

A PHONOLOGICAL AND GRAMMATICAL  
ANALYSIS OF EWE

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A Thesis  
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Master of Arts  
in  
English: Teaching English as a Second Language

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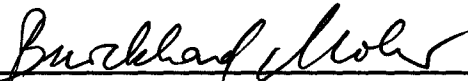
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THESIS: A PHONOLOGICAL AND GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF EWE

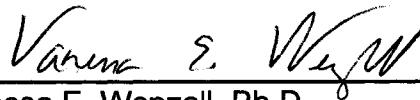
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To my loving husband Salieu who has been a great source of inspiration, and to  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.....	3
Syllable Structure.....	3
Consonants.....	5
Vowels.....	11
Tone.....	14
3. GRAMMATICAL FEATURES.....	23
Substantives.....	23
Pronouns.....	26
Adverbs.....	28
Numerals.....	33
Adverbs.....	34
Conjunctions.....	35
Interjections.....	35
4. SAMPLE TEXT.....	36
WORKS CITED.....	38
APPENDIX: PHONETICS CHART.....	40

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to form a phonological analysis of the African language Ewe, including its tonal features, which play a vital role in developing the vocabulary of this language. The consonant and vowel system, as well as the syllable structure, are examined to reveal how the rules of these systems create various speech patterns of the language. This paper also presents an overview of grammatical features by identifying the various parts of speech that serve to create the syntactic structure of the language.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Ewe is spoken by people of West Africa; specifically, it is a dialect cluster that is spoken in the southern part of the Volta Region in Ghana, the southern part of Benin, and parts of Ogun and Lagos of Nigeria (Capo, 1991). For local use, Ewe is used for communication purposes in everyday activities, in markets, in religion, and in entertainment. For instructional use, standard Ewe is used for the first three years of schooling, as well as a subject of study in secondary schools and in teacher training colleges. It is also spoken in churches, and can be heard on radio and television programs.

Standard written Ewe was introduced in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century by the North German Missionary Society of Bremen. They used standard Ewe as medium of instruction in their schools, and in their churches. About 1930, the African alphabet that is currently recognized, was introduced by the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (London) for several other African languages, including Ewe (Duthie, 1996).

There have been several publications produced in Ewe on topics related to culture, religion, fiction, and history. There have also been publications of various genres such as: stories, poetry, songs, proverb collections, dramas, and collections of names. Many of these publications are old and now unobtainable.



All mentions of “row” and “column” in the thesis refer to the Phonetics Chart (Appendix). All examples of Ewe in this thesis have been taken directly from the works of (Duthie, 1996; Westermann, 1930).

## CHAPTER 2

## PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

## Syllable Structure

The structure of the Ewe syllable consists of the following: Tone, Nucleus, and Margin (Duthie, 1996). Tone may be high as in *tó*, *-fí*, *é-*, *-tú*, *dzŕá*, or low as in: *k`o-*, *fl`e*, *m`e-*, *gbò*, *d`u*, *-m`a*. The Nucleus may consist of an ordinary oral vowel: *i, e, ε, ə, α, ɔ, o, u*, or a nasal consonant with its own tone: *-m̃, ŋ*.

The Margin may consist of one consonant such as *t-*, *k-*, *-f-*, *f-*, *m-*, *gb-*, *l-*, *n-*, *d-*, *dz-*, *d-*, or two consonants such as *fl-*, *dzr-* (note that *gb* and *dz* represent simple sounds). The tone, nucleus and margin make up the syllable structure for Ewe.

There are three structural types (Duthie, 1996):

One type of syllable consists of tone and nucleus:

<i>-e</i>	<i>`e</i>	<i>`o</i>	<i>`a</i>
's/he'	'you'	'not'	'?'

Another type consists of one margin, tone, and nucleus:

<i>tó</i>	<i>tú</i>	<i>mé-</i>	<i>gbò</i>	<i>lá</i>	<i>l`e</i>	<i>nú</i>	<i>dú</i>
'stop'	'gun'	'I'	'goat'	'the'	'is'	'thing'	'eat'

The last type consists of two margins, tone, and nucleus:

<i>flé</i>	<i>dzŕá</i>	<i>gblò</i>	<i>trò</i>	<i>fl`a</i>
'buy'	'sell'	'say'	'turn'	'chief'

## Notes

1. Some pairs of letters stand for single consonants:

*ts ó kpé nyé*

'take' 'meet' 'my'

2. In consonant clusters, the second margin must be: /l, r, i, w/u/

*gblc dzrá sr o kplé biá fia sue*

'say' 'sell' 'study' 'and' 'ask' 'chief' 'small'

3. All syllables consisting of only tone and nucleus represent grammatical items:

*é- `e- é-ka `o -`a du-m E-ve a-me  $\eta$ -kú  $\eta$ -kò*

's/he' 'you' 'which' 'not' '?' '-ing' '(noun prefixes)'

4. Some syllables look like margin plus nucleus in the spelling ( $\eta$  u), but actually sound like nucleus alone ( $\eta$ ):

*$\eta$ úto  $\eta$ úti*

'very' 'surface'

5. Some words appear to have a double nucleus, but they are really two syllables. A final -i, -e, or  $\varepsilon$  often realizes suffixes:

*b o. b o.  $\varepsilon$*

'easily'

6. Some words with only one nucleus may have more than one tone, showing that there are two syllables combined:

*nê* from *ná + -`ε*

'to him/her'

*n`a se* from *n`e + á + se*

'you should hear'

7. Some types of words do not fit into the three basic syllable types, e.g.:

Ideophones or picture words:    *`a `i*    *kp`am fũũ*    *`a`o góŋgó*

'ouch'    'slap'    'plenty'    'no'    'tightly'

Non-Ewe origin words:    *atám kránt sue státsi aprím*

'oath'    'cutlass'    'small'    'starch'    'cannon'

In Ewe, the margin can only occur before the nucleus, which is quite different from many other languages that allow the margin to come before or after the nucleus (Duthie, 1996).

