently seek ways of arresting and ameliorating the excessive negative impact of these international languages on the sociolinguistic, cultural, political and economic well-being of the native languages and their users. The threat posed by Englishisation is stealthy but real and something drastic needs to be done to avert a total erosion of national indigenous languages by international languages.

## 6.5. Ambivalent identities

As a social phenomenon, language is a marker of identity being "the most flexible and pervasive of the many symbolic resources available for the creation, articulation, reinforcement and sustenance of identity" (Inyima 2019) and indigenous Igbo naming systems evince systems of assigning identities which are informed by the Igbo culture, value system, and worldview. Identity underscores the very essence of human existence and defines and distinguishes an individual, a group, a society and a nation. Deng (1995) defines it as "the way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, language…." Hence it is fundamental to a person's sense of self and is constructed by an intrinsic relationship of language, social structures and cultural patterns. Findings from the study reveal that the high incidence of Englishised names borne out of literal translations, 38% (54), is because the name bearers are torn between identities: they are culturally and linguistically ambivalent: they want to cling to their Igbo identity but seem not to be able to because of an outward but very strong pulling force as indicated by the high percentage of extrinsic motivation (77%, 109). Some respondents, among which are *Onyemaobichukwu* - Godswill and *Kelechukwu* – ThankGod, opine that most

times they feel like the proverbial bat that is neither a land nor an air animal: neither Igbo in the truest sense of the word, especially since English is their only means of communication, nor English. They therefore feel bereft of the dignity, pride and honour which Fearon (1999) argues is within the semantic field of identity in contemporary times and this impacts negatively on their self-confidence.

### 6.6. Cultural amorphism

Related to the foregoing discussions on identity is what Arowolo (2010) calls "cultural emptiness", and "cultural draught" as a result of the intrinsic relationship between language, culture and identity. The researchers observed in the course of the study that many Englishised names lack distinct classifying features being neither Igbo nor English in the truest sense and as such cannot be classified as either. Phonetic alterations merely sound English, literal translations are "Igbo in English" forms and clippings are mere trendy meaninglessness as observed by Mr Onyemaechi Chukwu, a traditional name giver aged 45. As earlier observed, indigenous Igbo names are not semantically opaque formations, but communicative tools with tons of socio-cultural information which easily identifies its bearers as Igbo. Needless to say, this cultural amorphousness has also affected the values and worldview of the name bearers as they are torn between Igbo and Western ideals.

## 7. Conclusion

The study has helped to identify the conflict and tension raised by Englishisation which is an aspect of language change occasioned by contact with other languages. Indigenous Igbo names provide brilliant insights into not just the language and culture of the Igbo but also especially the very essence of their being. The Englishisation of Igbo names although motivated by prevailing global realities is a threat to linguistic and cultural diversity as it deprives humanity of the rich cultural, linguistic, ecological and socio-historical heritage implicit in indigenous Igbo names. More importantly, since names are a part of the lexicon of the Igbo language and an integral aspect of the Igbo culture, including the value system, Igbo people lose a key aspect of their identity. Madukwe & Madukwe (2010) corroborate this loss of value which they say has sired a loss of the Igbo distinctiveness. Thus, the Englishisation of aspects of Igbo naming patterns if unchecked can whittle down the interesting and meaningful patterns that are synonymous with names, thus infringing grossly on the Igbo unique and expressive patterns of naming. It cautions of the likely implications that may emanate should the habit of adopting trendy Englishised forms of Igbo

names be encouraged. Chief among these is that there is the likelihood that the trend will propel into extinction the Igbo habit of giving and bearing meaningful, semantically transpicuous and pragmatically portentous names. It foresees a situation where Igbo personal names, like most English names, would no longer have an identifiable meaning - actual, literal meaning (Mavrides 2005) or cultural identity. Thus, by making their names trendy, through Englishisation, Englishised name bearers/givers as well as the whole idea of Englishisation are helping to gently but steadily erode the linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the Igbo language thereby robbing the Igbo language of an integral part of its lexical inventory, and linguistic scholarship, and indeed the world, of these vital repositories of information on the structures and processes of the language. To check this menace, the study recommends deliberate concerted reorientation by way of awareness campaigns, government policies, and media promotion of acculturation with additive bilingualism. Also, there should be the promotion of multiple functional identities and positive language attitudes at both national and global levels. Admittedly, more robust and pragmatic government policies and greater awareness campaigns by governmental, non-governmental and cultural bodies have been mounted post UNESCO Igbo-language-extinction prediction. These and other community and media initiatives like BBC Igbo, African Magic Igbo (on cable television), Igbo language Academy on radio, broadcast by the Anambra Broadcasting Service, Nzuko Ndi Igbo Radio Programme limited, a wholly Igbo-content radio programme for the promotion of Igbo culture and oral traditions, and online digital initiatives like Igbotic.net and twitter handles like "Igbo for kids" and "Igbo Amaka" have unarguably birthed a certain consciousness, a "renaissance", and nascent longing for self-rediscovery in both name givers and name bearers, these initiatives need to be increased, sustained and more vigorously pursued in addition to the innovative promotion of acculturation with additive bilingualism and multiple functional identities for any significant reversal of the trend.

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**Anna Kohler**†
SIL Togo-Benin
no ORCID ID

**David Roberts**
Independent researcher
ORCID 0009-0004-2282-9159

**Matthew Harley**
SIL Nigeria
ORCID 0000-0002-5819-5037

**Komi Sena**
SIL Togo-Benin
no ORCID ID

# Vowel and tone processes in Ife (Togo)

**Abstract**

This article describes the morphophonological and morphotonological processes that occur when vowels are juxtaposed in Ife, an Ede language closely related to Yoruba that is spoken in Togo and Benin. Its source is an unpublished manuscript based on extensive fieldwork undertaken by the principal author in the 1980s. We have checked the language data in it and expanded, restructured and updated the analysis. The article first investigates the juxtaposition of two vowels across a word boundary (V#V) in verb phrases (with object nouns and pronouns) and noun phrases (in genitive constructions, with possessive pronouns, and with the referential morpheme). It then proceeds to examine nasal-vowel sequences

preceding word boundaries (NV#) in noun phrases (with object pronouns, and locative prepositions). Five types of vowel process are identified (elision, assimilation, coalescence, labialisation, and diphthongisation), and four types of tonal process (elision, merging, spreading, and a kind of polarity). The article ends by summarising the findings, and comparing them to Yoruba, which is far better documented, thereby highlighting potential topics that future Ife researchers might focus on.

**Keywords:** Ife, Yoruba, Ede languages, vowel processes, tonal process

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Aim

Many languages have strategies to avoid vowel hiatus, a sequence of vowels coming together across a syllable boundary through morphological or syntactic concatenation (Casali 2011). Such strategies include vowel elision, deletion, assimilation, coalescence, glide formation, and consonant insertion. The aim of this article is to describe the morphophonological and morphotonological transformations that interact with vowel hiatus in Ife. Since all morphemes end with a vowel and most nouns begin with a vowel, the condition for such processes to occur in this language is frequently fulfilled.

The article is organised as follows. This introduction contains general information on the Ife people and their language (Section 1.2), an overview of previous literature (Section 1.3), and a phonological sketch (Section 1.4). The analysis itself is organised into two types of phonotactic context: vowels followed by vowels across word boundaries (V#V, Section 2), and nasal consonants followed by vowels before word boundaries (NV#, Section 3). Within each of these major sections, the data is organised into sub-sections by syntactic environment. The article concludes with a summary of Ife vowel and tone processes, and a comparison with Yoruba (Section 4).

## 1.2. The Ife people and their language

Ife is a Niger-Congo Defoid language that constitutes the western-most variety of the Ede continuum (Capo 1989). The population was estimated to be 127,000 speakers in Togo in 2012 and 43,600 in Benin in 2016 (Eberhard et al. 2025). There are two principal dialects, Tchetti (which was chosen for orthography standardization) and Djama, the present study being based on the former. Ife is closely related to Yoruba, leading Fábùnmi (2010: 33) to assert that it is merely a dialect

of the parent language. Yet neither Porto Novo Yoruba in Benin nor Ile-Ife Yoruba in Nigeria are mutually comprehensible with Togolese Ife (Boëthius 1982; Kluge 2011: 13). This was confirmed in a recent literacy experiment in Atakpamé where, among 44 adult Ife participants, 30 self-assessed as having no knowledge at all of spoken Yoruba, and a further ten as having extremely limited ability insufficient for basic communication, together accounting for over 90% of the sample (Roberts & Walter in preparation). Still, the close genetic relationship between Ife and Yoruba is incontestable, so this article will cite the much more extensive Yoruba literature wherever similarities are noted.

## 1.3. Previous literature

### 1.3.1. Literature on Ife

Published linguistic research on Ife is quite sparse, being limited to sketches of the phonology (Boëthius 1983), the tone system (Kohler 1983), and various aspects of the morphosyntax (Boëthius 1987; Klaver 1995, 1999). A bilingual Ife-French dictionary is available on-line (Gardner & Graveling 2016). As far as we are aware, a study of vigesimal numerals (Fábùnmi 2010) is the only contribution comparing Ife and Yoruba. Beyond descriptive linguistics, Ife has benefited from an evaluation of the literacy programme (Reeder 2013, 2017) and a quantitative experiment assessing the contribution of full tone marking to literacy skills (Roberts 2020; Roberts et al. 2022; Roberts & Walter 2021). No previous phonological study has accounted for vowel and tonal processes in detail.

### 1.3.2. Literature on vowel processes in Yoruba

Cross-linguistically, elision and assimilation are by far the most widely attested strategies for avoiding vowel hiatus, and Yoruba, the most widely spoken and well-known Ede language, is no exception, with both processes receiving much attention in previous literature (e.g. Abiodun 2000, 2005; Awobuluyi 1978; Badejọ 1986; Bamgboṣe 1965, 1967; Dada 2015; Ọla 1991; Ọladeji 2017; Orie & Pulleyblank 2002; Oyelaran 1972; Pulleyblank 1988a).

In a study of vowel elision in 87 mostly Niger-Congo languages, Casali (1997) shows that elision of the $V_1$ is much more common and productive than elision of the $V_2$, and that every language with $V_2$ elision also has $V_1$ elision. Furthermore, some morphosyntactic contexts, such as the boundary between two lexical words, have a very strong preference for $V_1$ elision. Yoruba is a notable exception in this regard, as it has proven rather elusive to explain what determines which vowel gets deleted in particular contexts. The situation is further complicated by variation between dialects as well as between fast and slow speech (Ọladeji 2017: 39-40).

Nevertheless, the following generalisations can be made about the operation of these processes in standard Yoruba. In Verb+Object Noun constructions:
1) All monosyllabic verbs[1] permit vowel deletion (Ọladeji 2017: 39). Disyllabic verbs on the other hand invoke vowel assimilation rather than deletion (Orie & Pulleyblank 2002: 102-104).
2) The vowel /i/ is idiosyncratic in that it is almost always deleted in vowel hiatus situations, regardless of whether it occurs as $V_1$ or $V_2$ (Badejọ 1986: 89; Bamgboṣe 1965: 25; Pulleyblank 1988a). Otherwise, more often than not, $V_1$ is deleted (Dada 2015: 47).
3) A high tone is always retained, even if the vowel carrying it is deleted (Oyelaran 1972: 165-166). $V_2$ can never carry a high tone as Yoruba does not permit high tones on vowels which occur word-initially.

In Noun of Noun constructions, vowel elision is common for some combinations but not for others. For those combinations in which elision occurs, it is almost always $V_2$ that is deleted, even if $V_1$ is /i/ (Dada 2015: 47). If elision does not occur, then assimilation typically does (Awobuluyi 1978; Bamgboṣe 1967; Pulleyblank 1988a), although there are some combinations that may not undergo either process (Dada 2015: 46).

Other contexts in Yoruba which permit vowel deletion are between a noun and an affix, a preposition and a noun, a conjunction and a noun, a complementiser and a noun, a verb and an adjective, a verb and a complement clause, and between the focus marker *ni* and a following subject clitic (Pulleyblank 1988a; Seidl 2000: 280-282). In all these contexts, it is $V_1$ that is usually deleted. Such a broad set of syntactic environments for $V_1$ deletion leads Seidl (2000) to argue that it is a post-lexical rule that operates whenever the relevant conditions are met; $V_2$ deletion, on the other hand, she argues, does not actually ever occur; in such cases, the vowel $V_2$ is simply not underlyingly present, as it is essentially an historic, word-forming, noun class marker expressing referentiality and definiteness which is simply not present in cases of noun incorporation. As part of her evidence, she gives examples in which the same Verb+Object Noun combination can have different meanings (compositional or idiomatic) depending on whether $V_1$ or $V_2$ is deleted (Seidl 2000: 291). This does seem to suggest that the two processes have different underlying morphosyntactic structures. Such an analysis (i.e. only $V_1$ deletion actually occurs) supports Casali's (1997) claim that $V_1$ deletion between lexical words is universal because the word-initial position is stronger than

[1] With the exception of /ku/, which is only found in greetings and appears to be a frozen allomorph of the verb /kí/ 'greet'.

the word-final one. Despite the attractiveness of Seidl's arguments, some Noun of Noun examples remain difficult to explain, and the rules driving vowel deletion and assimilation in Yoruba are likely to remain the focus of ongoing debate for quite some time. For example, Komolafe (2018) disagrees with some of Seidl's claims, and proposes an alternative Optimality Theory analysis, which claims to account for a more complete data set using ranked constraints based on vowel height and ATR harmony as well as faithfulness and markedness constraints.

## 1.4. Phonological sketch of Ife

### 1.4.1. Data transcription

Phonemic data are transcribed between /slashes/ and phonetic data between [square brackets]. The palatal approximant /j/ is transcribed /y/ following the Africanist tradition. Doubly articulated consonants are transcribed with a subscript ligature /◌͡◌/ and nasal vowels with a subscript tilde /◌̰/ to leave room for the superscript marking of tone. High tone (H) is indicated with an acute accent /◌́/, low tone (L) with a grave accent /◌̀/, mid tone (M) with a macron /◌̄/, underlyingly toneless morphemes with a superscript ring /◌̊/, and floating tones with a circled letter Ⓜ.

### 1.4.2. Segments

Ife, like Yoruba, is a highly isolating SVO language with very little morphology. TAM distinctions are expressed with up to three autonomous verbal particles. Ife has 18 consonant phonemes /b t d t͡ʃ d͡ʒ k g k͡p g͡b f s (z) h l ɹ y w ŋ/ (Boëthius 1983: 114),[2] which matches Yoruba, except for the presence of a palato-alveolar /t͡ʃ/ and (marginally) an alveolar /z/ that are absent in Yoruba, while conversely Yoruba has a voiceless grooved fricative /ʃ/ that is absent in Ife (Akinlabi 2001: 837).

Ife has seven oral vowel phonemes /i e ɛ a ɔ o u/, five of which have corresponding nasals /ḭ ɛ̰ a̰ ɔ̰ ṵ/ (Boëthius 1983: 125). This is identical to Yoruba except that in the latter language the open nasal /a̰/ is usually analysed as an allophone of /ɔ̰/ (Akinlabi 2004: 456; Bamgboṣe 1966: 7-8). Furthermore, the phoneme /ɛ̰/ is extremely rare in Yoruba, leading Pulleyblank (1988a: 237) to suggest that Yoruba has only three nasal vowels. Its distribution in Ife has not yet been investigated. In Ife, as in Yoruba, the vowel /u/ is unattested word-initially. Ife has a restricted

[2] Boëthius (1983: 114) includes the velar nasal /ŋ/ in her phoneme chart, but later (p. 135) clarifies that she considers the series [m n ɲ ŋ] to be allophones, presumably of an archiphoneme /N/. The phonemic status of nasal phonemes is contested in Yoruba too (Akinkugbe 1978: 62-65; Akinlabi 2004: 457; Ladefoged 1964: 23-24).

vowel harmony system (Boëthius 1983: 129-131) not dissimilar to Yoruba (Archangeli & Pulleyblank 1989).

In the lexicon, disyllabic VCV is by far the most frequent noun structure (1), although VCVV (2) and VVCV (3) are also found, as well as a few trisyllabic nouns (4).[3] Onsetless V syllables are only present in prefixes, never in roots. Vowel length is often the result of word internal consonant deletion (5) as in Yoruba (Akinlabi 2004: 466-467). The citation forms of verbs tend to be monosyllabic CV structures (6), but disyllabic CVCV nouns also occur (7). Surface NCV (8), NNCV (9) and CVN (10) structures are attested, but only as the result of processes that will be described in Section 3. Syllabic nasals are homorganic to the place of articulation of the following consonants.

(1) *[ādʒ͡á]* 'dog'

(2) *[ādɛ̀ɛ̄]* 'chicken'

(3) *[ēérú]* 'ashes'

(4) *[ābétù]* 'shadow'

(5) */ēbè* *ītʃ͡ū/* → *[ēbèēt͡ʃū]*
mound yam 'yam mound'

(6) *[bá]* 'join'

(7) *[tàrè]* 'find'

(8) *[ŋ́g͡bá]* 'in the calabash'

(9) *[ŋ́ŋ̀wèrè]* 'at the time'

(10) *[bōbàm̄]* 'my father'

## 1.4.3. Tone

Like Yoruba, Ife has three discrete level tones (H, M, L) and all vowels as well as surface pre-consonantal and final nasals are tone bearing. The Yoruba M tone has been analysed as underlyingly toneless (Akinlabi 1985; Akinlabi & Liberman 2000: 33-35), but no such analysis has yet been applied to Ife. Kohler (1983: 139, 141) finds no evidence of automatic downstep in Ife, and we confirm that it is absent in HLH forms such as [náàgú ɛ́] 'in the fufu'. Yoruba, on the other

[3] Boëthius (1983: 110-111) cites CVC as a marginal syllable structure, but her examples are all ideophones ending in a surface nasal. Kohler's original manuscript transcribes nine words as having an NCV structure (e.g. /ñlé/ 'house') and Boëthius (1983: 110-111) concurs with some of these. However Komi Sena considers them all to be VCV structures (e.g. /ilé/ 'house').

hand, not only has downstep (Connell & Ladd 1990: 6), but also upstep (Akinlabi & Liberman 1995: 17; Connell & Ladd 1990; Laniran 1993; Laniran & Clements 2003: 232), L tone declination (La Velle 1974: 119), tone-consonant interaction (Hombert 1977: 176-178; Laniran & Clements 2003: 208), and H and L tone assimilation (Laniran & Clements 2003: 230-241). Within the limits of our study, we have not found any evidence in Ife of the Yoruba process whereby H and L tones spread onto the following L and H tones respectively, creating HL and LH contours (Bamgboṣe 1966: 9; Laniran & Clements 2003: 208); indeed Kohler's Ife dataset contains no contour tones at all. Neither does Ife mark subjects with a H tone as does Yoruba (Akinlabi & Liberman 2000).

Tones in Ife tend to be more robust than segments during vowel processes, with H and L tones in particular resisting elision (11), (12). The M tone, too, merges with a following M (13), and remains stable before H (14), but tends to elide preceding L (15) or following H (16). Since almost half of verbs are H tone, and more than half of disyllabic nouns begin with a M tone, the latter case is particularly frequent. Whenever only one tone surfaces, the corresponding segment is only one mora in length, whether due to merging of identical tones (11, 13) or M tone elision (15, 16). Two dissimilar surface tones require two moras (12, 14); in other words, contour tones are prohibited on single moraic tone-bearing units.

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (11) | /H#M/ | */ó* | *né* | | *ēgī/* | → | *[ó négī]* |
| | | SP3SG | have | | tree | | 'He/she has a tree.' |
| (12) | /H#L/ | */ó* | *kɛ́* | | *ɔ̀k͡pá/* | → | *[ó kɔ́ɔ̀k͡pá]* |
| | | SP1SG | take | | stick | | 'He/she took the stick.' |
| (13) | /M#M/ | */ó* | *k͡pā* | | *ēd͡ʒò/* | → | *[ó k͡pēd͡ʒò]* |
| | | SP3SG | hit | | snake | | 'He/she hit the snake.' |
| (14) | /M#H/ | */ó* | *d͡ʒɛ̄* | | *éwō/* | → | *[ó d͡ʒɛ̄ɛ́wō]* |
| | | SP3SG | eat | | head | | 'He/she ate the head.' |
| (15) | /M#L/ | */ó* | *fā* | | *ìrù/* | → | *[ó fàrù]* |
| | | SP3SG | pull | | tail | | 'He/she pulled the tail' |
| (16) | /H#M/ | */ó* | *rí* | | *ēyē/* | → | *[ó réyē]* |
| | | SP3SG | see | | bird | | 'He/she saw the bird' |

If tone patterns beginning with a L tone have not yet been mentioned in this regard, it is because examples (11 - 16) only contain verb phrases with an object noun, and all L tone verbs, whether they be monosyllabic (17) or disyllabic (18), surface as M when they precede a noun, as do Yoruba monosyllabic verbs

(Awobuluyi 1978: 156). Example (19) does not contradict this rule: The surface M subsequently elides before a L tone noun, as already illustrated in example (15).

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (17) | /L#M/ | /ó | mà | | ɔ̄kɔ̄/ | → | |
| | | ó | mā | | ɔ̄kɔ̄ | → | *[ó mākɔ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | know | | husband | | 'She is not a virgin.' |
| (18) | /L#M/ | /ó | tàrè | | ōwó/ | → | |
| | | ó | tārē | | ōwó | → | *[ó tārōwó]* |
| | | SP3SG | find | | money | | 'He/she found money.' |
| (19) | /L#L/ | /ó | k͡pa̰ | | èkṵ̀/ | → | |
| | | ó | k͡pa̰ | | èkṵ̀ | → | *[ó k͡pà̰kṵ̀]* |
| | | SP3SG | carry.on.back | | door | | 'He/she carried the door on his/her back.' |

## 2. V#V processes in Ife

Processes of the kind that affect adjacent vowels across word boundaries (V#V) are by far the most frequent in natural Ife speech. The following sections present five morphosyntactic environments where this phonotactic structure can occur: Verb+Object Noun (Section 2.1), Verb+Object Pronoun (Section 2.2), Noun of Noun (Section 2.3), Noun+Possessive Pronoun (Section 2.4), Noun+Referential Morpheme (Section 2.5), as well as a miscellany of other environments (Section 2.6).

### 2.1. Verb+Object Noun

V#V processes occur most frequently between verbs and object nouns, and may involve elision (Section 2.1.1), assimilation (Section 2.1.2), coalescence (Section 2.1.3), labialisation (Section 2.1.4), diphthongisation (Section 2.1.5), and/or various combinations of these.

#### 2.1.1. Elision

Ife vowels and/or tones may completely elide, as in Yoruba (cf. Orie & Pulleyblank 2002; Pulleyblank 1988b). In (20), one of the two identical vowels elides, and the two H tones merge.[4] In (21), it is the $V_2$ that elides, but again the tones are unaffected since they are both M. In (22), the $V_1$ elides, and its H tone reassociates to the $V_2$ causing its M tone to elide. In (23) the $V_2$ elides, and its L tone reassociates to the $V_1$ causing its M tone to elide.

[4] The referential morpheme in example (20) will be treated in Section 2.5.

| | | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (20) | /H#H/ | */ó* | *rí* | *íd͡ʒā* | *á/* | → | *[ó ríd͡ʒāá]* |
| | | SP3SG | see | male.friend | REF | | 'He saw the male friend in question.' |
| (21) | /M#M/ | */ó* | *mɔ̄* | *ōmī/* | | → | *[ó mɔ̄mī]* |
| | | SP3SG | drink | water | | | 'He/she drank water.' |
| (22) | /H#M/ | */ó* | *né* | *ārū̱* | *lákṵ́/* | → | *[ó nárū̱ lákṵ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | have | mouth | big | | 'He/she has a big mouth.' |
| (23) | /M#L/ | */ó* | *d͡ʒɛ̄* | *ìkà̱t̪̃/* | | → | *[ó dzɛ̀kàtɪ̃]* |
| | | SP3SG | eat | maize.dumpling | | | 'He/she ate a maize dumpling.' |

If, on the other hand, the $V_1$ is /a/, it is the $V_2$ that elides. Out of 30 /Ca/ verbs checked before various /ɔ/ or /o/ initial nouns, four – representing all three tones and with no clear evidence of frequency effects – were found to be exceptions to this rule, i.e. the $V_1$ [a] elides before $V_2$ /ɔ/ or /o/. The four verbs in question are: /g͡bà/ 'receive', /tà/ 'sell', /k͡pā/ 'hit', and /dá/ 'create'. In the case of dissimilar tones, it is the M tone, whatever its position, that elides, with H#M surfacing as [H] in (24) and /M#L/ surfacing as [L] in (25). In (26), both vowels effectively carry a M tone because of the rule stipulating that a L tone verb becomes M when followed by a noun object (see Section 1.4.3), and this M, merging with the adjacent M tone to its right, is retained in the surface form.

| | | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (24) | /H#M/ | */ó* | */t͡ʃá* | *ōkō/* | → | *[t͡ʃákō]* |
| | | SP3SG | weed | field | | 'He/she weeded the field.' |
| (25) | /M#L/ | */ó* | *fā* | *ìrù/* | → | *[ó fàrù]* |
| | | SP3SG | pull | tail | | 'He/she pulled the tail.' |
| (26) | /L#M/ | */ó* | *mà* | *ɔ̄kɔ̄/* | → | |
| | | *ó* | *mā* | *ɔ̄kɔ̄* | → | *[ó mākɔ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | know | husband | | 'She is not a virgin.' |

## 2.1.2. Assimilation

When Ife V#V structures undergo assimilation, both vowels are retained and all the features of one spread to the other, as in Yoruba (cf. Ọladeji 2017). In (27-28), all the features of the $V_2$ spread leftwards onto the $V_1$, while in (29) it is the features of the $V_1$ that spread rightwards onto the $V_2$. In both scenarios tone is unaffected.

| | | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (27) | /H#L/ | */ó* | *rí* | *ò͡tʃù͡kpá/* | → | *[ó róò͡tʃù͡kp̄á]* |
| | | SP3SG | see | moon | | 'He/she saw the moon.' |
| (28) | /H#L/ | */ó* | *gú* | *àgú/* | → | *[ó gáàgú]*[5] |
| | | SP3SG | pound | fufu | | 'He/she pounded fufu.' |
| (29) | /H#L/ | */ó* | *fú* | *ìwé/* | → | *[ó fúùwé]* |
| | | SP3SG | give | paper | | 'He/she gave paper.' |

## 2.1.3. Coalescence

When Ife V#V structures undergo coalescence, a third vowel surfaces in the place of the two underlying ones. If the $V_1$ is [MID-OPEN], and the $V_2$ is [MID-CLOSE] the former tends to elide leaving its [MID-OPEN] trace on the $V_2$. It is the M tone, as usual, that is susceptible to elision whichever vowel it is associated to underlyingly, so /H#M/ surfaces as [H] (30) (cf. (23) where /M#L/ surfaces as [L]).

| | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (30) | /H#M/ | */ó* | *né* | *ōgùgù/* | → | *[ó nɔ́gùgù]* |
| | | SP3SG | have | root | | 'It has a root.' |

If the $V_1$ and $V_2$ are [FRONT, OPEN] and [FRONT, MID-CLOSE] respectively, the elided surface form may coalesce to [MID-OPEN], i.e. an aperture half-way between the two (31).

| | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (31) | /M#M/ | */ó* | *kp͡ā* | *ēd͡ʒò/* | → | *[ó kp̄ēd͡ʒò]* |
| | | SP3SG | hit | snake | | 'He/she hit the snake.' |

If the $V_1$ is [NASAL] this feature is retained in the surface form. In both (32) and (33), the $V_1$ elides, the L tone of the $V_1$ surfaces as M before a noun object (as stipulated in section 1.4.3), and the [+NASAL] feature of the $V_1$ spreads rightwards onto the $V_2$. The [OPEN] $V_1$ and the [MID-CLOSE] $V_2$ also coalesce to [MID-OPEN] as in (31). The main difference between these two examples is that in (32) tone is unaffected, whereas in (33) the M tone preceding a L tone elides. In (34), even the nasal on the right edge of the second noun spreads leftwards onto the $V_2$ and the $V_1$. A reviewer has questioned whether nasality only spreads onto vowels that are the result of coalescence irrespective of their quality, or whether there is a more general regressive, word-internal spreading process

[5] Or optionally, and more naturally, [ó gʷáàgú]; see example (35).

that is normally blocked when the target vowel is [MID-CLOSE], with coalescence to a [MID-OPEN] vowel unblocking it. We recommend this question as a topic for further research.

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (32) | /L#M/ | */ó* | *tà̰* | | *ēérú/* | → | |
| | | *ó* | *tā̰* | | *éérú* | → | *[ó tḛ̄ḛ́rú]* |
| | | SP3SG | spread | | ashes | | 'He/she spread the ashes.' |
| (33) | /L#L/ | */ó* | *k͡pà̰* | | *èkù/* | → | |
| | | *ó* | *k͡pā̰* | | *èkù* | → | *[ó k͡pḛ̄ḛ̀kù]* |
| | | SP3SG | carry.on.back | | door | | 'He/she carried the door on his/her back.' |
| (34) | /M#L/ | */ó* | *g͡bà* | | *èérí/* | → | |
| | | *ó* | *g͡bā* | | *èérí/* | → | *[ó g͡bḛ̄ḛ́rí]* |
| | | SP3SG | receive | | dirt | | 'It is dirty.' |

## 2.1.4. Labialisation

The juxtaposition of two Ife vowels may result in the labialisation of the preceding consonant. A [LABIAL] $V_1$ (/u, o, ɔ/) tends to resist total elision, and when the $V_2$ is [-LABIAL] the preceding C is sometimes labialised instead. In (35) and (36), although both alternatives are possible, the first of each pair is considered more natural. In (36) and (37), the L tone of the verb surfaces as M before a noun object (as stipulated in section 1.4.3), then merges with the M tone of the $V_2$.

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (35) | /H#L/ | */ó* | *gú* | | *àgú/* | → | *[ó g$^{w}$áàgú ~ ó gáàgú]* |
| | | SP3SG | pound | | fufu | | 'He/she pounded fufu.' |
| (36) | /L#M/ | */ó* | *kɔ̀* | | *ēgī/* | → | |
| | | */ó* | *kɔ̄* | | *ēgī/* | → | *[ó k$^{w}$ɛ̄gī]* |
| | | SP3SG | refuse | | wood | | 'He/she refused the wood.' |
| (37) | /L#M/ | */ó* | *bò* | | *ād͡ʒá/* | → | |
| | | *ó* | *bō* | | *ād͡ʒá* | → | *[ó b$^{w}$ād͡ʒá]* |
| | | SP3SG | cover | | dog | | 'He/she covered the dog.' |

## 2.1.5. Diphthongisation

Finally, Ife $V_1$ and $V_2$ very occasionally retain all their features, resulting in diphthongisation in the surface form. In (38), the L tone of the verb surfaces as M before a noun object (as stipulated in section 1.4.3) but, because its host vowel remains intact, it does not elide preceding a L tone as expected, and as illus-

trated in example (15). A comparison of the diphthongisation in (38) and the far more frequently attested elision in (22), both involving the same vowels, nicely illustrates why it is more prudent to couch the analysis of Ife vowel processes in terms of tendencies than fixed rules.[6]

| | | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (38) | /L#L/ | /ó | wɛ̀ | àk͡pò | → | |
| | | ó | wɛ̄ | àk͡pò | → | *[ó wɛ̄àk͡pò]* |
| | | SP3SG | wash | bag | | 'He/she washed the bag.' |

## 2.2. Verb+2SG/3SG Object Pronoun

Object pronouns follow the verb, and since most of them have a CV structure they do not participate in vowel processes. However, the 2nd and 3rd person singular object pronouns have the structure V and therefore trigger certain morphophonemic changes. These will be treated in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 respectively, which pattern very similarly to Yoruba (cf. Bamgboṣe 1966: 106).

### 2.2.1. 2SG object pronoun

The 2nd person singular object pronoun is a toneless morpheme /ɛ̊/ which undergoes a kind of tonal polarity, surfacing as M following H (39) and H elsewhere (40, 41).

| | | | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (39) | /H#V̊/ | /ó | kɔ́ | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó kɔ́ ɛ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | teach | OP2SG | | 'He/she taught you (sg).' |
| (40) | /M#V̊/ | /ó | bɔ̄ | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó bɔ̄ ɛ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | heal | OP2SG | | 'He/she healed you (sg).' |
| (41) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | k͡pè | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó k͡pè ɛ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | call | OP2SG | | 'He/she called you (sg).' |

The addition of the 2nd person singular object pronoun triggers certain morphophonemic processes. If the verb ends in /a/, its features assimilate to those of the object pronoun (42-44). Verbs ending with /e/, on the other hand, do not change their vowel before the object pronoun, as illustrated in (41) above, even though this vowel is closer to /ɛ/ in aperture than is /a/. The same assimilation also occurs in one other verb, /fú/ 'to give', even though it does not

[6] Similarly, compare the diphthongisation in (61) and the elision in (68), which are syntactically and tonally analogous.

end in /a/ (45) and even though other verbs ending in /u/ do not undergo this transformation (46).

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (42) | /H#V̊/ | /ó | bá | | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó bɛ́ ɛ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | join | | OP2SG | | 'He/she joined you (sg).' |
| (43) | /M#V̊/ | /ó | k͡pā | | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó k͡pɛ̄ ɛ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | hit | | OP2SG | | 'He/she hit you (sg).' |
| (44) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | mà | | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó mɛ̀ ɛ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | know | | OP2SG | | 'He/she knows you (sg).' |
| (45) | /H#V̊/ | /ó | fú | | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó fɛ́ ɛ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | give | | OP2SG | | 'He/she gave you (sg).' |
| (46) | /H#V̊/ | /ó | rú | | ɛ̊/ | → | *[ó rú ɛ̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | trick | | OP2SG | | 'He/she tricked you.' |

## 2.2.2. 3SG object pronoun

The 3rd person singular object pronoun /V̊/ is best represented as an archiphoneme because its underlying vowel quality is under-specified and its surface form is a copy of the preceding vowel. This pronoun is also considered to be toneless because, like its 2nd person singular counterpart, it undergoes a kind of tonal polarity, surfacing as M following H (47) and H elsewhere (49-52).

| | | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (47) | /H#V̊/ | /ó | kí | | V̊/ | → | *[ó kí ī]* |
| | | SP3SG | greet | | OP3SG | | 'He/she greeted him/her.' |
| (48) | /M#V̊/ | /ó | t͡ʃē | | V̊/ | → | *[ó t͡ʃē é]* |
| | | SP3SG | do | | OP3SG | | 'He/she did it.' |
| (49) | /M#V̊/ | /ó | k͡pā | | V̊/ | → | *[ó k͡pā á]* |
| | | SP3SG | hit | | OP3SG | | 'He/she hit him/her.' |
| (50) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | kɔ̀ | | V̊/ | → | *[ó kɔ̀ ɔ́]* |
| | | SP3SG | refuse | | OP3SG | | 'He/she refused it.' |
| (51) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | bò | | V̊/ | → | *[ó bò ó]* |
| | | SP3SG | cover | | OP3SG | | 'He/she covered it.' |
| (52) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | rù | | V̊/ | → | *[ó rù ú]* |
| | | SP3SG | transport | | OP3SG | | 'He/she transported it.' |

The segmental quality of this pronoun is always identical to that of the preceding vowel, sometimes resulting in tonal minimal pairs between the 3rd and 2nd person singular object pronouns following verbs ending in /ɛ/ (53, 54).[7]

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (53) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | nɛ̰́ | V̊/ | → | [ó nɛ̰̄ ɛ̰̄] |
| | | SP3SG | marry | OP3SG | | 'He/she married her/him.' |
| (54) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | nɛ̰́ | ɛ̊/ | → | [ó nɛ̰̄ ɛ̰̄] |
| | | SP3SG | marry | OP2SG | | 'He/she married you (sg).' |

However, three H tone nasal verbs in Kohler's database – /g͡bɛ̰́/ 'lead', /fɔ̰́/ 'embrace', /kɔ̰́/ 'fill' – do not follow this pattern. On these, the 3rd person singular object pronoun undergoes the kind of polarity observed elsewhere surfacing as M as expected, but the root itself also surfaces as M (55). In the case of /g͡bɛ̰́/ 'lead', this distinguishes it tonally from the corresponding 2nd person singular form (56).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (55) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | g͡bɛ̰́ | V̊/ | → | [ó g͡bɛ̰̄ ɛ̰̄] |
| | | SP3SG | lead | OP3SG | | 'He/she led it.' |
| (56) | /L#V̊/ | /ó | g͡bɛ̰́ | ɛ̊/ | → | [ó g͡bɛ̰̄ ɛ̰̄] |
| | | SP3SG | lead | OP2SG | | 'He/she led you (sg).' |

## 2.3. Noun of Noun

The genitive noun phrase is marked with a floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker between the two nouns, as in Yoruba (Awobuluyi 1978: 156). In Ife, this tonal morpheme is most obviously present when the second noun begins with a consonant because the final vowel of the first noun is lengthened in order to articulate it (57, 58).

| | | V | # | C | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (57) | /LⓂM/ | /ɔ̀nà | Ⓜ | lɔ̄mɛ̄/ | → | [ɔ̀nàā lɔ̄mɛ̄] |
| | | road | GEN | Lomé | | 'the Lomé road' |
| (58) | /HⓂM/ | /lālá | Ⓜ | bōbā/ | → | [lāláā bōbā] |
| | | cow | GEN | father | | 'cow of father' |

The influence of the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker is also manifest, though less clearly, in three V#V contexts. First, it sometimes emerges between two H tones, without a consonant being present in the second noun (59).