### Consonants

Ewe has 28 consonant sounds; however, it will be shown that some of those sounds are allophones, with the end result being 23 consonant phonemes.

Duthie (1996), provides examples of these consonants:

The first margin of an Ewe syllable may be filled by any sound in rows 1-3 of the phonetics chart. These sounds are labeled as voiced and voiceless obstruents. The first margin may also be filled by any sounds in rows 4-6, which are labeled as voiced sonorants.

1. *Fricatives*: in Ewe there are eight fricatives: /s, z, x, h, f, v, f, v/

/f/ and /v/ are made with the lower lip touching the upper part of the teeth:

*afã*    *fofó*    *fá*

*eve*    *vevé*    *avuv*

'half' 'father' 'be cool'

'two' 'bile' 'cold'

*/f/* and */v/* are made with the two lips nearly touching:

*fo afé fúflu*

*E ve ūii ava vu*

'beat' 'house' 'bare'

'Ewe' 'far' 'war' 'open'

*/s/* and */z/* are made with the blade of the tongue close to the alveolar ridge behind the upper teeth.

*só susú sésiē*

*ze zā zo*

'horse' 'thought' 'strongly'

'pot' 'use' 'walk'

(Southern speakers change */s/* and */z/* into */sh/* and */zh/* before *li:* *ashi* 'hand', *azhi* 'groundnut'.)

*/x/* is produced with the back of the tongue raised towards the soft palate, and */h/* is made with the vocal cords coming together.

*xóxóxó xo xexéme xlē*

*aha hε hiā ho*

'long ago' 'room' 'world' 'read'

'wine' 'knife' 'need' 'eagle'

## 2. Plosives

Plosives are featured in row 3 of the chart. There are eight plosives or stops in Ewe: */k,g, kp, gb,t,d,b, d/*

*/k/* and */g/* are produced with the back of the tongue raised against the soft palate, just as the */x/* above.

*kó kaka koklo*

*gā ŋgɔ gɔme*

'tall' 'scatter' 'chicken'

'big' 'front' 'under'

*/kp/* and */bg/* are also produced with the back of the tongue against the soft palate, while at the same time the lips are closed.

<i>kpui</i>	<i>kpó</i>	<i>kple</i>	<i>akpé</i>	<i>gbɔ</i>	<i>gbá</i>	<i>gbé</i>
'short'	'see'	'and'	'thanks'	'goat'	'first'	'refuse'

*/t/* and */d/* are produced with the tip and blade of the tongue pressed against the back of the upper teeth.

<i>atí</i>	<i>tó</i>	<i>tútútú</i>	<i>dadá</i>	<i>ɲdi</i>	<i>adé</i>
'tree'	'stop'	'exactly'	'mother'	'exactly'	'six'

(As with */s/* and */z/*, Southern speakers change */t/* and */d/* into *tsh=ch* and *dzh=j* before *li*: *atshi* = *achi* 'tree', *edzhii* = *ejii* 'he looked for it'.)

*/b/* is produced with the two lips together.

<i>búbu</i>	<i>bé</i>	<i>blá</i>	<i>ab</i>	<i>bó</i>
'other'	'that'	'tie'	'snail'	

*/d/* is produced with the tip of the tongue touching lightly against the ridge behind the upper teeth. Some speakers pronounce it like */r/* (especially in the South).

<i>d̪a</i>	<i>d̪é</i>	<i>d̪ed̪é</i>	<i>nú̪du̪</i>
'cook'	'to'	'only'	'food'

### 3. Affricates

Row 2 of the phonetics chart contains affricates that are found in Ewe.

*/ts/* and */dz/* are combinations of */t/* and */d/* plus */s/* and */z/*.

<i>tsó</i>	<i>tsã</i>	<i>atsú</i>	<i>dzo</i>	<i>dzu</i>	<i>adze</i>
------------	------------	-------------	------------	------------	-------------

'take' 'then' 'male'

'fire' 'insult' 'sorcery'

The affricates *ty = tsy=tsh= ch* and *dy= dzy=dj=j*, are pronounced as alveolo-palatal sounds:

*atsyo tsrió tsi atsatsa dzi dze dzó*

'finery' 'skin' 'stay' 'reed mattress' 'heart' 'salt' 'leave'

#### 4. Nasals

Ewe has four nasals, which are found in row four: /*n, ny, m, ŋ*/

/*n*/ is produced while the tip of the tongue is pressing against the ridge behind the upper teeth.

*no nú ná náné*

'was' 'thing' 'give' 'something'

/*ny*/ is produced with the blade of the tongue pressing up against the hard palate.

*anyí ényó nyá nyenyé*

'ground' 'it is good' 'know' 'being'

/*m*/ is produced with the two lips pressed together.

*mumu ame ma*

'mute' 'person' 'divide'

/*ŋ*/ is produced with the tongue pressing against the soft palate.

*ŋɔŋlc aŋɔ ŋutsu ŋe*

'writing' 'tar' 'man' 'break'

## 5. *Approximants*

Approximants can be found in row 6; Ewe has four of them: /l, ɣ, y, w/

/l/, which is also known as a lateral, is produced with the tip of the tongue pressing against the ridge behind the upper teeth, while the sides of the tongue are low enough to let the air pass through freely.

*lala lá lé lolo*

'wait' 'the' 'catch' 'be big'

/ɣ/ is produced with the back of the tongue raised towards the soft palate.

*ɣe ɣletí ɣaxlá esiɣl*

'sun' 'moon' 'secrecy' 'always'

/y/ is produced with the middle of the tongue raised towards the hard palate.

*yiyi yó ya yéye*

'going' 'call' 'air' 'new'

/w/ is produced with the back of the tongue raised towards the soft palate and with the lips rounded.

*wɔwɔ wóawó awu*

'doing' 'they' 'garment'

### Variants of the Consonant Phonemes

Duthie (1996), points out the various allophones that are found in the consonant system of the Ewe language. Southern speakers of Ewe have two variants or allophones of the dental and alveolar phonemes: [sh zh, tsh dzh, tsh



dzh] occur before //, and [s z, t d, ts, dz] occur before all other vowels.

There are other examples of allophones that were found by Duthie, which accounts for all speakers of Ewe:

// occurs before oral vowels, but a nasalized version [ l̃ ] occurs before nasalized vowels:

<i>lala</i>	<i>lɔlɔ</i>
'wait'	'love'

The palatal sonorants in column 4 are allophones of each other. The nasal [ny] occurs only before nasalized vowels, while the approximant [y] is found to occur before oral vowels.

<i>nyrá</i>	<i>nyúnɔ</i>	<i>yrá</i>	<i>yéye</i>
'rage'	'fifth'	'blessing'	'new'

The velar sonorants that are found in column 6 are another pair of allophones. [ŋ] occurs only before nasalized vowels, while the approximant [ɣ] occurs only before oral vowels.

<i>ŋú</i>	<i>ŋotí</i>	<i>ɣe</i>	<i>ɣla</i>
'side'	'nose'	'dance'	'hide'

In column 1 of the phonetics chart, the nasal [n] occurs before nasalized vowels only, while the plosive /d/ occurs only before oral vowels

<i>nɔ</i>	<i>né</i>	<i>dɔ</i>	<i>dó</i>
'drink'	'if'	'eat'	'reach'

The bilabials that are found in column 8 of the phonetics chart are allophones as well. The nasal [m] occurs only before nasalized vowels, while the plosive [b] occurs only before oral vowels.

<i>mó</i>	<i>má</i>	<i>bú</i>	<i>bia</i>
'way'	'divide'	'lose'	'big red'

There is another distinction which involves lip rounding. The approximant [ɣ] (row 6) that was mentioned earlier occurs only before unrounded vowels when the vowels are not nasalized; if they are nasalized [ɲ] occurs instead. And /w/ occurs only before rounded vowels (Many Northern speakers do not have [ɣ] and use /w/ before all oral vowels).

So far, the various phonemes that can occur in the first syllable margin have been presented. The selection of sounds that may occur in the second margin is more limited. In the phonetics chart, rows 5 and 6 of column 1 features two of these sound that are found in the second margin: /l,r/. These two sounds happen to be variants of each other. The lateral approximant [l] must follow velar and labial consonants, while the trill [r] can only occur in the second margin after alveolar consonants. The approximant /y/ functions in the second margin as well.

### Vowels

According to Duthie (1996), In Ewe, every syllable must contain a nucleus which is most often filled by a vowel (phonetics chart, rows 7-10). The sounds

that occur in the nucleus are voiced. The articulation of vowels requires that either the middle or the back of the tongue be raised towards the hard palate just a little way for open vowels, or all the way up for closed vowels. In the following examples Duthie (1996), presents all vowels that are found in Ewe:

### Oral Vowels

*/a/* is an open vowel, made by raising the middle of the tongue only slightly towards the center of the hard palate.

<i>kábá</i>	<i>abladzó</i>	<i>lala</i>	<i>atsatsa</i>
'quickly'	'plantain'	'wait'	'mattress'

*/i/* is a closed vowel, made by raising the middle of the tongue a long way up towards the front of the hard palate.

<i>sísíblisí</i>	<i>yiyi</i>	<i>édíi</i>
'bear'	'going'	'he looked for it'

*/u/* is also a closed vowel. It is made by raising the back of the tongue towards the soft palate, and with rounded lips.

<i>dunú</i>	<i>kúkú</i>	<i>fufu</i>	<i>búbu</i>
'eat'	'hat'	'fufu'	'other'

*/o/* is similar to */u/*, but is only half- closed and the lips are not as rounded.

<i>xóxóxó</i>	<i>fofó</i>	<i>dzodzó</i>	<i>fo</i>
'long ago'	'father'	'departure'	'beat'

/ɔ / is similar to /o/, but is half- open, and the lips are still slightly rounded.