[7] Abraham (1958: xii) reports a subtle phonetic distinction between equivalent pairs in Yoruba.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (59) | /HⓂH/ | */ābó* | Ⓜ | *ídʒā/* | → | *[ābóō ídʒā]* |
| | | goat | GEN | male.friend | | 'goat of male friend' |

Second, the M tone on the $V_2$ shows an abnormal reluctance to elide following a H tone. In (60) and (61),[8] the underlying $V_1$ and $V_2$ undergo no changes, while in (62), the aperture of the $V_1$ assimilates to that of the $V_2$. In both cases, whether or not vowel processes occur, the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker merges with the M tone on the $V_2$ and the latter is retained. Compare these with example (16), which illustrates the more usual tendency of a M tone to elide following a H tone.

| | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (60) | /HⓂM/ | */ēwé* | Ⓜ | *ēgí/* | → | *[ēwéēgī]* |
| | | leaf | GEN | tree | | 'leaf of tree' |
| (61) | /HⓂM/ | */ābé* | Ⓜ | *ābó/* | → | *[ābéābó]* |
| | | underneath | GEN | goat | | 'under the goat' |
| (62) | /HⓂM/ | */īlé* | Ⓜ | *ēyē/* | → | *[īléēyē]* |
| | | house | GEN | bird | | 'nest' |

Third, the M tone on the $V_1$ shows an abnormal reluctance to elide preceding a L tone. In (63) the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker merges with the M tone on the $V_1$ and the tone on the latter may be retained. Compare this with example (15), which illustrates the more usual tendency of a M tone to elide the preceding L tone.

| | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (63) | /MⓂL/ | */ēnē* | Ⓜ | *ɔ̀rɰ̃/* | → | *[ēnēèrɰ̃] ~ [ēnèrɰ̃]* |
| | | person | GEN | sky | | 'ancestor spirit' |

In all other cases, the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker is undetectable. First, in V#C contexts, when the V is M tone, the Ⓜ tone genitive marker simply merges with it and no lengthening occurs (64-66).

| | | V | # | C | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (64) | /MⓂM/ | */éwō* | Ⓜ | *lālá/* | → | *[éwō lālá]* |
| | | head | GEN | cow | | 'head of cow' |
| (65) | /MⓂH/ | */ēyē* | Ⓜ | *kókō/* | → | *[ēyē kókō]* |
| | | bird | GEN | bush | | 'bird of bush' |

[8] Compare the diphthongisation in (61) and the elision in (68).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (66) | /MⓂL/ | */ēgī* | Ⓜ | *d͡ʒɔ̀lɔ̀/* | → | *[ēgī d͡ʒɔ̀lɔ̀]* |
| | | tree | GEN | bottle.gourd | | 'bottle-gourd tree' |

Second, in V#V contexts, where the $V_2$ is M, the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker merges with it. In (67), the $V_2$ subsequently elides; in (68),[9] the $V_2$ with its M tone elides following a H tone on the $V_1$ (cf. example 16); in (69) the features of the $V_1$ spread onto the $V_2$, but the tones are retained; and in (70) the lack of elision results in diphthongisation.

| | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (67) | /MⓂM/ | */ɛ̄nɛ̄* | Ⓜ | *ōkō* | → | *[ɛ̄nɛ̄kō]* |
| | | person | GEN | field | | 'peasant' |
| (68) | /HⓂM/ | */ābɛ́* | Ⓜ | *ēgī/* | → | *[ābɛ́gī]* |
| | | underneath | GEN | tree | | 'under the tree' |
| (69) | /LⓂM/ | */ēbè* | Ⓜ | *īt͡ʃū/* | → | *[ēbèēt͡ʃū]*[10] |
| | | mound | GEN | yam | | 'yam mound' |
| (70) | /LⓂM/ | */àwò* | Ⓜ | *āmà/* | → | *[àwòāmà]* |
| | | dish | GEN | clay | | 'clay dish' |

Third, the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker elides preceding a L tone, so long as no M tone is present with which it can merge (71, 72). This is in line with the generalisation that M tones tend to elide preceding L tones (cf. example (15)). What is more surprising, given the dissimilarity of the tones involved, is that the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker also elides between L#H (73). As a reviewer has pointed out, if the tonal hierarchy of Ife, following Yoruba, is H > L > M, this would explain why M elides before or after either of the two other tones.

| | | $V_1$ | # | $V_2$ | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (71) | /HⓂL/ | */ɔ̀k͡pá* | Ⓜ | *ìwé/* | → | *[ɔ̀k͡páàwé]* |
| | | stick | GEN | paper | | 'pencil' |
| (72) | /LⓂL/ | */òk͡pì* | Ⓜ | *ìt͡ʃà/* | → | *[òk͡pìt͡ʃà]* |
| | | bottom | GEN | gourd | | 'under the gourd' |
| (73) | /LⓂH/ | */ìdì* | Ⓜ | *íd͡ʒā/* | → | *[ìdìíd͡ʒā]* |
| | | place | GEN | male.friend | | 'place of male friend' |

[9] Compare the elision in (68) and the diphthongisation in (61). For a discussion, see Section 2.1.5.

[10] [ébèēt͡ʃū] 'yam mound' is also possible.

## 2.4. Noun+2SG/3SG Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns are placed after the noun they qualify. The 2nd and 3rd person singular possessive pronouns are tonal minimal pairs – /ɛ̀ɛ̄/ 'your (sg)' and /ɛ̀ɛ̀/ 'his, her, its', respectively – that trigger various transformations in rapid speech. In (74), the features of the $V_1$ assimilate to those of the $V_2$ but no elision occurs, whereas in (75), the $V_1$ elides and its H tone spreads right, reassociating to the $V_2$. In (76) and (77), the $V_1$, with its M tone, elides. In (78) and (79) the $V_1$ elides but its [NASAL] feature spreads rightwards onto the $V_2$.

| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (74) | /H#LM/ | /ìdá | ɛ̀ɛ̄/ | → | *[ìdɛ́ɛ̀ɛ̄]* |
| | | older.sister | PP2SG | | 'your (sg) older sister' |
| (75) | /H#LL/ | /ìdá | ɛ̀ɛ̀/ | → | *[ìdɛ́ɛ̀]* |
| | | older.sister | PP3SG | | 'his/her older sister' |
| (76) | /M#LM/ | /bōbā | ɛ̀ɛ̄/ | → | *[bōbɛ̀ɛ̄]* |
| | | father | PP2SG | | 'your (sg) father' |
| (77) | /M#LL/ | /bōbā | ɛ̀ɛ̀/ | → | *[bōbɛ̀ɛ̀]* |
| | | father | PP2SG | | 'his/her father' |
| (78) | /L#LM/ | /àgùdn̰ | ɛ̀ɛ̄/ | → | *[àgùdɛ̰̀ɛ̰̄]* |
| | | sheep | PP2SG | | 'your (sg) sheep' |
| (79) | /L#LL/ | /àgùdn̰ | ɛ̀ɛ̀/ | → | *[àgùdɛ̰̀ɛ̰̀]* |
| | | sheep | PP3SG | | 'his/her sheep' |

## 2.5. Noun+Referential Morpheme

According to Klaver (1995: 107-111), the referential morpheme /ɛ́/ has two principal functions. On the one hand, following a noun, it has an identifying function akin to a definite article (80-81) although, as already illustrated in many previous examples, its presence is not necessary to sometimes justify a definite English gloss.

| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (80) | /H#H/ | /mādé | ɛ́ | t͡ʃɛ̄ | èkídā̰/ | → | *[mādé ɛ́ t͡ʃèkídā̰]* |
| | | child | REF | be | beautiful (f.) | | 'The girl in question is beautiful.' |
| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | | | |
| (81) | /M#H/ | /ī͡t͡ʃū́ɛ́ | lákṵ́/ | | | → | *[ī͡t͡ʃū́ ɛ́ lákṵ́]* |
| | | yam | REF | | | big | 'The yam in question is big.' |
| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | | | |
| (82) | /L#H/ | /ōdò | ɛ́ | nɔ̄nɔ̀/ | | → | *[ōdò ɛ́ nɔ̄nɔ̀]* |
| | | river | REF | deep | | | 'The river in question is deep.' |

On the other hand, the morpheme /é/ also occurs with a similar function at the end of certain types of subordinate clause (83, 84). Klaver considers the unifying sense of these two functions to be an identifier of previously known information. The referential morpheme /é/ has several allomorphs conditioned by the features of the preceding vowel. In most contexts, it surfaces as [é] (83), but following a nasal $V_1$ it surfaces nasalised (84),[11] following an open $V_1$ it surfaces as [á] (85), and these two transformations may co-occur (86).

(83) /M#H/ /ēnē yèé dʒ͡ɛ́ ōnùg͡bó $V_1$ # $V_2$ yɔ̄ é/ →
person REL be important exceed REF
*[ēnē yèé dʒ͡ɔ́nùg͡bó yɔ̄ é]*
'the most important person'

(84) /L#H/ /ní $V_1$ # $V_2$ àtʃ͡ɛ̰́tʃ͡ɛ̰́ é/ →
LOC first REF
*[náàtʃ͡ɛ̰́tʃ͡ɛ̰́ ɛ̰́]*
'firstly'

(85) /H#H/ /ĩwɔ̄ $V_1$ # $V_2$ yèé né ĩ́kpá é/ →
ABS2SG REL have strength REF
*[ĩwɔ̄ yèé né͡kpá á]*
'you (sg) who have the capability'

(86) /L#H/ /ní àsòkò yèé ó lɔ̄ káà rí ābétù $V_1$ # $V_2$ kɑ̰̀ é/ →
LOC moment REL SP3SG go do find shadow one REF
*[náàsòkò yèé ó lɔ̄ káà ráábétù kɑ̰̀ ɑ́]*
'In the moment when he/she happened to find a shadow…'

## 2.6. Other morphosyntactic environments

The cases enumerated above are the most productive morphosyntactic environments in which V#V processes occur, but the list is by no means exhaustive. Vowel processes can occur in a wide variety of other morphosyntactic environments, such as interrogative verb phrases (87), consecutive verb phrases (88), determined noun phrases (89) and coordinative noun phrases (90).

[11] In example (84), the locative morpheme /ní/ 'at' also tends to undergo a vowel process that will be described in more detail in Section 3.1.

| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (87) | /H#H/ | */kí* | *ó* | *t͡ʃē/* | → | *[kót͡ʃē]* |
| | | INT | SP3SG | do | | 'What did he/she do?' |
| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
| (88) | /H#L/ | */t͡ʃí* | *òkúté* | *nī/* | → | *[t͡ʃóòkúté nī]* |
| | | then | mouse | say\PRF | | 'then the mouse said…' |
| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
| (89) | /M#H#M/ | */ōgū* | *kí* | *ōgū/* | → | *[ōgūkógū]* |
| | | war | any | war | | 'any war' |
| | | $V_1$ # $V_2$ | | | |
| (90) | /H#LM#M/ | */ād͡ʒá* | *òŋū* | */ābó/* | → | *[ād͡ʒáŋʷābó]* |
| | | dog | and | goat | | 'dog and goat' |

## 3. NV# processes in Ife

In NV syllables consisting of a nasal consonant [m, n] and a [CLOSE FRONT] vowel /i/, the vowel may elide, leaving a new onset nasal before another vowel, a syllabic nasal before a consonant, or a syllable coda nasal before silence. Such processes occur in noun phrases involving the locative preposition (Section 3.1) and the 1sg object pronoun (Section 3.2).[12]

### 3.1. Locative preposition+noun

The locative preposition /ní/ 'at, with, in, on, to' undergoes certain transformations when juxtaposed with a following noun. In (91-93), the V of the preposition elides before a C-initial noun and the remaining nasal consonant becomes syllabic (and therefore tone-bearing), and its place feature becomes homorganic with that of the following consonant. The tone is unaffected by this process.

| | | V # C | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (91) | /H#H/ | */ní* | *kókō/* | → | *[ŋ́kókō]* |
| | | LOC | bush | | 'in the bush' |
| (92) | /H#M/ | */ní* | *lōmē/* | → | *[ń̩lōmē]* |
| | | LOC | Lomé | | 'in Lomé' |

[12] Kohler's original manuscript also cites examples of this process occurring in noun phrases involving the 1st person possessive pronoun (e.g. /ārā mī/ → [āràmī] 'my body') and in polysyllabic nouns (e.g. /òkpòŋ̀kpōmī/ → [òkpòŋ̀kpōmī] 'larva'). However, Komi Sena considers such forms to be marginal and preferred to exclude them from the analysis.

(93) /H#L/ /ní dʒ͡ɔ̀lɔ̀/ → [ńdʒ͡ɔ̀lɔ̀]
LOC gourd 'in the gourd'

V-initial nouns with initial H tone are infrequent, but in (94-95), the $V_1$ elides and the two adjacent H tones merge.

(94) /H#H/ /ní éwō/ → [néwō]
LOC head 'in the head'

(95) /H#H/ /ní árū̃/ → [nárū̃]
LOC mouth 'in the mouth'

V-initial nouns with initial M tone are much more frequent. In (96-99), the $V_1$ elides and its H tone spreads right onto the $V_2$ causing its M tone to elide.

(96) /H#M/ /ní ētí/ → [nétí]
LOC ear 'in the ear'

(97) /H#M/ /ní ērū̃/ → [nérū̃]
LOC meat 'in the meat'

(98) /H#M/ /ní ōgū/ → [nógū]
LOC war 'to war'

(99) /H#M/ /ní ɔ̄dʒ́/ → [nɔ́dʒ́]
LOC feast 'in the feast'

V-initial nouns with initial L tone are also frequent, but they undergo neither vocalic nor tonal elision. In (100-104), the features of the $V_1$ simple assimilate to those of the $V_2$.

(100) /H#L/ /ní ɔ̀nà/ → [nɔ́ɔ̀nà]
LOC road 'on the road'

(101) /H#L/ /ní èkʊ̀/ → [néèkʊ̀]
LOC door 'in the door'

(102) /H#L/ /ní èrɔ́/ → [néèrɔ́]
LOC story 'in the story'

(103) /H#L/ /ní àgú/ → [náàgú]
LOC pounded yam 'in the pounded yam'

(104) /H#L/ /ní òkpì/ → [nóòkpì]
LOC bottom 'in the bottom'

### 3.2. 1SG object pronouns

Like the 2sg and 3sg object pronouns (Section 2.2), the 1sg object pronoun /m̊i/ is a toneless morpheme that undergoes the kind of tonal polarity observed elsewhere, surfacing as M after a H tone (105) and H elsewhere (106, 107). Its close vowel /i/ may optionally elide, in which case the pronoun surfaces as a syllabic nasal.

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | NV# | | |
| (105) | /H#V̊/ | */ó* | *rí* | | *m̊/* | → | *[órímī] ~ [órím̄]* |
| | | SP3SG | see | | OP1SG | | 'He/she saw me.' |
| | | | | | NV# | | |
| (106) | /M#V̊/ | */ēbī* | *wà* | *k͡pā* | *m̊/* | → | *[ēbí wà k͡pāmí] ~ [ēbī wà k͡pāḿ]* |
| | | hunger | CNT | hit | OP1SG | | 'I'm hungry.' |
| | | | | | NV# | | |
| (107) | /L#V̊/ | */ó* | *kɔ̀* | | *m̊/* | → | *[ókɔ̀mí] ~ [ókɔ̀ḿ]* |
| | | SP3SG | refuse | | OP1SG | | 'He/she refused me.' |

## 4. Summary and discussion

It will be helpful to summarise the foregoing analysis with brief statements encapsulating Ife vowel processes (Section 4.1) and tone processes (Section 4.2), then conclude by comparing both of these with Yoruba (Section 4.3).

### 4.1. Vowel processes in Ife

V#V structures may undergo elision, coalescence, assimilation, labialisation and diphthongisation. Table 1 summarises the coalescence, assimilation and labialisation, followed by some generalisations.

**TABLE 1:** Summary of coalescence, assimilation and labialisation processes in V#V structures

| | | | $V_2$ | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **1 /i/** | **2 /e/** | **3 /ɛ/** | **4 /a/** | **5 /ɔ/** | **6 /o/** | **7 /u/** | **8 /Ṽ/** |
| $V_1$ | **1 /i/** | i | e | ɛ | a | ɔ | o | - | Ṽ |
| | **2 /e/** | e (i) | e | ɛ | a | ɔ | o | - | Ṽ |
| | **3 /ɛ/** | ɛ | ɛ | ɛ | a | ɔ | ɔ | - | Ṽ |
| | **4 /a/** | a | ɛ | ɛ (a) | a | a (ɔ) | a (o) | - | Ṽ |
| | **5 /ɔ/** | ɔ | $^{(w)}$e | $^{(w)}$ɛ | $^{(w)}$a | ɔ | ɔ | - | Ṽ |
| | **6 /o/** | o | $^{(w)}$e | $^{(w)}$ɛ | $^{(w)}$a | ɔ | o | - | Ṽ |
| | **7 /u/** | u | $^{(w)}$e | $^{(w)}$ɛ | $^{(w)}$a | ɔ | u | - | Ṽ |
| | **8 /Ṽ/** | Ṽ | Ṽ | Ṽ | Ṽ | Ṽ | Ṽ | - | Ṽ |

1. The [CLOSE] vowel /i/, whether it is the $V_1$ (line 1) or the $V_2$ (column 1), almost always elides when juxtaposed with a different vowel, as in Yoruba (Ọladeji 2017: 40).

2. If the $V_2$ is underlyingly [OPEN] or [MID-OPEN] /ɛ a ɔ/, its features tend to be retained in their entirety (columns 3-5). The only systematic exception observed is that, when the $V_2$ is the referential morpheme /ɛ/, it surfaces as [a] following /a/ (column 3, row 4).

3. If the $V_1$ is underlyingly [LABIAL] /ɔ o u/, and the $V_2$ is /e ɛ a/, the preceding C tends to be labialised (columns 2-4). If the $V_2$ is underlyingly [MID-CLOSE, LABIAL] /o/, its aperture tends to assimilate to that of the $V_1$ (column 6).

4. If either V is underlyingly [NASAL] this feature tends to be retained in the surface form (/Ṽ/, row 8 and column 7).

5. If the $V_1$ is [FRONT, OPEN] /a/, and the $V_2$ is [FRONT, MID-CLOSE] /e/, the two vowels tend to coalesce to [FRONT, MID-OPEN] [ɛ], i.e. an aperture half-way between them (row 4, column 2).

As for word-final /NV#/ structures, which are not reported in Table 1, the vowel /i/ tends to elide leaving a syllabic tone bearing nasal. If this results in an NC sequence, the place feature of the C spreads leftwards onto the N.

## 4.2. Tone processes in Ife

Table 2 summarises the tone changes accompanying V#V processes in Verb+Object constructions, followed by some generalisations.

**TABLE 2:** Tone changes accompanying V#V vowel processes in Verb+Object Noun constructions

| | | $V_2$ | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | noun | | | pronoun |
| | | **1 /H/** | **2 /M/** | **3 /L/** | **4 /V̊/** |
| $V_1$ | **1 /H/** | H | H | HL | M |
| | **2 /M/** | MH | M | L | H |
| | **3 /L/** | - | - | - | H |

M tones tend to elide following a H tone (row 1, column 2) and preceding a L tone (row 2, column 3). Adjacent tones merge (column 1, row 1; column 2, row 2). Tone patterns beginning with a L tone are unattested in verb+object noun constructions (row 3). When, in the case of an object pronoun, the $V_2$ is toneless, it surfaces as M following H, and H elsewhere (column 4).

As for the genitive noun phrase, which is not reported in Table 2, the floating Ⓜ tone marker is realised on an extension of the $V_1$ when the second noun begins with a consonant or between two H tones. Additionally, a M tone shows an abnormal reluctance to elide on the $V_2$ following a H tone, and on the $V_1$ preceding a L tone. In all other contexts the floating Ⓜ tone genitive marker is undetectable.

## 4.3. Vowel and tone processes in Ife and Yoruba

Since Ife is far less well-documented than its giant neighbour in Nigeria, it will be instructive, by way of conclusion, to summarise the similarities and differences between these two Ede varieties, thereby signalling some topics of interest for future Ife researchers.

Vowel processes in Ife and Yoruba are broadly similar, and their unpredictability leads researchers in both languages to couch their analyses in terms of tendencies rather than fixed rules. Both languages use elision, assimilation, and coalescence strategies to avoid vowel hiatus. In both languages, the close vowel /i/,

whichever position it is in, almost always elides when juxtaposed with a different vowel. Both Ife and Yoruba have three discrete level tones, and share three similar tonal phenomena: L tone monosyllabic verbs raised to M before a noun object, genitive noun phrases marked by a floating Ⓜ tone marker, and object pronouns undergoing a kind of tonal polarity. On the other hand, Ife apparently has no spreading processes generating the kind of HL and LH contours found in Yoruba; indeed, Kohler's Ife data contain no surface contours at all. Neither does Ife apparently follow Yoruba in marking subjects with a H tone. And although, in both languages, the 2sg and 3sg subject pronouns are tonal minimal pairs, their tones do not match (Yoruba /ō, ó/; Ife /ò, ó/, respectively).

Our current understanding of Ife phonology is insufficiently developed to say for sure whether it replicates other well-documented Yoruba phenomena. At the segmental level, more thorough investigation is needed of the vowel harmony system, the underlying status of the front half-close nasal vowel /ɛ̃/, and consonant deletion generating surface long vowels. As for the tone system, an in-depth analysis would also reveal whether Ife echoes Yoruba tonal phenomena such as upstep, tone-consonant interaction, and H and L tone assimilation, and whether Ife researchers should follow Yoruba in calling into question the phonemic status of the M tone.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ABS | absolute pronoun |
| C | consonant |
| CND | conditional |
| CNT | continuous |
| FUT | future |
| GEN | genitive marker |
| H | high tone |
| INT | interrogative |
| L | low tone |
| LOC | locative preposition |
| M | mid tone |
| N | nasal |
| n. | noun |
| NEG | negative |
| OP | object pronoun |
| PL | plural |
| PP | possessive pronoun |
| REF | referential morpheme |
| REL | relative pronoun |
| SG | singular |
| SP | subject pronoun |
| V | vowel |

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**Pascal Kpodo**
University of Education, Winneba
Department of Ewe Education
ORCID 0000-0002-6263-6595

**Evershed Kwasi Amuzu**
University of Ghana
Department of Linguistics
ORCID 0000-0001-9955-0202

**Cynthia Selase Aku Mallet**
University of Education, Winneba
Department of Ewe Education
ORCID 0009-0005-1557-5055

**Gabriel Kwame Agbemehia**
University of Education, Winneba
Department of Ewe Education
ORCID 0009-0005-6065-1897

# Ethnopragmatic and sociolinguistic interpretation of death-announcing euphemisms in Ewe

## Abstract

This article explores how the Ewe culture influences death-announcing euphemisms and attempts to establish how widely speakers know the contexts of their use. It scrutinises two sets of data: qualitative data analysed using ethnopragmatic lenses to describe the expressions and their typical contexts of use and quantitative data analysed within

the Variationist Sociolinguistic Approach. The study has found that while some expressions are popular, others are now out of use. It also reveals that while age and education do not significantly influence knowledge and appropriate use of the euphemisms, dialect, gender, and community of residence are impactful.

**Keywords:** Ewe, euphemisms, death-announcing euphemisms, sociolinguistics, ethnopragmatics

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## 1. Introduction

The main aim of this article is to explore the cultural nuances and particularities of the Ewe people that influence death-announcing euphemistic expressions in the Ewe language. The article further seeks to establish whether and how widely speakers know the euphemistic expressions and the contexts in which they are normally used. The article will be a useful contribution to the existing literature on the Ewe language in the field of euphemisms. However, whereas the field of euphemisms is extensively explored globally in terms of the ethnopragmatics of euphemisms (Allan & Burridge 2006; Chinyanganya 2013; Epoge 2013; Fernández 2008; Linfoot-Ham 2005; Mbaya 2002; Mirza Suzani & Yarmohammadi 2013; Qanbar 2011; Radulović 2012; Talley & Hui-ling 2012), there is hardly any study that attempts to, in addition, explore the sociolinguistics of such expressions. This study attempts to employ a methodology by which that kind of hybrid research may be carried out.

Euphemism is a word or series of words which are used in place of words which communicate sad, unpleasant, or shocking ideas. Euphemisms are considered softer and more pleasant ways of saying otherwise hurtful and unpleasant things. According to Cruse (2006: 57), euphemism is "an expression that refers to something that people hesitate to mention lest it offends, but which lessens

the offensiveness by referring to it indirectly in some way". The word "euphemism" originated from Greek meaning *eu* 'good' and *pheme* 'speaking'. In the Ewe language, when a person uses a euphemism, he is said to have *de ba mo na nya*, which means he has 'put clay on the face of a word'; that is, he has polished a word up with clay to disguise its unpleasant meaning and, thus, making it more beautiful and appealing to the ears of the hearer.

In every culture, there are social and cultural constraints on the discussion of certain topics such as death, gender, religion, and others. These topics are considered taboo and thus cannot be discussed explicitly. These social constraints give rise to the deployment of euphemisms. In other words, the emergence of euphemisms is triggered by the existence of taboo topics (Al-Kharabsheh 2011; Al-Husseini 2007). In the words of Mofarrej and Al-Haq (2015: 111), "it is not only the existence of taboo topics that makes people use euphemisms, but also the social, cultural and more importantly the religious requirements that motivate people to be polite and decent". They sought to establish a direct link between the usage of euphemisms and politeness or verbal decency, which enhances solidarity among people. This corroborates Owiredu's (2020) explanation of what Agyekum (2002) says about the Akan people regarding how they conceive euphemisms as a process of embellishing speech to show communicative competence and politeness.

The use of euphemisms is an integral part of the socialization and cultural education of every Ewe child, just as reported in many cultures around the world (Qanbar 2011; Allan & Burridge 2006). In Ewe, the ability to save the face of one's audience is seen as the hallmark of communicative competence. This is the reason why euphemistic expressions abound in the language. The varying euphemistic expressions in the language offer speakers the opportunity to be polite and socially correct in every discourse.

If there is any time among the Ewe people when it is expected that people show empathy, it is during bereavement. Any discourse involving the death of someone must be handled with a lot of care. The Ewe people's fear of death makes it culturally inappropriate to discuss the topic of death without the use of euphemisms. Due to this, there are several death-related euphemisms in the Ewe language. It is observed that the use of death-related euphemisms is cultural context dependent such that each euphemistic expression must be used within specific ethnopragmatic contexts. Thus, to use death-related euphemisms, the speaker has to internalize both the linguistic forms as well as the specific contexts within which each of them may be used.

Death-related euphemisms are phrases or expressions that serve as socially acceptable substitutes for direct references to death. Within the context of discussions involving death, the Ewe people prioritise indirectness over anything else. They use death-related euphemisms intending to comfort those who are grieving and demonstrating empathy, allowing individuals to connect with the emotions of those in mourning. A typical example of a death-related euphemism in English is "kicked the bucket." This expression is mainly used to indicate that someone has died. Among English people, it is socially unacceptable to inform a mother that her son has committed suicide using the direct expression "killed himself."

## 2. The concept of death among the Ewes

Just like all other ethnic groups in Ghana, the Ewe people see death as a transition from the physical world into the world of the spirit. The world of the spirit is also known as the ancestral world, where all departed forebears went. In the Ewe mythology, death is not the end of life but a transition from *kodzogbe* 'the physical world' to *tsiẽfe* 'the ancestral world' where the soul awaits another opportunity for incarnation. The Ewe people believe that the social organization and structure of the ancestral world is not different from what is experienced in the physical world. For that matter, the people see death as a journey from this world into another world. Culturally, since human beings do not die, death is not seen as the end to the existence of man but rather a hiatus in the activities of life. This belief system informs the Ewe people's conceptualisation of death and the various death-announcing euphemistic expressions in the language.

Just like many other African societies, due to fear, the topic of death is tabooed (Owiredu 2020). The Ewe people believe in the evocative power of names and that by calling the name of something, the thing manifests inadvertently. A popular saying has it that whenever you mention the name of somebody, prepare a seat for him/her to sit on. This means that whatever we call by name will consequently appear. Because of this, the mention of the word *ku,* which means 'death' is strictly forbidden. Citing Allan and Burridge (1991), Owiredu (2020: 408) states that death is a "fear-based-taboo" in which different fears such as "fear of the loss of loved ones, fear of the corruption of the body, fear of evil spirits, and fear of what comes after death" exist together. Thus, the Ewe people only talk about death through the use of euphemisms to avoid the fear the word *ku* invokes.

## 3. Methodology

The study used the sequential exploratory mixed methods design in which two sets of data were collected, starting with the qualitative data collection and analysis, which informed the quantitative data collection and analysis. The initial qualitative data were collected from four (4) purposively sampled participants who were all above the age of seventy (70). The qualitative data were collected through sociolinguistic interviews and analysed using ethnopragmatic lenses.

In collecting the second set of data, which is the quantitative data, we used the quota and judgment sampling techniques in selecting the respondents for the study. The sample universe was stratified based on judgment of the researchers. After the stratification of the sampled universe, we adopted the network sampling technique (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995) to select the respondents in filling the quotas. In this approach, we asked the initial respondents to recommend and connect us to other people who fit our predetermined criteria and might be willing to participate in the study. Social factors such as age, dialect, gender, education, and community (rural vs urban) were used in the stratification of the sampled universe, as shown in Table 1. In all, data were collected from three hundred and two (302) respondents through the "fieldworker-administered survey" (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 54) in which we had the prepared questionnaires administered to the respondents on the field by trained research assistants and ourselves. This method came in handy because most of the participants were non-literates and could not fill in the questionnaires by themselves.

**TABLE 1.** Sample distribution

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age | 20-39 | 138 |
| | 40-70 | 164 |
| Gender | Male | 140 |
| | Female | 162 |
| Community | Rural | 159 |
| | Urban | 143 |
| Education | Pre-Tertiary | 158 |
| | Tertiary | 144 |
| Dialect | Anlo | 201 |
| | Evedome | 101 |

## 4. Death-announcing euphemisms and their cultural context

This section presents and discusses the results of the exploratory study by looking at the following:

1. Death-announcing euphemisms in Ewe
2. Cultural factors that inform the composition of the death-announcing euphemisms
3. Ethnopragmatic contexts in which each euphemism is used

The four participants in the exploratory study identified the following as some of the many death-announcing euphemistic expressions in Ewe. They said when someone dies, the immediate family members announce the death to others within the community and beyond through the use of one of the following euphemisms:

(1) *Eyi kɔƒe.*
'He/she has gone to the village.'

(2) *Ati ge le esi.*
'A wooden staff has fallen from his grips.'

(3) *Emu zi.*
'He/she has left the seat lying on its side or leaning against something.'

(4) *Eyi amadaƒe.*
'He/she has gone to collect herbs.'

(5) *Etrɔ megbe.*
'He/she has turned his/her back.'

(6) *Egbe dze/akplẽ.*
'He/she has rejected salt/*akplẽ* (staple food for the Ewe people).'

(7) *Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ.*
'His/her sleeping place has become unwholesome.'

(8) *Ezɔ zã.*
'He/she has walked at night.'

(9) *Ezɔ fiazɔli.*
'He/she took a royal stroll.'

(10) *Ati gã aɖe mu.*
'A big tree has fallen.'

(11) *Eyi nakegbe.*
'He/she has gone to fetch firewood.'

(12) *Ebu ta.*
'He/she lost his/her head.'

(13) *Kpele/alɔƒi ge le esi.*
'Kpele/alɔƒi' has fallen from his grasp.'

(14) *Emu atɛ.*
'He/she has left the 'atɛ' in a lying position.'

The respondents further provided the cultural factors that determine the formation of the various death-related euphemisms as well as the peculiar ethnopragmatic contexts within which each of them is used.

*Eyi kɔƒe* means 'he/she has gone to the village.' This euphemism is based on the belief system of the Ewe people that human beings come from a place called *Bome,* which is conceived of as a small village (*kɔƒe*) where people go back to whenever they die. Death is, therefore, seen as a kind of journey back to that village. According to the respondents, this particular euphemistic expression is used in announcing the death of very old people who have completed their life's journey here on earth. The people see the death of very old people as a return journey back home where they meet their departed kinsmen. This expression is also used to communicate the death of chiefs, since regardless of their age, chiefs are considered and treated as old men.

*Ati ge le esi,* which means 'a wooden staff has fallen from his grips' is used to announce the death of chief priests and very old people. Upon their installation, chief priests are given a wooden staff which is a symbol of their authority and spiritual power. Throughout their lifetime, they carry this wooden staff wherever they go. When they die, this wooden staff is put aside to be given to their successor. So, the death of chief priests is seen as the wooden staff falling from their grips. Very old people also carry walking sticks to aid their movement from one place to another. The walking sticks become the identifying feature of the old people such that they are never seen without their sticks (*ati*). Their death is described as they dropping their walking sticks or the sticks falling from their grips. Thus, rather than saying a chief priest or an old person is dead, the people will say *ati ge le esi:* 'wooden staff or walking stick has fallen from his/her grips'.

*Emu zi,* meaning 'he/she has left the seat lying on its side or leaning against something'. There is the belief that whenever we leave seats or stools standing while they are not in use, our ancestors or other spirit beings come to sit on them. Since we cannot see the ancestral spirits sitting on the stool or the seat, we run the risk of sitting on them whenever we wish to resume the use of the seat or stool. Sitting on a seat which is already occupied by an ancestral spirit could spell doom for the person. To avoid sitting on the ancestors or disrupting them whenever we wish to resume sitting, one is expected to leave the seat lying

on its side or leaning against something whenever they are vacant. The death of chiefs is seen as a temporary vacation of their stools, and so, it is likened to the act of leaving a seat lying on its side or leaning against something. This, indeed, means that chiefs do not die, they only leave their stools vacant for a while and return to reoccupy them. Because of this belief, whenever chiefs die, their stools are physically leaned against a wall or left lying on the ground. The death of chiefs and chief priests is communicated using this euphemism.

*Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ,* meaning 'his/her sleeping place has become unwholesome', is employed to announce the passing of an individual who has reached an advanced age and remained bedridden for an extended period before their demise. Typically, as people age and experience prolonged illnesses, they are confined to a specific room where only designated family members attend to their needs. These designated individuals periodically update the rest of the family on the sick person's condition. The room where the individual is kept is referred to as *dɔƒe* 'sleeping place'. The designated caretakers maintain the cleanliness of this room to ensure it remains free of unpleasant odours. Upon the person's passing, the room is considered unwholesome due to the foul smell that the body emits.

*Egbe dze/akplẽ* means 'he/she has rejected salt/*akplẽ*'. The primary staple food of the Ewe people is *akplẽ* 'a meal made from corn flour and mostly served with soup'. Typically, in the preparation of *akplẽ*, salt is added, or in cases where the *akplẽ* is not salted, the accompanying dish is seasoned with salt. Consequently, the term for *dze* 'salt' is often interchangeably used to refer to *akplẽ* among the Ewe people. This implies that every living Ewe individual consumes either *akplẽ* or something seasoned with salt daily. It is not uncommon for an Ewe speaker to claim that he/she has not eaten anything until he/she eats *akplẽ*. Because dead people do not eat, the only time Ewe people fail to eat *akplẽ* is when they are dead. Consequently, the death of an individual is metaphorically described as the person refusing *akplẽ*. It is crucial to note that this euphemism is exclusively employed for individuals other than babies, as infants do not consume *akplẽ* or solid food. The respondents, therefore, stressed the fact that this euphemism is never used to announce the death of infants.

*Eyi amadaƒe* translates as 'he/she has gone to collect herbs'. This euphemism is used to announce the death of herbalists and *Bokɔnɔwo* 'Afa diviners'. These people often leave home and go into the bush, sometimes for days, looking for herbs as part of their occupation. People within the community often meet these people either going into the bush for herbs or returning from the bush with the herbs. Thus, anytime these people are not at home, it is believed that they are in the bush looking for herbs. Whenever people like this die, Ewes believe

that they have gone into the spirit world to look for herbs that they cannot find in the physical world. According to the belief system of the Ewe people, human beings do not die. Rather, they go and return to the world. This is to say, the Ewe people believe in reincarnation. Because of this belief, the people think that when diviners die, they go and return as diviners. In other words, diviners do not die. Rather, they embark on long journeys into the world of the spirits to fetch herbs. This is the reason why their death is announced using this euphemism.

*Kpele/alɔfi ge le esi* means '*Kpele/alɔfi* has slipped from their grasp'. *Kpele*, also known as *gumaga*, is a crucial tool for *Afa* diviners. Another essential item employed by diviners is *alɔfi*, 'a wooden effigy' which they carry wherever they go. Due to the significance of these items in the practice of divination, diviners consistently bear them throughout their lives, relinquishing them only in death. Hence, the passing of diviners is symbolized by the release of these items from their grip. This euphemism is exclusively employed to announce the demise of *Afa* diviners. Participants noted that these expressions might not be widely recognized among speakers of the Evedome dialect of Ewe, because the *Afa* divination practice is not prevalent in that community.