<i>t ɔtrɔ</i>	<i>ɔɔɔlc</i>	<i>tɔ</i>	<i>k ɔk ɔ</i>
'turning'	'writing'	'stop'	'tall'

/ɛ / is pronounced by raising the middle of the tongue a little way up towards the front of the hard palate.

<i>pɛpɛpɛ</i>	<i>nɛ</i>	<i>akpɛ</i>	<i>fáfɛ</i>
'exactly'	'for him'	'calabash'	'cold'

/e/ is pronounced similarly to /ɛ/ but it requires raising the middle of the tongue closer towards the front of the hard palate.

<i>se</i>	<i>gbe</i>	<i>kpe</i>	<i>ze</i>	<i>agble</i>	<i>de</i>
'hear'	'voice'	'meet'	'pot'	'farm'	'palm'

The / e / sound is not usually spoken when it occurs in the roots of words; instead, / ə / is used. /e/ is accepted when singing, when following another nucleus, or when following /y/ or /i/. For example:

<i>a- eeeto</i>	<i>w'ɔ ɛzo</i>	<i>míedzo</i>	<i>ésee</i>
'looord!'	'welcome!'	'we left'	'he heard it'

The most common vowel is / ə /. This sound is made by raising the middle of the tongue a little ways up towards the center of the hard palate. Its written form is /e/: *le Evegbe me* 'in the Ewe language'

### Nasalized Vowels

This class of vowels is produced in the same way as the oral vowels; however, the back of the nasal passage is open and air flows out in two areas: the nose and the mouth. In written form, a (~) is used to differentiate nasal from oral vowels. This does not pertain to cases where a nasal vowel follows a nasal consonant, in which case nasalization is automatic.

*hã má ewóhí fũũ múmú nyó*

'also' 'divide' 'perhaps' 'plenty' 'green' 'be good'

*ɛhẽ xlẽẽ gblẽ né lo*

'aha!' 'read it' 'spoil' 'if' 'love'

### Tone

Ewe is a tone language. Every syllable contains either a high or a low toneme. Tone simply indicates the musical pitch of the voice. The basis of this language is its tone therefore, using the correct tone is very important in Ewe, for without it, a word could take on various meanings. Duthie (1996), presents the various roles that tone plays when conversing in Ewe, beginning with the following examples which demonstrates how different tones can represent different interpretations of a word:

#### normal writing

#### all tones marked

*ègbe*

*ègbé*

'you refused'

*egbe*

*égbé*

'he refused'

<i>ègbe</i>	<i>ègbè</i>	'you plucked'
<i>egbe</i>	<i>égbè</i>	'he plucked'
<i>egbe</i>	<i>égbè</i>	'today'

### The Non-high Toneme

The non-high toneme may sound either low (˘) or mid (-) when there is only a nucleus in the syllable.

<i>àti</i>	<i>èvè</i>	<i>èyi</i>
'tree'	'two'	'you went'

The rules change when syllables have margins. A voiced obstruent in the first margin means that the underlying non-high tonemes on each side of the margin sound low (˘).

<i>evè</i>	<i>gèḡè</i>	<i>adzò</i>	<i>agbà</i>
'two'	'many'	'riddle'	'load'

When the first margin is a sonorant, then the underlying non-high tonemes on each side sound mid (-). {note: all mid tones are liable to change in context.}

<i>medzo</i>	<i>awu xóxó</i>	<i>nye ṣútó</i>	<i>nyi</i>
'I left'	'old shirt'	'I myself'	'cow'

### The High Toneme

The high toneme sounds high in syllables containing a nucleus only:

<i>é bé wóádzó</i>	<i>vévíé</i>	<i>yiyím ésia</i>
'he said'	'importantly'	'going this one'

When the first margin is a voiceless obstruent, the underlying toneme of the stem sounds high.

*ato kplé té kpó atsú*

'five' 'with' 'under' 'see' 'male'

When the first margin is a sonorant, the underlying high toneme of the stem also sounds high.

*mí ná lá wó aló mé né nú*

'we' 'for' 'the' 'they' 'or' 'not' 'if' 'thing'

When the first margin is a voiced obstruent, the underlying high toneme sounds either high or low + high = rising (ˇ).

*dzi gbó bláeve*

'on' 'with' 'twenty'

*gbě adzě*

'bush' 'withcraft'

*vĩ avũ dõ*

'child' 'dog' 'hole'

### Changes of Tone

(a). A falling tone (^) occurs on a verb when it is immediately followed by a substantive, functioning as the object, and it contains a middle tone, e.g.:

*tu´*

'to take'

*tú*

'gun'

*éstô tú*

'he took the gun'

(b). All low-toned syllables of a word, which immediately follow a syllable with a middle tone, acquire a middle tone:

*tso*

*lã*

*lãtsoso*

'to kill' 'animal' 'the killing of an animal'

(c). A rising tone (ˇ) often indicates ellision of *é* 'it is'. The substantive

acquires the high tone of the elided *é*, and its previous low tone becomes a rising tone:

*tsi*      *tsĩ* (from *tslé*)

'water'    'soup'

(d). When a low-toned substantive becomes the second part of a compound noun, a low to rising tone occurs:

*agble*                  *tegbľě*

'farm'                  'yam farm'

(e). A rising tone is often used when syllables with middle tones are followed by a low-toned syllable:

*fesre*                  *fesregbala*

'window'    'window – breaker'.