The next euphemism discussed is *emu atɛ* which means 'he/she has left the *atɛ* in a lying position'. This euphemism is similar to *kpele/alɔfi ge le esi*, as discussed above. *Atɛ* is a small wooden plate on which diviners inscribe the codes they interpret from the *kpele*, placed in front of them. It is typically positioned beside the diviner during the divination process. When not in use, diviners leave the *atɛ* lying against the wall. Upon the death of a diviner, their *atɛ* is permanently positioned against the wall, giving rise to the euphemism *emu atɛ*.

*Ati gã aɖe mu* means 'a big tree has fallen'. Trees are very important in maintaining balance in the ecosystem. Very big trees provide shelter and food to all other creatures within the ecosystem. Whenever such a big tree falls, it causes disruption and distress in the system. Metaphorically, prominent people who are benevolent are seen as big trees as they provide comfort and sustenance to the rest of the community. Many people depend on these prominent people for survival. Thus, the deaths of these prominent and benevolent members of the society are announced through the euphemistic expression, *ati gã aɖe mu*.

*Etrɔ megbe* meaning 'he/she has turned his/her back'. It is believed that life is a journey from *Bome* 'the ancestral world where the soul receives a body to become human' through *Kodzogbe* 'the physical world' to *Tsiẽfe* 'the ancestral world where the souls of the dead dwell' and back to *Bome*. This journey is seen as a complete life cycle and everybody is expected to walk the full length of the

journey (*Bome – Kodzogbe – Tsiẽfe – Bome*). Whenever infants die, it is believed that they have abandoned the *Kodzogbe* through *Tsiẽfe* portion of the journey and have returned to *Bome*. According to the participants, this euphemism is particularly used in communicating the death of infants.

*Ebu ta,* which means 'he/she has lost his/her head' is exclusively used in announcing the death of young people or adolescents. This euphemism is said to have originated from among the southern Ewe people who are mostly fisher folks. When children are learning to swim, the most common accident that happens is drowning. Standing on the shore, the adults who often supervise the children as they learn swimming keep looking out for their heads above the water. The signal that a child is in peril is when their head cannot be seen above the water. From this experience, whenever a child gets drowned, he is said to have lost his head, i.e., e*bu ta*. When children die, the euphemism *ebu ta* is used to communicate their death. Thus, the right context for the use of this euphemism is the death of children or adolescents. There is the indication that this euphemism may not be popular among the central and northern Ewe people.

*Eyi nakegbe* which means 'he/she has gone to fetch firewood', is employed when announcing the passing of one of a pair of twins. Twins hold a sacred status in the Ewe culture for it is believed that they come into the world in pairs to provide mutual assistance to each other. Since babies are traditionally washed with warm water, firewood becomes a vital necessity for their care. When one of the twins, usually a baby, passes away, the death is described as having gone to fetch firewood for the surviving twin. This euphemism is rooted in the concern that informing the surviving child of their twin's demise might lead to further tragedy, as there is the fear that the second twin may also succumb to the news. Thus, the expression, *eyi nakegbe,* is exclusively used in announcing the passing of twin babies.

*Ezɔ zã* means 'he/she has embarked on a night journey'. This euphemism is employed to announce the passing of individuals who endured illnesses deemed abominable, such as leprosy or madness. Given the taboo nature of these afflictions, those who succumb to them are discreetly laid to rest under the cover of night, eschewing the customary farewells. This cultural practice serves as a deterrent against such deaths. It is believed that death manifests in various forms, and by discrediting it in a specific guise, they hope to ward off its recurrence in that form. These individuals are interred at night, often before the community is made aware of their demise. For this reason, reference to the passing of these individuals is centred around the time they transition to the ancestral realm, giving rise to the euphemism *ezɔ zã* 'he walked at night'.

*Ezɔ fiazɔli* which means 'he/she took a royal stroll' is used in contexts similar to those in which *ezɔ zã* is used. The difference is that in this case there is a sarcastic depiction of the dead person's journey out of this world as a royal walk. Traditionally, the burial of chiefs is conducted under the cover of night and in secrecy, i.e., before the broader community is informed of their demise. The euphemism ironically likens the nightly secret burial of people who succumb to diseases such as madness and leprosy to what is done to chiefs. This expression is used to mock death and not the dead person.

In what follows, we explore whether and the extent to which the generality of members of the Ewe speech community know the meanings of these euphemistic expressions and the contexts in which they are used.

## 5. The knowledge of death-announcing euphemisms in different social groups within the Ewe community

The first thing we sought to find out in this segment of the study was the general knowledge of the various death-announcing euphemisms among the speakers of the Ewe language. The survey sought to establish how popular the knowledge of the ethnopragmatic contexts within which each of the Ewe death-announcing euphemisms is used. The result of the investigation is presented in Table 2. In the table, the various euphemisms are arranged in a hierarchical order starting from the most popular euphemistic expression to the least popular one. The result shows that the expression e*yi kɔfe* is the most widely known and frequently used death-announcing euphemism followed by e*mu zi, ati gã aɖe mu, eyi amadafe* and *egbe dze/akplẽ*. The least common death-announcing euphemisms are *kpele/alɔfi ge le esi* and *emu atɛ*.

**TABLE 2.** Popularity hierarchy of death-announcing euphemisms in Ewe

| S/N | Variables | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *Eyi kɔfe.* | 279 | 23 | 302 |
| | | 92.4% | 7.6% | 100.0% |
| 2 | *Emu zi.* | 240 | 62 | 302 |
| | | 79.5% | 20.5% | 100.0% |
| 3 | *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | 222 | 80 | 302 |
| | | 73.5% | 26.5% | 100.0% |

| S/N | Variables | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | *Eyi amadaƒe.* | 198 | 104 | 302 |
| | | 65.6% | 34.4% | 100.0% |
| 5 | *Egbe dze/akplẽ.* | 161 | 141 | 302 |
| | | 53.3% | 46.7% | 100.0% |
| 6 | *Eyi nakegbe.* | 157 | 145 | 302 |
| | | 52.0% | 48.0% | 100.0% |
| 7 | *Ati ge le esi.* | 133 | 169 | 302 |
| | | 44.0% | 56.0% | 100.0% |
| 8 | *Ezɔ zã.* | 129 | 173 | 302 |
| | | 42.7% | 57.3% | 100.0% |
| 9 | *Etrɔ megbe.* | 55 | 247 | 302 |
| | | 18.2% | 81.8% | 100.0% |
| 10 | *Eƒe dɔƒe menyo o./ Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ.* | 54 | 248 | 302 |
| | | 17.9% | 82.1% | 100.0% |
| 11 | *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | 49 | 253 | 302 |
| | | 16.2% | 83.8% | 100.0% |
| 12 | *Ebu ta.* | 28 | 274 | 302 |
| | | 9.3% | 90.7% | 100.0% |
| 13 | *Kpele/alɔƒi ge le esi.* | 13 | 289 | 302 |
| | | 4.3% | 95.7% | 100.0% |
| 14 | *Emu atɛ.* | 1 | 301 | 302 |
| | | 0.3% | 99.7% | 100.0% |

Judging from the results from Table 2, it is clear that some of the euphemisms are getting extinct from the language. While *kpele/alɔƒi ge le esi* and *emu atɛ* are not known to almost all the respondents, the euphemism *ebu ta* seems to have undergone a process of overgeneralization such that even though the respondents seem to know it, they misapply it.

One of the main focuses of this article is to investigate how the various social factors such as age, dialect, gender, education, and community affect the use of the various death-announcing euphemisms and to also establish which segments of the Ewe-speaking society are more competent in the use of the euphemisms. Tables 3 to 13 present the distribution of the fourteen death-announcing euphemisms under discussion along the aforementioned social variables. These tables show how the various social factors affect the use of the various death-announcing euphemisms.

Table 3 represents cross-tabulations of the social variable "age" categorized into two groups, 20-39 and 40-70 against the fourteen linguistic variables. The two categories of the age groups 20-39 and 40-70 represent the younger generation and the older generation of Ewe speakers respectively. In all, the 20-39 age group includes 138 respondents while the 40-70 age group includes 154 respondents. On the part of the linguistic variables, the "correct categories" indicate the responses that correctly show the ethnopragmatic context within which each of the fourteen euphemisms is supposed to be used and the "incorrect categories" indicate the responses that failed to show the appropriate context within which each euphemism is supposed to be used.

**TABLE 3.** Age-based distribution of death-announcing euphemisms

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi kɔfe.* | 20-39 | 125 | 13 | 138 |
| | | 90.6% | 9.4% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 154 | 10 | 164 |
| | | 93.9% | 6.1% | 100.0% |
| *Emu zi.* | 20-39 | 117 | 21 | 138 |
| | | 84.8% | 15.2% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 123 | 41 | 164 |
| | | 75.0% | 25.0% | 100.0% |
| *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | 20-39 | 100 | 38 | 138 |
| | | 72.5% | 27.5% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 122 | 42 | 164 |
| | | 74.4% | 25.6% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi amadaƒe.* | 20-39 | 92 | 46 | 138 |
| | | 66.7% | 33.3% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 106 | 58 | 164 |
| | | 64.6% | 35.4% | 100.0% |
| *Egbe akplẽ.* | 20-39 | 67 | 71 | 138 |
| | | 48.6% | 51.4% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 94 | 70 | 164 |
| | | 57.3% | 42.7% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi nakegbe.* | 20-39 | 73 | 65 | 138 |
| | | 52.9% | 47.1% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 84 | 80 | 164 |
| | | 51.2% | 48.8% | 100.0% |
| *Ati ge le esi.* | 20-39 | 53 | 85 | 138 |
| | | 38.4% | 61.6% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 80 | 84 | 164 |
| | | 48.8% | 51.2% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ zã.* | 20-39 | 50 | 88 | 138 |
| | | 36.2% | 63.8% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 79 | 85 | 164 |
| | | 48.2% | 51.8% | 100.0% |
| *Etrɔ megbe.* | 20-39 | 25 | 113 | 138 |
| | | 18.1% | 81.9% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 30 | 134 | 164 |
| | | 18.3% | 81.7% | 100.0% |
| *Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ.* | 20-39 | 23 | 115 | 138 |
| | | 16.7% | 83.3% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 31 | 133 | 164 |
| | | 18.9% | 81.1% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | 20-39 | 15 | 123 | 138 |
| | | 10.9% | 89.1% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 34 | 130 | 164 |
| | | 20.7% | 79.3% | 100.0% |
| *Ebu ta.* | 20-39 | 20 | 118 | 138 |
| | | 14.5% | 85.5% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 8 | 156 | 164 |
| | | 4.9% | 95.1% | 100.0% |
| *Alɔfi ge le esi.* | 20-39 | 5 | 133 | 138 |
| | | 3.6% | 96.4% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 8 | 156 | 164 |
| | | 4.9% | 95.1% | 100.0% |
| *Emu atɛ.* | 20-39 | 1 | 137 | 138 |
| | | 0.7% | 99.3% | 100.0% |
| | 40-70 | 0 | 164 | 164 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The results show that in the 20-39 age group, 125 respondents making up 90.6% of the group have demonstrated that they are knowledgeable about the appropriate context in which the euphemism *eyi kɔfe* must be used while 13 respondents making up 9.4% could not indicate the appropriate context in which this euphemism should be used.

On the part of the 40-70 age group, 154 respondents (93.9%) correctly indicated the appropriate ethnopragmatic context in which the euphemism *eyi kɔfe* is supposed to be used while only 10 individuals (6.1%) could not indicate the correct context for its use.

The result for *emu zi* is remarkably different from the case of *eyi kɔfe*. In the case of *emu zi*, 117 out of 138 respondents from the 20-39 age group making up 84.8% gave the correct response to the question while 123 out of 164 respondents from the 40-70 age group making up 75.0% provided the correct response. This shows that young Ewe speakers are slightly more knowledgeable about the appropriate context for the use of the euphemism *emu zi* than their older counterparts.

The results further show that while the older speakers are more knowledgeable about the appropriate context for the use of nine euphemisms (*eyi kɔfe, ati gã aḍe mu, egbe akplẽ, ati ge le esi, ezɔ zã, etrɔ megbe, efe dɔfe gblẽ, ezɔ fiazɔli* and *alɔfi ge le esi*) than the younger speakers, the younger speakers are also more knowledgeable about the correct ethnopragmatic context for the use of the remaining five euphemisms (*emu zi, eyi amadafe, eyi nakegbe, ebu ta* and *emu atɛ*).

To establish that age as a social factor truly influences the appropriate use of the various death-announcing euphemisms, Pearson Chi-Square tests were conducted for each euphemism. These tests investigate the significance of the variation between the two social groups in relation to the appropriate use of the respective euphemisms. The Pearson Chi-Square Test result for the euphemism *egbe akplẽ* is presented in Table 4 below.

The test result shows that there is no significant variation between the two groups of speakers in relation to the appropriate use of the euphemism *egbe akplẽ* at the 0.05 alpha level because the result, $\chi 2(1, 302) = 2.314$, $p = .128$ shows that the p-value is greater than 0.05. This test result suggests that the two groups of Ewe speakers are not significantly different when it comes to the use of this euphemism.

**TABLE 4.** Pearson Chi-Square Test to establish the significance of variation between younger and older speakers of Ewe in using *egbe akplẽ*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 2.314[a] | 1 | .128 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | 1.975 | 1 | .160 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 2.315 | 1 | .128 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .134 | .080 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 2.306 | 1 | .129 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 64.43. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

The result does indicate that the observable variation between the younger generation of Ewe speakers and their older counterparts is not as a result of age as a social factor. Thus, the null hypothesis that any noticeable variation between the two groups may be due to chance stands true. The results of the Pearson Chi-Square Test conducted for all the other death-announcing euphemisms are similar to the result for *egbe akplẽ* with the exception of *emu zi, ati ge le esi, ezɔ zã, ezɔ fiazɔli* and *ebu ta.*

Table 5 displays the distribution of the various death-announcing euphemisms along dialect lines. As indicated earlier, the Ewe language has been divided into two broad dialect groups known as Anlo dialect and Evedome dialect. To investigate the effect of dialect on the use of the various death-announcing euphemisms, data were analysed along dialect lines as can be seen in the table.

**TABLE 5.** Dialect-based distribution of death-announcing euphemisms

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi kɔfe.* | Anlo | 185 | 16 | 201 |
| | | 92.0% | 8.0% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 94 | 7 | 101 |
| | | 93.1% | 6.9% | 100.0% |
| *Emu zi.* | Anlo | 170 | 31 | 201 |
| | | 84.6% | 15.4% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 70 | 31 | 101 |
| | | 69.3% | 30.7% | 100.0% |
| *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | Anlo | 163 | 38 | 201 |
| | | 81.1% | 18.9% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 59 | 42 | 101 |
| | | 58.4% | 41.6% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi amadafe.* | Anlo | 146 | 55 | 201 |
| | | 72.6% | 27.4% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 52 | 49 | 101 |
| | | 51.5% | 48.5% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Egbe akplẽ.* | Anlo | 85 | 116 | 201 |
| | | 42.3% | 57.7% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 76 | 25 | 101 |
| | | 75.2% | 24.8% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi nakegbe.* | Anlo | 106 | 95 | 201 |
| | | 52.7% | 47.3% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 51 | 50 | 101 |
| | | 50.5% | 49.5% | 100.0% |
| *Ati ge le esi.* | Anlo | 92 | 109 | 201 |
| | | 45.8% | 54.2% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 41 | 60 | 101 |
| | | 40.6% | 59.4% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ zã.* | Anlo | 95 | 106 | 201 |
| | | 47.3% | 52.7% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 34 | 67 | 101 |
| | | 33.7% | 66.3% | 100.0% |
| *Etrɔ megbe.* | Anlo | 42 | 159 | 201 |
| | | 20.9% | 79.1% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 13 | 88 | 101 |
| | | 12.9% | 87.1% | 100.0% |
| *Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ.* | Anlo | 33 | 168 | 201 |
| | | 16.4% | 83.6% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 21 | 80 | 101 |
| | | 20.8% | 79.2% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | Anlo | 47 | 154 | 201 |
| | | 23.4% | 76.6% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 2 | 99 | 101 |
| | | 2.0% | 98.0% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ebu ta.* | Anlo | 25 | 176 | 201 |
| | | 12.4% | 87.6% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 3 | 98 | 101 |
| | | 3.0% | 97.0% | 100.0% |
| *Alɔfi ge le esi.* | Anlo | 13 | 188 | 201 |
| | | 6.5% | 93.5% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 0 | 101 | 101 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| *Emu atɛ.* | Anlo | 1 | 200 | 201 |
| | | 0.5% | 99.5% | 100.0% |
| | Evedome | 0 | 101 | 101 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

In each dialect group, the number of respondents who demonstrated correctly that they can use the respective euphemisms within the appropriate ethnopragmatic contexts and those who could not demonstrate correctly have been noted as "correct" and "incorrect". In all, 201 respondents have been drawn from the Anlo-speaking communities and 101 respondents have been drawn from the Evedome speaking communities. The results show that 92.0% of the Anlo dialect speakers correctly indicated the appropriate context in which the euphemism *eyi kɔfe* should be used while 93.1% of the Evedome dialect speakers correctly indicated the appropriate context in which this euphemism should be used.

Indeed, the Pearson Chi-Square Test results displayed in Table 6 show that there is no significant variation between the two dialect groups in relation to the appropriate use of the euphemism *eyi kɔfe* at the 0.05 significance level because the p-value is 0.750 which is greater than 0.05. One can stipulate that due to the popularity of this euphemism, the speakers of the Ewe language across the two dialect areas are very familiar with its usage, hence, they use it within the appropriate ethnopragmatic context.

**TABLE 6.** Pearson Chi-Square Test to establish the significance of variation between Anlo and Evedome speakers of Ewe in using *eyi kɔƒe*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | .101[a] | 1 | .750 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | .008 | 1 | .930 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | .103 | 1 | .749 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .822 | .474 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .101 | 1 | .751 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.69. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

However, concerning *emu zi, ati gã aɖe mu, eyi amadaƒe, eyi nakegbe, ati ge le esi, ezɔ zã, etrɔ megbe, ezɔ fiazɔli, ebu ta, alɔƒi ge le esi,* and *emu atɛ,* the speakers of the Anlo dialect demonstrated a more profound understanding of the appropriate contexts for using them compared to their counterparts who speak the Evedome dialect. In other words, speakers of the Anlo dialect are more knowledgeable about the appropriate contexts of the use of eleven (11) out of the fourteen (14) death-announcing euphemisms under study. For example, it is observable from Table 5 that *eyi amadaƒe* is more popular among speakers of the Anlo dialect than speakers of the Evedome dialect. While 72.6% of the Anlo respondents correctly demonstrated knowledge of the cultural context in which this euphemism can be used, only 51.5% of the Evedome respondents correctly demonstrated that they know how to appropriately use it. This result is not surprising because of the cultural contexts in which *eyi amadaƒe* is used. This expression is used to announce the death of *bokɔnɔwo 'Afa* diviners' and herbalists among the Anlo people. The practice of *Afa* divination is not common among the Evedome people, and, for that matter, there are not many *Afa* diviners among them. The evidence from the qualitative data that the phrasings of these euphemistic expressions are influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the people is, therefore, supported by the results of the quantitative data.

To determine whether the variations between the two dialects in relation to the use of the eleven euphemisms are statistically significant or not, let us look, for instance, at the distribution of *emu zi*. In the case of *emu zi* which is the second most commonly used death-announcing euphemism among the Ewe people, the crosstab results show that 84.6% of the Anlo dialect speakers demonstrated that they are competent in its appropriate use as against 69.3% of the speakers of the Evedome dialect. The results of the Chi-Square test conducted to ascertain the significance of the variation between Anlo and Evedome is displayed in Table 7.

**TABLE 7.** Pearson Chi-Square Test to establish the significance of variation between Anlo and Evedome speakers of Ewe in using *emu zi*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 9.607[a] | 1 | .002 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | 8.694 | 1 | .003 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 9.219 | 1 | .002 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .003 | .002 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 9.576 | 1 | .002 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 20.74. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

The Pearson Chi-Square test result from Table 7 is $\chi 2(1, 302) = 9.607$, $p=.002$. This indicates that the p-value (.002) is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This result suggests a significant association between the variable *emu zi* and dialects. In other words, the variation between speakers of Anlo and Evedome is statistically significant. This result shows that the knowledge of the appropriate ethnopragmatic context for the use of the euphemism *emu zi* is highly influenced by the dialect one speaks; i.e., it is more likely that speakers of the Anlo dialect will use this euphemism correctly than their counterparts from the Evedome dialect community.

The Pearson Chi-Square tests also show significant variations between Anlo and Evedome regarding the use of *eyi amadaƒe, ati gã aɖe mu, ezɔ zã, ezɔ fiazɔli* and *ebu ta*. In the case of the three euphemisms (*eyi kɔƒe, egbe dze/akplẽ, eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ*) where the speakers of the Evedome dialect seem to be more knowledgeable than their Anlo counterparts, the results of the Pearson Chi-Square tests suggest that the observable differences are not significant. This further proves that the speakers of the Anlo dialect are generally more knowledgeable about the appropriate use of the various death-announcing euphemisms than the speakers of the Evedome dialect. It is, therefore, safe to say that speakers of the Anlo dialect are more likely to preserve the euphemistic expressions.

To assess the potential influence of gender on the appropriate usage of the various death-announcing euphemisms, the data collected were analysed along gender lines. The respondents were categorized into two groups: males and females, and the results of the analysis of the gender-based distribution of the use of the various euphemisms are presented in Table 8 below.

**TABLE 8.** Gender-based distribution of death-announcing euphemisms

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi kɔƒe.* | Male | 129 | 11 | 140 |
| | | 92.1% | 7.9% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 150 | 12 | 162 |
| | | 92.6% | 7.4% | 100.0% |
| *Emu zi.* | Male | 110 | 30 | 140 |
| | | 78.6% | 21.4% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 130 | 32 | 162 |
| | | 80.2% | 19.8% | 100.0% |
| *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | Male | 113 | 27 | 140 |
| | | 80.7% | 19.3% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 109 | 53 | 162 |
| | | 67.3% | 32.7% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi amadaƒe.* | Male | 74 | 66 | 140 |
| | | 52.9% | 47.1% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 124 | 38 | 162 |
| | | 76.5% | 23.5% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Egbe akplẽ.* | Male | 88 | 52 | 140 |
| | | 62.9% | 37.1% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 73 | 89 | 162 |
| | | 45.1% | 54.9% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi nakegbe.* | Male | 60 | 80 | 140 |
| | | 42.9% | 57.1% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 97 | 65 | 162 |
| | | 59.9% | 40.1% | 100.0% |
| *Ati ge le esi.* | Male | 60 | 80 | 140 |
| | | 42.9% | 57.1% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 73 | 89 | 162 |
| | | 45.1% | 54.9% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ zã.* | Male | 40 | 100 | 140 |
| | | 28.6% | 71.4% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 89 | 73 | 162 |
| | | 54.9% | 45.1% | 100.0% |
| *Etrɔ megbe.* | Male | 12 | 128 | 140 |
| | | 8.6% | 91.4% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 43 | 119 | 162 |
| | | 26.5% | 73.5% | 100.0% |
| *Efe dɔfe gblẽ.* | Male | 28 | 112 | 140 |
| | | 20.0% | 80.0% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 26 | 136 | 162 |
| | | 16.0% | 84.0% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | Male | 23 | 117 | 140 |
| | | 16.4% | 83.6% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 26 | 136 | 162 |
| | | 16.0% | 84.0% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ebu ta.* | Male | 23 | 117 | 140 |
| | | 16.4% | 83.6% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 5 | 157 | 162 |
| | | 3.1% | 96.9% | 100.0% |
| *Alɔfi ge le esi.* | Male | 13 | 127 | 140 |
| | | 9.3% | 90.7% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 0 | 162 | 162 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| *Emu atɛ.* | Male | 1 | 139 | 140 |
| | | 0.7% | 99.3% | 100.0% |
| | Female | 0 | 162 | 162 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The results show that female speakers of Ewe are more knowledgeable about the appropriate ethnopragmatic contexts of the use of 8 out of the 14 euphemisms (*eyi kɔfe, emu zi, eyi amadafe, ati ge le esi, ezɔ zã, etrɔ megbe, eyi nakegbe,* and *ebu ta),* than their male counterparts. On the other hand, the male speakers of Ewe are more knowledgeable about the correct contexts of the use of six (6) euphemisms (*ati gã aɖe mu, egbe akplẽ, efe dɔfe gblẽ, ezɔ fiazɔli, alɔfi ge le esi* and *emu atɛ).*

To find out if the variations observed between the two groups regarding the use of each of the fourteen euphemisms are significant or not, Pearson Chi-Square tests have been conducted for the respective euphemisms. The results show that the variations between the female speakers and their male counterparts are statistically significant in the case of eight out of the fourteen euphemisms. While the female speakers of Ewe are significantly more competent in the use of five of the euphemisms (*eyi kɔfe, eyi amadafe, ezɔ zã, etrɔ megbe, eyi nakegbe,* and *ebu ta),* the male speakers are only significantly more competent than the female speakers in the use of three euphemisms (*ati gã aɖe mu, egbe akplẽ* and *alɔfi ge le esi*).

For instance, the data regarding *eyi amadafe* reveals that approximately 77% of female respondents correctly indicated their familiarity with the use of this euphemism. In contrast, only about 53% of the male respondents demonstrated

their competence in using the same euphemism. The observable difference between these two groups of respondents has been assessed using the Chi-Square Test, and the results are provided in Table 9 below.

**TABLE 9.** Pearson Chi-Square Test to establish the significance of variation between male and female speakers of Ewe in using *eyi amadafe*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 18.661[a] | 1 | .000 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | 17.627 | 1 | .000 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 18.792 | 1 | .000 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .000 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 18.599 | 1 | .000 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |

The result $\chi 2(1, 302) = 18.661$, $p = .000$ constitutes strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis. The p-value is reported as .000, which is less than 0.001 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the variation between men and women in relation to the use of this euphemism is not by chance. This means that gender is an influencing factor in the use of this particular euphemism among the Ewe people. This result indicates that female Ewe speakers are more likely to use this particular euphemistic expression than their male counterparts.

The next social factor considered in this study is education. Table 10 displays the distribution of the competent use or otherwise of the fourteen euphemisms under investigation in this study using education as the basis. We seek to find out if the level of education of the speakers of Ewe influences the appropriate use of the various death announcing euphemisms in any significant way.

The 302 respondents have been grouped into two pools according to their educational level. In all, 158 respondents belong to the pre-tertiary education level while 144 speakers belong to the tertiary education level.

**TABLE 10.** Education-based distribution of death-announcing euphemisms

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi kɔfe.* | Pre-Tertiary | 149 | 9 | 158 |
| | | 94.3% | 5.7% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 130 | 14 | 144 |
| | | 90.3% | 9.7% | 100.0% |
| *Emu zi.* | Pre-Tertiary | 126 | 32 | 158 |
| | | 79.7% | 20.3% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 114 | 30 | 144 |
| | | 79.2% | 20.8% | 100.0% |
| *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | Pre-Tertiary | 113 | 45 | 158 |
| | | 71.5% | 28.5% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 109 | 35 | 144 |
| | | 75.7% | 24.3% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi amadafe.* | Pre-Tertiary | 97 | 61 | 158 |
| | | 61.4% | 38.6% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 101 | 43 | 144 |
| | | 70.1% | 29.9% | 100.0% |
| *Egbe akplẽ.* | Pre-Tertiary | 86 | 72 | 158 |
| | | 54.4% | 45.6% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 75 | 69 | 144 |
| | | 52.1% | 47.9% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi nakegbe.* | Pre-Tertiary | 82 | 76 | 158 |
| | | 51.9% | 48.1% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 75 | 69 | 144 |
| | | 52.1% | 47.9% | 100.0% |
| *Ati ge le esi.* | Pre-Tertiary | 64 | 94 | 158 |
| | | 40.5% | 59.5% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 69 | 75 | 144 |
| | | 47.9% | 52.1% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Ezɔ zã.* | Pre-Tertiary | 61 | 97 | 158 |
| | | 38.6% | 61.4% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 68 | 76 | 144 |
| | | 47.2% | 52.8% | 100.0% |
| *Etrɔ megbe.* | Pre-Tertiary | 25 | 133 | 158 |
| | | 15.8% | 84.2% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 30 | 114 | 144 |
| | | 20.8% | 79.2% | 100.0% |
| *Efe dɔfe gblẽ.* | Pre-Tertiary | 24 | 134 | 158 |
| | | 15.2% | 84.8% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 30 | 114 | 144 |
| | | 20.8% | 79.2% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | Pre-Tertiary | 25 | 133 | 158 |
| | | 15.8% | 84.2% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 24 | 120 | 144 |
| | | 16.7% | 83.3% | 100.0% |
| *Ebu ta.* | Pre-Tertiary | 14 | 144 | 158 |
| | | 8.9% | 91.1% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 14 | 130 | 144 |
| | | 9.7% | 90.3% | 100.0% |
| *Alɔfi ge le esi.* | Pre-Tertiary | 7 | 151 | 158 |
| | | 4.4% | 95.6% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 6 | 138 | 144 |
| | | 4.2% | 95.8% | 100.0% |
| *Emu atɛ.* | Pre-Tertiary | 0 | 158 | 158 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| | Tertiary | 1 | 143 | 144 |
| | | 0.7% | 99.3% | 100.0% |

Generally, respondents with tertiary education background appear to be more knowledgeable about the appropriate use of the various death-announcing euphemisms than those with pre-tertiary education background. The table shows that respondents with tertiary education background demonstrated that they are more knowledgeable about the appropriate use of ten (10) out of the fourteen death-announcing euphemisms, while those with pre-tertiary education background demonstrated that they are more competent in the use of four (4) of the death-announcing euphemisms.

Despite the observable difference between the two groups of Ewe speakers in relation to their competence in the use of the euphemisms, the results of the Pearson Chi-Square tests conducted to establish the significance of these variations rather suggest that there is no significant association between the two variables for all the fourteen cases tested. For example, the Pearson Chi-Square tests conducted to investigate the significance of the variation between the two groups of speakers in relation to the euphemism *ebu ta* (as shown in Table 11) revealed that the observable difference is not statistically significant.

**TABLE 11.** Pearson Chi-Square Test to establish the significance of variation between male and female speakers of Ewe in using *ebu ta*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | .066[a] | 1 | .797 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | .004 | 1 | .953 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | .066 | 1 | .797 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .844 | .475 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | .066 | 1 | .797 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.35. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

Since there is no significant difference between the two groups in respect of any of the euphemisms, it is safe to conclude that education as a social factor does not influence the appropriate use of the various euphemistic expressions.

The final social factor investigated is community. The Ewe-speaking community has been divided into two: rural communities and urban communities. Thus, the data collected were analysed along community lines to see if the community in which a speaker dwells has any effect on their level of competence in the use of the respective death-announcing euphemisms. Out of the 302 Ewe speakers who participated in the study, 159 of them are rural dwellers while 143 are urban dwellers.

Table 12 displays the distribution of the people's knowledge of the appropriate use of the given death-announcing euphemisms based on the community they come from.

**TABLE 12.** Community-based distribution of death-announcing euphemisms

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi kɔfe.* | Rural | 143 | 16 | 159 |
| | | 89.9% | 10.1% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 136 | 7 | 143 |
| | | 95.1% | 4.9% | 100.0% |
| *Emu zi.* | Rural | 124 | 35 | 159 |
| | | 78.0% | 22.0% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 116 | 27 | 143 |
| | | 81.1% | 18.9% | 100.0% |
| *Ati gã aɖe mu.* | Rural | 126 | 33 | 159 |
| | | 79.2% | 20.8% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 96 | 47 | 143 |
| | | 67.1% | 32.9% | 100.0% |
| *Eyi amadafe.* | Rural | 112 | 47 | 159 |
| | | 70.4% | 29.6% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 86 | 57 | 143 |
| | | 60.1% | 39.9% | 100.0% |
| *Egbe akplẽ.* | Rural | 71 | 88 | 159 |
| | | 44.7% | 55.3% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 90 | 53 | 143 |
| | | 62.9% | 37.1% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Eyi nakegbe.* | Rural | 95 | 64 | 159 |
| | | 59.7% | 40.3% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 62 | 81 | 143 |
| | | 43.4% | 56.6% | 100.0% |
| *Ati ge le esi.* | Rural | 72 | 87 | 159 |
| | | 45.3% | 54.7% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 61 | 82 | 143 |
| | | 42.7% | 57.3% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ zã.* | Rural | 72 | 87 | 159 |
| | | 45.3% | 54.7% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 57 | 86 | 143 |
| | | 39.9% | 60.1% | 100.0% |
| *Etrɔ megbe.* | Rural | 30 | 129 | 159 |
| | | 18.9% | 81.1% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 25 | 118 | 143 |
| | | 17.5% | 82.5% | 100.0% |
| *Eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ.* | Rural | 40 | 119 | 159 |
| | | 25.2% | 74.8% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 14 | 129 | 143 |
| | | 9.8% | 90.2% | 100.0% |
| *Ezɔ fiazɔli.* | Rural | 41 | 118 | 159 |
| | | 25.8% | 74.2% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 8 | 135 | 143 |
| | | 5.6% | 94.4% | 100.0% |
| *Ebu ta.* | Rural | 22 | 137 | 159 |
| | | 13.8% | 86.2% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 6 | 137 | 143 |
| | | 4.2% | 95.8% | 100.0% |

| | | Correct | Incorrect | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Alɔfi ge le esi.* | Rural | 12 | 147 | 159 |
| | | 7.5% | 92.5% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 1 | 142 | 143 |
| | | 0.7% | 99.3% | 100.0% |
| *Emu atɛ.* | Rural | `1 | 158 | 159 |
| | | 0.6% | 99.4% | 100.0% |
| | Urban | 0 | 143 | 143 |
| | | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The urban community dwellers are more competent than the rural dwellers in the use of only three out of the fourteen euphemisms: *eyi kɔfe, emu zi* and *egbe akplẽ*. It is important to note that these three euphemisms are among the five most popular and the most frequently used euphemisms across the Ewe-speaking community.

On the other hand, it is evident from the table that rural dwellers are more knowledgeable than the urban dwellers about the appropriate context within which the rest of the euphemisms should be used. The Pearson Chi-Square tests conducted to establish the significance of the variation between the two groups of Ewe speakers in relation to the appropriate use of the fourteen death announcing euphemisms revealed that the differences found between them were statistically significant in the case of seven euphemisms: *eyi amadafe, egbe akplẽ, eyi nakegbe, efe dɔfe gblẽ, ezɔ fiazɔli, ebu ta,* and *alɔfi ge le esi.*

The data displayed in Table 12 show that speakers from rural communities are more knowledgeable about the appropriate use of *efe dɔfe gblẽ* than their counterparts from urban communities. While 25.2% of the respondents from rural communities appropriately indicated the correct ethnopragmatic context in which this euphemism is used, only 9.8% of the respondents from urban communities correctly indicated the appropriate socio-cultural context in which the euphemism is used. The data indicated that more urban dwellers are using this particular euphemism with a more generalized application than its original application. Because there are more radio stations and other social-media users in the urban communities, which drive information dissemination and also propagate new trends, it is believed that a shift in the application of this particular euphemism is already underway among the urban dwellers. The Pearson

Chi-Square test results displayed in Table 13 indicate a statistically significant variation between the speakers from the rural communities and the speakers from urban communities.

**TABLE 13:** Community-based Chi-Square Test for *efe dɔfe gblẽ*

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Value** | **df** | **Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (2-sided)** | **Exact Sig. (1-sided)** |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 12.108[a] | 1 | .001 | | |
| Continuity Correction[b] | 11.084 | 1 | .001 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 12.609 | 1 | .000 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .001 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 12.068 | 1 | .001 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 302 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 25.57. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

The Pearson Chi-Square test results as shown in Table 13 are $\chi 2(1, 302) = 12.108$, $p = .001$. Given that the p-value of .001 is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05, the Chi-Square test provides strong grounds for us to reject the null hypothesis. Consequently, the findings reveal a statistically significant association between the appropriate use of the euphemism and the community in which the speaker resides. Specifically, rural inhabitants are more likely to use this euphemism within the correct socio-cultural context compared to their urban counterparts.

## 6. Discussion of findings

It is clear that there are several death-announcing euphemistic expressions in the Ewe language and that each of these expressions is used in a unique ethno-pragmatic context. Factors such as the type of death, social status, occupation, and age of the deceased person, as well as whether the person has been sick for a long time, determine which euphemism should be used in announcing the

death of someone. Both the qualitative and quantitative data provided evidence that shows that many of the death-announcing euphemisms are no longer popular in the language.

Out of the 14 death-announcing euphemisms provided by the four elderly respondents in the qualitative study, *eyi kɔƒe* has been established as the most frequently used and well-known death-announcing euphemism, followed by *emu zi* and *ati gã aɖe mu*. This means that the majority of Ewe speakers are conversant with the ethnopragmatic contexts within which these euphemisms are used.

The least-known death-announcing euphemism is *emu atɛ,* followed by *alɔfi ge le esi.* These two euphemisms are nearly extinct from the language, as speakers are unfamiliar with them and, therefore, could not indicate the appropriate ethnopragmatic context in which they are used. Only 13 respondents out of the 302 speakers of the Ewe language have been able to correctly use *alɔfi ge le esi*. On the part of *emu atɛ*, only 1 respondent was able to indicate the appropriate context for its usage. This trend forecasts the imminent extinction of these two euphemisms.

Although some of the euphemisms, such as *etrɔ megbe, eƒe dɔƒe gblẽ, ezɔ fiazɔli,* and *ebu ta,* are still in use, they are often applied with a general interpretation, simply meaning 'someone is dead'. The knowledge regarding the specific contexts in which these euphemisms may be used is no longer available to many speakers of the language, and it is almost certain (unless active education about their use takes place) that they will soon become mere synonyms.

It is, on the other hand, heart-warming that there are no significant differences among Ewe speakers regarding the appropriate use of the most popular euphemism, *eyi kɔƒe*. This indicates that the knowledge of its appropriate use is not influenced by dialect, gender, age, education, or the speaker's community. Any observed variations in its use among individuals may likely be attributed to chance, given the broad-based and prevalent knowledge of its application among the Ewe-speaking population.

In general, the study revealed that social factors such as age and education do not significantly influence the appropriate use of any of the death-announcing euphemisms. Although some observable variations were noticed among comparable social groups, statistical evidence suggested that these differences were merely coincidental. On the other hand, social factors such as dialect, gender, and community were found to significantly impact the appropriate use of death-announcing euphemisms in the Ewe culture.

We discovered that among the two major dialects, speakers of the Anlo dialect are more inclined to use the various death-announcing euphemisms within their appropriate ethnopragmatic contexts compared to speakers of the Evedome dialect. This suggests that the extinction and the shift in the application of some euphemisms will likely be more pronounced among Evedome speakers. The geographical location of the Evedome people, leading to their daily interaction with individuals from other Ghanaian languages (especially Akan) and cultures might account for this situation.

Specifically, in terms of gender, the study revealed that more females demonstrated knowledge of the appropriate contexts of use of the various euphemisms than males. This finding echoed findings reported in the literature about the use of euphemisms as a strategy for politeness. It is reported widely that women tend to demonstrate more politeness than men in their speech (Leaper & Ayres 2007; Brescoll & Uhlmann 2008). The natural inclination of female speakers toward politeness in their speech patterns predisposes them to appropriately use euphemistic expressions, and we believe that this tendency explains why more Ewe females know how to use the expressions than their male counterparts.

Finally, the study established that Ewe speakers in rural communities demonstrate greater competence in using death-announcing euphemisms than their urban counterparts. This outcome is not surprising due to the distinction between the language situation in the rural communities and urban communities. Often, urban communities tend to be bilingual or multilingual, and even multicultural. The language situation in the urban communities tends to influence the people's speech patterns. As these euphemisms are deeply rooted in cultural nuances, knowledge about their appropriate usage may only be guaranteed by speakers' frequent exposure to them in speech situations, which is what is lacking in urban communities.

## 7. Concluding remarks

This article explored how cultural nuances and particularities of the Ewe people influence death announcing euphemistic expressions in their language and attempted to establish whether and how widely speakers know the euphemistic expressions and the contexts in which they are used. It, therefore, scrutinised two sets of data: a qualitative data analysed using ethnopragmatic lenses to describe the expressions and their typical contexts of use and a quantitative data analysed within the Variationist Sociolinguistic Approach to establish the relationship between respondents' levels of knowledge of the expressions and

their age, gender, dialect, level of education, and whether speakers are rural or urban dwellers.

The study found that while some expressions are popular, others are now out of use. The study also revealed that while age and education do not significantly influence knowledge and appropriate use of death-announcing euphemisms, dialect, gender, and community do.

The place of knowledge of appropriate use of euphemisms in the cultural competence of speakers of a language cannot be overemphasized. Because of this, we think that the variations we observed in the knowledge of the death-announcing euphemisms highlight a worrying situation, especially regarding Ewes living in urban areas. We saw that Ewe rural dwellers are more knowledgeable in the use of the expressions (and are arguably more culturally competent than their urban counterparts) because they are more regularly exposed to their use in speech situations. To even out this disparity, we recommend that a very concerted effort is made to integrate this aspect of language education in at least basic school curricula (where the study of Ghanaian languages is mandatory) to stimulate the youth's exposure, wherever they live, to the use of such expressions.

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**Deo S. Ngonyani**
Michigan State University
Department of Linguistics, Languages, and Cultures
ORCID: 0000-0002-2034-3604

# The verb extension *-an* in Ndendeule (dne)

## Abstract

This article describes the verbal extension *-an* and its morphosyntactic and semantic properties in Ndendeule, a Bantu language spoken in southern Tanzania. One of the functions of the extension is to create reciprocal constructions. As in other languages, the reciprocal constructions in Ndendeule express several situations, including prototypical reciprocal or mutual situations, chain, collective situations, melee, radial, and iterative situations. Most reciprocal constructions involve minimally two participants. Some of the reciprocal situations may involve only one actor. The data from Ndendeule show that the underlying sense of the different situations is the diversity of relations. The verbal derivation is also recognized as the antipassive. The suffix has a flexible order with other verb extensions, resulting in different meanings.

**Keywords:** reciprocal, antipassive, multiplicity of relations, Bantu verb extensions

## 1. Introduction

Ndendeule, a largely undescribed Bantu language spoken in southern Tanzania, has the verb extension *-an-* similar to those of other Bantu languages. One of the functions of this extension is to express reciprocity. The so-called reciprocal exhibits feature cross-linguistically attested in other languages. An example of the reciprocal is the contrast between a non-reciprocal base verb and a reciprocal.

(1) a. *ɓ-ana* *ɓa-ki-ŋ-kem-a* *mbuya*.
2-child 2SM-PST-1OM-call-FV 1.grandmother
'The children called their grandmother.'

b. *β-ana* *ɓa-ki-kem-an-a*.
2-child 2SM-PST-call-RECP-FV
'The children called each other'.

The verb *kema* 'call' in (1a) takes the subject *ɓana* 'children' and the object *mbuya* 'grandmother'. The derived verb *kemana* 'call each other' in (1b) displays only the subject and no object. The reciprocal engenders the interpretation that there is more than one child, and they are calling each other.

The Bantu verb extension *-an* is generally described as the reciprocal extension (Meeussen 1967; Guthrie 1962; Mchombo 2004). Schadeberg (2003) prefers associative to reciprocal because of the suffix's many different kinds of readings and situations. In recent studies, the polysemy of the reciprocal constructions in Bantu is widely recognized (Bostoen et al. 2015; Chavula 2020; Dalrymple et al. 1998; Khumalo 2014; Maslova & Nedjalkov 2013; Mchombo 2004). Chavula (2020), for example, examines the situations expressed by the reciprocal *-an* in Citumbuka (N21) and identifies situations such as the prototypical reciprocal, chaining, iteration, antipassive, collection, distributive, and quasi-middle voice. In Ciluba, the extension *-an* is associated with prototypical reciprocal, associative, and iterative readings (Dom et al. 2015).

The polysemy of the reciprocal constructions is not an exclusive feature of Bantu languages. It is also well-known that cross-linguistically reciprocal constructions are associated with several interpretations, including reciprocity, reflexivity, and a plurality of events (Lichtenberk 1985, 2007; Nedjalkov 2007). The logical question is what common features characterize the different situations. According to Lichtenberk (2000: 34):

"There is a plurality of relations in an overall situation (event, state, etc.) if what can be considered to be the same relation holds more than once either between one or more participants and the event/state they are involved in, or between the relevant entities".

Plurality is shown to obtain in reciprocal constructions expressing such situations as mutual or reciprocal, chaining, collective, and iterative. A plurality of relations can be distinguished as (a) a plurality of participants and (b) a plurality of events (Bostoen et al. 2015; Lichtenberk 2000). The former is concerned with the two or more participants involved in the depicted relations, while the latter captures reciprocal situations where the same relation is true of several events. For this

reason, the extension is referred to as reciprocal in this article and the construction as the reciprocal construction.

This article describes the properties of the construction that is characterized by the extension -*an* in Ndendeule. In particular, the article addresses the following questions:

a) What are the syntactic properties associated with -*an* in Ndendeule?
b) What meanings are derived from the constructions of this verb extension?
c) What semantic characteristics are shared by the different reciprocal situations?
d) What are the possible combinations of -*an* and other verbal derivations?

The article demonstrates that the extension -*an* is found in valency-reducing and non- valency-reducing environments. Furthermore, all -*an* reciprocal situations in Ndendeule are indeed characterized by a plurality of relations. Some of the -*an* constructions in Ndendeule exhibit antipassive features. The antipassive characteristics of the Bantu reciprocal have been noted in Bostoen et al. (2015) and Ndayiragije (2006).

The description is presented in the following six sections. Section 2 introduces Ndendeule and sketches some relevant features. A morphosyntactic description of the reciprocal constructions follows in Section 3. The plurality of relations is explored in Section 4, while Section 5 argues that the extension -*an* is also used for antipassive. Section 6 presents a brief account of the co-occurrences of the extension -*an* with other verb extensions. Some concluding remarks are made in Section 7.

## 2. Introducing Ndendeule

Ndendeule (ISO code 693-3 *dne*) is listed as N101 in the Guthrie-Maho classification of Bantu languages (Guthrie 1967-71; Maho 2009). It is spoken by over 200,000 people (Ngonyani 2025). There exists no published grammar of Ndendeule. The data are based on Ndendeule, spoken in Mkongo, the author's native dialect. This section introduces aspects of Ndendeule grammar that are most relevant for describing the extension -*an*. The features include the phoneme inventory, noun classes, verbal morphology, word order, and grammatical relations.

The phoneme inventory of Ndendeule consists of seven vowels /i, ɪ, ɛ, a, ɔ, ʊ, u/ and 18 consonants. The vowels are transcribed here as *i, ɪ, e, a, o, ʊ, u*. The consonants include voiceless stops /p, t, c, k/, voiced fricatives /β, ɣ/, voiceless fricative /h/, nasal consonants /m, n, ɲ, ŋ/, prenasalized stops /ᵐb, ⁿd, ᶮɟ,

ᵑg/ (transcribed as *mb, nd, nj, ng* ), glides /j, w/, and the liquid /l/. There is no established orthography.

Ndendeule, like other Bantu languages, categorizes nouns into classes, which are numbered following a tradition established by Bleek (1869) and Meinhof (1932). The classes are based on the agreement that nouns trigger on adjectives, verbs, pronouns, and demonstratives. There are 19 noun classes in Ndendeule. A number in the gloss of a noun indicates the class of the noun, while numbers in the glosses of other word categories indicate agreement with the noun as the controller. Here are examples of noun classes, with the agreement they trigger on the verb.

**TABLE 1.** Examples of noun classes

| Class | Prefix | Example | Gloss | SM-V | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | *m-* | *mundu* | 'person' | *a-gwile* | 'she/he fell' |
| 2 | *ʙa-* | *ʙandu* | 'people' | *ʙa-gwile* | 'they fell' |
| 3 | *m-* | *mpaca* | 'mat' | *u-gwile* | 'it fell' |
| 4 | *mi-* | *mipaca* | 'mats' | *ji-gwile* | 'they fell' |
| 5 | *li-* | *lihamba* | 'leaf' | *li-gwili* | 'it fell' |
| 6 | *ma-* | *mahamba* | 'leaves' | *ɣ a-gwile* | 'they fell' |
| 7 | *ki-* | *kiʙɪɣa* | 'pot' | *ki-gwile* | 'it fell' |
| 8 | *hi-* | *hiʙɪɣa* | 'pots' | *hi-gwile* | 'it fell' |

The table provides examples of nouns with their nominal prefixes and the class number and agreement on the verb *gwile* 'fell'. A few noun classes are transparently semantic. For instance, Classes 1 and 2 are singular and plural, respectively, for humans. However, most classes are semantically opaque. Every noun must belong to at least one class.

The verb is highly agglutinative. In addition to the root, it may contain a subject prefix, object marker, tense, aspect, mood, relative marker, and several derivational extensions such as causative, applicative, and stative. The order of these different structural elements appears in (2).

(2) COMP-SM-TNS-NEG-OM-ROOT-EXT-PRF-FV

The following examples show the different elements combined into the verbal complexes.

(3) a. *βa-ki-ti-βutuk-il-a.*
2SM-PST-1PL-run-APPL-FV
'They ran to us'.

b. *jwa-a-ki-βa-βutu-h-a*
1REL-1SM-PST-2OM-run-CAUS-FV
'who made them run'

The verb in (3a) comprises a subject marker *βa*-, past tense *ki* -, object marker *ti*-, root *βutuk* 'run,' applicative extension -*il*, and the indicative final vowel -*a*. In (3b), the verb has, in addition, the relative maker *jwa*- (a complementizer), which appears before the subject marker. The verbal suffix -*an* belongs to the system of verb extensions.

Ndendeule is an SVO language, as the following examples demonstrate.

(4) a. *Mw-ana* *a-ki-ɣeɣ-a* *hanju.*
1-child 1SM-PST-carry-FV 10. firewood
'The child carried firewood'.

b. *Mu-nahota* *a-ki-βa-hemel-el-a* *β-ana* *hi-ɪβɪ.*
1-elder 1SM-PST-2OM-buy-APPL-FV 2-child 8-thing
'The elder bought things for the children'.

c. *Mw-ana* *a-ki-βɪk-a* *hanju* *ku-ki-hinja.*
1-child 1SM-PST-put-FV 10.firewood 17-7-kitchen.
'The child put the firewood in the kitchen'.

The SVO order is shown in (4a). In double object constructions, the indirect object (IO) or applied object appears before the direct object (DO) or base object, as in (4b), or before the locative goal, as in (4c).

A description of the reciprocal in Ndendeule requires reference to subject and object marking. The verb in a finite clause bears a subject prefix that agrees with the subject. For example,

(5) a. *β-ana* *βa-βʊk-ite.*
2-child 2AM-leave-PRF
'The children have left'.

b. *ki-kʊβi* *ki-gw-ile.*
7-squirrel 7SM-fall-PRF
'The squirrel has fallen'.

c. *ki-gw-ile*
7SM-fall-PRF
'It has fallen'.

In (5a), the noun *βana* 'children' is a Class 2 item that triggers the *βa-* subject prefix on the verb, while in (5b), *kikʊβɪ* 'squirrel' is a Class 7 noun that is matched with the subject prefix *ki-* on the verb. A pro-drop language, Ndendeule omits some subjects, as in (5c). However, subject marking is obligatory for finite sentences. Hence, the subject marker in (5c) agrees with a Class 7 subject recoverable in the context.

The object can be marked on the verb, as shown in the contrast between the following two sentences.

(6) a. *β-ana* *βa-kamw-ile* *ki-kʊβi.*
2-child 2SM-catch-PRF 7-squirrel
'The children caught a squirrel'.

b. *β-ana* *βa-ki-kamw-ile* *ki-kʊβi.*
2-child 2SM-7OM-catch-PRF 7-squirrel
'The children caught the squirrel'.

The same object *kikʊβɪ* 'squirrel' appears in (6a) and (6b). Using the object marker in (6b) makes the object definite. Other pragmatic uses of object marking include marking human objects.

Another essential feature of the verb is its system of verbal derivations or verb extensions, as they are known in Bantu linguistics. The extension *-an* is part of this system of derivations. The following is a list of the extensions in Ndendeule that have varying degrees of productivity.

**TABLE 2.** Verb extensions in Ndendeule

| Extension | Abbreviation | Affix | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| Applicative | APPL | *-il* | do for, with, by, at, |
| Causative | CAUS | *-ih, -h* | make, cause, let do |
| Impositive | IMPS | *-ik* | put in a position |
| Reciprocal | RECP | *-an* | do each other |
| Reversive | REV | *-ul* | undo |
| Stative | STAT | *-ik* | be in state |

Applicative and causative extensions increase the verb's valency, while stative and reciprocal extensions decrease it. Impositive and reversive extensions do not change the verb's valency.

With this sketch of features of Ndendeule grammar, the morphology and syntax of the reciprocal construction can be described.

## 3. The reciprocal construction

This section presents the features that characterize the morphosyntax of the reciprocal construction in Ndendeule. It highlights the reciprocal marking strategy, changes in grammatical relations, transitivity patterns, and some typological aspects of Ndendeule reciprocal.

Typologically, the reciprocal is described in terms of (a) strategies of encoding the reciprocal and (b) its relationship with the reflexive (Nedjalkov 2007). Reciprocals can be formed by clause doubling, reciprocal pronouns, periphrastic marking, compounding verbs, affixing on the predicate, root reduplication, or clitics. The examples and the preceding description show that Ndendeule forms its reciprocal constructions with an affix on the predicate.

The distinguishing feature of the reciprocal construction in Ndendeule is the verb extension *-an* attached to transitive verbs. The suffix triggers some morphosyntactic features described in this section. Examples of the derivation are in (7).

(7) Examples of reciprocal derivation

a. *liɣa* *liɣana*
'insult' 'insult each other'

b. *lɪpa* *lɪpana*
'pay' 'pay each other'

c. *maɲa* *maɲana*
'know' 'know each other'

d. *leka* *lekana*
'leave (tr)' 'separate, part ways'

There are no variants of the affix. The following two sentences contrast a non-reciprocal (8a) and a reciprocal construction marked by *-an* (8b).

(8) a. *ɓ-ana* *ɓ-i-n-liɣ-a* *tati.*
2-child 2SM-PRS-1OM-insult-FV 1.father
'The children are insulting their father'.

b. *ɓ-ana* *ɓ-i-liɣ-an-a.*
2-child 2SM-PRS-insult-RECP-FV
'The children are insulting each other'.

The verb *liɣa* 'insult' in (8a) is not derived. The sentence contains the subject *ɓana* 'children' and the object *tati* 'father'. Note that there is also an object marker on the verb. In (8b), the suffix *–an* is attached to the verb. The sentence has a subject but no object noun phrase or object marker. The plural subject and the extension *–an* result in a reciprocal reading of at least two children insulting one another.

Another feature is that the reciprocal affix restricts the realization of the subject. For most of the reciprocal constructions, the subject must be one of three forms: (a) a plural subject, as illustrated in (9c), (b) a coordinate subject phrase, as illustrated in (9b), or (c) a singular subject, in which case the verb must be complemented with a comitative *na*-phrase as in (9d).

(9) a. *Mw-ana* *a-ki-ɓa-liɣ-a* *ɓa-ɣeni.*
1-child 1SM-PST-2OM-insult-FV 2-guest
'The child insulted the guests'.

b. *Mw-ana* *na* *ŋ-ɣeni* *ɓa-ki-liɣ-an-a.*
1-child and 1-guest 2SM-PST-insult-RECP-FV
'The child and the guest insulted each other'.

c. *ɓ-andu* *ɓa-ki-liɣ-an-a.*
2-person 2SM-PST-insult-RECP-FV
'People insulted each other'.

d. *Mw-ana* *a-ki-liɣ-an-a* *na* *ŋ-geni.*
1-child 1SM-PST-insult-RECP-FV with 1-guest
'The child and the guest insulted each other'.

In (9d), the singular subject is marked on the verb with the usual subject marker. However, there can be no object marker as in (9b) and (9c).

In some situations, the reciprocal constructions do not exhibit all the abovementioned features. This can be observed in (10).

(10) a. *Mw-ana* *i-yit-an-a* *ma-ci.*
1-child 1SM.PRS-spill-RECP-FV 6-water
'The child is spilling water'.

b. *Abiba* *i-kem-an-a.*
1.Abiba 1SM.PRS-call-RECP-FV
'Abiba is calling out (people)'.

In (10a), the verbal suffix -*an* does not eliminate the object. The subject, in this case, is singular. The child and the water are not in a mutual relationship. The singular subject appears without a comitative phrase in (10b). The situations associated with such forms are described in the following two sections regarding the plurality of relations and antipassive.

The patterns of reciprocal sentence structure are summarized in Table 3.

**TABLE 3.** Patterns of reciprocal sentence structure

| Sentence pattern | Example |
|---|---|
| SBJPL V-an | (9a) |
| SBJ & SBJ V-an | (9b) |
| SBJ V-an OBL | (9c) |
| SBJSG V-an OBJ | (10a) |
| SBJSG V-an | (10b) |

With respect to reciprocal-reflexive relations, Maslova & Nedjalkov (2013) list three types of languages.

a) Languages in which the reciprocal construction is the same as the reflexive construction.
b) Languages in which the reciprocal construction is distinct from the reflexive construction.
c) Languages in which both reflexive-reciprocal and non-reflexive-reciprocal are found.

In Ndendeule, the reciprocal is distinct from the reflexive, as the following examples demonstrate.

(11) a. *βa-ɣeni* *βa-ki-lɪp-an-a.*
2-guest 2SM-PST-pay-RECP-FV
'The guests paid each other'.

b. *βa-ɣeni* *βa-ki-ki-lɪp-a.*
2-guest 2SM-PST-REFL-pay-FV
'The guests paid themselves'.

The verb in (11a) carries the suffix -*an*, marking the reciprocal with a plural subject. On the other hand, the reflexive in (11b) is marked with the prefix *ki*-,

appearing between the tense marker and the stem. Mchombo (2004) presents evidence that the reciprocal is distinct from the reflective in Chichewa, a related Bantu language spoken in Malawi. He argues that the reflexive construction is transitive while the reciprocal construction is intransitive. The reflexive, he argues, expresses an anaphoric argument while the reciprocal derives a different argument structure. The facts in Chichewa are similar to the facts in Ndendeule.

As in Lichtenberk (1985), it is necessary to distinguish between the reciprocal construction and the semantics or situations, not all of which involve reciprocity. The suffix *-an* and its related morphosyntactic features form the reciprocal constructions. The construction expresses various meanings, including the prototypical reciprocal, as well as senses not involving reciprocity. The meanings of the reciprocal constructions are the subject of the following section.

## 4. Plurality of relations

As noted earlier, reciprocal constructions are characterized by polysemy cross-linguistically. The following English sentences show examples of multiple relations, which indicate the type of interpretation or situation the sentence engenders.

(12) English reciprocals (Evans et. al. 2011: 8)
   a. The members of this family love one another [Strong]
   b. The people at the dinner were married to one another [Pairwise]
   c. The graduating students followed one another up onto the stage [Chain]
   d. The teacher and her pupils intimidated one another [Radial]
   e. The drunks in the pub were punching one another [Melee]
   f. The children chased each other around in the ring [Ring]

Relations are considered strong if they minimally involve two participants with the same relation to each other, as in (12a). Reciprocals are also used to express a collection of pairs, each pair in symmetrical relations, as in (12b), in which several married couples exist. In chain relations, participants have two relationships, as one participant follows another and is followed by another (12c). However, the participants at both ends have only one relationship that links them to the chain. Radial reciprocal in (12d) allows for an interpretation in which the teacher intimidates the students, and students intimidate the teacher. Melee reciprocal involves both symmetrical and asymmetrical relations. The fight in the pub (12e) involves many drunks. Some exchange blows, and some may hit people who did not hit them or receive blows from people they did not hit. Ring reciprocals describe situations where each participant exhibits relations with two other participants, such as chasing and being chased (12f).

Such readings are also found in Ndendeule. Using similar situations, the multiplicity of relations can be demonstrated. Ndendeule reciprocal constructions express multiple relations (R) among participants (Lichtenberk 1985). Adapting Lichtenberk (1985) and Dalrymple et. al. (1998), the relations are represented as arrows. Thus, a simple non-reciprocal situation with two participants A and B is in (13).

(13) *Halima* *a-ki-ɓa-lɪp-a* *ɓa-ɣeni.*
Halima 1SM-PST-2OM-pay-FV 2-guest
'Halima paid the guests'.

The situation is represented in this way, with Halima as A and *ɓageni*, 'the guests' as B.

**FIGURE 1.** A simple non-reciprocal situation


The agent, *Halima*, is designated as A, and the theme, *ɓaɣeni* 'guests' is designated as B. The arrow represents the relationship R as *akiɓalɪpa* 'she paid them'.

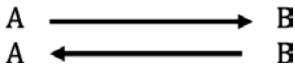
The prototypical reciprocal reading of the reciprocal construction in Ndendeule occurs when participant A does something to B, and B does the same thing to A. In this situation, A stands in relation R to B, and B stands in the same relation R to A (Lichtenberk 1985). This is also described as a mutual relation. Such relations are demonstrated in (14).

(14) a. *Halima* *na* *ɓa-ɣeni* *ɓa-ki-lɪp-an-a.*
1.Halima and 2-guest 2SM-PST-pay-RECP-FV
'Halima and the guests paid each other'.

b. *ɓa-ɣeni* *ɓa-ki-lɪp-an-a.*
2-guest 2SM-PST-pay-RECP-FV
'The guests paid each other'.

This mutual relation can be represented as in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2.** Prototypical reciprocal




(a) Using two arrows


(b) Using one arrow

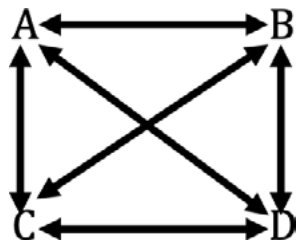
In (14a), the participants are expressed by a coordinate phrase. The participants are subsumed under the plural subject in (14b). Both these sentences are captured by the two-way relation shown in Figure 2.

Mutual reciprocal relations may involve more than two participants if every group member in the situation has a similar relationship with every group member.

(15) *ʙa-ɣeni* *ʙa-ki-lamukil-an-a*.
2-guest 2SM-PST-greet-RECP-FV
'The guests greeted each other'.

If the greeting involves shaking hands, for example, the statement is true of each group member (guest) shaking hands with every person in the situation. This is captured in a simplified diagram below involving only four members.

**FIGURE 3.** Multiple mutual reciprocal




This diagram represents a situation in which four guests arrive at a place where they greet each other.

Another kind of reciprocal situation is known as chaining. According to Lichtenberk (1985; 2000), in a chaining situation, participant A is in R relationship with B. B is in R relationship with C, and C is in R relationship with D. These form a chain in which A and D have only one relation and not two identical relations. Consider children walking along in one line. One can say:

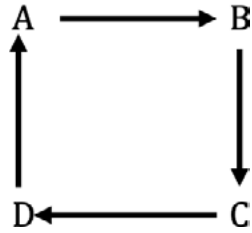
(16) *ʙ-ana* *ʙa-ki-longoh-an-a*.
2-child 2SM-PST-go.ahead-RECP-FV
'The children followed one another'.

This situation is exemplified by Figure 4, in which children follow one another, perhaps in a single file. The first person in this chain does not follow anyone, and no one follows the last person.

**FIGURE 4.** Chain


Not all chains have endpoints with only one relation. Some chains are described as closed (Lichtenberk 1985). In this situation, the participants go in a circle or around, as in Figure 5.

**FIGURE 5.** Ring




A good example is children running around a hut, as in the following sentence.

(17) *ɓ-ana* *ɓa-ki-ɓɪnɣɪth-an-a* *ku-tindir-a* *li-kuta.*
2-child 2SM-PST-chase-RECP-FV INF-go.round-FV 5-hut
'The children chased each other around the hut'.

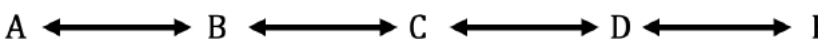
Each child follows someone, and each is followed by another, creating a chain with no open ends.

A chain with open ends may involve mutual relations between the open ends, as shown in the following sentence. A situation in which people hold hands would be expressed as in (18).

(18) *ɓ-ana* *ɓa-ki-kamul-an-a* *ma-ɓoko.*
2-child 2SM-PST-hold-RECP-FV 6-hand
'The children held hands with each other'.

Except for the children at the two ends, A and E, everyone holds hands with two people in the diagram, as represented by Figure 6.

**FIGURE 6.** Open-ended chain




Two or more participants may collectively or together have the same relation with some other participants. Collective situations are cases in which "two or more

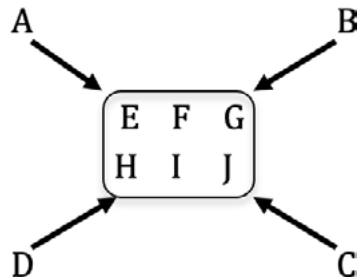
participants are jointly involved in a situation in identical roles" (Lichtenberk 1985:28). For example, boys A, B, C, and D pick mangoes, as in (19).

(19) a. *ɓ-ana* *ɓ-i-lokot-a* *hyembe.*
2-child 2SM-PRS-pick.up-FV 10.mango
'The children are picking up mangoes'.

b. *ɓ-ana* *ɓ-i-lokot-an-a* *hyembe.*
2-child 2SM-PRS-pick.up-RECP-FV 10.mango
'The children are picking up mangoes'.

Notice that in (19b), the relationship is between multiple actors collectively with the mangoes. The children do not have a relationship with the same mangoes. Each child is picking different mangoes. These multiple relations expressed in (19b) can be represented in Figure 7.

**FIGURE 7.** Collective

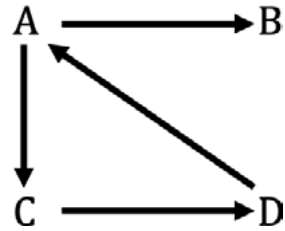



The diagram shows that each of the boys has a relationship with items in the set of mangoes. All relations are directed to the same set. Lichtenberk (1985: 28) suggests that collective situations may be interpreted as involving two roles for each participant. One role is a performer of the activity, and the other is a companion for the other participants involved in the joint activity. In the example of children picking mangoes (19), one role is that of a mango picker, and the other role is that of a co-participant in the mango-picking activity.

Another kind of situation expressed by reciprocal is when, in a group, everyone does not have the same relationship with everyone. For example;

(20) *ɓa-ɣeni* *ɓa-ki-tangat-an-a.*
2-guest 2SM-PST-help-RECP-FV
'The guests helped one another'.

**FIGURE 8.** Melee



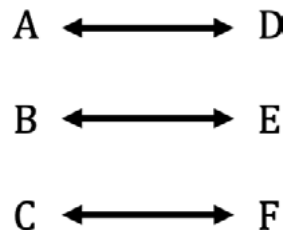

This sentence may describe a situation with four guests: A, B, C, and D. Each is getting help, as represented in Figure 8. A gets help from D but helps B and C. C helps D, and D helps A.

Pairwise reciprocal situations involve pairs engaged in the same relationship. Consider, for example, Nikata's three children, A, B, and C. They were married, but now each is divorced from their spouses.

(21) *ɓ-ana ɓa Nikata ɓ-oha ɓa-lek-ine.*
2-child 2.of Nikata 2-all 2SM-leave-RECP.PRF
'All of Nikata's children are divorced'.

This sentence does not translate as the siblings divorcing each other. But each child was married to someone, and now, each pair is split.

**FIGURE 9.** Pairwise




Three couples, each involving Nikata's child, ended up divorcing, which is expressed in the language as leaving each other.

A reciprocal expression is also possible when A, B, C, and D are grandchildren laughing at their grandmother E, who is also laughing at them.

(22) *mbuya i-hek-an-a na ɓa-cʊkʊlʊ.*
1.grandmother 1SM.PRS-laugh-RECP-FV with 2-grandchild
'The grandmother and the grandchildren are laughing at each other'.

**FIGURE 10.** Radial

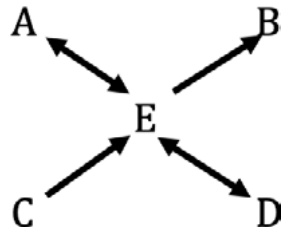



Figure 10 shows the relations. Notice the possibility of some two-way and one-way relations. Grandmother E is laughing at A, B, and D, and A, C, and D are laughing at Grandmother. The laughter revolves around the grandmother as the focal point, but she also laughs at some or all of them.

The reciprocal construction is also used when a participant engages in multiple iterations of an event or relationship. We can think of the participant as A; at the other end, there may be B, C, D, etc. Consider, for example, a situation in which Halima is picking mangoes. That means she is repeating the action with different mangoes.

(23) a. *Halima* *i-lokot-an-a* *hyembe*.
1.Halima 1SM.PRS-pick-RECP-FV 10.mango
'Halima is picking up mangoes'.

b. *Mpwanga* *i-liɣ-an-a.*
1.Mpwanga 1SM.PRS-insult-RECP-FV
'Mpwanga is insulting people'.

c. *ɓ-ana* *ɓ-i-yit-an-a* *ma-chi.*
2-child 2SM-PRS-spill-RECP-FV 6-water
'The children are carelessly spilling water'.

We can think of each instance of picking a mango as a relationship R. Repeatedly picking mangoes results in the iteration of the Rs.

**FIGURE 11.** Iteration

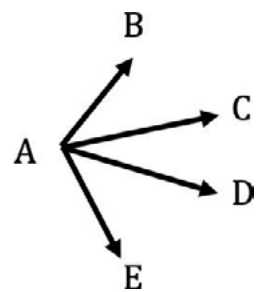


Figure 11 captures (23) in which some implicit participants are the targets of the insults in (23b). This kind of iteration is also common for actions done carelessly or in (23c).

To sum up, the verb extension *-an* creates several possible interpretations, including prototypical reciprocal and iterative actions. Not all interpretations involve mutual relations or actions. What is clear, however, is that like reciprocal constructions in other languages of the world (Dalrymple et al. 1998; Evans et al. 2011; Lichtenberk 1985), the reciprocal construction in Ndendeule is associated with multiple relations actions. In Bantu languages, one of the iterations has been identified as the antipassive, to which we now turn.

## 5. Antipassive

The antipassive is a construction in which the logical object of a transitive verb is suppressed or demoted (Aldridge 2012; Dixon 2000). An example of the antipassive from West Greenlandic Eskimo illustrates such a demotion.

(24) West Greenlandic Eskimo (Bittner 1987: 194)

a. *Jaaku-p* *ujarak* *tigu-a-a.*
Jacob-ERG stone.ABS take-TR.INDIC-3SG
'Jacob took the stone'.

b. *Jaaku* *ujarak-mik* *tigu-si-vu-q.*
Jacob.ABS stone-INST take-AP-INTR.INDIC-3SG
'Jacob took stone'.

Sentence (24a) is based on the verb *tigu* 'take,' which is marked as transitive. The two arguments of the verb are *Jaakup* 'Jacob,' the agent with the ergative case *-p*, and the *ujurak* 'stone' in the absolutive case. In (24b), however, the agent *Jaaku* 'Jacob' appears in the absolutive case, while the internal argument *ujarakmik* 'stone' is marked with the instrumental case *-mik*. Therefore, the verb in this sentence is marked with an antipassive suffix *-si* and an intransitive marker *-vu*.

Early studies on the antipassive since Silverstein (1972) associated the phenomenon with ergative languages, particularly in the Americas, Australia, and Asia (Dixon 2000; Dixon & Aikhenvald 2000). However, studies on grammatical function-changing morphology in languages of the world have revealed that the core characteristics of antipassives are attested more widely, even in accusative languages (Bostoen et al. 2015; Ndayiragije 2006; Polinsky 2013; 2017). Bos-

toen et al. (2015) provide a comprehensive study of the construction in Bantu languages and note that it is rarely described as an antipassive.

Consider the core characteristics of the antipassive. Following the designations of the subject of a transitive sentence as A, the subject of an intransitive sentence as S, and O for the internal argument (Dixon 2000), Dixon & Aikhenvald (2000: 9) identify the criteria for prototypical antipassives as:

a) Antipassive applies to an underlying transitive clause and forms a derived intransitive.
b) The underlying A becomes S of the antipassive.
c) The underlying O argument goes into a peripheral function, being marked by a non-core case, adposition, etc.; this argument can be omitted, although it can always be included.
d) There is some explicit formal marking of an antipassive construction (same basic possibilities as for passive).

In ergative languages, A is marked with ergative case, and S is marked as absolutive, just as O is absolutive.

The first characteristic is that antipassive operation applies to transitive verbs. This is indeed the case for the *-an* constructions in Ndendeule. The affix attaches to transitive verbs. The second feature is the presence of an intransitivizing or valency-reducing affix. As described earlier, the suffix *-an* attaches to transitive verbs to derive verbs that are one argument less. The third feature, the suppression of the object, is accomplished in two ways: eliminating the object and optionally placing the base object in an oblique phrase. Total elimination is demonstrated in the examples in (25) below.

(25) a. *kɔngʊ* *Mice* *i-kamul-an-a.*
Here 1.Mice 1SM.PRS-hold-RECP-FV
'Here Miche is holding (others)'.

b. *Mwajuma* *i-kom-an-a.*
1.Mwajuma 1SM.PRS-hit-RECP-FV
'Mwajuma is fighting'.

c. *Mbuya* *a-ki-yim-an-a* *hyembe.*
1.grandmother 1SM-PST-withhold-RECP-FV 10.mango
'Grandmother is denying (people) mangoes'.

These three sentences with *-an* derivation are characterized by the lack of one defining feature of prototypical reciprocals, namely, plural or coordinate subjects. Sentences (25a) and (25b) have only the subject, while the

ditransitive verb in (25c) lacks the indirect object. Therefore, one object is suppressed.

Notice that it is possible to have a singular subject with no comitative phrase anywhere in the sentence in these examples. The examples also show that the suffix removes an object from the structure, just like in the reciprocal reading. For example, when a child reports or complains uttering the sentence in (25a), we know Miche is holding others he is playing with or who are with him, most likely against their will. These examples show that the subject need not be plural, nor need there be a post-verbal object.

The object marker is a reliable test of objecthood. The object in *-an* constructions is suppressed by introducing it as an oblique object. When it is introduced in this way, it cannot be marked on the verb. It is suppressed. This is demonstrated in (26).

(26) a. *Mwajuma i-tangat-an-a na ɓ-ana.*
1.Mwajuma 1SM.PRS-help-RECP-FV with 2-child
'Mwajuma and the children are helping each other'.

b. **Mwajuma i-ɓa-tangat-an-a na ɓ-ana.*
1.Mwajuma 1SM.PRS-2OM-help-RECP-FV with 2-child
'Mwajuma and the children are helping each other'.