(f). Certain pronouns can influence tone; when a substantive contains a low tone in its last syllable, that syllable becomes a rising tone when followed by the demonstrative pronouns *sia*, *ma*, *kema*, e.g.:

*be*                  *bě sia*

'straw'              'this straw'

(g). The article *á* has a high tone, which is often assimilated to that of the preceding vowel, e.g.:



*xó*                      *x óa*  
 'house                'the house'

(h). High-toned verbs ending in *o, u,* or *i* communicate their tone to the first vowel of their object when it is a noun with a low initial *a*, and the second syllable is either low or middle-toned.

<i>lò àzi</i>	<i>ló àzi</i>	'pick up eggs'
<i>tú àgba</i>	<i>tu ágbà</i>	'tie up the load'
<i>tó àgbeli</i>	<i>tó àgbèli</i>	'pound cassava'

(Verbs ending in *e* and *a* do not follow this rule because they either undergo elision or contraction.)

#### Changes of Tone in Reduplicated Verbs

There are two types of changes, those that occur with verbal-nouns, and those that occur with verbal adjectives.

(a). Low-toned verb:

*du* 'to eat'

By the reduplication processes, both a verbal-noun and a verbal adjective are produced; thus *dudu* 'the eating' or 'edible, eaten'.

The tone of these two forms is dependent upon whether they are substantival or adjectival, e.g.:

Verbal-noun: *dudu* 'eating'

*núdùdu* 'the eating something'

*agbeliɖuɖu* 'the eating of cassava

Verbal Adjective:

*ɖuɖũ* 'edible, eaten'

*nu ɖuɖũ* 'something edible'

*agbeli ɖuɖũ* 'edible cassava'

(b). High-toned verb: *tś* 'to take, carry'

Verbal-noun: *ts tś* 'the bearing'

In this case only the last syllable is high; however, should the verbal-noun be immediately preceded by an object, then both syllables of the verbal-noun are high, e.g.:

*núts ts (nutsótsó )* 'the carrying of a thing'

This rule also applies should an article be present, e.g.:

*nú lá tsó tsó* 'the carrying of the thing'

In the case that the possessive particle *fe* comes between the object and the verbal-noun, the tone follows the rule given above i.e., the last syllable only is high, e.g.:

*atí lá fé tsótsó (tsótsó)* 'the carrying of the tree'

Verbal Adjective: *tsó tsó* 'bearable'

This also has a high tone on both syllables, but the second syllable is lengthened.

Change of Tone in Adjectives and Adverbs

(a). Simple, unreduplicated form:

The tone becomes low, and the final vowel is lengthened when an adjective describes a large object, or an adverb is the function of a large object:

*goli* 'rounded, cylindrical'

*atigo le golii* (gòlìì) 'the barrel is cylindrical'

The tone becomes high, and the final vowel is shortened when an adjective describes a small object, or an adverb is the function of a small object:

*kpévi le góli* 'the stone is rounded'

(b). Reduplicated form:

As an adjective, a high-tone indicates that an object is quite small.

*kpévi lá le góligoli* 'the stone was quite small and rounded'

As an adverb, a low tone indicates the function of a large object, and a high tone indicates the function of a small object. In both cases all the vowels are short.

*núbabla gā lá mli dé aga me goligoli*

'the large bundle went rolling into the abyss'

*núbabla su lá mli dé aga me góligoli*

'the small bundle went rolling into the abyss'

### The Tone of Pronouns

- (a). The personal pronoun of the third person singular has a high tone when subjective or possessive, and a low tone when objective.
- (b). The possessive pronouns of the first and second persons singular are low when they follow their substantive, e.g.:

*atínyè , ati w`o*

'my' , 'your tree'

If they precede their substantive they acquire a rising tone:

*nyě xo , wǒ ga,*

'my house', 'your money'

Should the initial letter of the following substantive be an *a*, then *nye* is contracted:

*nyě atí (nyǎtí) 'my tree'*

- (c). The following pronouns demonstrate the importance of tone (Westermann 39):

<i>è</i>	'I'	<i>é</i>	'he'
<i>w`o</i>	'you'(sing.)	<i>wó</i>	'they'
<i>mi</i>	'we'	<i>mi</i>	'you (pl.)'
<i>wò</i>	'your (sing.)'	<i>wó</i>	'their'

### The Tone of Questions

Questions are expressed by a low tone added to the last syllable if it has high tone.

*kpò* 'to see', *ameka nèkpô* ? 'Whom did you see?'

*tso* 'to take', *nuka nètsô*? 'What did you take?'

A low tone is added, if the last syllable has a middle tone.

*no* 'mother', *ameka kpò nye no* ? 'Who has seen my mother?'

The last syllable is slightly lengthened, if the last syllable has a low tone.

*voo* 'python', *ameka kpò voooo*? 'Who saw the python?'

## CHAPTER 3

## GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

Westermann (1930), discusses and uses the following examples to indicate that in Ewe different word forms are produced by means of adding a prefix or suffix to the existing word. There are no internal conjugations, e.g. *sing*, *sang*, *sung*, like we find in European languages. The eight parts of speech are:

- |                 |                  |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Substantives | 5. Numerals      |
| 2. Pronouns     | 6. Adverbs       |
| 3. Verbs        | 7. Conjunctions  |
| 4. Adjectives   | 8. Interjections |

## Substantives

Gender

Ewe has no grammatical gender; it is expressed by different words:

<i>ɣútsù</i>	'man'	<i>nyànù</i>	'woman'
<i>amega</i>	'old man'	<i>nyaga</i>	'old woman'
<i>fõ</i>	'elder brother'	<i>dã</i>	'elder sister'
<i>tsé</i>	'younger'	<i>fóe</i>	'younger sister'
<i>Mensa</i>	'third son'	<i>Mansa</i>	'third daughter'

Number

(a) Substantives are made plural by adding the third person plural of the personal pronoun to them:

<i>ame</i>	'human being'	<i>amewó</i>	'human beings'
<i>atí</i>	'tree'	<i>atíwo</i>	'trees'
<i>xo</i>	'house'	<i>xowó</i>	'houses'

(b) When a determinative is present, the plural marker is added to it:

An adjective:

<i>ḍevi</i>	'child'	<i>nyuí</i>	'good'
<i>ḍevi nyuí</i>	'a good child'	<i>ḍevi nuyíwo</i>	'good children'

A pronoun:

<i>xo</i>	'friend'	<i>nye</i>	'my'
<i>xonye</i>	'my friend'	<i>xonyèwó</i>	'my friends'

The article:

<i>xo</i>	'house'	<i>á</i>	'the'
<i>xoá</i>	'the house'	<i>xoáwo</i>	'the houses'

### Case

(a). The subject stands before the verb:

*fia vá* 'the king came'

(b). The object:

The object generally follows the verb:

*mekpò atí lá*  
I saw tree the

The object may precede the subject if it is emphasized:

*lākle míewú*

a leopard we killed

'we killed a leopard'

(c). The possessive:

The possessive precedes the substantive to which it refers. It is usually separated by *Fé*:

*Fia Fé xo*

chief house

'the chief's house'

*Fé* is omitted in names of relationships:

*Fia dadá*

chief mother

'the chief's mother'

Westermann (1930), points out that many actions which we express by one verb are expressed in Ewe by two or more; should there be two objects, the first is attached to the former verb, the second to the latter. In this case the second verb is frequently *na* 'to give', in that, what one does to another is done for him and is, as it were, given to him; e.g.; *eFlè só nám* 'he bought a horse (and) gave (it) to me; = 'he bought me a horse'.



## Pronouns

The Absolute Forms of Personal Pronouns

(a). As subject or object:

<i>nye</i>	'I'	<i>míawo</i>	'we'
<i>wó</i>	'you'	<i>miawó</i>	'you'
<i>éya, ye</i>	'he, she, it'	<i>wóawo</i>	'they'

Absolute pronouns do not come immediately before the verb; they are separated by the pronoun *é* or the article *Iá*:

<i>éyàé fi fi</i>	'he has stolen'	<i>nye Iá mekp è</i>	'I have seen it'
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(b). As possessive:

The majority of the possessive pronouns precede their substantive.

<i>nye[ye, yeFé, zíe]</i>	'my'	<i>mia, miaFe</i>	'our'
<i>wo</i>	'your'	<i>mia, miaFe</i>	'you'
<i>é, eFe</i>	'his, 'her'	<i>wó, wóFe</i>	'their'

The Connected Forms of the Personal Pronouns

(a). As subject:

<i>me</i>	'I'	<i>míe, míe</i>	'we'
<i>è</i>	'you'	<i>míe, mí</i>	'you'
<i>é</i>	'he, she, it'	<i>wó</i>	'they'

(b). As object:

<i>m</i>	'me'	<i>mi</i>	'us'
<i>wò</i>	'you'	<i>mi</i>	'you'
<i>è</i>	'him, her, it'	<i>wó</i>	'they'

### Reflexive Pronouns

The reflexive is formed by the addition of *dokui*.

<i>dókuinyè</i>	'myself'	<i>dókuiwò</i>	'yourselves'
<i>edokui</i>	'himself'	<i>mia dokui</i>	'ourselves'
<i>mia dókui</i>	'yourselves'	<i>wó dókui</i>	'themselves'

### Demonstrative Pronouns

- (a). *si, sia* 'this'      *siawo* 'these'
- atí sia* 'this tree'      *atí siawó* 'these trees'
- atí eve siawó* 'these two trees'
- (b). *má, kéma, me, keme, kém* 'that one', 'the other' (of two), 'the next'
- nyi ma* 'that cow'      *de kéma* 'that oil palm'
- tsó te keme nám* 'give me the other yam'

Adding *e* as a prefix to each pronoun makes it substantive: *éma, ékema,*

*éme, ékeme:*

*tsó ékémá nám* 'give me that one'

(c). *á, la* 'the'

These two words serve as a definite article; they indicate that reference has previously been made to a substantive. The article is most often used in fables and stories, where substantives are frequently repeated (Westermann 66).