The oblique object *ɓana* 'children' cannot be object-marked on the verb, as (26b) shows.

The third characteristic of the antipassive construction is an indefinite reading of the object. The suppression of the base object may not always result in the complete elimination of the object. The object phrase may appear with an indefinite reading, as in (27).

(27) a. *Kamwali a-ki-pɪngul-an-a mi-kongo.*
1.girl 1SM-PST-cut-RECP-FV 4-tree
'The girl cut trees'.

b. *ɓa-chʊkʊlʊ ɓ-i-tek-an-a u-ɣɪmbɪ.*
2-grandchild 2SM-PRS-scoop-RECP-FV 14-beer
'The grandchildren are carelessly scooping beer'.

The arguments of the base *pɪngula* 'cut down' are the agent *kamwali* 'girl' and the theme *mikongo* 'trees'. However, the second argument is non-specific in the derived verb in (27a). Therefore, the reciprocal cannot possibly involve binding

the agent and theme. The same can be said for (27b), where the theme *uɣɪmbɪ* 'beer' receives a very non-specific reading and is not bound by *βachɔkɔlɔ* 'grandchildren'.

A summary of the comparison of the antipassive in ergative languages and the antipassive features of the reciprocal in Ndendeule, an accusative language, is presented in Table 4.

**TABLE 4.** A comparison of antipassive and Ndendeule reciprocal

| | **Antipassive in ergative languages** | **Ndendeule reciprocal** |
|---|---|---|
| Morphology | Antipassive or intransitive morpheme | *-an* suffix |
| Base transitivity | Transitive base | Transitive base |
| Object | Base object becomes peripheral | Base object becomes peripheral or is eliminated |
| Subject | Base subject is marked with case of subject of intransitive | Subject is marked the same in transitive and intransitive |

The table shows that, except for subject case marking, some Ndendeule -an constructions (also known as reciprocal constructions) exhibit the same features as antipassive in ergative languages with respect to morphology, transitivity, and treatment of the base object.

## 6. Co-occurrence with other extensions

Another essential feature of the reciprocal is its co-occurrence with other verb extensions. This section only explores the position of *-an* relative to other verb extensions.

Hyman (2002) proposes a pan-Bantu order of the verb extensions as causative-applicative-reciprocal-passive (CARP). The reciprocal appears after causative and applicative. The data in Ndendeule contains cases that are not consistent with this template. There are three extensions that the reciprocal *–an* can precede, namely, causative, applicative, and stative. The examples in (28) illustrate this.

(28) a. *-an-ih* RECP-CAUS
b. *-an-il* RECP-APPL
c. *-an-ik* RECP-STAT

The reversive is the only productive verb extension that cannot appear after the reciprocal -*an*. The post -*an* occurrences are illustrated in the following sentences.

(29) a. *ɓa-ki-kung-an-ih-a* *mbuhi.*
2SM-PST-headbutt-RECP-CAUS-FV 10.goat
'They made goats headbutt each other'.

b. *ɓa-ki-kem-an-il-a* *mi-halo.*
2SM-PST-call-RECP-APPL-FV 4-issue
'They called each other (to discuss) the issues'

c. *ɓ-andu* *ɓa-ki-kong-an-ik-a.*
2-person 2SM-PST-meet-RECP-STAT-FV
'People met'.

The examples show that the extension -*an* can appear before the causative (29b), applicative (29c), and stative (29d). The reversive and the stative cannot be added to a reciprocal, as (29a) shows. There is no passive voice in the language.

The reciprocal may appear after reversive, impositive, causative, applicative, and stative.

(30) a. *ɓa-ki-hyɪk-ul-an-a.*
2SM-PST-cover-REV-RECP-FV
'They exposed each other'.

b. *ɓa-ki-hom-ek-an-a* *mambo* *pa-lu-ɓanja.*
2SM-PST-stick-IMPS-RECP-FV 10. peg 16-11-ground
'They stuck pegs all over the ground'.

c. *ɓa-ki-kung-ih-an-a* *mbuhi.*
2SM-PST-headbutt-CAUS-RECP-FV 10.goat
'They caused each other to be headbutted by goats'.

d. *ɓa-ki-let-el-an-a* *u-lahi.*
2SM-PST-bring-APPL-RECP-FV 14-bamboo.wine
'They brought bamboo wine to each other'.

e. *Ma-chi* *ɣ-i-yit-ik-an-a.*
6-water 6SM-PRS-spill-STAT-RECP-FV
'Water is spilling all over'.

These examples represent reciprocalized forms of the extended verbs. They show the following pairwise combinations.

(31) a. REV-RECP
b. IMPS-RECP
c. CAUS-RECP
d. APPL-RECP
e. STAT-RECP

As pointed out, several cases of using *-an* with other extensions do not always result in the compositional meaning of the verbs they derive. Nevertheless, they are covered in the different situations that were described earlier as multiple relations. It is quite possible that the different reciprocal situations described earlier may give rise to different permutations of the extensions.

In summary, the extension *-an* cannot precede the reversive. But it can appear after any extension, including non-valency-changing ones. This calls for more research on other languages and research to account for the co-occurrences.

## 7. Conclusion

The article set out to describe constructions characterized by the verb extension *-an* in Ndendeule. This is commonly known as the reciprocal extension and marks reciprocal construction. The reciprocal marking strategy in the language is the verbal extension *-an* attached to transitive verbs. The construction is used to express different situations and relations. They include prototypical mutual relations, chain, collective, ring, radial, melee, pairwise, and iteration. Some of the situations do not involve mutual relations or reciprocity. However, all situations express a plurality of relations. This is consistent with findings in cross-linguistic studies of reciprocal constructions (Chavula 2020; Dalrymple et al. 1998; Dixon 2000; Evans et al. 2011; Lichtenberk 1985; Nedjalkov 2007).

This article also explored the reciprocal construction in Ndendeule and its antipassive features. It demonstrated that the reciprocal in Ndendeule, an accusative language, exhibits three characteristics of antipassive associated with ergative language: (a) there is a verbal suffix *-an* that is attached to transitive verbs making the verb intransitive; (b) the derivation demotes the base object to either oblique or peripheral object; (c) and the base object receives a non-specific or non-definite reading. The findings about the antipassive in this accusative language are consistent with what has been suggested by others, such as Aldridge (2012), Bostoen et al. (2015), and Ndayiragije (2006). Furthermore, it comports with Ndayiragije's suggestion that ergativity is not a central feature of antipassive.

The reciprocal suffix can co-occur with other verb extensions. It can appear before the causative, applicative, and stative extensions. But it cannot precede the reversive. Any verb extension in Ndendeule may precede the reciprocal. This shows that there are alternative affix orders associated with different meanings. This is inconsistent with the Pan-Bantu verb extension template that Hyman (2002) observed in many Bantu languages. This calls for further investigation into constraints on the order of verb extensions.

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## Abbreviations

ABS = Absolutive
AP = Antipassive
APPL = Applicative
CAUS = Causative
COMP = Complementizer
ERG = Ergative
EXT = Extension
FV = Final vowel
IMPS = Impositive
INDIC = Indicative
INF = Infinitive
INST = Instrumental
INTR = Intransitive
NEG = Negation
OBJ = Object
OBL = Oblique
OM = Object marker
PRF = Perfect aspect
PRS = Present tense
PST = Past tense
RECP = Reciprocal
REL = Relative marker
REV = Reversive
SBJ = Subject
SM = Subject marker
STAT = Stative
TNS = Tense
TR = Transitive

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**Afsat Sanni-Suleiman**
University of Ilorin, Nigeria
Department of French
ORCID: 0000-0003-1994-0783

# The development of literacy in indigenous languages in West African francophone countries: challenges and expectations

## Abstract

The French style of governance during colonization was "assimilation". It made French the only medium of instruction and communication in schools, thus annihilating African languages and cultures. Francophone African countries are now struggling to include their indigenous languages into the school curriculum. This article examines the challenges faced by francophone countries like the Benin Republic, in their quest to elevate the status of indigenous languages. It submits that indigenous languages should be promoted alongside the official language for better understanding and national development. The article concludes that the revival of indigenous languages in schools' curriculum is key to African technological development.

**Keywords:** assimilation policy, mother tongue education, francophone African countries, West Africa, Benin

## 1. Introduction

Language education in Africa is tied to the colonial system of education. This is because, in Africa, formal education has its root in colonization. As a result, African children are educated predominantly through the medium of languages

of their past colonial masters that is, English, French or Portuguese, as the case may be.

However, it has been noted that the British colonial masters were more tolerant in their educational policy approach than their counterpart in France. The former allowed the indigenous languages of the colonized to be integrated in their educational system. That is, they always made sure that pupils did not lose contact with their mother tongue (M.T.) or the language of the immediate environment, in the first years of formal education, unlike the French who imposed their language on their subjects throughout the whole process of their education. Referring to the two policies, Bamgbose (1983: 57) asserts that:

> The most important factor to be considered in this choice was the ultimate goal of the colonial power. Basically, there were two apparently divergent goals: assimilation and separate development. The former envisages bringing the colonial subjects to a reasonable educational level so that they may be absorbed into the culture of the colonizing power. This inevitably meant education in the colonial language. The latter envisages giving the colonial subjects free scope to develop in their own way outside the culture of the colonizing power. This meant education in their own language.

Thus, while the French favored assimilation, thereby "negating" the African culture and civilization, the British acknowledged them. Today, more than sixty years after independence, the French language policy has still maintained its status quo, subjecting indigenous languages to be absent in the school curriculum of many francophone countries. After many years of independence, francophone African countries did not make an effort to change the situation. Cultural alienation then took the stage, relegating African languages to the background in their own countries. Not so long ago, francophone African countries saw the need to change the narrative. The struggle to integrate indigenous languages in the school curriculum started, but to date it is still at the teething level, despite the fact that specialists in educational psychology, cognitive psychology, and second language acquisition advocate for mother tongue instruction in the early years for a stronger foundation for learning.

The main objective of this study is therefore to investigate the efforts made by some francophone countries, with special reference to the Republic of Benin, to introduce indigenous languages in their educational system.

## 2. Colonial education in West Africa

The history of education in Africa can be roughly divided into pre-colonial and post-colonial periods since the introduction of formal education in Africa by European colonists, particularly in the West African francophone regions.

### 2.1. The pre-colonisation period

During the precolonial period white traders landed in Africa, and used their languages to trade with Africans. Mutual understanding was possible through the work of interpreters trained for this purpose. At that time, the relationship between European languages and African languages was based in a way on the principle of peaceful coexistence. Agboton (1998: 24) informed us for example that Guézo, one of the greatest kings of Abomey, signed a treaty of commerce and friendship with France in 1851. The kingdom of Porto-Novo also signed a treaty with France in 1863 and renewed it in 1883 to protect itself against the English. Gradually the French language was introduced to the coast of Africa through European explorers in search of new markets and raw materials for the development of their industries. They were followed a few years later by Catholic and Protestant missionaries engaged in a mission of evangelization. It was therefore necessary to train interpreters for these religious goals, hence the establishment of schools. Teaching at that time was the exclusive work of the missionaries.

### 2.2. The colonisation period

With colonisation, teaching took another form, especially in francophone countries. It was now necessary to train workers/laborers on the spot to accelerate the exploitation of local resources. It should therefore be emphasised that the multiplication of schools did not have the primary role of literacy for Africans, but rather for developing the industry of the metropolis. Secular schools were created after the vote in France in 1886 of the law on secularisation. The secular schools first known as regimental schools were intended to train subordinates who would serve in the colonial administration. They were renowned for the brutality of their teaching. Mother tongues were banned from school premises to make way for French. Due to lack of methods, French was taught as a mother tongue and teachers resorted to powerful means of coercion, including punishment. The two types of schools (religious and secular) collaborated peacefully until the colonial administration decided to submit all missionary schools to its diktat to develop more secular education. With the creation of secular schools, French

language became an end to itself and not a simple means of communication, thus a decision had to be taken on the language of instruction. To resolve the problem created by the "cacophony" of the protectorates, it was decreed that all teaching be giving only in French in religious schools. That decree was later on supported by *L'arrêté No. 806 du 24 novembre 1903 signé par le Gouverneur Général Roumé qui institua l'école et organisa le service de l'enseignement dans les colonies de l'Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF*), Journal Officiel du Sénégal Dépendance no 153, cited by Tossou (2006: 10). Any violation of this law was severely penalised. The educational programmes as well as the school structure were gradually conforming to those of the metropolis. Direct method was used in teaching, that is French language was taught as a mother tongue language and teachers went to great lengths to enforce it. Latin and Greek that are referred to as "dead languages" today, were taught in secondary schools for good mastery of the French language. Henceforth, French as the official language was imposed on in francophone schools to the detriment of the indigenous languages, the use of which was considered to be barbaric. One of the means used to establish the hegemony of the use of French in Africa of which Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) is an example, is the famous symbol, which prevents students from expressing themselves in their M.T.

Obsessed by their assimilation mission in reinforcing French "superiority" over the indigenous languages, the French colonists also used the symbolic punishment of tying a wooden stick, monkey head or seashell around the neck of pupils who were caught speaking their mother tongue at the school premises. Thus, the use of the languages of the environment was almost forbidden in schools. This linguistic policy of the French colonies which prohibited the use of African languages at school ended up convincing the African elites of the inferiority of their tongues. This had no other consequences than the cultural alienation of the African people. French enjoyed this privileged position for a long time because it was the language of the coloniser, the "civilised" one who held all the knowledge. This situation continued until independence. Colonial schools continued to perpetrate the ideology of the old guardian power, because it was believed that indigenous languages could not cater for the technology advancement of Africa.

## 2.3. The post-colonial period

After independence, English and French continued to play a leading role in all African societies with the exception of a few countries such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Somalia and Soudan, which opted for a language of the country

as their official language. This is also the case for Kirundi in Burundi and Kinyarwanda in Rwanda. But the fact still remains that these languages work side by side with the languages of the former colonial masters. The difference is that they are recognised as official languages in the same way as English or French. Nevertheless, some French-speaking countries have experienced education in indigenous languages, if only for a short time. Gaucher (1966: 68) asserts that "*la première expérience de l'enseignement en langue africaine a eu lieu au Sénégal, à l'école wolof-française*" ('first experience of teaching in an African language took place in Senegal, at Wolof-French school'). Also, in the Republic of Guinée, Diallo (2002: 8) confirms that:

*L'indépendance en 1968 s'est accompagnée d'une volonté de rupture linguistique et culturelle avec la France traduite par une marginalisation du français dans l'enseignement et par une importance remarquable accordée aux langues nationales dans différents domaines (…). C'est ainsi que les langues nationales ont été introduites dans une première phase comme langue d'alphabétisation, puis comme matières enseignées dans tout le cursus scolaire et, à partir de 1968 date du lancement de la Révolution Culturelle Socialiste, comme médium de l'enseignement*.

'Independence in 1968 was followed by a linguistic and cultural rupture with France, which translated into the marginalisation of French in education and by the remarkable importance accorded to national languages in various fields. That was how the national languages were introduced in the first stage as a language of literacy, then as subjects taught in the school curriculum, and from 1968, when the Socialist Revolution was launched, as a medium of instruction' [our translation].

However, everything changed with the fall of the Revolutionary Government in 1984.

## 3. Sociolinguistic situations in the Republic of Benin

The Republic of Benin, a French- speaking West African country, borders Burkina Faso to the northwest, Niger to the northeast, Nigeria to the east and Togo to the west. Studying the sociolinguistic situation of the Republic of Benin means taking a close look at its different ethnolinguistic groups and establishing which social group speaks which language, in what situations and for what purpose.

There are over 68 languages spoken in Benin as reported by the 2013 Census of Population and Housing. These various groups settled in the country at different times. The ethnic groups include the Yoruba in the southeast (they migrated from Nigeria in the 12$^{th}$ century); the Dendi in the north-central area (they came from Mali in the 16$^{th}$ century); the Bariba and the Fula in the northeast; the Ottamari in the Atakora mountains; the Fon in the south-central area; and

the Mina, Xueda and Aja from the coast of Togo. Of these languages, we have the Gbe group comprising Fongbe, Adjagbe, Gengbe, etc.; and the Ede group with Ede Yoruba, Ede Ica, Ede Idaaca, and Ede Ife. Both groups (Gbe and Ede) are the prominent languages in the south of the country, where urban populations are concentrated. In the north, there are quite a number of languages (at least six) that are also regionally important, that is the Gur group comprising Baatonum, Biali, Dendi, Fulfulde, and Yom. However, Fon stands out among these numerous indigenous languages as it is the most widely spoken. All these languages have the status of national languages, because each of them plays vital roles in their various communities. They are first spoken in the families and used as lingua franca among different ethnic groups. Their use, mostly in informal contexts, enhances ethnic solidarity, social integration, and linguistic and cultural efficiency in communication. It is noteworthy that indigenous languages are widely spoken in Benin, but they are not used for literacy in schools, despite the fact that some of them (Fon, Batonum, Goun, Dendi, Yoruba) have orthographies that have been codified. Nevertheless, they are periodically updated by the Ministry for Literacy and Promotion of National Languages (*Ministère de l'alphabétisation et de la promotion des langues nationales*).

On the other hand, the presence of French as the country's official language is a direct consequence of colonisation. French is used as a medium of instruction at all levels of education and as the language of administration, the judiciary, technology, research and documentation.

Thus, it occupies a privileged position despite the multitude of languages that exist in those communities. Therefore, apart from the elites who introduce French to their children from childhood, many people be it in rural or urban areas do not speak the official language. This creates a serious problem to the children of the common men who are faced with the French language from the first day in school. They are cut off abruptly from their mother tongue, the languages of their immediate environment and, subsequently, from their culture, making them feel disoriented in their own community. For many children this often impacts negatively on their entire education, leading to poor performance and high rates of drop-out. The leadership of the country saw the problem and tried to change the situation.

Therefore, in 1972, with the advent of the military revolutionary regime of October 26, the political discourse on colonial languages completely changed. The new regime put a special emphasis on the revaluation of national languages, to the point that French felt strongly threatened. It was a new dawn for the Beninese system of education with the creation of *L'École Nouvelle*, i.e. 'The New

School'. *L'École Nouvelle* must be free from all forms of foreign domination and cultural alienation. Article 7 of the new programme emphasises that:

*Les langues nationales doivent être introduites progressivement dans l'enseignement, d'abord comme des matières d'enseignement au même titre que les autres disciplines, ensuite comme véhicule du savoir.*

'Indigenous languages must be introduced gradually into the education system, first as subjects in the same way as other disciplines, then as vehicles of knowledge' [our translation].

That was how the French language, a real tool of cultural alienation, shifted from the official language to the working language in the Republic of Benin.

To be effective, this revaluation of national languages called for a number of provisions, some of which Dakpogon (2008: 4) lists as follows:

- The creation of the Directorate of Literacy and Local Press, the Ministry of Literacy, divided into regional Directorates;
- The creation of newspapers in national languages with the aid of Swiss cooperation;
- The creation of child awakening and stimulation centres; they are the real nursery schools where children between the ages of 3 to 5 years immerse in their M.T. intended pursuant to legal provisions to become a real tool for learning;
- The translation of the fundamental law into local languages;
- The election to the Revolutionary National Assembly (Parliament) of Illiterates and the use of local languages in the Parliament;
- The creation of the Beninese Association of Writers in national languages;
- The establishment of *Université Nationale du Bénin* which became *Université d'Abomey-Calavi*; the Department of Literary and Linguistic Studies successively changed into the Department of Literary Studies and Oral Tradition, then later to the Department of Language and Communication Sciences.
- A ban on broadcasting European songs on national radio for native songs to strive. These measures encouraged the promotion of new musical bands which sprung up with many songs in local languages [our translation].

Furthermore, Beninese students were no longer sent to francophone countries to further their education. They were rather sent to the East, to countries like China, Cuba, North Korea, Canada, the United States, Germany, etc., to break with the French domination and above all to avoid the harassment from the French people in their land. Beninese first names were also more popular than French names. Mention should also be made to the effort made by the

government with the help of national and foreign partners to translate some fundamental texts (constitution, electoral laws, etc.) into key Beninese languages.

The rehabilitation of national languages is also reinforced by programmes in local languages on the national broadcasting channel on hygiene, health, and advice to farmers. The consequence of these sulks towards French is none other than the reduction in the prestige that people conferred on it.

With the Revolutionary Regime, therefore, the status of indigenous languages was enhanced. The French language and the Beninese languages were used alternatively either in administrative functions, at schools or even in offices.

As earlier said, the Catholic and Protestant missionaries used indigenous languages to teach during colonisation, before the promulgation of secularism. Actually, in order to spread the gospel, the Methodists had taught the people of Porto-Novo in Gungbe and those of Save and Dassa in Yoruba. The missionaries of the Sudan Interior Mission also taught in Yom, Baatonum, Busa, Dompago, Boko, and Fulani in the north. In line with the programme of alphabetisation, some foreign companies settled in the country also took part in that mission of literacy. That is the case of a French textile company that left its traces in Borgou, in the north east of the country where a good number of cotton producers had been literate in Baatonum. The success of this experiment favoured its application in other languages like Fon and Yoruba for the benefit of oil palm producers in the central and southern regions during the period. In the same vein, SONADER (*Société Nationale du Développement Rural*, 'National Society for Rural Development'), opted to "… give the peasant the intellectual and technical means to be able to follow all the financial operations linked to their productions" (original: *donner aux paysans producteurs, les moyens intellectuels et techniques de pouvoir suivre toutes les opérations financières liées à leurs productions* (Hazoumè 1994: 25). The activities of this literacy were limited only to reading, writing and arithmetic. Those experiences, the aim of which was to teach the cooperators how to read and write, had enabled them to ensure and take part with more confidence and responsibility in the sale and purchase of agricultural products. Kounouho (2005: 35) informes us that:

*…sur l'initiative conjointe des élèves et des enseignants, une expérience débuta en 1970 au lycée Mathieu Bouké de Parakou sous forme de causerie en fon, en dendi et en baatonu. Elle s'étendit au Lycée Béhanzin de Porto-Novo où trois langues ont été introduites de 1970 à 1975.*

'…on joint initiative of students and teachers, an experiment began in 1970 at the Mathieu Bouké High School in Parakou in the form of a chat in Dendi and Baatonum. It extended

to the Béhanzin High School in Porto-Novo where three languages were introduced from 1970 to 1975' [our translation].

Those languages were Fon, Dendi and Baatonum, and according to Yai (1976: 70):

*[Ces cours] avaient lieu deux fois par semaine le jeudi et le samedi et constituaient en exercices de transcription des langues, des contes, des interprétations de proverbes, des conversations ayant trait à la vie de tous les jours. Seuls les cours de yoruba comportaient la littérature et l'histoire du peuple yoruba*.

'These courses took place twice a week on Thursday and Saturday and consisted of exercises in the transcription of languages, tales, proverbs, conversations having a bearing on everyday life. Only Yoruba lessons included literature and history' [our translation].

If Yoruba lessons included literature, the honour goes to the many works done by Nigerians in the field. Unfortunately, that initiative which was not officially supported by the government was only for a short duration. The lack of required manuals, qualified teachers in Fongbe, Dendi and Baatonum, the absence of methodology and especially the scarcity of funds are the causes of the failure of that experiment. However, several newspapers emerged in the regions and even in the villages which were predominantly educational; they addressed issues of health education, agricultural extension and population. Thus, we will say that despite the efforts made by the Beninese government to give literacy to the majority of the population in five years, the results were unsatisfactory. But it is evident that the revolutionary period visibly contributed more to literacy and focus on linguistic issues than any other period. At least the populace was made to appreciate their own language in a more valuable way.

## 4. Mother tongue education: a conceptual framework

Mother tongue (M.T.) is the language the child begins to learn from birth, it is actually the language the child is exposed to even before he begins to speak. That is why it is also referred to as the first language or native language. Thus, mother tongue plays a crucial role in our lives, it is the dominant language which actually determines a person's thoughts. In fact, as early as 1800, mission educators in colonial Africa, especially in the anglophone axes, were convinced that indigenous languages were key to effective learning. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953).

Several other studies over the years (Cummins, 2000; Benson, 2002; Kosonen, 2005; King & Mackey, 2007; Bamgbose, 2011) have proven that learning in one's M.T. at a younger age better prepares one for education success. UNESCO (1953: 46) defines mother tongue as "the language which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication". Mother tongue instruction refers to "the application of the learners' native language as the medium of instruction in the teaching and learning process" (Nadela-Gradeda et al. 2022: 5208). This is usually the language that children speak at home or the language of the immediate environment. Most African children are bilingual before they start going to school; they speak their mother tongue at home in family and the dominant language spoken in their environment. So more often than not the language of instruction which is the language of the former colonial master becomes the second or third language to them. Right from its declaration in 1953, UNESCO stipulated the advantages of M.T. education, which is supported by many more researchers like Hovens 2002; UNESCO Bangkok 2005; Cummins 2001, to mention but a few. They all attest that having a stronger mother tongue foundation leads to a much better understanding of the curriculum as well as a more positive attitude towards school, whereby it is important that children maintain their first language when they begin schooling in a foreign language. The denial of it may cause a setback in their education pursuit, as they are likely to drop out of school at an early age or they might need to repeat their classes. This setback can make them lose confidence in themselves, and thus affect their personality, because they will continuously see themselves as failures in the society. It has also been confirmed that cognitive development as well as intellectual improvement is relatively faster in those who are fluent in their M.T. If a student is educated in their mother tongue, the proportion of their educational achievement is greater than someone's who is taught in a medium different from their mother tongue (Nishanthi 2020; Cummins 2000; Bialystok 2001). UNESCO (1953: 11) from its findings declared that:

> It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar medium.

The use of M.T. as a means of instruction in schools is therefore imperative for the child's successful growth. If the language of instruction is the child's M.T., parents at home will also be part of his learning by following his progress

in school and helping him in his assignments. The child will feel more protected and will have a better understanding of his culture.

Researchers have also confirmed that multilingualism which was first seen to have negative influence on children's learning is rather an asset to their intellectual development (Baker 2020; Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). According to Cummins (2001: 17):

> When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the way in which their two languages organize reality.

The advantages of using a mother tongue as a medium of instruction are so numerous that one wonders why African countries still continue to stick to the system of education inherited from the colonial powers.

## 5. Attitudes of African elites

After independence, the minority elites who knew how to read and write, continued with the colonial system of education, thus perpetuating the assimilation concept left by the colonial master. They did not see the need to change the narrative because of their selfish interest. They were the new "bourgeois" that had access to power, and this was kept jealously. Imperialism set in which further led to the deterioration of education and socio-economic challenges.

African leaders maintained the status quo of the indigenous languages as left by colonial masters by further relegating it to the background. French became the first language of their children at home to the detriment of any other language that might have been that of the parents, because they want them to excel in school. Let us be reminded that first language/M.T. is the language that should first be introduced to children in the first three years of their schooling.

Furthermore, African elites prefer to interact more in the western languages than in their mother tongue. They even believe that European languages are the only languages that can develop their intellectual capacity that will lead them to the corridor of power and the world of technology.

All these attitudes led to the inequality of education in Africa. Majority of African children are not educated, because it is not made attractive to them due to the medium of instruction (French) that is alien to them.

## 6. Implementing indigenous language education in the francophone community

The role of African languages has been hotly debated for decades, and the debate continues to date. Conferences of scholars, educational practitioners and government ministers continue to examine and re-examine the arguments in favour of the pedagogical importance of using a child's own mother tongue as the medium of instruction, at least in the early years of formal schooling (UNESCO 1953, 2003). New policies, structures, programmes, trainings, philosophies, etc. have been promulgated, but the obstacle to its acceptance and implementation is enormous.

However, in recent years, some countries like Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger have embarked on pilot projects involving the use of indigenous languages in education at the early stage of schooling. The mere mention of such projects instantly brings to memory the Six-Years Primary Project experimented by Fafunwa in the 1970s. The project was a practical implementation of what was advocated by UNESCO, that is using students' native language to teach all subjects throughout the duration of programme, while offering English language as a subject. Not only was the project successful, it also justified the claims of UNESCO (1953; 2003a; 2003b). Students who were taught in their native language performed better than those who had English as their medium of instruction, even in English as a subject. Years later, in 1994, a similar project was introduced in Burkina Faso where about eight indigenous languages were selected to be used as a medium of instruction in primary schools, with French language as a subject. The pilot project also recorded an amazing result. Bamgbose (2011: 9) informs us that:

> The primary school certificate examination has shown an overwhelming superior performance by the children in the project schools as compared with the children taught only in French. For example, in the 2004 examination, children in the project schools recorded a success rate of 94.59% as compared with the national average success rate of 73.73%, giving a clear superiority rate of 20.86%.

That is another testimony to the importance of literacy in M.T.

In the Republic of Benin, in 2003, assessment of teaching in some of the states' primary education revealed that majority of pupils could neither write, nor read or speak the French language correctly. Gaye (2003: 4) confirmed the United States agency for International Development USAID (2003) to have reported that "fewer than 10% of children can speak, read and write French at the levels

expected in Nouveaux Programmes d'Etudes (NPE) materials in CI and CP. We noted also that students in CE1 encounter similar difficulties in French, where about 20 per cent operate at required levels of mastering". Due to that disturbing situation, the Government enacted Act n° 2003-17 known as Orientation Law of National Education. This Law, along with subsequent policies, was crucial in shaping education reforms in the country. The Law also stipulates gradual inclusion of indigenous languages into teaching. It is, however, pertinent to note that, despite the constant mention of the introduction of indigenous languages into the system of education, its full implementation is yet to see the light of the day. To date, instruction in indigenous languages did not go beyond the premises of the pre-primary school level.

The Republic of Niger is not left out in the curriculum reform experiment with the creation of bilingual schools in three different regions in the country (Agadès, Tilabéry and Zinder) where three native languages, namely Arabic, Hausa and Zarma, are used for instruction. A new Ministry of Education was created for the purpose - *Ministère de l'enseignement primaire de l'alphabétisation et la langue maternelle*. The results are also impressive as "studies comparing students' performance in traditional (francophone) schools, Franco-Arabic schools and bilingual schools (where students learn in their mother tongue and French), found that bilingual schools ranked highest while French speaking ranked last", according to the Global Partnership for Education as reported by Hassan (2023). It should, however, be noted that French has not been excluded from the school curriculum; rather, it is being introduced gradually. That is another score for the literacy in indigenous language.

Cameroon started the same project in the nineties, but today the project is a shadow of itself. According to Chiatoh (2014), because Cameroon is "…faced with about 250 languages, governments have been rather too cautious with decision-making concerning indigenous language-based multilingual education and therefore cannot adequately address indigenous language promotion needs". This explains that the languages of the colonial master are still very much dominant.

Côte d'Ivoire is one of the francophone countries that maintained a strict French policy in education. French language is so deeply rooted in the daily life of the citizens that a local variety called *nouchi* has emerged from it. Nevertheless, the Ivorian government instituted a programme that should introduce the teaching of M.T. at early grade levels and transition to the French language over time. However, that policy has not had full implementation in all schools in Côte d'Ivoire.

The survey in some selected Francophone countries in Africa concerning the use of indigenous languages in schools confirms that teaching children in their M.T. improves their performance and it is most likely to motivate them in completing their education. The results are another fact confirming that children taught in their mother tongue tend to perform better academically in the long run. It not only boosts their confidence in learning, and promotes their proficiency in their M.T., it also helps in preserving and promoting their cultural identity in the community.

## 7. Conclusions

The study reveals that African countries strived to include indigenous languages in their curriculum. However, despite the fact that all the experiments were successful, the projects did not go beyond the primary school level. After the pilot projects, the policy makers of the various countries did not make an effort to follow them up so as to improve on the technical constraints that would have mitigated against the successful implementation of the programme. The major reason behind the lack of continuity being that M.T. is too costly to implement.

Moreover, colonial structures, procedures, and curriculum ill-suited to national needs and realities should be expunged from the system. Qualified teachers should be trained, with an incentive for the successful implementation of the project. The use of national languages and affirmation of cultural identity should be enhanced. It is not about showcasing African languages; rather, it is about adopting a language in education policy that will facilitate learning, and as Ridge (2002: 14) puts it, “help real people get the most out of the linguistic resources available to them”.

Francophone African countries still have a long way to go in the integration of indigenous languages in their educational systems. Referring to the Republic of Benin which is our point of reference, it is unfortunate to note that instruction in M.T. is still left at the crèche level. The lack of political will from our leaders is seriously compromising the full implementation of the project. The integration of indigenous languages in the school curriculum is the only way of maintaining and promoting the socio-cultural values of Africa. Moreover, literacy in our native languages will help in the enhancement of our local industries and thus in promoting our national development. We will therefore conclude with the words of Gowan Mbeki (2000: xi-xiii) in a forward to Prah (2000):

The loss which a country incurs when half of its population is illiterate is incalculable. In the highly competitive world in which we live, it is necessary that every man and woman acquire skills to compete with their counterparts wherever they may be found in the world. If 50 per cent of our population is illiterate, the country will not be in a position to compete in the global market. The fastest way to reach out to the illiterates is through the use of the home language. Before we can seriously talk of development, we should first wipe out illiteracy.

Thus, wiping out illiteracy for the development of francophone countries, and indeed Africa at large, is by developing and enhancing the status our indigenous languages in the communities.

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**Zuzanna Augustyniak**
University of Warsaw
ORCID 0000-0001-5740-694X

**Kamil Kuraszkiewicz**
University of Warsaw
ORCID 0000-0002-8429-4645

# The early Islamic tradition in Ethiopia: report on the first season of the archaeo-ethnographic research in Negash (Tigray)

## Abstract

In both Islamic and Ethiopian tradition Negash (Tigray, northern Ethiopia) was the destination of a group of followers of the Prophet Muhammad seeking refuge from persecutions ca. 615 CE. They established the first Muslim community in Africa, and the memory of those events is still alive and clear. The article presents the premises and preliminary results of the project aiming to identify any material evidence of the early settlement in Negash as well as related traditions. As a result of this initial phase, the archeological evidence of pre-modern settlement has been identified and presented. Further steps of the research have been outlined.

**Keywords:** Islam, Ethiopia, Negash, Tigray, hijra

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## 1. Introduction

It is in Tigray, the northernmost regional state of Ethiopia, that the most important Islamic holy place in the Horn of Africa lies. In the village Negash (Gori 2007b) lying on the road linking Mekelle with Addigrat (Fig. 1) are tombs of companions of Prophet Muhammad who found here refuge from persecutions for their belief during the first *hijra* in 615 (Trimingham 1952: 44-46; Henze 2000: 43). The refugees, led by Ǧafʿar Ibn Abī Ṭālib (Veccia Vaglieri 1991: 372), were accepted by the righteous king of Aksum, Al-Negashi Al-Aṣḥam Ibn Abǧar (Munro-Hay 2003: 369-370; van Donzel 1993: 862-864; van Donzel 2003: 1109-1110).[1] The king did not only offer them his hospitality, but also refused to expel the refugees as requested by hostile to them Quraysh. The migrants settled in the area where the modern village is situated. It is from these events that the most revered tradition about the origins of Muslims in North-East Africa derives. Although sources are unequivocal about Al-Negashi's conversion to Islam, the holy compound in Negash which includes a shrine believed to be the mausoleum of Al-Negashi, is an important destination for Muslim pilgrims, not only from Africa, and is regarded by Ethiopian Muslims as "the second Mecca" (Trimingham 1952: 152; Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 34-35; Mohammed & Akbaba 2018: 18-19; Mohammed & Akbaba 2021: 17-19). The possible conversion of the king of Aksum also allowed Muslim jurists to consider Ethiopia as already a Muslim country which should be not included in the *jihad* (Trimingham 1952: 46; Munro-Hay 2003: 369). Some of them, however, consider it as the "first Andalusia" that – as any other territory that once belonged to the domain of Islam but was lost – should be regained.[2]

The modern holy compound is of a relatively recent (but difficult to be precisely determined) date (e.g., Dorso & Lagaron 2023: 87); it was renovated with the support of the Turkish government before the war in Tigray in the years

[1] The identification of the ruler mentioned by Islamic authors with a king of Aksum attested in Ethiopian sources is not certain (Hartmann 1895, 299-300, but see: Munro-Hay 2003, 369).

[2] This seems to be a relatively modern idea, not referred to in literature. On the concept of *Dar al-Islam*: Parvin & Sommer 1980, 1-21. The authors express their gratitude to Prof. Katarzyna Pachniak (Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw) for the invaluable insights and information on this subject.


Figure 1. Location of Negash.

2020-2022 (during which it suffered severe damage, and is now being repaired by the Turkish government). However, according to a very vivid local tradition, the actual settlement of Muslim incomers was not situated where the modern mosque and Al-Negashi's shrine are, but rather farther west (Mohammed & Akbaba 2021: 17-19).

It is that settlement that will be the focus of an interdisciplinary research project in Negash initiated by researchers from the University of Warsaw and realized in cooperation with Mekelle University. The initial aim of the project is to identify archaeological remains of the settlement and to confront them with written sources and local traditions as well as to establish a road map for further research.

## 2. The project

Despite its importance for the world of Islam, Negash is not as widely recognised as it deserves to be. The cooperation between the University of Warsaw (Archaeo-Oriental Studies Research Group – AOS), the Mekelle University (Institute of Palaeo-Environment and Heritage Conservation – IPHC) and the Tigrai Culture and Tourist Bureau (TCTB) gives a unique opportunity to change this situation. The collaborative Negash Research Project is focused on the area and period that are important in Ethiopian history, but even more so in the history of Islam.

The research focuses on the earliest settlements in the Negash area, whose history still holds many unanswered questions. It also explores the site's significance in the collective awareness of local Muslim and Christian communities. The research is structured around three key aspects: pre-modern settlement in the region of Negash (particularly that related to the first *hijra*), the figure of Al-Negashi and the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in the area. Since the settlement lies on the intersection of ancient trade routes, the research may also expand the knowledge of ancient trade and cultural exchange networks that encompassed Africa and the East. The role of the enigmatic Al-Negashi may contribute also to the knowledge of early power struggles in Ethiopia and in the Islamic world.

In order to address the research problems mentioned above the project needs to apply an interdisciplinary approach. It will include both archaeological search (in a broad sense) for traces of those first settlers, historical investigation concerning Al-Negashi and ethnographic research on local community to shed light on the actual meaning and on their significance for later, including modern, generations. In the wider perspective, the research is intended to enhance the area's tourism potential and heritage awareness among the local population.

An important aspect of the project is to contribute to the welfare of the local community and to the attractiveness of the Tigray region as a destination in tourism and pilgrimages (the latter in particular from the Gulf countries).

### 2.1. Cooperation and participation

The project is based on the idea of equal partnership between Polish and Ethiopian scholars. Thus the managing team will consist of Prof. Kamil O. Kuraszkiewicz and Dr. Zuzanna Augustyniak from the Polish side, while the MU side will be represented by Mr. Habtom Teklay and Ms. Desta Haileyesus as their deputies, who will be the Principal Investigators in the initial phases. This arrangement will enhance the spirit of partnership and facilitate the continuation

of the project, especially in the situation when foreign members might not be able to come to Tigray.

The project team will include specialists from different disciplines (palaeobotany, palaeozoology, geophysics, architecture, conservation, physical anthropology, geology, history, museology; a GIS specialist, a pottery specialist, etc.) chosen in agreement with the TCTB and IPHC, and according to procedures applied at the University of Warsaw and the Mekelle University.

Students' participation (both at graduate and postgraduate level) is a crucial aspect of the project. The added value of the research conducted within the project envisages classes offered to students both of the Mekelle University and the University of Warsaw. The classes may result in the best students being involved in the project's fieldwork.

Minor research tasks will be assigned to them and their finds will be presented in theses co-supervised by Polish and Ethiopian colleagues.

## 3. Field survey

Following the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2023 between the Institute of Paleoenvironment and Heritage Conservation (Mekelle University) and the Archaeo-Oriental Studies Research Group (University of Warsaw), the collaborative Negash Research Project was launched in November 2024. The initial research is focused on pre-modern settlement in the region of Negash, in particular settlement related to the first *hijra*, and on the coexistence of Muslims and Christians.

The first stage involved a field visit, aimed at identification of the most interesting zones for the next stages of the project, conducted in November 2024 in the area to be investigated. The people involved in the first site visit included Prof. Kamil Kuraszkiewicz (University of Warsaw), Dr. Zuzanna Augustyniak (University of Warsaw), Prof. Wolbert Smidt (Mekelle University), Ms. Desta Haileyesus (Mekelle University), Mr. Mearg Abay Abebe (MA student in archeology and African Studies and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Warsaw) and Mr. Berihu Gebremedhin (*wereda* representative).

The examined area extends west of the new mosque in Negash and the Negash village itself.

As part of the visit, several members of the local community were inquired, including the imam and the *shaikh*'s son, as well as the team responsible for the renovation of the modern mosque.

The first phase in preparation of the research was fully financed by the Archaeo-Oriental Studies Project (University of Warsaw).

## 4. Archaeology

In the process, three areas with clear evidence of pre-modern settlement have been identified, all of them located on hilltops (preliminarily designated as Hill A, B and C), lying on both sides of the river valley (see Fig. 2-3). Importantly, the archaeological sectors are situated above and outside the cultivated areas.

Remains of a mosque are found on Hill A. The preserved parts of walls were built of small, flat irregular fragments of local limestone bound with clay mortar – this type of masonry is well attested in the region (Lyons 2007: 179-207; Lyons 2009: 137-162; Fauvelle & Mensan 2024: 65-71), with clear evidence of recent repairs aimed at protecting the ruin. The walls are preserved up to the height of 1.60 m. The structure measures ca. 6.50 by 4.50 m, with a narrow (ca. 0.50 m) entrance in the southern wall. A niche – undoubtedly the *mihrab* – is clearly visible in the middle of the northern wall, which conforms the direction of *qibla* in Negash (see Fig. 4). Another niche-like feature, possibly giving access to the minaret, is found on the eastern wall, in the north-eastern corner of the building. The floor of the mosque cannot be seen, as a thick layer of debris is accumulated on it and the whole structure, as well as its surrounding, is overgrown with bushes and weeds. In front of the mosque, a low rectangular platform is preserved, possibly being originally an entrance terrace or portico. The layout of the structure is roughly consistent with the layout of some early mosques in Ethiopia, although the asymmetric position of the entrance and the platform in front of it seem not to find analogies among medieval Islamic structures in Ethiopia (Fauvelle et al. 2017; Pradines 2017; Cornax-Gómez & de Torres Rodríguez, 2023). To the east of the mosque, a group of large, irregular stones was found, some of them set upright.

On Hill B, situated west of Hill A and south-west of the modern mosque, remains of a large, complex polygonal structure ("the house on the hill") are preserved (see Fig. 5). The masonry is strikingly similar to that of the mosque, although without any evidence of repair (cf. Fauvelle & Mensan 2024: 83-114; Chekroun et al. 2011). The thickets are even more dense than those on Hill A, which severely hinders a closer identification of the structure or even recognizing its plan. Around the building, pottery fragments (Fig. 6) were found on the surface, as well as fireplaces (Fig. 7), attesting to relatively modern activities on the site. Although numerous, the pottery fragments visible on the surface are heavily


Figure 2. Map of the survey area (K. Kuraszkiewicz, based on Apple Maps satellite photo).

Figure 3. Panorama of the surveyed area – view from the village toward the west (K. Kuraszkiewicz).

worn and non-diagnostic, but it can be assumed that excavating the area can yield more data in this respect.

On Hill C, situated directly south of the modern mosque, remains of a rectangular house ("the *shaikh* house") are found, with one wall preserved up to the height of over 2.00 m. Adjacent to the house, there is a wall, probably enclosing an original courtyard (Fig. 8). The masonry does not differ from that of the structures on Hills A and B, but in one of the walls an opening is preserved, constructed in a way conforming the solutions found in Tigray (e.g., Fauvelle & Mensan 2024:

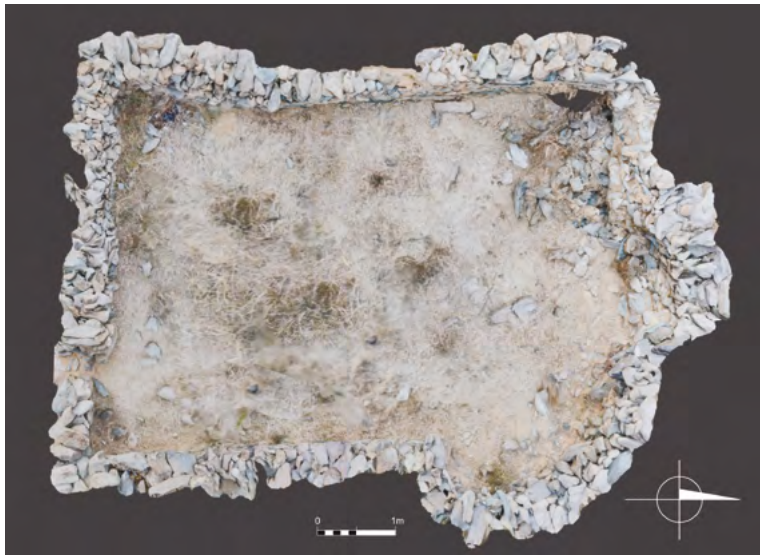


Figure 4. Preliminary 3D scan of the remains of the mosque on Hill A (K. Kuraszkiewicz & B. Kuraszkiewicz).

Figure 5. The structure on Hill B (W. Smidt).

Figure 6. Pottery fragments found on Hill B (Z. Augustyniak).

Figure 7. One of the fireplaces found on Hill B (Z. Augustyniak).

Figure 8. The structure on Hill C (W. Smidt).

Figure 9. One of the walls of the structure on Hill C (K. Kuraszkiewicz).

Figure 10. The pivot stone on Hill C (Z. Augustyniak).

101-102, Fig. 9). In front of the house, a large flat stone with a round hole is found in situ, possibly a socket for a door pivot (Fig. 10).

Other potentially interesting places were seen on two hills to the west of Hills A-C as well as on the lower area between Hills A and B. Prominent remains of stone structures (the masonry apparently resembling that of those on the hills) are visible in these places, but the prospection did not include them this time. This distribution of the architectural remains seems to conform to the settlement patterns in the Late Pre-Aksumite and Early Aksumite periods (Michels 2005, 103-107, 110-114; 123-132).

Directly south of the modern mosque a graveyard is found, its southern, abandoned extremity described by the imam as the oldest part, possibly related to early settlers in the area. The graveyard is overgrown in bushes and weeds, but numerous irregular, flat upright stones are visible, some of them with inscriptions or their traces, evidently marking positions of tombs. Because of the thickets, the layout of the cemetery (cf. Petersen 2013; Gleize 2022), and even the position of the graves cannot be precisely identified. One well preserved

Figures 11a and 11b. Two gravestones on the Old Graveyard (K. Kuraszkiewicz).

tombstone is shown on Fig. 11b: a stela inscribed for a woman named Ḫadīǧa, daughter of Badr (?) Isma'īl.[3] The stela is irregular, without any trace of carving apart from the inscription. The form of the tombstone conforms that found on other early Islamic cemeteries in Tigray, although the inscription is quite unusual, both the spelling and the palaeography being imperfect (e.g., Loiseau 2020; Dorso, Lagaron 2023: 96-103). The documentation of the cemetery should be a part of the project.

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[3] The present authors express hereby their gratitude to Joanna Musiatewicz (Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw) for her help in interpreting the inscription. The text is not completely clear; a possible lection of it is حق خديجة بنت كبير بادر اسماعيل; however, the translation poses problems. The initial حق is puzzling and seems to have no analogies as the beginning of Islamic funerary inscriptions; also خف is possible here but no less problematic (Fauvelle et al. 2017, 270-276; Dorso and Lagaro 2023, 96-103). While the name of the deceased – Ḫadīǧa, is clear, the same cannot be said of her father. Kabīr was a popular name among Muslims in India, but apparently not so in Ethiopia. On the other hand, kabīr was a honorific title of religious teachers, used in Harar (Gori 2007a; Nieuważny 2021, 45). Thus, both interpretations of the word would be possible, but quite surprising in Tigray. Also, the spelling of the name Badr (?) is incorrect.

Of the above-mentioned, Hills A and B seem the most promising and suitable for the next stage of the project.

## 5. The second phase

The next phase of the project will include clearing of the structures and their surroundings of thickets and debris, but without actual excavations, mapping of the area (using Total Station and a drone with camera), creating of a GIS database as well as 3D scanning of the structures to document their preservation state.

During that phase, the ethnographic research will focus on the figure of Al-Negashi. The narrations about him and the Islamic migrants will be scrutinized and compared with written sources (both Ethiopian and Arabic). His tomb being the focus of pilgrimages and fertility rituals will also be analysed (Trimingham 1952: 252). The second phase of the project will also include ethnographic research concerning the community of Negash. The research will focus not only on the modern structure of the community, but also on the oral narratives concerning the early settlements and the site itself. This may facilitate identification of the structures found on the hills as well as shed light on their place in the memory of the local community and the history of the region.

Depending on the results of subsequent phases of the project the team will include specialists from different disciplines (palaeobotany, palaeozoology, geophysics, architecture, conservation, physical anthropology, geology, history, museology, etc.) chosen in agreement with the TCTB and IPHC.

## 6. Plans for the future

The following phase will include limited excavation of the buildings themselves (to reach the floor levels) and their surroundings, as well as small trial trenches to check possible earlier construction stages or structures. This work will require participation of specialists in pottery, possibly (depending on the results) in palaeobiology and geology. Most probably, an architect will be included in the team at this stage. The exploration must involve complete documentation and protection of the excavated remains.

During this phase of the project ethnographic research will be extended to the community of Negash. Starting from the oral narratives concerning the early settlements and the site itself, which will contribute to identification of the structures found on the hills, the research will continue to investigate the modern structure of the community. Combining the two will result in a broad

picture of the development of the community in the historical perspective of the region.

## 7. Further research possibilities

In the further perspective, the project will encompass several aspects of research, the potential of which can already be identified. The exact sequence in which they will be carried out will depend on the ongoing results on the one hand, and on the available funding on the other. The exact topics of research will be further developed based on first research experiences.

### Archeological research topics:

1. Identification and documentation of the oldest settlements in the area (households, administrative buildings, sacred/cult places, irrigation installations, storage and production areas, graveyards etc.).
2. Identification of settlement patterns.
3. Correlation between the preserved settlement remains and the history of the area as recorded in written sources and oral traditions.
4. Conservation of the preserved remains to be visited by tourists and pilgrims.
5. Reconstruction of the first settlement and its successors.

### Ethnographic research topics:

1. Local oral traditions and narratives on the origins of Negash.
2. Historical research on Islamic and other sources regarding early settlement.
3. The genealogy and settlement history of Negash based on local oral traditions.
4. Religious traditions of the local Muslim community, especially regarding the traditions of the site.
5. Christian narrations about Negash.
6. Traditions related to the graveyard behind the modern mosque (including epigraphic studies).
7. Landscape of Negash (sensobiographic walking).
8. Documentation of households in Negash (division of internal space).
9. Labour division and gender roles.
10. Local plant usage.
11. Food culture of the site.

### Community outreach:

1. Workshops on the cultural heritage of Negash.
2. Workshops on the maintenance of the archaeological site in Negash.
3. Guided tours for local communities and schools.
4. Foundation of a local museum/community center and a pilgrimage center.

We sincerely hope that the project will not only enhance the academic cooperation between Poland and the Tigray region but also contribute to the welfare of the local community.

## 8. Community impact

Every stage of the project requires cooperation with the local community, both to engage them in the protection and care of the heritage and to improve their welfare as a result of the influx of visitors. The latter will be the result of creating an archeological park and museum, the target being tourists and Muslim pilgrims. This could also include hosting facilities owned by the local community.

At an early stage of this aspect workshops on the cultural heritage of Negash and guided tours for local communities and schools will be organized. An important part of this process will naturally involve smooth day-to-day interaction between the research team and the local community.

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**Gilbert Susokwakhe Nxumalo**
University of KwaZulu-Natal
ORCID 0000-0002-6064-0099

**Marshall Tamuka Maposa**
University of KwaZulu-Natal
ORCID 0000-0001-9264-2569

# Historical consciousness and indigenous rituals: History Education students' attitude to the Zulu indigenous tradition

## Abstract

This explanatory and qualitative study stems from the expectation that history education students have developed the competency to apply historical consciousness to different concepts, including those that are part of their culture, such as the Zulu indigenous rituals. Historical consciousness is the conceptual framework and postcolonial theory is the theoretical framework for this study. 15 participants were divided into three focus groups for interviews. The findings from the data analysis revealed that participants had conflicting historical consciousness in relation to Zulu indigenous rituals. Their consciousness both conforms to and resists contextual influence rather than being informed by the official history they learn.

**Keywords:** historical consciousness, Zulu indigenous rituals, history education, South Africa, postcolonial theory

## 1. Introduction and background

This article focuses on young Zulu History Education students' application of historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals in post-apartheid South Africa. It should be noted, from the outset, that Zulu identity, as is the case with any identity, is complex. The Zulu fall under a greater Nguni ethnicity which includes other groups such as the Xhosa and the Swazi (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007). Zulu people are found in different parts of South Africa, and even across the world. However, they are traditionally found in the KwaZulu-Natal province, much of which was part of the pre-colonial Zulu Kingdom. It became a kingdom under King Shaka, who, through conquest and diplomacy, incorporated smaller chiefdoms in the 1820s (Osei 1971). This implies that some people who did not identify as Zulu then adopted Zulu identity and this assimilation continue over time. Consequently, although King Shaka enforced a new Zulu identity, the Zulu culture has also been dynamic, especially as the area was colonised and became part of the Union of South Africa. The cultural dynamism continued though the advent of apartheid in 1948 and its fall in 1994 up to present-day post-apartheid South Africa.

The post-apartheid dispensation attempted to eradicate all forms of discrimination and advocate for equality and unity in diversity. This denoted the recognition of cultural diversity as promoted by the United Nations General Assembly Declaration of the Rights of Natives (Seroto 2011). All citizens can freely practice their cultural rituals without fear of penalisation. Some of these rituals have been passed from generation to generation playing spiritual, cultural and educational roles in accordance with societal needs and expectations (Seroto 2011; Sifuna & Otiende 2006). To Zulu people, indigenous rituals are an instrument for orientation from childhood to adulthood, while also being cultural devices utilised to instil the spirit of communalism in their young people (Nxumalo et al. 2003). Nevertheless, these Zulu indigenous rituals differ from one community to another, even though there are certain similar patterns. The change of times and the influence of cultural interaction had an immense impact on the Zulu rituals.

The majority of Zulu people today are exposed to official education. The subjects of this study are studying History Education at university, meaning that they are individuals who are formally training to be professional teachers. Additionally, they are expected to be tolerant and develop an understanding of Zulu rituals when teaching about King Shaka and the formation of the Zulu Kingdom. Besides learning about teaching and learning methodologies, they are also expected to develop the competencies that come with studying history. One of the main

outcomes of studying history is the development of historical consciousness. According to Rüsen (2012: 66) "historical consciousness is an orientation mode in actual situations of life in the present: it functions to assist us in comprehending past actuality in order to grasp present actuality as well as future actuality". Admittedly, all human beings have a historical consciousness because they have a conception of the past in relation to the present and future in relation to their own being (Seixas 2004; Tosh 2000). However, students of history should have developed a sounder historical consciousness (Maposa 2009; Rüsen: 2012). All education is meant to be applied, either to other academic phenomena or to phenomena outside of the classroom. Hence, the Zulu History Education students ideally have a historical consciousness which is informed by their studies and they are expected to be able to apply it, not only to the content they learn in class, but also to other aspects that they experience outside the classroom. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how young native Zulu History Education students apply their conception of historical consciousness to the Zulu indigenous rituals.

By being in the university system, some Zulu students may face contending experiences. They may be active participants in Zulu indigenous rituals at home, yet university culture and formal education tends to clash with the informal education from their society (Phillips 2002). This is in addition to the significant impact that colonialism had on the cultural norms, values and beliefs of former colonised societies (Hlatshwayo 2000). Indigenous rituals are important to Zulu people, and in many cases, children are obligated by parents to participate. Yet students who get to university develop new critical knowledge, experiences and freedoms which tend to either criticise or scorn cultural traditions such as rituals. This is why this study set to find out how the History Education students apply their historical consciousness to important cultural phenomena in the form of indigenous rituals.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Zulu indigenous rituals

The Zulu people are a distinct population group in many ways, for instance through rituals, language, dress code, social values, food, songs and dance (Msimang 2007). Their rituals, in their rudimentary form, are social practices of the Zulu people as conceptualised before western colonisation (Barnhardt 2005; Nxumalo et al. 2003). Although they have been modified through time,

most of them are still practiced for the same purposes. These rituals are inherited from generation to generation through word of mouth, as well as through practise (Phillips 2002). For instance, traditional Zulu people perform rituals, summoning their ancestors, with whom they often communicate, through burning an incense-like herb called *impepho*, requesting their presence and also acceptance of sacrifices. Different types of domestic animals, including chickens, goats, sheep and cattle can be slaughtered for sacrifice, depending on the type of ritual. The head of the family would also burn *impepho* with the intention to invite the spirits of the ancestors to come and receive the sacrifice (Nxumalo et al. 2003). It is for this reason that the Zulu people always regard themselves bound to respect their ancestors as they (ancestors) control their destiny. The ancestors are "the dispensers of fortune" and thus expect a display of respect by obedience to customs (Raum 1973: 391). The Zulu people also believe in *uMvelingqangi* (a male god responsible for all life), *uNomkhubulwano* (a female god who provides food security, particularly through good harvests) and a god for the control of weather, particularly thunder (Nxumalo et al. 2003).

There are different types of ceremonies which are practiced in relation to an individual's stage and circumstances in life. These rituals are easily understood if one follows the life of a Zulu person from birth to death, particularly if they die at an advanced age (Msimang 2007). Examples of these rituals include *imbeleko*, *ukuhlowa kwezintombi*, *umemulo*, *umshado*, and *umngcwabo*. Traditionally, the child is to be given a name after birth and is then introduced to the ancestors in the *imbeleko* ritual. If the child is a girl, their first menstruation is acknowledged by her father through a ritual called *umhlonyane* (Mkhize 2013). Historically, teenage Zulu males underwent *ukusoka* 'circumcision'. Both rituals involve the slaughter of a goat by the father with the intention to inform the ancestors. It should be noted, though, that *ukusoka* was abolished by King Shaka in the 1820s because it was considered to have consumed time reserved for military and economic productivity. Although it was revived by King Zwelithini after the 1970s, its practice is not widespread (Nxumalo et al. 2003).

For as long as they are not married, girls and young women undergo *ukuhlolwa kwezintombi* 'virginity testing'. It entails physical examination by mature women called *oNomehlo* in order to determine virginity by confirming if the maiden's hymen is intact (Scorgie 2002; Nxumalo et al. 2003). A red clay dot is painted on the foreheads of those who are found to be no longer virgins, while those who are confirmed to be still virgins receive a certificate (Leclerc-Madlala 2003).

The ritual which signifies young Zulu women's graduation into adulthood is called *umemulo*. This ritual involves the slaughter of a cow to the ancestors in

acknowledgement of the young woman's readiness for marriage. Marriage itself involves a ritual called *umshado* or *umgcagco* (Mkhize 2011). This could be considered as an equivalent of the wedding, although there are some cultural differences. The expectation is that good fortune comes to an individual later in life after undergoing all these stages. However, death can occur at any stage in life, and when it occurs, Zulu people perform the *umngcwabo* ritual. This is an equivalent of a funeral and burial. Another important ritual is often administered a year after the death of an individual with the fundamental aim of uniting the departed person with his or her long-proceeded family members, since there is a strong belief that such rituals elevate them to "ancestor-hood" of that particular family.

In most cases, the practice of rituals is preceded by a visit to *isangoma*, 'seer', before the day of the ceremony. This assists the family to understand what might be the expectations of the ancestors in relation to the particular ritual. During this consultation, the ancestors are believed to speak to the family through *isangoma*, warning the family about the unforeseen circumstances that might hinder the smooth practise of that particular ritual. It is therefore important to allow the seer to preside over the occasion from the beginning to the end (Nxumalo et al. 2003).

## 2.2. Historical consciousness and rituals

Historical consciousness renders a connection between the past, present and future actualities (Angvik 1997; Rüsen 2005; Tosh 2000). These actualities are often intertwined and influence each other. This would enable a person to understand a particular phenomenon through its past to make it possible to interpret and understand its present and perceive a future. This means that one of the key aspects of historical consciousness is the temporal notion (past, present and future). What a Zulu person thinks about their indigenous rituals in the present day or for the future is therefore influenced by their awareness of the past in relation to the said rituals.

The second key aspect of historical consciousness is identity, be it individual or collective. Each individual shares a personal experience and each experience contributes to the enlightenment of the group as a whole, but also to that of each individual (Braybrooke 1980). Therefore, individual identity has a bearing on their historical consciousness, in other words, on how they connect with rituals associated with that identity. Humans are individuals, but they are also social beings. As a result, individual consciousness influences collective consciousness and vice versa.

The above discussion shows that historical consciousness is a mental awareness of how a string of historical events of the past has conditioned the current position of an individual as part of a larger group (Mazabow 2003). The mental awareness involves a consciousness of various elements, such as a perspective on time and chronology, an ability to periodise, an ability to recognise change and transition, an ability to establish cause and effect and a sense of development. This means that it can only be manifested through actions. People's practices and what they say about their indigenous rituals reveals their historical consciousness. In other words, we can only know the Zulu people's historicised awareness of their rituals through their words and other actions. This is because historical consciousness influences the behaviour of the individual or group in the present and their aspirations in relation to the future (Mazabow 2003).

Historical consciousness is not uniform because it is informed by varying factors, particularly time, space and environment (Angvik 1997; Mazabow 2003). In other words, context greatly informs the nature of historical consciousness. As a result, people who lived before colonisation in South Africa and the people who live in the post-colonial era interpret and understand the practice of culture differently.

This study applies Rüsen's (2005) typology of historical consciousness as a conceptual framework to understand young Zulu History Education students' historical consciousness. According to this framework, there are four types of historical consciousness: traditional, exemplary, critical and genetical. Furthermore, Rüsen (2005) suggests traditional historical consciousness regards the past as eternal, evident and permanent. Through it, Zulu people learn and inherit Zulu indigenous rituals from elders unquestioningly. Exemplary historical consciousness implies individuals using the past to instruct contemporary action and belief (Rüsen 2005). This means that Zulu people observe and value how their parents practise Zulu indigenous rituals and are expected, though not forced, to also practice them. Critical historical consciousness entails questioning and deviation from ostensibly pregiven life orientation (Rü¨sen 2005). Therefore, a Zulu individual with this consciousness problematises Zulu indigenous rituals and deviates from how the elders viewed and practiced them. Genetical historical consciousness perceives the past as changing and inherently changeable, and accepts otherwise alien standpoints (Rü¨sen 2005). Such an individual not only differs from their elders, but also rejects Zulu indigenous rituals which are rooted in the past and limit individual agency.

## 3. Postcolonial theory and Zulu rituals

Growing from the 1950s, postcolonial theory has been an essential lens used to expose, understand and explain the political influences of colonisation, particularly noting how colonised people stand at the forgotten centre of global modernity (Said 2004; Elam 2019). It is different from post-colonial history, which refers to the time after colonisation which is considered to have officially ended (Chakrabarty 1992; Mohanty 1992; Spivak 1990). Postcolonial theory therefore refers to how the dominant identities in Europe continue to shape or control the formerly-colonised people (the subaltern) and their cultures, denying them a voice and violating their histories and traditions (Ashcroft et al. 2002). Another tenet of postcolonial theory regards the contestations on the impact of imperial colonisation on the indigenous people's identity (Bhabha 1994). Identity is central to culture and historical consciousness, meaning that postcolonial theory explains how the subaltern's identity is either completely replaced or it is hybridised. An additional tenet of postcolonial theory examines the possibility of total decolonisation of the formerly colonised societies. It explains the challenges the subaltern faces in identifying with pre-colonial phenomena, particularly on whether they can be revived in their traditional state (Ashcroft et al. 2006). In this study, this would explain Zulu people's struggles over either the preservation, modernisation or even abandonment of their traditional ways of living, which includes the practise of indigenous rituals.

A further tenet of postcolonial theory relates to language, which was a useful tool used by colonisers to dominate colonised societies (Bhabha 2001; Fanon et al. 2004; Spivak 2008). This implies that language is also central to decolonisation. For instance, the Zulu indigenous rituals may lose their essence when their names are translated to English. It was shown above that while *umshado* may be loosely translated into a wedding, the two concepts are not necessarily the same. Similarly, *umkhosi womhlanga* is usually translated into 'the reed dance', when it is much more than a dance of girls carrying reeds. Finally, postcolonial theory explains the impact of cross-cultural interactions, both positive and negative. Post-colonial societies, including South Africa, have to learn to be tolerant of different cultures because of the cross-cultural interactions. The negative is that these interactions may actually strengthen prejudice and discrimination over nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, age or sexual orientation (Connolly & Kassim 2016).

## 4. Research methodology

This article is drawn from a larger-scale study on the application of historical consciousness. It is an interpretivist and qualitative study, meaning that it is concerned with an in-depth understanding of peoples' experiences (Cohen et al. 2018). The experiences in this case are the participants' application of historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals. The participants were from both genders (males and females) residing in South Africa irrespective of the province and were also between the age of 19 and 25. The intention was to collect rich data, since some rituals are more inclined with females, such as virginity testing, *umemulo*, etc., whereas others involve more males, such as circumcision or cleansing (*ukubuyisa*).

The research was undertaken in an institution of higher education in greater Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa. Originally, this institution was built for white students during apartheid, although a few black students from affluent backgrounds were accommodated. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, the institution accommodates students of all backgrounds. By virtue of the demographics of KwaZulu-Natal, most students are black, the majority of them being of Zulu ethnicity. Within this student body, some of them specialise in History Education. We decided to work with students who are in their final year, on the assumption that they would have learned, both unofficially and officially, about Zulu history, and this experience should have developed their historical consciousness, which they can then apply to different phenomena, in this case, Zulu indigenous rituals.

Out of a population of 190 students, we sampled 15 participants. The participants had to be native Zulu, meaning that their surnames should be of Zulu lineage that can be traced back to the era of King Shaka, the builder of the Zulu nation. While this criterion has loopholes, its purpose was to work with participants who do not question their Zuluness, as is the case with some people from the clans which were conquered by King Shaka. These 15 participants were divided into three focus groups. Hence, the participants were given the consent forms to read and sign before the commencement of the interview which clearly stated that they participated voluntarily. To ensure confidentiality it was explained to them that their names were not going to appear in this study, but they asked to use pseudonyms. We generated data through semi-structured, one-on-one and focus-group interviews. In the focus groups, the participants were given scenarios of individuals in varying circumstances relating to Zulu indigenous rituals. Open-ended questions were used with the intention to probe the participants

where necessary to get rich data. Such questions made the participants feel comfortable to talk as they noticed that we showed interest in knowing about their Zulu rituals. As a result, there were divergent views about Zulu rituals among the participants in relation to Zulu rituals. The data was then analysed thematically.

## 5. Research findings

The findings from the data analysis are presented in two parts. The first part presents how the participants apply historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals. The second part presents explanations for this application.

### 5.1 Application of historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals

The participants' application of historical consciousness focused mainly on issues of identity and time. Therefore, the findings are presented in the form of these themes: historical identity as collective, historical identity as individual, the past as obsolete, the past as linked to the present and future.

In relation to historical identity as collective, some participants identified themselves as a collective when speaking about the Zulu indigenous rituals. One participant who refers to the family collective is Thandeka[1] who says, "it is wise for us as children to conform, obey and abide ourselves with our parents' teachings, because this is what would make us to become responsible adults." Similarly, Sakhile argues that, "we as young Zulu people are expected to learn about Zulu indigenous rituals from our parents. Therefore, it is their responsibility to practise them with the intention to pass them to their children in the future." Such participants do not isolate their individual identity from their parents. This means that they view themselves as part of a collective, thus revealing her collective historical consciousness regarding the Zulu indigenous rituals.

Other participants do not limit the collective to the family. Phakade indicates that, "my parents told me that long time back before the European people arrived in South Africa, it was parents' and the community's responsibility to impart traditional knowledge to their children." Nongcebo adds, "our parents have the responsibility to nurture us according to the family values which emanate from the community. This is how we get recognition from the community." Nongcebo

[1] The respondents agreed to the use of their first names (pseudonyms) in the publication of research results.

further adds the collective of the Zulu nation as exemplified by this statement in reference to *ukuhlolwa kwentombi*: "the rationale behind this … is an attempt to impart the knowledge and significance of Zulu rituals to young people with the intention to build the future native Zulu nation." These arguments show that such participants foreground the community over the individual in trying to explain why they engage in and support various Zulu indigenous rituals, meaning that they have a collective historical consciousness.

Some participants differ by revealing a historical consciousness informed by individual identity in relation to Zulu indigenous rituals. Senamile argues that:

"I really do not understand our parents when it comes to decision making. My mother always looks at what other parents do to their daughters and apply that to me. I feel like I am a prison at my home, a place which I need to feel protected at. My body is my body, therefore I am in charge of it and I need to contribute in decision making pertaining virginity testing without any fear".

The above statement shows that Senamile does not think that decisions over participation in Zulu indigenous rituals should not be collective. Thalente further points out that, "I have a right to do things in my way without being forced by other people about how I should live my life." Similarly, Thandeka explains that "I do not like to partake in virginity testing, since I am old enough that I can take my own decisions about my life without the interference of my parents and the community." Although these participants show an individual historical consciousness, there is evidence of some confusion. For example, Thandeka and Senamile argue for their freedom to individually decide on participation in the rituals, yet they earlier pointed out the importance of the socialisation by the family and community collectives. In fact, these participants revealed a double historical consciousness in relation to the Zulu indigenous rituals.

In relation to time, some participants view the past as obsolete. Themba relegates the relevance of Zulu indigenous rituals to the past by saying: "we are told that before colonisation, our great grandparents were communicating with their ancestors through burning *impepho*." This suggests that Zulu indigenous rituals are a practice of the past. Jabulani adds that although his grandparents slaughtered sacrifices for the ancestors, his parents decided not to do the same, showing how the rituals have lost relevance to him. With reference to practising *umhlonyane* Amanda states, "people need to understand that as time changes, we have to change as well and go with the demands of life which are out there such as, education and employment." These statements show that some Zulu

people do not like to continue with Zulu indigenous rituals at present as they view them as obsolete, with no place in the contemporary South Africa. Limiting the practice of traditional rituals to the past shows a limited historical consciousness.

However, some participants linked the past to the present and the future, albeit for different purposes. According to Sipho, "it is important for us as young people to partake in Zulu indigenous rituals … as parents tell us. Such rituals equip us to become responsible adults who are well vested about their well-being in the society." This showed a link between the past and the present. Amanda indicates that, "some of us take the virginity testing ritual as sacred and therefore we are compelled to continue with it even though times changes." This shows that they are keen to carry the traditions of the past into the present and into the future. Additionally, Senamile states that, "it is necessary that I should think for myself and when things do not go in my way, so that in the future I should blame myself and not my parents." This implies that she also links the past to the future, although for a different personal reason of not wanting to participate in the rituals. Whatever, the reason, such participants reveal sound historical consciousness that makes them make informed decisions about the Zulu indigenous rituals, linking them to the past, the present and the future.

## 5.2. Explanations for the application of historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals

The findings above show that some young Zulu people still espouse Zulu indigenous rituals in the present-day while some do not. They also reveal that the participants have different historicised identity and temporal conceptions in relation to the Zulu indigenous rituals. All this is a manifestation of the participants' historical consciousness which they apply to the Zulu indigenous rituals. This section of findings explains why participants have the conceptions of historical consciousness that they revealed. The explanations mainly relate to the influence of coloniality, the influence of westernisation, the influence of Christianity and they are concluded with summarizing statements.

The data shows that South Africa being a postcolonial society informs the participants' application of historical consciousness to their rituals. The postcolonial is constructed paradoxically as having affected the practice of traditional rituals through exposing some Zulu people to opportunities that had been denied them during the colonial times. One such opportunity is access to university. As explained by Elihle, "Universities are in urban areas therefore, we have to migrate from rural areas where Zulu indigenous rituals are practiced." University experiences have altered the participants' views on the criticality of rituals, as they

take more independent decisions, thus abandoning collective consciousness of the family and community. As Nongcebo argues, "my parents' teaching was valuable to a certain extent while I am still young attending primary and high school. But, when I get to university I need to be more independent and make my own decisions and choose my friends without the influence of my parents."

The participants show awareness of the link between coloniality and university education. Themba argues, "The challenge here is the educational structures which we inherited from colonialism that are culturally different from those the native Zulu people practised in the past." Thabiso adds that, "historically the Zulu people were practising their Zulu indigenous rituals freely with no criticism and dilemma. However, when colonisation took place in South Africa the very same native Zulu people started to have dilemmas whether to continue with Zulu indigenous rituals or just accept the Western way of life. Therefore, we as young people are the victims of that dilemma." Further critique is offered by Thalente who says that "tertiary education in South Africa can be viewed as an instrument which perpetrates the irrelevance of Zulu indigenous rituals and marginalising the integration of Zulu indigenous values and indigenous languages into the education system at all levels." These statements show that the participants are aware that being in university can either grow or compromise their historical consciousness on their culture. This awareness explains why some participants are proud to have still retained some practices of their traditional rituals despite the negativity of colonialism on their culture. For instance, Malusi maintains that "the Zulu people are custodians of culture and that could be the reason that makes them continue with Zulu indigenous rituals even though they are living in the modern times."

Not all participants celebrate Zulu indigenous rituals simply because they are part of an inherited culture. Amanda claims that "some indigenous rituals were oppressive, humiliate and degrade Zulu women. For example, virginity testing rips off the dignity of Zulu women and exposes them to rape." She further claims that colonialism actually helped to end some of this traditional oppression, claiming that it "gave the Zulu women an opportunity to compete in the global arena." Silungile supports Amanda's claim that the rituals are oppressive, but instead of crediting colonialism for freeing her, she identifies the post-apartheid "South African constitution."

There is an overlap between the influence of coloniality and the influence of westernisation which has had a bearing on the participants' historical consciousness. Themba admits that "we as Zulu people are exposed to the western way of life such that we tend to secede [sic] from the practise of our Zulu indigenous

rituals." Sakhile adds that as a result of western influence, "some Zulu people avoid traditional weddings and go for white weddings, whereas others go for both."