### Relative Pronouns

*sì*, (singular) *siwó* (plural)

*lākle si miēkp ets lá*

'the leopard which we saw yesterday'

In the following example, the plural marker is attached to the relative *si*, rather than the substantive:

*lākle siwó miēkp etsó lá*

'the leopards which we saw yesterday'

It has been found that the relative pronoun *si* is the same as the demonstrative *sì*, e.g.; *ati si mekp* 'tree which I have seen'

### Verbs

Verbs describe:

(a) an action: *yi* 'to go'

(b) a condition *mló* 'to lie'

(c) a quality *kó* 'to be high'

To show tense or mood, verb forms are made by combining several verbs, or by combining verbs and nouns.

### The Conjugation of the Verb

On pages 74-80, Westermann presents an overview of the following conjugation of verbs in Ewe: Aorist, Future, Habitual, Progressive, Ingressive, or Intentional, Imperative, Cohortative, Prohibitive, Verbal-noun, and Verbal Adjectives.

(a). The Aorist does not indicate any particular time. It can mean past or present which is captured in context. Generally it is used to express the past.

<i>meyi</i>	'I go, went'	<i>míeyi</i>	'we go, went'
<i>èyi</i>	'you go, went'	<i>miefi</i>	'you go, went'
<i>éyi</i>	'he goes, went'	<i>woyi</i>	'they go, went'

(b). The Future is formed by prefixing *a* to the verb.

<i>máyì</i>	'I shall go'	<i>míayì</i>	'we shall go'
<i>ayì</i>	'you will go'	<i>miayì</i>	'you will go'
<i>áyì, wóáyì</i>	'he will go'	<i>wóayì</i>	'they will go'

(c). The Habitual is formed by suffixing *na* to the verb.

<i>meyina</i>	I usually go	<i>míeyina</i>	we usually go
<i>èyina</i>	you usually go	<i>mieyina</i>	you usually go
<i>éyina</i>	he usually go	<i>wóyina</i>	they usually go

(d). The Progressive is formed with the help of the verb *le* 'to be', 'to exist'. The main verb is in its infinitive form, to which *ím* is suffixed.

<i>mele yiyím</i> 'I am going'	<i>míelè yiyím</i> 'we are going'
<i>èle yiyím</i> 'you are going'	<i>miele yiyím</i> 'you are going'
<i>él'e yiyím</i> 'he is going'	<i>wólè yiyím</i> 'they are going'

The Preterite of the Progressive is formed in the same way as the progressive, except *no* is used instead of *le*:

*meno yiyím* 'I always used to go'

The Future of the Progressive is formed in the same way as the preterite of the progressive, except that *a* of the future precedes *no*:

*mánò yiyím* 'I shall always go'

(e). The Ingressive or Intentional indicates that one intends to do a thing, or that it will certainly occur. It is formed in the same way as the progressive, except that the syllable *ge* follows the infinitive.

<i>mele yiyi gé</i> 'I am about to go'	<i>míel'e yiyi ge</i> 'we are about to go'
<i>èle yiyi gé</i> 'you are about to go'	<i>miele yiyi gé</i> 'you are about to go'
<i>él'e yiyi gé</i> 'he is about to go'	<i>wól'e yiyi gé</i> 'they are about to go'

(f). The Imperative is a command to the person addressed. It is formed by using the verb by itself. However, in the plural the pronoun precedes the verb:

*yi* 'go!'                      *miyi* 'go (plural)!'

(g). The Jussive is a command to the subject of the verb. It is formed by prefixing *né* or *ná* to the verb:

*náyì* 'you are to go'                      *náyì, néyì* 'he is to go'

*né wóáyì, né woyì, wó néyì* 'they are to go'

(h). The Cohortative expresses an invitation in which the speaker includes himself. The imperative of *na* 'to give' is placed before the main verb.

*ná míyì*

'give we go (let us go (sing.))'

*minà míyì*

'let us go (plural)'

(i). The Prohibitive is a negative imperative. *ga* is placed between the pronoun, and the verb is made negative.

*megàyì o* 'do not go (sing.)'

*migayì o* 'do not go (plural)'

(j). The Verbal-noun is a substantive formed from the verb by reduplicating the verb.

*yiyì* 'the act of doing'

(k). The Verbal adjective is an adjective formed from the verb, by reduplicating the verb.

*du* 'to eat'    *duḍḍ* 'edible, eaten'

## Adjectives

In Ewe the adjective follows the substantive.

*xo nyuí atí kòkó*

house good tree high

'good house' 'high tree'

If a qualifying word is present in the sentence, it follows the adjective.

*tó kókó siawo*

mountain high these

'these high mountains'

When the substantive is plural, the adjective takes the plural marker.

*to nyanyrãwó* 'angry buffaloes'

Some adjectives are actually verbs:

*kó* 'to be high' *fá* 'to be cool'

These verbs can be made into real adjectives through reduplication or by

suffixing an *e*:

*kóko* 'high' *fáfa* 'cool'

*nyóe* 'good'

Adjectives can be made into substantives by suffixing *t* to the end of the word:

*lolo* 'large' *lolot* 'the large one'