Related to westernisation is urbanisation, which is another explanation for the participants' historical consciousness. For instance, Elihle feels that "we need to be realistic; if you are staying in a suburb how possible is it for one to purely follow Zulu indigenous rituals? Inasmuch as we like our traditions, we need to admit that times have changed and the new demands of living make us compromise". Sakhile agrees that Zulu people cannot practice Zulu indigenous rituals in the suburbs "since we would not be able to slaughter in those places." Instead, they find it easier to conduct Christian rituals. Thabiso explains that his father administered the *imbeleko* ritual for him, but "when we had moved to suburbs my father did not administer *imbeleko* ritual for my younger sister, but instead he took her to church to be baptised instead of introducing her to our ancestors, but at least he introduced her to God in church."

Some participants explain their historical consciousness by citing Christianity's dilution of Zulu beliefs, values and rituals. Jabulani points this out and is supported by Phakade, who specifically uses his cousin's family as an example: "Christianity has divided us as Zulu people; some of us continue with the practise of Zulu rituals while others have adopted Christianity. Those who adopted Christianity tend to criticise and look down upon those who still practise Zulu rituals." The same sentiments on Christianity are shared by Siphosethu and Elihle. However, not all the participants have a problem with Christianity. This is the case with Amanda, cited earlier. Silungile supports this argument, asking "Why do [people] not see that Zulu indigenous rituals are oppressive to Zulu women, belittle them and make them submissive to men?"

Many participants also identify the dynamism of phenomena over time. Sakhile says, "I am not saying Zulu indigenous rituals are bad, but my concern is about the time. It was fine for our grandparents to practise them in the past … before colonisation." Amanda reiterates that the rituals "were important to our grandparents during their time. But, now the time has changed and it is impossible for me to live exactly the life of my grandparents." Elihle states that, "times and people always change. … it is impossible that our grand grandparents who lived 50 years ago practised the same Zulu indigenous rituals in the same manner our parents who are living at present can do. Likewise, with us it is impossible to follow exactly what our parents say or do, because we are living in different times." Although Thabani does not completely disparage the Zulu indigenous rituals, he considers them too bureaucratic, making them obsolete.

Another change over time is the demographics of South Africa. As Sakhile points out, "At present we are living together with other races." This implies that change in demographics contributes to change in cultural practices. While Sakhile accepts this cultural evolution, Amanda views it differently, complaining about cases where a young white woman and a South African Indian participated in the *Umhlanga*. Her main concern is not the diversity, but she questions, "Who tested them whether were they virgins or not? The mere fact is they bypassed all the processes of testing and the young Zulu women are expected undergo these humiliating processes." She thus sees some rituals as having lost their essence.

Despite the negative effects of coloniality, westernisation and Christianity, most of the participants still have pride in their traditional rituals. Thabiso considers it a "privilege to meet the Zulu king" at Enyokeni when they attend the *umhlanga* ceremony. Jabulani argues, "I really do not understand why I should not continue with what I learnt from my parents and follow the religion which criticises my rituals which give me identity and a sense of belonging. I will not accept anything that will remove me from practising my rituals." Thandeka concurs, stating that, "These rituals identify me as a Zulu person and I strongly believe in them as the root of my life. I do not have a problem with religion as long as it does prevent me from practising my rituals." It can be seen that these participants who have a collective identity and who link the past to the present and future are inspired by their ethnic identity.

## 6. Discussion of findings

The findings presented above are substantive and may be interpreted in many ways. For this article, we interpret them using the conceptual framework of historical consciousness and the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory.

It was shown that some participants hold a conception of historical consciousness which is informed by a collective historical identity. This is shown by some participants who indicate that families, community and the Zulu nation play a pivotal role in moulding and nurturing how they view indigenous Zulu rituals. Therefore, these young people espouse living according to the teachings and expectations of the families and community. They do not consider questioning or changing from practising these rituals. Instead, they accept being voluntary active participants. This implies traditional historical consciousness whereby the past is transferred to the young people in the form of history and is unquestioningly conserved, valued, cherished and acknowledged from one generation to the next (Rüsen 2004).

While some participants showed evidence of a collective identity, there were findings which represented individual identity. This is the case with participants who view most rituals as patriarchal and oppressive (Mkhize 2013). This seemingly implies a critical historical consciousness because they question traditional standpoints. But, as noted earlier, some of these participants manifest a double consciousness because they also show how much they respect the rituals as taught by their families, community and nation. What this means is that such individuals have an exemplary historical consciousness, because even though they question some aspects of their cultural heritage, they still learn from it and practice it (Rüsen 2004). This would be expected in a postcolonial society where individuals struggle with (re)conceptions of their culture (Ashcroft et al. 2006; Tosh 2000). Those who declared their independence and live lives which are completely different from their parents' manifest genetical historical consciousness (Rüsen 2004).

Some participants' responses show that some Zulu people view the past as obsolete, since some practices either changed or stopped especially during colonisation. One such practice is *ilobolo* and *umgcagco* (Msimang 1991). Such conceptions of the past are explained to be especially results of colonisation (Bhabha 1994; Bhabha et al. 2005). These participants show genetical historical consciousness by accepting otherwise alien standpoints, such as refusing to participate in *ukohlolwa* (Rüsen 2004).

Other participants show that the knowledge and teachings of their parents and forebearers help them to develop a better understanding of Zulu indigenous rituals. Thus, their historical consciousness is informed by past reality which informs the present reality that establishes a harmonious expectation of the future actuality (Wassermann 2008). Most such individuals are also the ones who have a collective historical consciousness because they do not limit themselves to just their individual selves. They thus manifest a traditional historical consciousness, since they would rather take the Zulu indigenous rituals as is. What should be noted is that none of the participants actually refer to the history of the Zulu Kingdom as taught officially. Neither do they refer to the time of the establishment of the kingdom. The farthest back their past references go is to the times of their grandparents, which, considering their ages, would be most possibly in the early 20th century.

The participants explained their application of historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals in various ways, with the most influential issues being coloniality, westernisation and Christianity. Some participants explain that they have lost interest in rituals because of the colonial experience. They acknowledge that

colonisation made Africans view the rituals as backward practices (Said 2003; Fanon 2008). It is not surprising that some participants thus view the rituals as oppressive and obsolete. Paradoxically it is the same reason that makes some participants feel the need to respect and continue the rituals. Those who are riled about the negative effects of colonisation insist that it is their duty to continue practicing the rituals in order to save them from colonial obliteration. They even consider university education as a colonial vestige which promotes anti-indigenous African discourses. This can be used to explain why they do not manifest a historical consciousness informed by official history.

The effects of colonialism overlap with those of westernisation. The participants show that their historical consciousness on their rituals is influenced by individualism which is an aspect of western liberalism. This is typical of postcolonial societies which experience the delegitimisation of non-western values such as community (Said 1993). Westernisation also explains why they feel that some of the rituals are now impracticable considering the conditions that come with urbanisation. This conception is explained by postcolonial scholars who view westernisation as a destruction of the indigenous social norms, be they political, economic or customary (Bhabha 2001; Fanon 2008; Said 2003). In the case of this study, the Zulu indigenous rituals are either completely replaced or they are hybridised (Bhabha 1994).

One of the replacements of the indigenous rituals is identified by the participants to be Christianity. Evidence of this is when some participants explain how rituals such as *imbeleko* have been replaced by baptism. Some accept this as both sensible and practical, particularly in the urban areas. However, other participants argue how Christianity has negatively affected Zulu culture, especially being used as a tool by the colonisers to control Africans (Fanon 2008; Spivak 2009). However, there is also evidence of double consciousness because while some participants still respect their indigenous rituals, they also do not feel comfortable to denounce Christianity.

## 7. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to explore how young native Zulu History Education students apply historical consciousness to Zulu indigenous rituals in post-apartheid South Africa. The findings show divergent views. Those who assumed a collective identity proved to appreciate the rituals in general, even though they grew at a different time from their parents. They still indicated that their parents, community and nation played a role in passing traditional knowledge

onto the next generation. The findings confirm that these traditions are actually a form of history being transferred to young people to be preserved, valued, cherished and acknowledged. Such participants have a traditional historical consciousness (following Rüsen 2004). This collective historical consciousness tallied with the conception of the past as connected to the present and future. We therefore argue that such individuals have a historical consciousness which developed in spite of, instead of and because of coloniality, westernisation and Christianity. If these colonial phenomena have had any influence on the young Zulu individuals' historical consciousness, they have actually strengthened the participants' appreciation of their indigenous Zulu rituals. One issue of concern with the participants was that their frame of reference of the past was limited to their grandparents' time. Considering that these young students were born after 1994, their grandparents were born when South Africa was already colonised. This means that their historical consciousness was not formed by the history that they learn in the classroom, despite them being History Education majors. Based on the argument that history students should be able to apply the historical consciousness that they acquire from official history to issues that are out of their academic curriculum, such as their traditional rituals, we thus argue that the participants reflect a limited historical consciousness, even if it is collective.

The other participants show that they have individual identity. Therefore, their conception of Zulu indigenous rituals differs from that of their parents. It is evident that these participants have been influenced by coloniality, westernisation and Christianity to have a negative attitude towards their traditional rituals. These participants also view the past, particularly Zulu indigenous rituals, as obsolete. This means that their historical consciousness challenges pregiven norms. They do not refer to the past in making sense of phenomena in their personal lives, even though they are History Education specialists. It would have been different if they had questioned the rituals on the basis of what they know about Zulu history, but they chose to dismiss the past as obsolete.

Although they may seem to be different from those with a traditional historical consciousness, there are actually similarities because both sets of young Zulu individuals did not use their official history knowledge as a lens to interpret the practice of indigenous Zulu rituals. Ultimately, both groups relied on their unofficial knowledge and experiences of Zulu culture in making their decisions. It is, therefore, not surprising that some of the participants demonstrated a double historical consciousness as they did not have one coherent frame of reference in application. This is one of the results of the hybridity which postcolonial theory explains as being a result of the colonial experience. Therefore, this study

shows that there is a need for the role of history in the construction of historical consciousness which can be applied to important social phenomena.

Ultimately, it is an undeniable fact that each and every person has a historical consciousness which emanates from either individual or collective identities. Hence, such identities influence peoples' thinking and behaviour.

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**Fred Atoh**
University of Nairobi
ORCID: 0000-0003-4371-2844

# Oral Afrocentric storytelling as mediated enunciation in knowledge space among the Luo people of Kenya

## Abstract

In this article, I reflect on the value of oral Afrocentric storytelling as a mediated method in knowledge space concerning the Luo language. The focus is on some mediation strategies that storytellers use. This was a qualitative study that purposively sampled and interviewed a group of elderly men and women based on their age, experiences in storytelling and leadership roles in the community for the stories used as data. Furthermore, I relied on personal anthropological experience and observation to obtain and analyse the data. Using the theoretical framework of narratology for analysis, I found out that storytelling is an established means of training and edutainment used across age and gender sets. Furthermore, the events in the stories transcend time and merge the worlds of animals, spirits, and humans into a single discourse space. In addition, Afrocentric features mediate in the art of narration and form part of the established tradition of storytelling.

**Keywords:** narratology, knowledge space, Afrocentric storytelling, *sigana*, mediation strategies

## 1. Introduction

Narration is the act of storytelling - recounting events or experiences, whether real or imagined, to an audience. This process uses various media such as written text, spoken word or visual platforms. People from different cultures view narration differently. Finnegan (1970: 1) observes that most people who are brought up in cultures "like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition" while those from non-Western worlds have established oral storytelling traditions. Jahn (2021: 2) defines a narrative as "anything that tells or presents a story", a definition that seems to acknowledge that narrativization can be written (Eurocentric view) or oral as it was in the pre-literate, and still is in the post-literate traditions (Afrocentric view).

Narration among the Luo is as old as the community itself. In a broader sense, Opondo (2014: 119) notes that the oral narrative is "one of the earliest prosaic performances in human civilizations". In the pre-literacy times, older men and women told stories to the younger people, and among themselves. The younger people also told stories to one another. The storytelling sessions were not random but defined within the social fabric of the community especially in the evening hours after the day's chores. This activity was leisurely and educational, and occasionally the young audience was separated along gender lines to allow for focus on specific gender concerns. This separation was occasioned by the need to educate the young people on specific gender roles and behaviour. As an orate community, the Luo used narratives to entertain, instruct, caution, and educate. The process significantly contributed to identity building in the community. Viewed from this perspective, the narratives presented a people's culture.

In the age of literacy, the trends have changed, and the structures are now different. Narration has since become less important as a communal activity and more individual and, in some instances, commercial. It is still practised but recent developments treat narration more as a commercial art; far withdrawn from the traditional structures and purposes. Kaschula (200: 36) writes about the functions of oral literature in contemporary contexts and takes notice of the re-creation processes that are occasioned by the need to "…assert values and attitudes". These values and attitudes reflect modernity, new order, and a new socio-economic setting. The model of the written knowledge space has made many scholars, researchers, and literary critics to ignore or pay lip service to the subtleties, flexibility and salient wealth of improvisation and originality that integrally abodes in the oral traditions or models characteristic of the non-literate traditions of narration. Many people quite easily fall for the allure of the familiar

textual territory at the expense of the realities exhibited in the nuances and complexities of performance in the oral knowledge space (Finnegan 1970:1; Jahn 2021: 2).

The Luo *sigana*, 'story' or 'narrative', was a well-established and mediated method in knowledge space as an oral means of training in many skills, and a form of edutainment that the people used across age and gender sets. The events in the stories transcended time and space to explore the past, present and future including merging the worlds of animals and spirits with the human space in which all things were alive. This is what Toolan (1988: 5) implies by displacement: the property of human language to "refer to things or events that are (far) removed, in space or time, from either speaker or addressee". Usually, the events that are recalled in narration are not only spatially but also temporally remote from the narrator and the listener. Furthermore, narration helps a community to concretise abstractions in its world to comprehend and appreciate itself and the larger society. Opondo (2014: 119) argues that the narrative is an embodiment of signification that lies at the core of "…self and societal awareness". This study explores the structured form of the pre-literacy narrative and its value as mediated enunciation in knowledge space within the Luo context. It reflects on the linguistic and non-linguistic mediation strategies that were used in narration by storytellers and how the audience related to this process as knowledge and a means of knowing.

## 2. Framework of analysis

To achieve my objective, I based my analysis and discussions on the theory of narratology as espoused by Onega & Landa (1996) which establishes a landscape covering narrative structure (fabula, story, text, and film) and includes such details as voice which I alluded to in this study. The article did not venture into structural analysis of narratives, types of narration, and modes and forms of narrative since it was outside its scope. Instead, it established the strategies used in oral narration that bear evidence of Afrocentric practices in narration using excerpts from sampled stories. Onega & Landa emphasise that the narrative is mediated enunciation and mention different narrative media which allow "for a specific presentation of the fabula, different point-of-view strategies, various degrees of narratorial intrusiveness and different handlings of time" (1996: 2). Therefore, each medium in its uniqueness, calls for its own "analytical approach to narrative structures and levels". According to Jahn (2021: 2), at the core of narratology is the narrative (story) and narrator. Any theoretical conceptualisation

of this kind must proceed along this foundation. Indeed, he concurs with Onega & Landa (1996) on many issues including the narrative voice and focalisation. Jahn's emphasis on practical narrative analysis providing the methods in practice is an important contribution to this research.

## 3. Literature review

Several studies have been undertaken in narration among the Luo people of Kenya. This study focused on a few such studies to demonstrate the available literature on this subject. Onega & Landa (1996) discuss narratology by suggesting a landscape covering the central concepts, their historical development, and bring together contemporary trends from many different disciplines into common focus. The import of this study is that it revolutionises the study of narratology as an interdisciplinary field. Its significance to this article is that it provides a conceptual framework that forms the pedestal for the issues raised in my study. More foundational is its focus on structure as a core pillar of the narrative. It is within the narrative structure that the Afrocentric aspects of storytelling examined in this article find a foothold and meaning.

There is a toolbox of basic narratological concepts, approaches, and models that can be used to analyse fiction (Jahn, 2021: 2). He delves into the nitty gritty of narration as theory and praxis capturing the fundamental concepts in narrative discourse. Although he focuses more on fiction analysis, much of his contribution impacts on the analysis of other forms of narratives and the process of narration. He outlines concepts and practices that solidify the conceptualisation in this study such as the notions of voice, focalisation, narrative situation, and characters and characterisation.

In another study by Opondo (2014: 1) on oral storytelling and national kinship, it was revealed that the oral narrative is "a communalizing genre in the traditional African context" that unites the artist, audience, and the entire community into a single web of collaboration in performance. Although she alludes to the impact of modernisation on oral narration using the platform of schools and colleges drama festivals, it is not lost on us that she emphasises the unifying effect of storytelling and how it is used to concretise abstractions to aid self and societal awareness and appreciation. This relates directly to the degree of acknowledgement my study proposes in discussing the underlying mediation strategies in Afrocentric narration.

These studies are relevant to this research as they all discuss narration as theory and praxis. They provide a strong reference point for the article because of the

concepts and methods captured in their discussions. However, the point of departure is that none of them explores the oral Afrocentric storytelling as mediated enunciation in the knowledge space using established narration strategies.

## 4. Methodology

This was a qualitative study meant to account for the emerging narrative discourse trends of mediation during narration. It involved a discussion and description of the strategies used in mediation enunciation practices among the Luo. I used primary data from stories by a group of elderly men and women who were purposively sampled and interviewed based on their age, experiences in storytelling and leadership roles in the community. The narratives were recorded for analysis. My experiential knowledge of the art of narration as a native speaker, and a participant in narration during childhood played an important role in data collection and analysis. I used observational and textual analysis of the stories to establish the common characteristics pointing to the mediation strategies. I studied interactions during the storytelling sessions without participating or interfering to take note of the salient narrativization nuances and features. By doing this, I was able to note the unspoken expressions that affect the intended narrator-meanings. Using covert observations made it impossible for the participants to be aware of being observed because then they would have modified their actions and responses (Kawulich 2012: 3). Bryant (2015: 5) argues that this approach helps to identify patterns in a discourse that may elude a casual observer or the discourse participants themselves. Furthermore, Bryant notes that the observation method enables a researcher to capture and understand the context of interaction. According to Kawulich (2012: 2), the observation method is instrumental in collecting data about people. It is a primary tool that is used when one wants to document what is happening in a particular setting with respect to individual behaviours. This approach enabled me to make observations and empirically interpret the results.

Regarding textual or content analysis of the stories, I analysed and interpreted the stories by considering the tone of voice, focalisation and other storytelling attributes that point towards Afrocentricity and mediation enunciation strategies. Botan et al. (1999: 5) argue that textual analysis involves choosing the types of texts, acquiring appropriate ones, and determining the approach to use to analyse them. Furthermore, content analysis was useful since it helped to identify and analyse occurrences of messages and characteristics of messages embedded in texts (Botan et al. 1999: 3). Using this approach, I was able to analyse data inductively and establish links between the objectives and summary findings

generated from the raw data. I discussed the stories based on the functions they perform in the space of knowing and knowledge, and the value they add to the worldview of the source community. I obtained the secondary data from readings on the subject. The respondents were assured of non-exposure and their identities were concealed.

## 5. Discussion and findings

### 5.1. The narrative tradition

The theory of narratology has several underpinnings that define a narrative: all narratives have a story, characters, and a storyteller - the narrator (Jahn 2021: 2). This implies that a clear structure existed in storytelling situations. It is worth noting that these foundations are typical of oral and written narratives although arguments abound regarding the narrator's voice and the presence of the audience as manifested in the different forms of narration. There are some definite characteristics of oral narratives arising from its oral nature that distinguish it from the written form. These features are marked as the mediators whose functions are encapsulated within the narrative structure.

Among the Luo people, narrations often occurred in the evening hours in the traditional times. This was considered the appropriate time after people had returned from their farms, businesses, or animal rearing. Every member of the audience would be expected to be seated after the evening meals. Indeed, these expectations depended on the type of audience. The girls, for example, would gather in the *siwindhe* (the house of a widowed or old grandmother) to listen to stories from the older women. In such circumstances, the boys would be told stories by older men. The choice of the stories would largely depend on gender separation whose main goal would be to address gender specific concerns. More general subjects relating to character, marriage, relationships, history, death, and moral questions were left for the general audience. For instance, morality-related tales taught listeners how to cope with difficult questions of life such as: Why do people die? What is the value of a deformed child? Who is an appropriate spouse? What is friendship? What causes suffering? How can one show compassion?

One such story revolves around Opondo's children.

*Opondo and his wife always bore lizard babies instead of human ones. These lizards were thrown away to die because they were unsightly. Once, however, the parents decided*

*to keep one such child who then grew to become an adolescent. The child loved to bathe alone in the river as a teenager. Before swimming he would remove his lizard skin. One day while swimming, he mysteriously became a normal human being. On one of those days, a passer-by saw him swimming and reported to his parents that he was a normal human being. They secretly went to watch him swim and confirmed the report. They destroyed his lizard skin and thereafter, the boy became accepted and loved by all the people. Opondo and his wife deeply regretted having thrown away all their many lizard children.*

This short story teaches that compassion should be shown to children and indeed anyone, with mental and physical defects. It was typical of many families to treat children (and generally people) with mental or physical deformities or first-born twins as outcasts. The children were considered as bad omen, and their families would be accused of witchcraft and ostracised. There are numerous instances of children being ostracised among different communities in Kenya because they were born twins. *The Standard* (2017) reported cases of cultural practices among some communities in Kenya. For example, a couple from Bungoma County had twins and the wife was "barred from entering her house by her father-in-law before special rituals were conducted to ward off the bad omen that the babies' birth allegedly portended". In the same newspaper, there are occurrences related to the treatment of twins in various families reported as follows: "…'Woman beheads her three-week-old twins', 'Man abandons wife after birth of six sets of twins', and 'Woman loses her twins on claims they are a bad omen'". It was also reported that "Among the Turkana, for instance, twins were believed to be a bad omen. Mr Charles Lokioto, a community elder, said the birth of twins was viewed with superstition and the possibility of one of them dying was often high.". Indeed, myths about twins still exist in some communities despite the influence of civilisation and globalisation.

Another story is about the origin of death.

*It was told that Were (God) wanted to put an end to death. He asked that an offering be made to him of white fat from a goat. Humans assigned the chameleon to deliver the offering up to the sky where Were lived. Along the way, the fat became dirty and cold because the chameleon was slow and was angrily rejected by Were. He declared that death would continue because of the insult. The chameleon became cursed by the Luo and has ever since been walking on all fours.*

This tale related to decision making and choices in life for more desirable results. It also emphasises the significance of obedience to instructions from those in authority.

It was typical of the stories to cover these subject areas under different types of narratives such as legends, myths, fables, love stories and epic. The different aspects of knowledge captured in Luo oral narratives included socio-psychological issues such as youth and growth, industriousness, marriage, family relations and history, character building, respect to peers/adults, death, life challenges, among others. These themes constituted the community's understanding of proper enculturation for its people. They formed the cornerstone for a holistic cultural induction of its members. According to Opondo (2014: 118), the oral narrative became "an important creative and creating aspect of reality-making processes of the human person" and the community would frown upon any forms of deviation from the established norms.

## 5.2. Strategies of mediation

### 5.2.1. Negotiation between the narrator and his audience

There are many forms of mediation in Afrocentric narratology that ground the practice in many cultures and are manipulated by different narrators to optimise on the enunciation. Onega & Landa (1996: 2) argue that every medium and genre "allows for specific presentation of the fabula, different point-of-view strategies, various degrees of narratorial intrusiveness and different handlings of time". To this extent, it was possible for a member of an audience to interrupt a narrator to present a point of view either in support of or disagreement with the narrator. This constructive negotiation between the narrator and his audience during narration was hinged on the premise that the process was a performance. Oral narratives in the orate Luo tradition was mediated by the performative activity of the narrator. It is in the performance that that the intimacy between the narrator, the delivery, and the audience became alive. The narrative owed its continued existence to the repeated performances. Finnegan (1970: 2) notes that the nature of "the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the literary form being exhibited". Although she was making a case for oral literature as a genre, the actual delivery is an essential aspect of the whole rendition. It has immense influence on the final product for the words alone are only a shadow of the real thing: the aesthetic experience for the narrator and his audience. In this sense, the orate Luo tradition integrated performance in its structure as part of its edutainment value.

There is a story about two sisters named Adilero and Adung'airo. One of the sisters, Adung'airo got lost in the forest when they went to fetch firewood. During her desperate search for her sister, Adilero bursts into a mournful song as she walks alone in the dark forest. In the song, she is asking Adung'airo who would

be able to find her in the dark forest. Interestingly, she hears Adung'airo's voice in her mind, responding with a song, also wondering who would help find her in the dark forest. Thus:

*Adung'airo ee ee Adung'airo,*
Adung'airo ee ee Adung'airo,
*Adung'airo nyarma, Adung'airo,*
Adung'airo, my mother's daughter, Adung'airo,
*Ng'ama chieng'no yudi, Adung'airo?*
Who will one day find you, Adung'airo?
*Adung'airo nyarma, Adung'airo.*
Adung'airo, my mother's daughter, Adung'airo.
*Adilero, ee ee, Adilero,*
Adilero, ee ee, Adilero,
*Adilero nyarma, Adilero,*
Adilero, my mother's daughter, Adilero,
*Ng'ama chieng'no yuda, Adilero?*
Who will one day find me, Adilero?
*Adilero nyarma, Adilero.*
Adilero, my mother's daughter, Adilero.

Oral performance in narration fuses the words into a unitary experience where the singer's voice trembling with emotions, the sobs, facial expression, vocal expressiveness and movements of grief, all blend to support the delivery of the story. Such devices are not mere embellishments superimposed on the narration, but integral and flexible parts of a complete realisation of the narration process.

In his discussion of voice markers in narratives, Jahn (2021: 3) points out three voice markers as content matter, subjective expressions, and pragmatic signals. In this song Adung'airo and Adilero use personal pronouns in a manner that draws attention to their closeness. Adung'airo uses the pronoun "you" to refer to her sister and their closeness is marked using the honorific "my mother's daughter" whose pragmatic sense exceeds the notion of "sister" as linguistically mapped. The honorific signifies a deeper bond between the two sisters that motivates one to go into the dark night to search for the other. When Adilero responds, in her sister's mind, she refers to herself using the pronoun "me" backed up by the same honorific. Subjective expressions are more richly captured in the tone of voice and marked by the "nonsense" expression *ee ee* and the rhetorical questions "who will one day find you, Adung'airo? (and, who will one day find me, Adilero?)". In an exaggerated tremolo voice, one feels an eerie sense of hopelessness and desperation that pervades the dark night in the forest where the

singer is. It is the ability of the narrator to manipulate the voice to bring out the appropriate mood in the song that makes the subjective expressions forceful.

### 5.2.2. Use of tone in narration

The inbuilt element of tone in many African languages is part of the Afrocentricity of oral narration. Young people were trained to exploit the element of tone in their languages for artistic competence and speech proficiency. Finnegan (1970: 4) compares the use of tone in African languages to the use of rhyme or rhythm in the written European poetry. Tone is significant for grammatical form and lexical meaning. In many African languages, tonal shift can vary the meaning of words that may have the same phonetic realisations. Verb tense, case marking in nouns and even affirmations and negations can heavily depend on tonal differences. She argues that "Tone is sometimes used as a structural element in literary expression and can be exploited by the oral artist in ways …analogous to the use of rhyme or rhythm in written European poetry". In addition, native speakers can easily identify a non-native speaker by their unawareness of tonal distinctions in a language because "tone (pitch) as an element in the structure of the language is almost universal in Africa" (Finnegan 1970: 56).

Among the Luo people, tone as a stylistic aspect was exploited subtly and effectively by an oral narrator during delivery. The tonal nature of these languages makes it a powerful resource during storytelling because its potentialities can be exploited to express different meanings, ambiguities, and witticism using pun. Akmajian et al. (2003: 129) observe that the principle of tone assignment at word-level applies across languages from different language families and is prominent in languages of Africa and Japanese. In other words, "tonal properties are part of the common and shared language facility in the human species". The gift of the gab was one of the admirable qualities of a good narrator. Young people in the Luo community were trained in oratory skills by being given a chance to take turns to tell stories and play word games with riddles and proverbs.

One informant creatively told a short story about marriage by exploiting one word in Dholuo which had four different senses depending on the play on tonal shifts as follows:

*Ka wuowi nene oyudo nyako KENDO [high – high tone pattern] gi herore. Nene onyiso jonyuolne kaeto to gipango dhi KEndo [high – low tone pattern]. Bang'e kane gisedak moromo to dhako ni koro nene igolone kendo [low – low tone pattern]. KeNDO [low-high] nyaka nobed gi ode owuon kaka miyo e pacho.*

'When a young man met a young woman and they fell in love, he would tell his parents to arrange to formalize their engagement with the young woman's parents. After they two had lived together for a period during which the woman would be cooking from her mother-in-law's house, she would be established in her own house as a mark of independence within the homestead'.

The tonal patterns represented in this word are responsible for the different meanings expressed. Hence, the initial word carries the sense of 'and' functioning in this context as a conjunction; the second word functions as a verb meaning 'to take a wife'; the third one is a noun whose literal meaning is 'a fireplace/ hearthstone'; and the last word is an adverb carrying the sense of 'moreover' in its context of use. It was important for a good orator to be able to articulate these different meanings correctly during narration.

H H H L L L L H
| | | | | | | |
ke ndo ke ndo ke ndo ke ndo

## 5.2.3. Musical interludes in narration

Herrmann, an American composer for films and a conductor, is cited by Villa (2023) in a blog titled *A composer's journey* and asserts that "Music can propel narrative swiftly forward or slow it down. It often lifts mere dialogue into the realm of poetry. It is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one single experience". In this view, he implies that music has a special function in storytelling. It provides a link between the screen (the narrative text) and the audience. This proposition underscores the significant function of music interludes in storytelling among the Luo people. Musical mediated in the orate tradition of narration in the Luo culture. The use of music depended on the type and artistic convention of the genre of narrative. Several narratives had musical interludes to reinforce the message in the prose narrative and entertain the listeners. Besides, it gave the audience a chance to actively participate in the narration process that revealed the interdependence of the musical and verbal expressions. Interdependence does not preclude the fact that the verbal element in the oral narrative is the more predominant. Furthermore, music provided a break from the monotony of a story to allow people to "retune" back into the narration. In this sense, the narrator would establish a choric form whose solo part may be picked up by a member of the audience rising to some kind of climax then a sudden stop to let the narration continue.

In one story, the hare goes to visit the crocodile in his home in the river. When it gets dark and the hare announces his intention to return home, the crocodile refuses to release him. They begin to chase each other around the house (in the river). The hare almost escapes when the crocodile gets hold of one of his legs. To trick the crocodile into loosening the hold on his leg, the hare decides to act relaxed and does not resist but bursts into a song in which he tells the crocodile that he is holding part of a log rather than the hare's leg. In the confusion, the crocodile lets go of the hare's leg and the latter escapes. Thus:

*Imako osika tiweyo tienda* (sung repeatedly)
'You have held part of a log instead of my leg'

This short musical interlude would be sung repeatedly by the narrator to reinforce the theme of the folly of greed and the need to be calm even in difficult circumstances to think and make the right decisions.

The use of musical interludes in storytelling is not unique to the Luo people. Hakimah (2020: para. 2) reports that in West Africa "Griots often accompany their stories and songs with music from instruments like the *kora* (a stringed instrument similar to a harp) or *balafon* (a kind of xylophone)". He adds that "For centuries, griots have passed down the epics of the Sahel through songs and stories, with each person adding details that related to their lives and the lives of their audiences. This is how the stories remained relevant across generations and cultures" (para. 3). Essentially, the song interludes emphasised certain dimensions in the story that would not stand out in the oral narration. In the process they reduced boredom, monotony and the spatial relationship between the narrator, the text, and the audience through the element of inclusivity by participation.

### 5.2.4. Visual resources in narration

Visual resources are essential to communication of whatever nature. In modern communication theories, visual aids play a central role in enhancing the effectiveness of the communication process. In the orate tradition of the Luo, the narrator is characteristically face-to-face with his audience. He can exploit this proximity to enhance the impact and content of his rendition by using gestures, facial expressions, and mimicry. Visual resources aid in the creation of appropriate mood points in the story. This can be achieved through the choice of dress, appurtenances, and dramatisation of specific narrative episodes as a way of not only reinforcing messages but also for mnemonic effects. This visual element can also involve a dance that includes the audience so that the verbal aspects

only became a part of a full performance replete with the narrative text, music, and dance. This enhances the aesthetics of the storytelling occasion.

*Aloo nyarma yawna*
'Aloo, my mother's daughter, open (the door) for me'
*Aloo nyarma yawna*
'Aloo, my mother's daughter, open (the door) for me'
*Koth biro tiyogoya, Aloo*
'It's coming to fall; It'll rain on me, Aloo'
*Koth biro tiyonega*
'It's coming to fall; It'll kill me'
*Aloo nyar mama*!
'Aloo, my mother's daughter!'

This song is part of the story of two sisters, Aloo and her sister. Aloo's sister had got lost in the forest but eventually found her way back home late in the night when it was about to rain. She was outside their parents' hut all by herself and crying out to Aloo to open the door before the rain falls. The audience is invited to visualise the agony in the singer's voice; the ominous state implied by the looming rainfall, the grim darkness; and her loneliness. She laments that the rain would not only fall on her but probably kill her. The audience can see the story's action with the mind's eye and "touch" the fear in the room with no one wanting to maintain eye contact with the narrator cum singer. The atmosphere would be filled with foreboding captured in the metaphorical use of rain - not just as a single event in time but also as a symbol of death - and the urgency in the tone of the singer. It is the visual resource which is invoked by the storyteller that triggers the flurry of emotions in the audience.

One of the important pragmatic pieces of information conveyed in the song is the singer's awareness of an audience and her degree of orientation towards that audience. She identifies her by the name Aloo and an endearment *nyarma,* 'my mother's daughter', which signals to the live audience her relationship with Aloo. These forms of address only apply if the addresser and the addressee are close. Again, the live audience is invited to visualise Aloo in the hut listening to her sister's cry in the night but failing to respond immediately. Many innuendos underlie Aloo's delay to respond to her sister's cry and the live audience is left to their own conjecture.

As mediators, visual resources work in tandem with the significant reality of audience presence. As opposed to the Eurocentric feature of written narratives, the African context of oral storytelling uses the presence of a live audience as

an aspect of visual resource. The audience and occasion constitute a unitary component of the knowledge space in which participatory learning occurs. An artist who does not confine himself to the bounds of convention, genre and personality is more receptive to his audience and allows himself to be influenced by the face-to-face encounter with the audience. Such a narrator can involve the audience more directly beginning with the attention-drawing formulaic opening:

Narrator: *Agonue sigana moro?*
'Can I tell you a story?'
Audience: *Ee, gonwa sigana moro.*
'Yes, tell us a story.'

Sometimes he can ask his audience to join in song and dance during important interludes in the narrative. The singing and dancing form a mental visual web about which Finnegan (1970: 10) observes that during such moments, "the close connection between artist an audience can almost turn into an identity…." Furthermore, the presence and reactions of the audience play a role in directing the behaviour of the narrator in many ways. He can avoid using obscenities, some kind of jokes or complex words depending on the composition the audience before him. This tendency introduces the important role of occasion which also dictates the form and content of the oral rendition. For example, historical narratives which require factual renditions such as wars, migrations and origin stories can be delivered in a dignified and aloof demeanour emphasizing continuity of delivery rather than excitement. The style would typically be studious and stately with the narrator exploiting his intellectual superiority over amateurs and audience alike. It is, therefore, the burden of the narrator to establish a balance between audience and occasion to negotiate a successful delivery of his story.

## 6. Conclusions

I sought to reflect on the existence of oral Afrocentric storytelling as mediated enunciation in knowledge space among the Luo people of Kenya using the conceptual frame of narratology. Narratology emphasises the idea of structure within a narrative defined by the presence of the following: a narrative - anything that tells or presents a story; a story - a sequence of events involving characters; and narrator - the teller of the narrative or the person who articulates ("speaks") the narrative text (Jahn 2021: 2). I focused on some linguistic and non-linguistic strategies of mediation that are used in narration by storytellers and how the live audience relates to this process as a means of knowing within the knowledge space of the Luo. The study established that there are clear modes of mediation

in narration such as negotiation between the narrator and his audience in which a member of the audience interrupted the narrator to present a point of view in support or disagreement. This was considered as constructive negotiation for space to bridge a narration gap and enhance inclusivity in storytelling. The second mode was the use of tone of voice as a skill in artistic dexterity and eloquence. Tone was manipulated to express covert nuances in the language among narrators, to express different meanings and for characterisation. It also emerged that the Luo narrators used musical interludes to break monotony, boredom and to entertain, beside emphasizing aspects of the message in the narrative. In addition, visual resources were used in narration to demystify complex messages, augment mood and act as mnemonics. This article recommends a further analysis to establish how the narrator's voice is distinguished from the voice in the subtext in the form of musical interludes during storytelling.

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**Costanza Mondo**
University of Turin
Department of Foreign Languages
and Literatures and Modern Cultures
ORCID 0000-0002-2236-4580

# Garden imagery in East African Anglophone literature from the mid-1960s to the present

## Abstract

This article examines garden imagery in East African Anglophone literature through contemporary literary sources, and sixties-seventies poetry from two East African literary journals. After exploring East African examples of Foucault's "oriental garden", I focus on the colonial English garden in East Africa and its transformation into a coveted status symbol after Independence. Drawing on MacKenzie's "Empire of Nature" and Quijano's "coloniality of power", I employ literary sources to read the garden as a *locus* of Huggan and Tiffin's "postcolonial ecocriticism" where practices of hope and power dynamics are played out in ways that are as meaningful today as they were in the sixties.

**Keywords:** gardens, East African literature, postcolonial ecocriticism, African ecocriticism, coloniality of power.

## 1. Introduction

One of the most iconic descriptions of a garden in literature is found as far back as the end of the 14th century, in "The merchant's tale" by Chaucer:

He [January] had a garden, walled about with stone;
So fair a garden never was there known.

[…]
Priapus never had the eloquence,
Though he be god of gardens, to re-tell
The beauty of this garden and the well
Under a laurel, standing ever-green.
Many a time King Pluto and his Queen
Prosérpina and all her fairy rout
Disported and made melody about
That well and held their dances, I am told. (2003: 377-378)

The highly romanticised quality and idealising poeticity of this description – which could find worthy equivalents in other coeval sources and many more throughout the history of literature down to the present-day – clashes with an ironic comment by a group of South African oral poets in the late seventies. Asked about the differences between European and African poetry, they listed a series of noticeable divergences, such as the addressed audience, use of language and clarity (Emmett 1979: 79). Most importantly, though, they candidly declared that white poets are "too much in love with nature. I can't write about flowers. I don't have a garden at home" (Emmett 1979: 79).

Aside from being a mainstay in literature, the Western fascination with nature reached other scales and shores in colonial times. The importation of foreign plants and tree specimens from the colonies was instrumental in the creation of the English garden and botanical gardens, with the Tradescant family in the 17th century, credited with being the first to travel abroad from England to collect plants from places as varied as North Africa, Spain and Holland (Johnson 1988: 84). These collecting expeditions resonate with the "*empire-hunting hands*" (Tejani 1971: 38, italics in the original) that the Kenyan poet Bahadur Tejani evoked in one of his poems in *Busara*, a literary journal published by the University of Nairobi in the seventies. Addressing such botanical ventures, contemporary postcolonial writers like Michael Ondaatje and Amitav Ghosh have depicted travelling/floating gardens on ships headed back to Britain, portraying how they

> might become important scientific incubators at the service of the British Empire, promoting capitalist imperialism, economic profits and vegetal and human displacement, diaspora and environmental pillage, exploitation and systematic irreversible changes in the ecosystem (Concilio 2017: 166).

These ships symbolised a centripetal movement of goods, riches and plant samples from the colonies to the imperial centre, which reaped fortunes from

the cultivation of cash crops, which in East Africa were, for instance, the clove and coconut produced in Zanzibar (Sheriff 1991: 4).

However, the treatment of nature by the colonial enterprise was extremely nuanced and entailed also centrifugal practices that were inscribed and readable not within the territory of the imperial "centre" but rather within the colonised lands, in the peripheries where what John MacKenzie called the "Empire of nature" (1988) was asserting itself in manifold ways. In East Africa, some of these involved tight regulations on game hunting which, MacKenzie maintains, considerably impinged on precolonial societies and were enforced on the local peoples even in the face of famine and starvation, as happened with the Kenyan Kamba in 1899 (1988: 58, 81, 163).

Considering images of gardens in East African Anglophone literature from the sixties to the early twenty-first century, this article attempts to shine a light on an often-unexplored side of the "Empire of nature" and its enduring consequences, by tracing the fortunes of the English garden transplanted in East Africa in colonial times and its transformation into a desirable status symbol for the post-Uhuru élite. The literary works I will be dealing with mainly come from Tanzania and Kenya. In the first section, I explore the representation of gardens in Abdulrazak Gurnah and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's fiction so as to bring to the fore the connections of these portrayals with resilience and hope, as well as the ways in which they locate themselves within the imagery of the "oriental garden" described by philosopher Michel Foucault. In the second part, I focus on the portrayal of the English gardens in examples of East African postcolonial literature in English comprising late-sixties and contemporary prose and poetry. Some of the poems under scrutiny were published in two literary journals: *Busara* and *Dhana*, whose pages hosted the literary production of students and would-be writers, some of whom became established voices in the East African literary panorama, such as Timothy Wangusa, Jonathan Kariara, Jared Angira and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. Availing ourselves of these sources not only allows us to examine first-hand literary testimonies of the way gardens were framed in the collective conception of the time and in relation to specific concerns, but also to trace the popularity of the image of the English garden among emergent East African writers in English.

I use the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism as theorised by Huggan and Tiffin, and borrow Anibal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power" (2000) to demonstrate how the perceptive transformation of gardens provides an ecocritical framing to the scholar's principle, which enables us to conceptualise unexplored practices of coloniality, their enduring consequences and representation in the

literary sphere, also in the guise of gardens of resilience which overthrow colonial logics. In addition, my analysis hopes to tease out another side of the image of the garden, which has become a fruitful pivot of ecocritical attention and, therefore, ought to be further examined in historical and literary perspectives grounded in multiple geographical areas, East Africa being a promising arena where Anthony Vital's theorisation of an "African ecocriticism" (2008: 87) might be tested. Indeed, while nowadays the "Anthropocene garden" (Iovino & Thiel 2019) has become a hybrid space where ambivalent, new relationships between humans and nonhumans are forged and collide, in postcolonial East African literature, English gardens become material spaces of postcolonial ecocriticism where power dynamics between élites and the *wananchi* (Yesufu 1986: 96) – the common people – were and are still played out with unexpected outcomes.

## 2. Gardens of Paradise: Images of resilience in Abdulrazak Gurnah and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor

As Michel Foucault points out, the oriental garden is a powerful heterotopia:

> The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. […] The garden has been a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia since the beginnings of antiquity (our modern zoological gardens spring from that source) (1986: 26).

When reading the philosopher's description, there comes to mind, for instance, Rabindranath Tagore's garden at Uttarayan as discussed by Sumana Roy, which "had to have a balance of plants in such a manner that there would be a crowd of flowering plants throughout the year, irrespective of season or the time of the year" (2021: 86). Nonetheless, similar gardens had been flourishing in East Africa for centuries and made up a considerable part of the local cultural imagination. In the Islamic tradition – which pervades the Swahili coast – gardens were considered symbols of paradise in the cultural imagination and art (Alemi et al. 2003: 1). The types of trees populating such gardens included cherry and orange trees, and lemons, peaches and apricots were fruits commonly to be found (Alemi et al. 2003: 1). In literature, an example of the "walled garden quartered by irrigation channels" (Alemi et al. 2003: 1) that can be found in eastern Islamic lands is nicely portrayed in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1994), set

at the end of the 19th century. It is through the eyes of Yusuf, the main character, that readers catch a rich glimpse of the garden of the house of his master, an affluent merchant:

> the garden was divided into quarters, with a pool in the centre and water channels running off it in the four directions. The quadrants were planted with trees and bushes, some of them in flower: lavender, henna, rosemary and aloe. In the open ground between the bushes were clovers and grasses, and scattered clumps of lilies and irises. Beyond the pool, towards the top end of the garden, the ground rose into a terrace planted with poppies, yellow roses and jasmine, scattered to resemble natural growth. […] Orange and pomegranate trees were scattered in parts of the garden, and as Yusuf walked under their shade he felt like an intruder, and smelt their blossoms with a feeling of guilt (Gurnah 2004: 42-43).

What Yusuf is unaware of when he enters the garden for the first time and then starts to help the gardener to tend to it, is that he is being observed by two women: Zulekha and Amina, the merchant's older and younger wife. Sharae Deckard underlined the continuity of the image of the woman in the garden in *Paradise* with the women-fruit of the Wâq al-wâq myth (2010: 117). Yet, comparing women to fruits and associating them with gardens is also a recurring motif in oral love poetry in Swahili, as evidenced by Jan Knappert's anthology where poets' beloved are likened to a variety of fruits, such as apples, grapes, rose-apples – and even lemons, which on the East African coast are not sour, as Knappert reminds us, but rather sweet and fresh (1972: 135), thus making an apt choice for a pleasing metaphor. Stemming from specific traditional fruit-related imagery (Knappert 1972: 167), the Swahili poem "The grape" evokes a garden and a romantic situation not unlike Yusuf's, who would like to marry Amina but cannot, due to his status of *rehani* – indentured servant – to the merchant Aziz:

*I passed along a fruit garden,*
*where there were many flowers,*
*and Paradisiac fruits,*
*the finest one could wish to choose from.*
*Grapes and pomegranades,*
*all neglectful of themselves.*

*O my heart, calm down,*
*you do not know the grape yet,*
*we do not know who owns it,*
*or how we shall carry it away* (Knappert 1972: 74, italics in the original).

Even when it is not connected with a heavenly atmosphere and imbued with paradisiacal hues, a humbler version of the garden is still an amenable place associated with pleasantness, as evidenced by historical examples. After the abolition of slavery in colonial Zanzibar in 1897, waves of labour shortages threatened the colonial plantations, since freed labourers did not want to go back to work for the plantation owners and rather preferred to rely on subsistence farming by cultivating their own small plots of land (see Depelchin 1991). The colonial administration was to take action against this:

> we do not want a class of small-holder who will regard their holdings merely as their sole means of support for the family, or merely as the garden in which they can grow their family food-supply (and that is the chief difficulty we have to contend with in dealing with natives (Zanzibar Annual Report: 143, quoted in Depelchin 1991: 31).

In literature, these smaller gardens are not necessarily reminiscent of the heavenly hues of the grand oriental garden but can still become places that keep the same sense of pleasantness intact while accruing significance as *loci* of resistance in the face of the hardships in a diasporic situation. In other words, their heavenliness is reframed and derives from the fact that they become safe harbours and shelters from the pain and trauma of situations of exile and social marginalisation. In Gurnah's *Dottie* (1990), this is evidenced by the passion for gardening of an old Martinican man who has lived in Britain for many years, forever a foreigner. After his passing, Dottie, the main character, goes to his house to learn more about him and the housekeeper fondly tells her "of all the plants and bushes she had put in and tended. Sometimes they needed special soil, and she had to go to the woods or to the Downs to find exactly what she needed" (Gurnah 2021: 394). Like green threads knitting together more than one immigrant character in Gurnah's prose, the acts of planting and tending to a garden symbolise the coronation of a new house and the beginning of family life for Abbas, the Zanzibari immigrant in *The last gift* (2011). Interestingly, he defies the norms of a carefully planned English garden and prefers to arrange his patch of garden in a looser, more "natural" way:

> that garden was full to bursting with roses and tomatoes and plums and fennel and jasmine and redcurrants, all growing anyhow as if they just found themselves there. It's natural growth, Abbas said, not an army of plants marching in a line (Gurnah 2012: 83).

Interestingly, the artificiality of the garden is here not intended as arbitrarily cultivating something in a dedicated space, but rather as the overly rigid disposition of flower and plant beds, which imposes a geometry that seems utterly alien

to a Nature which "does not love a ladder, nor any of the tidy forms humans build to arrange their cosmologies" (Cohen 2015: 107). In both novels by Gurnah, it is tempting to read the creation of a garden as a way of home-making, thus effecting the dialectic combination between a sense of space and a sense of place that ecocriticism investigates for the creation of a local identity (see Iovino 2020: 55). As a matter of fact, it offers a healing and alleviating gesture to counter and negotiate the characters' uprootedness in a sort of unconscious re-rooting process that does nothing but bring to the fore the human-nonhuman connection and its high perceptive value in a condition of displacement.

The therapeutic and situating activity of tending a garden is to also be found in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*, this time not with respect to a diasporic situation in England, though, but rather in relation to a condition of marginality and internal exile imposed by the frowning contempt of a small community. Having borne a daughter out of wedlock and having later been abandoned by her seducer, Munira is rejected by her family, who move to Zanzibar and leave her behind on the island of Pate, in the Lamu archipelago off the coast of Kenya. A social outcast spitefully referred to as *kidonda* – 'wound' – Munira faces the double difficulty of raising her daughter deprived of any form of support, with the added burden of shame and social judgment weighing down on her. Her solace, once again, is to be found in a garden that she begins to cultivate soon after her family's abandonment: "She then started a garden of flowers, spices, and herbs, which she tended one plant at a time, burying her hand into the difficult loam and churning it with manure until it became fruitful again" (Owuor 2022: 22). Later on in the novel, after having remarried and successfully raised her daughter Ayaana in the face of a series of hardships, Munira proudly associates the action of creating a garden with a foundational element of her identity and a telling proof of her resilient temperament, which nothing and nobody could bend:

> You have borrowed, begged, and stolen herb, flower, shrub, tree seedlings for this garden. You learned about the character of plants, how human they were. Some take, some give, some share; others must have everything for themselves. You found the ones that purged the salt that would have burned roots. And the earth yielded to you. It helped you raise your daughter (Owuor 2022: 474).

From the literary examples presented so far, it can be seen that the garden is not alien to East African literature and culture, but rather an important element of the cultural imagination that is portrayed by two contemporary authors in ways that evoke the opulent oriental garden, represent the smaller garden of resilience

and bring to attention the garden patch as a space of social reaffirmation. Although gardens already had a series of connotations in the East African local imaginary, British colonialism exported the English garden, a different variety that exerted fascination because it was associated with the prestige of the colonial ruling class. Its attainment by the post-Independence élite conferred the same status in a way that spurs reflections on the coloniality of power, a term by which Quijano intends the process whereby "The structure of power was and even continues to be organized on and around the colonial axis" (2000: 568) even in countries that have gained independence from colonial domination. Such conservation of colonial structures of power under new guises produces the paradox of "independent states of colonial societies" (Quijano 2000: 565) which could also pin down the East African context of Tanzania and Kenya. As a matter of fact, the garden became one of the "props" in which colonial power was externalised from individuals, abstracted and essentialised in a material object. It is precisely with this image of the garden, traced in prose and poetry from the sixties to contemporary times, that the next section is concerned.

## 3. The Coloniality of the Garden as a Status Symbol

The exportation of the English garden to colonised lands did not just cater to the superimposition of imperial schemata onto politically subjugated territories, but, most crucially, could have originally stemmed from a re-awakened primeval human fear of the pervasiveness and "destructive advance of coarse vegetation" (Dutton 1937: 1). Consider the following passage from Dutton's *The English garden* (1937), where the author refers to the abandoned garden of a Palladian house in Derbyshire:

> In a garden which has been abandoned for a year or two, it is similarly astonishing to see how easily Nature *enforces a conquest* over cultivation, how soon the surroundings of any demolished house revert to a condition of *chaos*. […, in the garden of that Palladian house] there remained nothing amidst the tangle of weeds, elder and ivy to show that any garden had ever existed. A century and a half of careful cultivation had been *obliterated* within little more than a year and a half of *Nature's domination* (1937: 2, emphasis mine).

In this passage, the atavistic *horror vacui* – the fear of emptiness – unconsciously morphs into *horror pleni* – that is, the fear of abundance, but a nonhuman one which entails, in turn, an emptiness of human presence. In literature, such an image of nonhuman reclamation of abandoned human spaces is perfectly evoked by the Ramsays' decaying vacation house in Virginia Woolf's *To the lighthouse*,

just to quote an example from a modernist novel that was published just the decade before Dutton's book:

> Poppies sowed themselves among the dahlias; the lawn waved with long grass; giant artichokes towered among roses; a fringed carnation flowered among the cabbages; while the gentle tapping of a weed at the window had become, on winter's nights, a drumming from sturdy trees and thorned briars which made the whole room green in summer (2000: 150).

Although very renowned, Woolf's is just one of many more literary representations that could be cited. Some of these include descriptions in recent texts such as the tattered Roman villa whose floors are "disfigured by […] weeds and grass sprouting through the faded tiles" (2015: 37) in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The buried giant* (2015) or the "mangroves […] growing out of mud walls while others had chunks of brick entwined in their roots" (2005: 149) in a former settlement in the Sundarbans depicted in Amitav Ghosh's *The hungry tide* (2004). As a matter of fact, weeding out and clearing a plot of land with the aim of creating a garden presupposes an oscillation between the polarities of *horror vacui* and *horror pleni*. It entails making a space of vegetal emptiness in the first place, just to later fill it with other forms of nonhuman life which, however, rather than growing freely and arbitrarily are bridled and carefully controlled by the eye and hand of the gardener.

It therefore emerges how cultivating a garden can be read as a way of imposing domination on a nature that is ultimately unknown, alien and always on the verge of encroaching if left to its own devices. This is even truer not for the familiar English landscape but, most crucially, for the nature of the colonies, where the perceived intrinsic hostility and alienness of nature was compounded by the foreignness of unexplored lands. In this regard, the African wilderness "rendered more strange, more incomprehensible by the mysterious glimpses of the vigorous life it contained" (1999: 5) in Conrad's "An outpost of progress" is a good example, albeit not as canonical as the "great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs, festoons" (2007: 36) in *Heart of darkness*. Echoing such feelings, in *The English garden*, Dutton uses a noticeably anthropocentric language which, in its slightly off-key and rather strident overemphasis, seems to paper over a fear that, far from being extinguished, still lurks in the exasperated defensiveness of a series of phrases all within a single page. These are of such hyperbolic a tone as "control of nature", "ascendancy of man over the forces of natural growth", "complete domination", "Nature crushed and tamed under the yoke of artificiality" and "thoroughly subjugated" (Dutton 1937: 2).

Discussing the fiction of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Abdulrazak Gurnah highlights how "land has come to acquire a metonymic function, signifying a wholesome mythic past whose retrieval is paralleled by the desire for the lost land" (1993: 143). Inscribed on local land, the garden could be seen to take part in this power discourse and add further nuances that problematise it. In *A grain of wheat* (1967), wa Thiong'o provides a memorable description of a luxuriant English garden, combining visual vividness with an interesting detail tailored to historical accuracy. The garden of the Thompsons, colonial administrators, is full of blooming lilies, sunflowers, morning glory and bougainvillea, but the flower that really catches the eye is one in particular: "it was the gardens of roses that stood out in colour above the others. Mrs Margery Thompson had cultivated red roses, white roses, pink roses – roses of all shades" (wa Thiong'o 2002: 36). The profusion of the rose – called the "queen of flowers" (Robinson 1921: 687) in *The English flower garden* – is not accidental and rather reflects a floral trend of the time that saw roses as the most popular flower in England by 1900 (Quest-Ritson 2001: 237). Given that Ngũgĩ does not specify the variety of roses tended to by the Thompsons, one is left wondering whether, among "the roses of all shades", the garden also contains specimens of the coveted "Graham Thomas" rose (Quest-Ritson 2001: 247), or the equally fancied Hybrid Tea rose, a staple of English gardens from 1900 to 1960, and first bred by Henry Bennett, a Wiltshire cattle farmer, in the 1870s and 1880s (Quest-Ritson 2001: 236).

Strengthened by a double tradition that saw the English rose grafted onto the familiar rose of the oriental garden, in the seventies the image of the rose was forged into a unique emblem of beauty, a real "queen of flowers" which is praised in a poem in the literary journal *Busara*, whose poet wonders that:

*The forests are many trees together*
*Only a few are the great "Mugumo"*
*Not every river and stream in Africa*
*Is the Nile, the Niger and the Congo*
*In the same way all flowers are not the rose* (Matenjwa 1972: 51, italics in the original).

Around the same period, another young poet deploys the image of the rose, but in a way that is slightly out of context, botanically speaking. Continuing a long literary tradition of which one of the earliest European examples can be traced in the "apple bright" (2017: 92) of William Blake's "A poison tree", Charles Okumu employs an arboreal image of growth to poetically represent the care and attention he dedicates to his love. His emotion grows to become a blooming tree which: "*Soon it will put up sweet /Smelling white roses*" (1973: 24, italics

in the original). Although roses can grow through the branches of a tree, such flowers do not directly stem from trees – unless they are specifically "tree roses" – which leaves readers wondering whether Okumu was referring to a rose tree, whether he took poetic/botanical license to embellish his rich arboreal imagery or whether the fascination for the rose took precedence over botanic realism.

This is not to say that roses and rose-laden trees are the only plants flourishing from the poetic expression of East African poets from the seventies; far from it. For instance, a poet writing in the first issue of *Busara*, too, links together love and trees, but opts for "*The blossoms* [that] *fall from the flame trees*" (Cullup 1968: 10, italics in the original) – a species of trees known to East Africa which Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor mentions in *The Dragonfly Sea*, whose Kenyan main character is surprised to find in China, so far from home, but a balm to her homesickness nonetheless:

> flame trees lit up with red flowers, transplanted exiles from her own world. She counted the flame trees and imagined them as family so she would not feel the bite of the loneliness that was already burrowing into her bones (Owuor 2022: 261).

As a matter of fact, Atieno Odhiambo highlights that "the English country garden has had a singular hold on the imaginary of the Kenyan elite", as exemplified by the song "English country garden" expressing the relish with which the empowered were assuming their "squirerarchy" (2007: 155, 158). "The process of class formation", holds Atieno Odhiambo, "was assuming its irreversible trajectory in Kenya" (2007: 159). After Uhuru, which in Kenya and Tanzania was gained in the early sixties, gardens became places of power and cherished status symbols for those whom Kesteloot calls the "evoluée" namely "individuals whose assimilation was encouraged by the coloniser" and the representatives of the "class which would come to stand apart from the great mass of the people" (1973: 489) and which was heavily exposed to Western education. In the literary journal *Dhana*, a reflection is carried out on post-Uhuru élites in a poem titled "Lament of Alunya the Voter" where: "*They are sitting /On top of Uhuru Tree /They are feverishly /Picking the ripe, juicy fruits /They do not want /To drop some /To us /Who are under the tree, /waiting*" (Lubwa 1972: 38, italics in the original). In this and other poems, in its verticality the tree becomes a symbol of social inequality and multi-tiered hierarchy. While the small group of those in power is free to pick juicy fruits standing on the higher branches of the tree, the common, impoverished people can only watch from below and wait for a morsel that will never come.

The trope of the "*fruits of uhuru*" (Koli 1974: 35, italics in the original) became particularly common in the early seventies and had already been dealt with by a foundational text of East African poetry and an example of what Abiola Irele called the "literary renaissance" (1973: 485) in 1970s East Africa. The 1972 "Lament of Alunya the Voter" is particularly interesting because in its form as well as in its themes is incredibly reminiscent of Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Ocol* (1970), which testifies to the literary climate promoted by journals such as *Dhana* and the receptiveness of young poets to contemporary written poetry in English. Published four years after *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* voices the perspective of Lawino's husband, an Acholi man – a Ugandan ethnicity – who has forsaken his culture and lore in order to imitate white men. It turns out that Ocol belongs to the group of "*black freedom fighters / […] turned white*" (Konyango 1972: 48, italics in the original) that, after Independence, sit on the branches of a tree enjoying privileges denied to others, such as a verdant garden, which, Ocol maintains, is more than deserved:

Comrade
Do you not agree
That without your present leaders
Uhuru could never have come?

And, surely,
You are not so mean
As to grudge them
Some token reward,
Are you?

I have a nice house
In the Town,
My spacious garden
Explodes with jacaranda and roses,
I have lilies, bougainvillea, canna…

Do you appreciate the beauty
Of my roses?
Or would you rather turn
My flower garden
Into a maize shamba? (p'Bitek 1972: 56-57).

In Ocol's address to the disempowered people, there feature many keywords already presented – the rose – and others that add layers to his words, in particular the reference to the shamba – a cultivated plantation – and the bougainvillea,

which, although often to be found in East Africa, cannot but bring to mind the island of Bougainville and Louis-Antoine de Bougainville "the eighteenth-century French explorer, who never actually set foot on the island" (Gurnah n.d.: 241). To further substantiate a case for p'Bitek's literary influence on "Lament of Alunya the Voter", let us point out that Ocol's wail "Mother, mother, /Why, /Why was I born /Black?" (p'Bitek 1972: 22) finds an echo in the exclamation in Lubwa's 1972 poem: "*Mother! Mother! /Why didn't you abort me /When I was still /Mere blood*" (1972: 42, italics in the original). After all, Cliff Lubwa was not the only poet to be influenced by Okot p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, literary models that resonate nowadays as powerfully as they did in the sixties and seventies, with contemporary Tanzanian poet Sandra Mushi wondering in her recent collection *Stains on my khanga* (2014): "My blackness /Is it the cries in Song of Lawino?" (2014: 103).

What is interesting in these poems by East African established and emergent writers of the sixties and seventies is that the stark contrast between privilege and poverty, the empowered and the dispossessed, the élite and the common people is symbolically set in the green arena of the garden that displays riches and resources while showing that their benefits are to be enjoyed only by some. The desire for gardens can therefore be read as an external and objectified manifestation of the more profound cultural and mental influence still exerted by colonialism in decolonised countries. Sometimes the contrasts embedded in the images of gardens become painfully jarring, as in the poem "The brown tangle," whose title does not refer to a ball of yarn or gnarled tree branches, but rather to a bedraggled pauper "*Lying on the green lawn*" in the midst of "*lovers of nature exploring the park*" (Githuka 1971: 36, italics in the original).

Proof of such fascination of the powerful for the English garden left a mark not just in the poetry published around the end of the sixties and the seventies in the aforementioned literary journals but continues to be depicted in contemporary poetry. In Mukoma wa Ngugi's *Logotherapy* (2016), the poem "Revolt" touches on colonial gardens, which are associated with the proceedings of the 1884 Berlin conference and the notorious scramble for Africa. Nonetheless, as the title of the poem promises, the peacefulness of the Europeans' gardens is soon to be disrupted by a revolt, symbolised by an explosive weapon souring the Edenic peacefulness of their green lawns:

I
Inside Berlin Conference,
they keep tearing

into black skin, naming
each tear for themselves

II
Heart keeps beating, alone,
with them, in them, outside
of them, a grenade resting
in their uneven gardens (wa Ngugi 2016: 73).

However, it is not just rich politicians and élites that can afford to keep a garden; the common people too can have access to greenery if they wish, although their garden is definitely different, more limited and divided up into many balcony flower pots that will never extend on the ground as freely as sweeping rose beds do. This is an excerpt from a poem by contemporary Kenyan poet Bethuel Muthee:

A neighbour's balcony blooms.
They are cultivating beauty that slithers
and spreads: philodendron, geraniums,
a stoic cactus robed in a red blanket.
[…]
Balconies, where we sit and dream
While someone slashes the grass on their back lawn (Muthee 2021: 1).

Nevertheless, the depiction of this balcony garden – mixing up the traits of the urban and the kitchen garden – is not totally negative and seems to pick up the green images of resilience already shown in Abdulrazak Gurnah and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor in a further display of dignity that is much more marked for the hardships it stands against. As a matter of fact, the balconies certainly fragment the wholeness of an English garden as much as small apartments box people into cramped spaces, but they also offer a deeper sense of community embodied by the proximity of the neighbours. Although a blander and somewhat more demure version of a garden, the balcony garden is a place of beauty, possibly even more so because of the adversities in which it manages to "slither and spread", while the cactus is portrayed as "stoic" in a posture of dignity that extends to the owners of the balconies. Thus, Muthee offers another image of a garden of resistance that challenges the colonial garden through its strength, ability to survive and adapt to circumstances in a display of flexibility and resilience. The shifting image of the garden and its variations as represented by a literature grounded in a specific East African social context seem to dovetail precisely with Anthony Vital's encouragement to develop an African ecocriticism that "engages in debating what a society's assigning

of significance to nature (in varieties of cultural products) reveals about both its present and past" (2008: 87).

## 4. Conclusion: the precariousness of the garden, the continuity of coloniality

*"The Emperor Babur, bashful during his first marriage,*
*complained of The Great Impermanence,*
*[…]*
*He supervised Gardens of Fidelity*
*with a thousand stonemasons*
*but what they built has disappeared"*
(Ondaatje 2024: 40)

The many ways in which the "Empire of nature" imposed and represented itself need further enquiries, especially by postcolonial ecocriticism, which, in Huggan and Tiffin's opinion, should focus on "colonialism, and to look accordingly for the colonial/imperial underpinnings of environmental practices in both 'colonising' and 'colonised' societies of the present and the past" (2015: 3). Indeed, the perspectives to be adopted not only involve observing the centripetal journey of plant samples from the colonies to the English botanical gardens, but also centrifugal practices of inscription and the processes of self-representation of the colonial empire in the very gardens it exported.

With respect to this, Coffin's *The English garden: meditation and memorial* (1994) offers a powerful image which, rather than providing answers, opens new academic fields of enquiry and spurs reflections on the way in which, in colonial times, gardens became spaces – rather than places – where power relationships were played out in a game of meaning and self-representation that problematise and destabilise each other. Since the precariousness of time was tightly related to gardens and embodied by the transience of their flowers, Coffin maintains, sundials were a popular ornament to be placed in gardens and took different designs, one of which came into vogue after the technique of lead-cast figures was imported from the Lowlands: "In 1701, Van Nost shipped to Hampton Court Palace two sundials, one supported by a kneeling youthful blackamoor, five foot high, costing thirty pounds, and the other by a kneeling Indian slave" (1994: 20). Many elements are of interest in such a brief passage, including the word "blackamoor" – an insult thrown angrily at one of the characters in Gurnah's *By the sea* by a passersby "speaking out of a different time" (Gurnah 2002: 71) – as well as allegorical references to the colonies which were meant to associate

"the garden and its plants with the wonders of the new worlds explored by the plant collectors" (Coffin 1994: 20-21).

Although Coffin insists that "Such figures, of course, made no allusion to the transience of time" (1994: 20), one might read the transience called to mind by the sundial and the garden as connected to the precariousness of the British empire and the temporariness of its hold on the overseas colonies, which in East Africa eventually gained independence in the sixties. Thus, it is possible to read the sundial-supporting statues as powerful allegories not of vanishing time and the fleetingness of human life, but of the inherent temporality of violent domination, becoming ambiguous regalia and heavy decorations on the imprisoning mask of empire, which Orwell so well described in *Shooting an elephant*: "when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib […] He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it" (2023: 9). At the same time, the element of resilience is still there, intact: albeit in a debasing way, the sundials inscribed the enslaved people into the peaceful atmosphere of the garden and underscored their presence, thus making the bending statues into *memento mori* or, to borrow the aforementioned image by Mukoma wa Ngugi, as a "grenade resting /in their uneven gardens" (wa Ngugi 2016: 73).

This article has attempted to highlight the representations of such "uneven gardens" in East African literature in English from the sixties to the present day, by making reference to contemporary novels, contemporary poetry and poems from the sixties and seventies that were published in two literary journals, *Dhana* and *Busara*. While one can read the precariousness of the English garden and its sundials as signs of the precariousness of the British Empire, one has to recognise that the image of the garden represents a continuity with colonialism in the meanings it came to acquire after Independence and in its symbol of a widening gap between the post-Uhuru élite and the common people. In its position of status symbol, desirable commodity and space where inequalities come to the surface, the image of the garden ought to be investigated further from an ecocritical perspective taking into account the colonial context and combining past and present to pin down the meanings accrued over time. Indeed, this verdant image becomes another arena in which the European perspective was adopted by the dominant groups of an independent society (Quijano 2000: 570). Equally important would be to take into account images of gardens of resistance which counter the continuity of coloniality and the meanings with which they are imbued in more contemporary prose and poetry, so as to trace their development. By linking together postcolonial ecocriticism

and the ecocritical reflections on gardens with Anibal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power", it is possible to open up new literary perspectives, locate alternative geographies and show a new face of the "element of coloniality" (Quijano 2000: 533) underpinning power models and relations today.

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# REVIEW

## ***Zheng He's voyages to Africa in the 15th century. The Maritime Silk and Porcelain Road***, edited by Li Xinfeng, co-authored with Zheng Yijun, Zheng Ming and Zhang Chunyu, translated by Shelly Bryant. Pretoria: African Institute of South Africa 2023, 362 pp.

In 1405, at the initiative of Ming Yongle Emperor Zhu Di, the first of seven great naval expeditions on the Western Ocean set out, commanded over the next 29 years by Zheng He, an outstanding expert in geography and navigation of the time. During the subsequent expeditions, Zheng He's fleet visited 90 countries and territories in Asia and East Africa, at least 40 of which established lasting trade and political contacts with China. This initiative, as envisioned, became a towering testament to China's power during the reign of the first two emperors of the Ming dynasty, who, having successfully completed the consolidation of their own territory, wished to see to China's prestige being raised beyond its borders.

Commander Zheng He's overseas expeditions, the importance of which was recognized by subsequent generations, became the subject of extensive research by historians, geographers and representatives of many other scientific disciplines in the 20th century and the legacy of this research at the dawn of the 21st century exceeded 2,700 publications. However, the vast majority of them were devoted to Asia. With regard to Africa, only the living memory of the ancient Kenyan kingdom of Malindi and the giraffe given to the Emperor of China remains. Many aspects of this direction of expeditions still remain unanswered; it is not even certain whether Zheng He personally set foot on the African soil or commanded the expedition from any of the ports of Southeast Asia.

The author of the monograph under review was prompted to undertake further research by the little-known circumstances of the establishment of the first political, commercial and cultural contacts on the African continent, which occurred during four of Zheng He's seven expeditions, in which Chinese ships

circumnavigated the entire east coast of Africa, from the Gulf of Aden in the north to the southern outpost of the continent, which decades later was named the Cape of Good Hope.

China's impressive and lavishly equipped Treasure Ships then laid the foundation for China's famous intercontinental sea route to Africa, the Maritime Silk and Porcelain Road. The echo of the intensive trade contacts established at that time is now seen throughout the coastal zone from Somalia to Mozambique in the presence of Chinese porcelain, looms, respect for traditional Chinese medicine, and the skill of playing mahjong. The then-established three new sea routes across the Indian Ocean from China to the Gulf of Aden region shortened the travel time and distance considerably compared to the hitherto preferred land route, while at the same time increasing the allowable volume of cargo, especially hard-to-carry porcelain, but also gold, silver, silk and other goods, exchanged on the African continent for ambergris, myrrh, frankincense, ivory and animals.

The reviewed work is not a source record, but a study whose actual author, rather than the editor, is Dr. Li Xinfeng – a writer, senior research fellow, Executive President of the China-Africa Institute, Director General of the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and editor-in-chief of Journal of West Asia and Africa and Journal of China-Africa Studies.

Having introduced the reader to the history of Commodore Zheng He's seven expeditions, presenting in the introduction the political realities of the era and the impressive realities of the enterprise of building such a magnificent fleet (proper trees were planted first), the author in the actual part of his work focuses on the field research undertaken in 1999, which was originally intended to cover the Lamu archipelago in Kenya and the coastal localities of southern Somalia. Surveys in the Somali part proved impossible to carry out due to the country's long-standing internal conflict and the threat of Somali pirates.

His two stays at Lamu Islands in 2002 and 2003 were an attempt to verify traditional accounts of the existence of Chinese settlements, inhabited for centuries by descendants of the crew of one of the ships of Admiral Zheng He's fleet, sunk around Shanga Rock near Pate Island. Knowing the enormous capacity of the ships, Li Xinfeng assumed that perhaps as many as several hundred crew members, men, made their way to the nearby island, perhaps saving the goods they carried, settling there permanently, establishing families based on marriages with local women.

Noting the presence among the local population of people with facial features attesting to the eastern origins of their ancestors, Li Xinfeng inquired both about

the transmissions of local tradition and what was preserved in the collective memory of their families and immediate surroundings. The successful course of the first phase of research led in the following years to the signing of a Kenyan-Chinese joint agreement to undertake archaeological explorations around Shanga Rock near Pate Island.

In the end, in the course of the research, Li Xinfeng and the archaeologists working with him did not find any remains of a sunken ship nor any written records or material evidence confirming the fact of sustained Chinese settlement in the Lamu Islands area which would date back to the 15th century. Nor was anything found to contradict this tradition, which the author believed to be historically accurate. The description of the course and results of the research contained in the work is an extremely passionate report on the field research, conducted with great dedication and, in the reviewer's opinion, the most valuable part of the publication.

Indeed, the extensive information included in the last chapter of the publication on the origins of contacts and the history of Chinese migration to Africa is only indirectly related to the main topic of the work and goes beyond the thematic scope of the legacy and significance of Zheng He's expeditions. Even more so, this remark applies to the reflections included therein on the phenomenon of neo-colonialism and the neo-colonial nature of contemporary contacts between the West and Africa.

In stating the decidedly oppositional nature of European and Chinese contacts with Africa ("Just as Zheng He's voyages to Africa were fundamentally different from those of European colonizers many years later, contemporary Chinese policy toward Africa is completely different from that of Western countries" (340)), the author not only simplifies the very complicated nature of the issue being signaled but is also sometimes inconsistent when he suggests that there were only partnership and friendship-based contacts between Chinese and African partners. He then cites excerpts from source texts ("an edict was given ordering Zheng He to collect tribute from Brava [modern Baraawe in southern Somalia] and Malindi on behalf of the court, after which the Ming emperor ordered Zheng He to go along to grant coloured coins to the kings and queens when the two countries paid the further tribute" (341)).

Indeed, it is true to say that Africa was not discovered by Europeans, as the Chinese had got to its southern reaches decades earlier, but pointing out the need to "discover" the continent is framed similarly to the approach Europeans are accused of. While acknowledging the accusations, given the negative

aspects of Western colonialism, it cannot be denied that the genesis of the great geographical discoveries of Europeans, as in the case of China, lay curiosity about the world and the desire to explore new continents. These expeditions, with the patronage of rulers, significantly expanded knowledge of the world and influenced the development of science in the broadest sense.

Leaving aside remarks of a propagandistic nature, the interpretation of which may not necessarily be entirely acceptable to the Western reader, the enormity of the extremely passionate research material, containing both historical content and relating to contemporary research, of great interest to Africanists, sinologists and all those interested in the broader subject of the history of the great geographical discoveries should nevertheless be emphasized.

Joanna Bar
Jagiellonian University

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