## Numerals

1 <i>deká, dé</i>	3 <i>etó</i>	5 <i>atõ</i>	7 <i>adre, andre</i>
2 <i>eve</i>	4 <i>ene</i>	6 <i>adé, andé</i>	8 <i>enyi</i> 9 <i>enyide, asieke</i>
10 <i>ewó</i>	20 <i>bláavè</i>	30 <i>bláàt</i>	
11 <i>wuideké</i>	21 <i>bláavè vó deke</i>	40 <i>bláanè</i>	
12 <i>wúive</i>	22 <i>bláavè vó ve</i>	50 <i>bláatõ</i>	
13 <i>wúietõ</i>	23 <i>bláavè vó tõ</i>	60 <i>blá`adè</i>	
14 <i>wúiene</i>	24 <i>bláavè vó ne</i>	70 <i>blá`adré</i>	
15 <i>wúiatõ</i>	25 <i>bláavè vó atõ</i>	80 <i>blá`anyí</i>	
16 <i>wúiadé</i>	26 <i>bláavè vó adé</i>	90 <i>blá`asiékè</i>	
17 <i>wúiadré</i>	27 <i>bláavè vó adré</i>	100 <i>alafá deká</i>	
18 <i>wúienyí</i>	28 <i>bláavè vó nyi</i>	101 <i>alafá deká kplé deká</i>	
19 <i>wúiasiéké</i>	29 <i>bláavè vó siék`e</i>	200 <i>alafá eve</i>	

Objects that are being counted remain in their singular form and are placed before the numeral:

*vú etõ*

*ship three*

'three ships'



If an article modifies the object being counted, then the sign of the plural is added to the numeral:

*nyi eveáwo* 'the two head of cattle'

Ordinals are formed by suffixing *-lea*, *-lia* to the cardinals: *et lia* 'the third'.

### Adverbs

1. Adverbial phrases of place, time, and manner, which contain a substantive, are introduced by *le*.

*ewó dó le afî* 'he worked here'

*eva le zā me* 'he came in the night (at night)'

*ewoe le v vō ta* 'he did it out of fear'

2. Cases where *le* is not used:

(a). When *gbe* is present in the sentence

*éva égbè* 'he came to-day'

*mekpón`ε gbesiagbe* 'I see him every day'

(b). Adverbs and adverbial phrases that do not express rest at a place, but motion to or from a place. If the motion is towards a place, the place aimed at is no longer considered an adverbial condition but the object of a transitive verb (Westermann, 1930):

*évâ afi* 'he came (to) here'

*éyì kofe me* 'he went into the village'

(c). *le* is never used in sentences where *de* is present.

*wófò fú dé afíma* 'they assembled there'

(d). Another case where *le* is not used is when a sentence expresses motion from a place. Instead of *le*, the verb *tsó* 'to come from' is used.

*estó Lome vá Kpando* 'he came from Lome to Kpando'

### Conjunctions

Some conjunctions that connect words:

*atíwo kplé kawó le avé me* 'trees and creepers are in the forest'

*Yawa aló Akuá náyi nákefoFé*

'Yawo or Akua must go to look for fire-wood'

### Interjections

Interjections are a part of speech that express emotion and can stand alone grammatically.

*yuê, áà, ehê, ahã, zíw`e, yiô, mbo, ampá* [expressions of delight, pleasure, surprise, agreement]

*â, áì* [expressions of bodily pain]

*ã, tsô, wuê, akúà* [expressions of displeasure, anger, sorrow]

*ké, aléle, dzaléle, ehí* [expressions of wonder, surprise]

## CHAPTER 4

## SAMPLE TEXT

Klala mee mado	I shall sleep in calico
Dzo tso nutsuviawo	war has come upon the sons of men
Klala mee mado	and I shall sleep in calico
Klini nu miedo do vo	we have arrived at the bridge head
adatsia ge;	tears fall
miato agbadzaviwo	We have arrived at the jetty
Klini nu miedo do vo	tears fall.
adatsia ge dzi mele fo	If you have no heart,
Nagbugbo	please go home

~Kofi Awoonor~

As stated earlier, tone marks are not usually written in Ewe texts. Native speakers of Ewe understand which tones are assigned to each word according to the context.

Ewe poetry comes to life around the drums; the sound embellishes the imagery of the poem. Various drums possess distinctive rhythmic patterns; some are used to express certain facets of life, e.g., war, love funerals, rites, and chiefship.

The sample text is a poem about war. The traditional style of reciting this type of poem involves a fierce sound bellowing from the old warrior drums *the atrikpui* and *the kpegisu*, as well as lively dancing that exhibit military formation, exaggerated taunts and boasts, yells and wild gestures.

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## WORKS CITED

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**APPENDIX**  
**PHONETICS CHART**

## PHONETICS CHART

Active and passive articulators		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		tongue tip on ridge	blade on upper teeth	blade on teeth ridge	tongue on hard palate	tongue behind hard palate	back on soft palate	6 & 8	upper and lower lips	lower lips on upper teeth
		apical alveolar	laminal dental	laminal alveolar	palatal		dorsal velar	Labial velar	bi-labial	labio-dental
Obstruent voiced/less	1. fricative			s z			x h		f v	f v
	2. affricative		ts	dz						
	3. plosive	t d	t d		tsy dzy		k g	kp,gb	b	
Sonorant voiced	4. nasal	n			ny		ŋ		m	
	5. trill	r								
	6. approximant	l			y		ɹ	w		
Vowel voiced	7. close				i i			u u		
	8. half-close				e e			o o		
	9. half-open				ɛ ɛ	ə ə		ɔ ɔ		
	10. open					a a				
Vowel Phon. Labels				front	Central			rounded back		

(Duthie, 1996)